

IT WAS ALMOST TOO LATE

RETURN OF THE ELSINORE

Testing the all new 250—after three years of stagnation.



By the Editors of MODERN CYCLE

Isn't it strange that the new 250 Elsinore has to prove itself? Remember just a couple of years back, the 214-pound Elsinore became an instant sensation. It was the first breakthrough in motorcycles in the last five years and it made all the rest of the manufacturers get off their dead asses.

All of a sudden, CZ couldn't give their heavy and poorly suspended 250 away for dealer cost. It would run away from a Husky and it cost about the same as a 250 Suzuki.

What made the 250 Elsinore such a breakthrough? More than anything else, the bike gave you more for your dollar than any bike ever did. Think about it for a moment. The Elsinore came out with DID rims standard when almost everyone else was using steel wheels, or the old mud gathering Akronts. It had forks that worked better than most and shocks that lasted for a while (until the damping went away). That foxy aluminum tank was narrow and light, while everyone else either had steel, or break-prone fiberglass.

The list of details was endless: tremendous brakes, light hubs, good pegs, easy shifting, comfy saddle, lots of power, and on and on.

Oh sure, the bike had some faults. A novice attempting to ride an Elsinore briskly, might find himself splattered all over the landscape more often than

not. And it had more than its share of front end washout. Some of this could be corrected by raising the forks in their triple clamps and sticking a Metzler on the front, but even a savvy rider had to pay attention. The power came on with a vicious whap and the light flywheels allowed the revs to build quickly. All in all, the Elsinore was not an easy bike to ride, because the rider had to move around a great deal and make lots of corrections to keep the thing going in its original intended direction of flight. Still, because it was so light, it didn't sap the rider too much. The Elsinore *could* be made to go fast and it did win a ton of races.

So much for its glorious history. Now. What happened, you ask?

Simple. Everybody else responded to the threat of the Elsinore and got busy. Maico, Husky, Ossa, Bultaco and the rest saw the light and the midnight oils were burned. They came out with stock machinery that handled better and was lighter than stuff they'd been racing. They got so goddamned scared of the pending invasion of Japanese "Elsinore," that they made more gains in two years than they're used to making in a decade.

Oh yes . . . those other Japanese "Elsinore." When Honda did introduce their killer weapon, all of the other major Japanese factories introduced

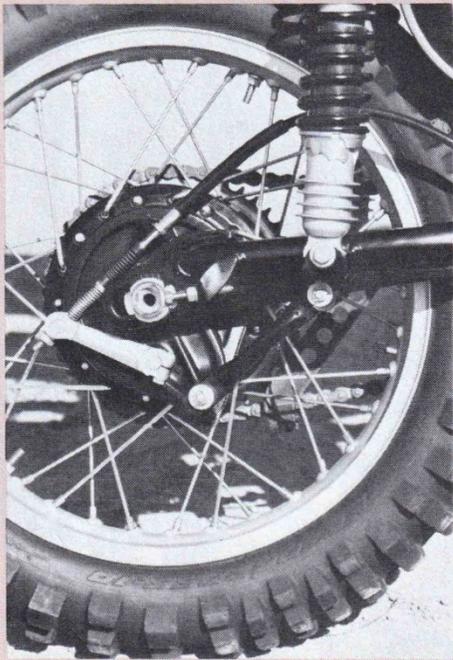


Typical Honda detailing: three cable guides on the brake cable alone.

Front brake is the finest we've used to date. Strong, light and progressive in feel.

