



TESTING THE H **MT-250** ONDA

Honda's first two-stroke trail bike echoes most of their four-strokes' vices and virtues.

■ Another link in the seemingly endless chain of enigmas from the world's largest motorcycle maker rests beneath that silvery tank on the MT-250 Honda. Honda's marketing department seems firmly committed to giving the public a street machine in dirt cycle disguise.

Honda shocked the world with a motocrosser good enough (with minor mods) to win the AMA's National Championship in its first year out. The technology is there, but it's wasted on the trail version of the oh-so-successful Elsinore motocrosser. With a start like that, how could they fail? Apparently with a lot of effort. The CR-250 seems to be at least a year ahead of any of the other Japanese 250cc machines, but the MT-250 is at least a year behind. The engineers retained the basic wheelbase and steering geometry of the motocrosser and the same basic engine castings, but that's about all that was carried over in the MT-250. This trail bike is as stable as anything on two wheels through the sand, as well it should be with the longest wheelbase in its class. Just sit back, way back, and dial it on through the soft stuff. If that sand patch leads to the riverbank and beyond you can proceed without fear; the two-stroke trail 250 has an excellent air intake system with a tiny grill tucked nicely beneath the seat, and a bit of ducting tape and silicone would seal it off as well as any Six Days wader.

We can't blame Honda for fitting a fuel tank with three-quarters of a gallon more capacity than the motocrosser. A trail rider or enduro entrant needs the extra fuel capacity to make it between gas checks. The shape is nice too, with little to interfere with your legs' grip on the sides of the tank and the seat. Somehow, though, they managed to put most of that extra capacity over the front wheel and up near the cap. The MT-250 has a top-heavy feeling that comes from the steel gas tank's shape and, apparently, the placement of the lights. Most of those porky pounds dangle over the front wheel and up near the top of the machine. The engine's center of gravity is about average for a machine



The logging trails through California's Feather Falls area were the MT's delight. Twisty trail riding is a chore, however. The riding position is great for sitting or standing.

in this class, so the top-heaviness must stem from the thoughtless placement of the "trail" lights and tank. The total weight is right in there with the other trail 250's but there's too much of it on top and too much forward. You'll never have to worry about this one sliding out from under your nose; that weight shoves the front tire down and down and down into the dirt. The aluminum tank from the CR-250 should bolt right on, but that's only a partial solution. Here's a chance for a clever plastic tank maker to fill a market need—produce a tank for the MT-250 that will place more of the weight back near the seat.

The seat, like the CR's, is excellent, having just enough length and side padding to make it comfortable regardless of your own contortions. It's nice, too, to find plastic fenders with a minimum of steel bracing. The things that help to make the MT just another Honda trail bike include ridiculous fittings like rubber-covered footpegs and a tachometer. The speedometer seemed to be accurate enough and it does have the necessary odometer resetting and tenth-mile features that an enduro rider requires. We tend to take U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestors for granted,

but too few European machines have them. The Honda does.

The forks were superb in both travel and dampening, but the shocks defied all efforts to obtain an effective setting. They bottomed vigorously on the softer spring settings and rode like rods on the stiffer settings. We had a chance to sample the handling on the mountain trails near the Feather Falls, California, recreation area and on the sand and motocross portions of the Indian Dunes motorcycle park just north of Los Angeles. The machine is great on any dirt road. The wheelbase is long enough to give you plenty of warning when a slide develops too far, and that heavy front end lets you concentrate on the rear most of the time. We never felt really comfortable on the machine, however. It felt like someone had tied an invisible backpack full of lead to the top of the tank. Any body English corrections were amplified rather than complemented by the machine. Perhaps the feeling of an impending fall would disappear from the rider's thoughts once it became a habit to correct carefully.

