

DIRT BIKE RIDES THE TYPE 2 HONDA

You betchum, Red Rider!



Pierre and Gunnar discuss some of the details as interested spectators gather quickly.

What would you do if American Honda offered you a ride on an RC500 Honda? You know, the latest works bike that Pierre and Marty and Tommy ride. Don't answer, we already know. You'd jump at the chance. How do we know? It happened to us.

On a spare day between Trans-AMA races, Honda, in the persons of Pierre Karsmakers and John R., met members of the DIRT BIKE staff for a semi-clandestine gathering among the mid-week granite ruts at Saddleback. Purpose: to let us ride one of the six RC500 Honda motocrossers in the United States. Care to ride along?

You've seen pictures of it, or, if you were lucky, got close enough at a race to want to get closer. It's the red one, very red. Red frame, red tank, red engine. Without question the most svelte of the new motocrossers. It stole the show in Italy at its debut — opened the way for a whole new line of apparel accessories. Heads stretch out the windows of the DIRT BIKE truck as we pull into the pits next to it. You can almost see ions pulsing in the air from the electric tension.

John R. and Pierre are accommodating, pointing out a few of the RC's clever nuances while we soak them up and lend them to film. This RC deserves its new designation. No part bears more than a visual resemblance to the old Elsinore line. This is no punched-out 250 Elsie! All of the motor pieces are sand cast magnesium, symbolizing the newness of the bike. Titanium bolts hold it together. In the RC, steel is the rare metal. We assume that the RC500 is exceedingly light and meet with our first awakening. At the last Trans-AMA Pierre's bike tipped the scales at 234 pounds.

Nice things. The swingarm is so close to the countershaft that only one larger size of countershaft can be used without rubbing. And the countershaft is on the opposite side of the Elsinore. In fact, the whole engine is reversed, a mirror image. And John R. claims that this bike is much better for service than previous bikes. Access is better and basic service can be performed quite quickly.

You can't sneak a ride without the suit, so we slip off to dress while the others talk. A casual reappearance with helmet, goggles, gloves and the



rest in place gets the point across. John R. waves us forward. There's no backing away now. The RC is tall, the tallest motocross bike we've ever encountered, as a matter of fact. Just rocking the bike in place moves the suspension through three inches of its travel. Sounds like a lot until you subtract it from the total: 12½ inches. That's right, 12½ inches at each wheel. That's why the RC stands as a giant and why the seat is thin and even why it seems to slant forward. Of course, that forward slant could be a psychological device. The RC looks like it's hauling tail when it's standing still.

With control operation checked, goggles adjusted and gas turned on there's only one thing left to do. Start it. Imagine trying to kick-start one of the most powerful 500 class motocrossers in existence. You think a Maico deals out a wallop, this thing should be a bear. Standing aside, the right foot gingerly approaches the lever. A swift kick and retraction and the lever moves easily through its travel. The motor spins through twice and on the third rotation catches. It's running! Nothing to it. Shut it off and start it again just for fun.

Time to go now. The clutch pulls easily and a gentle nudge slips the transmission into first. With a little gas the RC500 pulls easily away. No revving, jerking or wheelspin. It drives away like a real live mundane motorcycle. Can't hardly touch the ground, but now it's OK. We're going.

On the track caution is in order. This motorcycle produces Grand Prix winning horsepower and it might be best not to let it all loose at once. The transmission shifts with just a touch up to third and the motor growls happily at low rpm. A little twist of the throttle and the RC crouches and goes. The powerband is so much smoother than you would expect in a works motocrosser. Almost 13 inches of rear wheel travel sticks the power to the ground tenaciously. It's hard to encourage wheelspin.

Ah, but it does get going. With pure acceleration, not wheelspin, available mph build up quickly. At a moderate speed in third gear the suspension is barely working. Bumps and chuck holes disappear under the front wheel. And now a turn. Brakes come on easily and smoothly. Tires gnaw at the ground



and the bike slows. Slows too much, in fact — not used to this much brakes. Point the front end in and squirt the bike out with some throttle. Wheelie, you say? Well, like we said, the RC does get a piece of the ground.

Myths begin to fall. The RC isn't hard to ride at all. There's flywheel and powerband to compare with any production motocrosser. Just more of everything. Through the whoops now in fourth gear the RC rocks gently like a roller coaster ride. No concussion, just suspension movement. And power to the ground. When the throttle is on, the bike accelerates. When the brakes are on, it slows down.

Cornering is simple. Might have thought that the suspension would be a little confusing unless you go as fast as Pierre. Not so, use whatever part you like. Turning is one of the things that the RC does like it shifts or brakes — perfectly. As if there is a little screw to adjust and John R. just turns it until the bike is correct. There is no qualification about the turning, it just does.

By now we must have been around a couple of times and the scattered early impressions are

beginning to congeal. The initial unreality of what we are doing is beginning to change into a harmony of bike and rider. Question yourself: Has there ever been anything like this? Have you ever ridden anything this good? Of course not. It doesn't take a champion to ride it, it's just plain good.

As a matter of fact, this next lap at the back of the track we just might be able to sneak out the back road and high-tail it to Encino. There must be some way we can make off with this thing. Got to have it. Maybe if we entered a Trans-AMA and claimed it. No, that wouldn't work. Have to qualify for one of those. Maybe if we gave Honda a free 12-page ad.

What? There's someone in the track. It's John R. signaling that we stop. No. Who wants to stop? He seems pretty adamant, though. See what he wants.

"What, can't hear you?"

"Yurtofzzz," John said.

Well, have to shut this thing off. "What was that, John?"

"You're just about out of gas, you've been riding for 50 minutes."

"Yeah? Who would have guessed it."



Coming up the famous Saddleback start hill it's easy to appreciate the good traction and the smooth power.