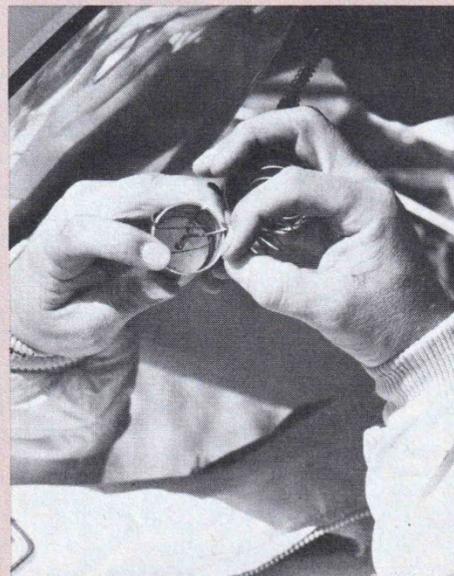
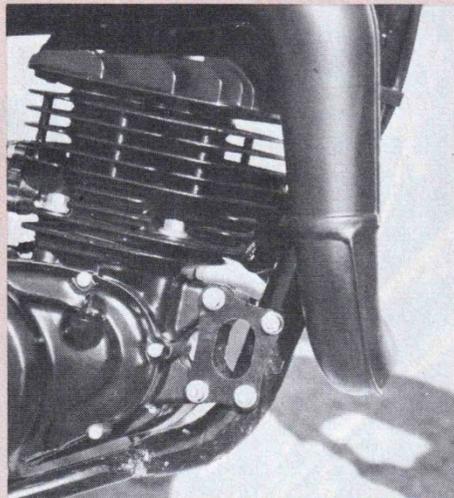






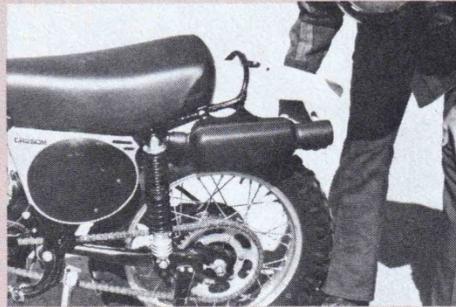
Cable-operated rear brake was one of the best we've ever felt. It was strong without being overly touchy.

Pipe was work of art; well tucked in and totally out of the way.



Carb comes with a fixed needle jet. This means that all mid range adjustments must be done with the needle position, or not at all.

For enduro use, Honda supplies this big bulky spark arrester/muffler. It's very heavy and can be jammed into the wheel, in spite of being bolted to the rear frame loop.



Take a long hard look at the knob design of that rear tire. You'll see that the knobs are spot staggered, with spaces being left every other pattern. This is designed for maximum traction on dry surfaces. It worked well, but we wore the tire out in the first few rides.

Under rubber cap on fork stanchion, you'll find a circlip holding in an aluminum plug. It's a non-vented cap, unfortunately.



their answer to the Honda threat. And, almost without exception, they proved to be dismal failures.

Back to the history lesson. Sooooo, a couple of years went by and the Europeans were still slugging it out. But not with Honda. With each other.

And Honda did nothing for almost three long years. The Elsinore, for all practical purposes, stagnated. It wasn't so bad the first year—and the 250 Honda more or less swelled the Sportsman motocross classes. By the second year, riders were carving frames up and switching forks and shocks. By the end of that second year, entire frame kits and hop-up kits were proliferating. By the third year, nobody was looking for an Elsinore . . . there were simply too many other alternatives.

Which, in a long winded manner, brings us up to the all-new 1975½ 250 Elsinore. And it also brings us to the more than obvious question: Does this new machine put the 250 Honda back in the race?

You bet your Gatoraid sucking ass it does. The all new 250 Honda is Honda's best effort since the evolution of the first Elsie's. When the factory riders campaigned their bikes, they did many different things to make them competitive with the European machinery. Different forks, moved forward shocks, a world of things. Honda seemed to be spinning their wheels with the production bikes, but going full tilt on the racing equipment. No one had any idea what they had planned for their newer models. What they did was compile all the information they had gathered over the almost three years of racing they had on the bikes. Put all of this info together and call it the 1975½ Elsinore.