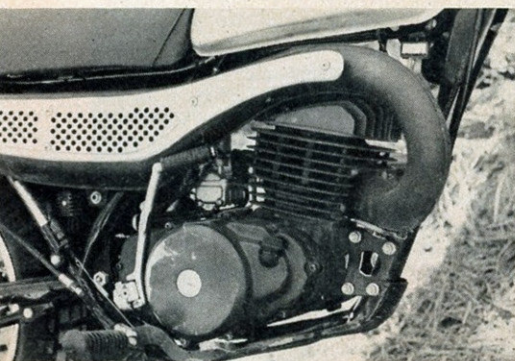
The MT-250's sluggish handling response isn't helped one bit by an engine that cranks out about as much power as most 175cc machines. The CR-250 engine has a lead in the horsepower race that has sent Honda's European and Japanese competitors scrambling, but something was lost in converting the bike to a trail machine. You'll want a bit of extra torque and power to overcome that heavy front end, but you won't find it. The combination of weight and low power makes a rapid trail ride a real challenge to your stamina. Surely they could have salvaged more of the motocrosser's power for the trail.

The MT-250, then, has to be evaluated like all of Honda's trail bikes—on its merits as a potential dirt cycle. The price is right, but the installation of the CR's cylinder, barrel and piston; a lighter fuel tank, serrated steel footpegs, better rear shocks and other personal-pick details will jack the price up to the level of the European machines. Maybe the 1975 machine will be better.

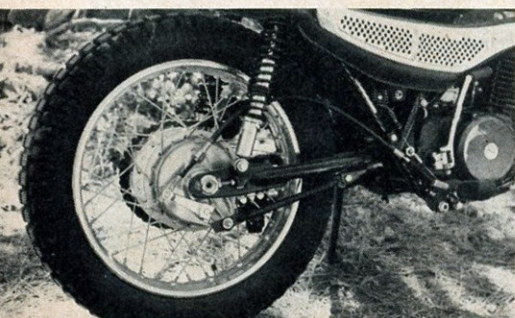
TESTING THE MT-250 HONDA



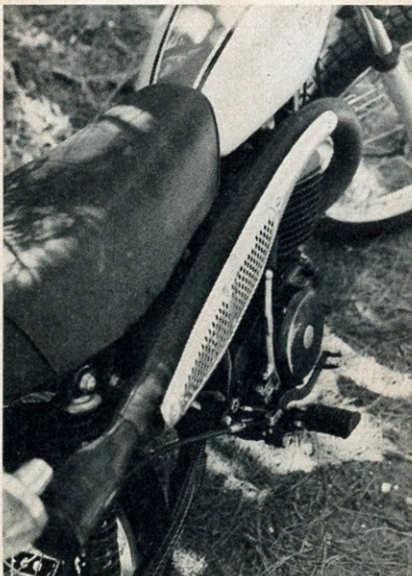
The MT-250's forks are fantastic, but they have to be to support the extra front-end weight and top-heaviness that Honda has built into the trail version of the CR-250.



The engine and frame are the same shape as those of the CR-250 but both could have been lowered to take advantage of the upswept expansion chamber. The pegs are rubber; the brake is serrated.



The cable-actuated rear brake performed well enough, but the super-stiff shocks kept the tire bouncing so much that any rear-wheel stops resulted in a quick lock-up.



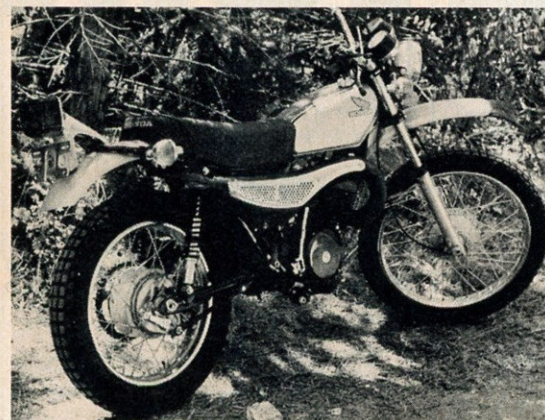
The expansion chamber tucks in nicely and has a built-in U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestor. The well-padded seat has enough side padding for comfortable knee-gripping.



The fuel tank and seat are slim. The riding position feels like a 175's until you lean the machine—the side-to-side feeling belongs to a 500cc machine.



TESTING THE MT-250 HONDA



BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Price . . . \$870 f.o.b. West Coast

Engine . . .

Type . . . two-stroke single

Bore . . . 70mm

Stroke . . . 64.4mm

Cubic centimeters displacement . . . 248

Carburetor size & type . . . 28mm Keihin slide-type

Ignition system type . . . magneto

Lighting system type . . . battery & alternator

Air filter size & type . . . oil-wetted foam

Gearbox

Overall ratio, first . . . 21.63:1

Overall ratio, second . . . 16.11:1

Overall ratio, third . . . 11.23:1

Overall ratio, fourth . . . 8.67:1

Overall ratio, fifth . . . 6.95:1

Overall ratio, sixth . . . N.A.

Shift pattern . . . one-down, neutral, four-up

Can be kick-started in any gear? . . . Yes

Dimensions

Wheelbase . . . 57 inches

Weight . . . 268 pounds

Front tire size & tread . . . 3.00 x 21 trials

Rear tire size & tread . . . 4.00 x 18 trials

Length . . . 84 1/2 inches

Handlebar width . . . 33 inches

Ground clearance . . . 10 1/4 inches

Fuel capacity . . . 2.2 gallons

Engine oil capacity . . . 1.4 quarts

Details

Folding footpegs? . . . Yes

Self-cleaning footpegs? . . . No

Tire-to-rim clamps? . . . Yes

Alloy rims front & rear? . . . No

Handlebar-mounted kill button? . . . Yes

Speedometer? . . . Yes

Odometer? . . . Yes

Odometer read in tenths? . . . Yes

Odometer resettable backwards? . . . Yes

Tachometer? . . . Yes

Muffler? . . . Yes

U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestor? . . . Yes

Head & tail lights? . . . Yes

Brake light control-actuated switches? . . . Yes

Horn? . . . Yes

Fuel tank material? . . . Steel

Front fender material? . . . Plastic

Rear fender material? . . . Plastic

Full-floating rear brake? . . . No (cable-actuated)

PERFORMANCE & HANDLING EVALUATION

Performance Specifications

Weight with 165-lb. rider and full tanks . . . 433 pounds

Rated horsepower at rpm . . . N.A.

Pounds (with rider) per horsepower . . . N.A.

Pounds (with rider) per cubic centimeter . . . 1.75

Number of speeds in transmission . . . 5

Handling Specifications

Weight distribution, % front/% rear . . . 39/41

Center of gravity (approximate)

Crankshaft center to ground . . . 15 inches

Crankshaft center to rear axle . . . 29 1/2 inches

Footpeg to rear axle . . . 21 1/2 inches

Footpeg to ground . . . 12 1/2 inches

Front suspension

Steering head angle (rake) . . . 30.5 degrees

Trail (axle setback from steering axis) . . . 5 3/4 ins.

Fork travel, compression . . . 4 1/2 inches

Fork travel, rebound . . . 1 3/4 inches

Rear suspension

Swing arm length, pivot to axle . . . 18 1/4 inches

Swing arm pivot to ground . . . 14 1/2 inches

Swing arm pivot to crankshaft . . . 11 inches

Rear chain run (countershaft sprocket to rear axle) . . . 23 1/2 inches

Shock travel, compression . . . 1 1/4 inches

Shock travel, rebound . . . 2 3/4 inches

Height of seat from ground . . . 32 1/2 inches

Length of seat . . . 23 1/2 inches



PERFORMANCE & HANDLING OPINION

(rated 1 to 10 on a scale of 10)

Power (within displacement class) . . . 7

Ability to maintain rear wheel traction . . . 8

Vibration . . . 8

Ease of starting . . . 8

Ignition waterproofing . . . 9

Air intake & carburetor waterproofing . . . 9

Oil leakage . . . 9

Fuel leakage . . . 10

Front fork dampening . . . 10

Tendency of front tire to skid in turns . . . 10

Ease of lifting front wheel with handlebars . . . 7

Steering response to effort at handlebars . . . 8

Rear wheel tendency to lock up or hop when braking . . . 8

Rear shock absorber dampening . . . 10

Stability in deep sand or mud . . . 8

Seat padding and comfort . . . 9

Convenience and operation of controls . . . 9

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Yamaha DT-250 Enduro

Honda MT-250 Enduro



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