On a few of the factory bikes, they had a nicely tucked in, cross-through pipe. This time it's standard. Hondas of old were notorious for crushing pipe and the stock item was over a hundred bucks. Accessory companies went crazy making enough pipes to keep the people supplied. This should be a thing of the past with this new pipe. Also it's one of the lightest pipes we've ever felt, next to the YZ. Elsinores of the past had a good set of fenders, but this year's has the best ever. They're white and made from good heavy duty plastic. Mounting is done very sano and uses lots of rubber grommets.

If you could ride one of the older 250s with speed, you had to be a rider of above average skill. This new Honda is easier to ride because the power has been changed around. It still hauls like the others, but now it comes on a bunch sooner and not so violently. Top horsepower is a bit lower, but you'd never know it by riding the bike.

Riding a bike like this new Honda requires a different approach. You have

to keep full concentration at all times. Even though the power is much broader than before, it's still explosive. This enables you to leave corners faster with a slow revving engine. If the engine bogs down, flip a finger on the clutch and it will snap to life.

Getting the bike moving is touchy. The engine wants to rev instantly, but if you just drop the hammer, much time will be lost in useless wheelspin. You really can't torque it out of the hole either, for the engine doesn't like to work below 3500 rpm. The secret seems to be to feed the clutch out and ease the throttle on until the engine is in the fat part of the power curve, then start short-shifting.

Once moving, it doesn't pay to wind the Elsinore out too far, as the engine pulls best at mid range and upper mid range. Like previous Elsinores, this one flattens out too early on top, but no other bike in the 250 class has as much snap in the mid range. Like anything else, it's a trade off, but a trade off that can be made to work if the rider uses the gearbox on the early side and makes the engine work, rather than attempt to rev.

Our first experience with the bike was on a dry, dusty day. It felt fairly stable, even on the baked enamel clay surface, but later in the week the rains came and so did the true potential of the bike. On a course that has a good cushion, you are able to do things that you'd never dream of. With traction, you can lean the bike right down to the cases. If you plan on doing any heavy riding you'd better drill a few holes in the shift lever or you'll be changing a shift shaft after a left side spill, which requires case splitting. If you get off the pipe, try to clutch it as fast as possible. Shifting the bike is simple. Think about it, and next moment, it happens. By placing your foot under the lever and slowly putting pressure on it, the box will slip into the next gear. Only on one occasion did we ever miss a shift and we rode the bike mercilessly. We used the clutch only for getting under way; the shifting didn't change even when the clutch wasn't used.

If you were to line up all of the top ten 250cc motocross bikes, and have a drag race, the Honda would be right in tied for the lead for the first half of the race and get pulled in the last half. It would probably end up in the middle of the pack by the end of the straight.

Honda sells an optional cylinder for this 250. With this barrel on the bike, it turns into a real monster revving a full 1500 rpm higher. It doesn't sacrifice too much off the bottom, but if you ride fast, then that won't make much difference. We talked to Richard Eirestedt the other day, and he's using a

new stock Honda for his practice bike. According to him, it handles better than the red-framed bikes he was racing last year.

Our bike came geared for fast motocross courses, but had enough grunt to pull out of tight corners in second gear. Our test track is not what you would call smooth. It has big holes, rough uphill straights and many drop away jumps. And, of course, a bad down hill. This Honda, when ridden correctly, could turn lap times as fast as any other bike we've ridden there. You had to change a few of your habits, like body English. But these all come easier with the more time you put on the bike. On the rougher sections the Elsie flew over the bumps with no problem. The stock shocks are not up to the job, but if you change the oil in them you can get better life and performance. We put Bel-Ray LT-300 in ours and they worked very good for stock dampers. If you plan a desert race or two, you'd better invest in some serious shocks.

We found that in berm turns, you could lean the bike deeply, confidently. On flat turns, the front end would track well with precise, positive steering. The biggest determining factor in the cornering of the bike, is the position of the body. You must keep on top of things because they happen so fast on a bike with this much instant power. If you get on the gas too soon in a corner, you might find the front wheel climbing upward. If you panic you'll probably chop the throttle and cause yourself to highside. Don't worry about it; stay where you are; the bike will settle into a drive for the next corner.

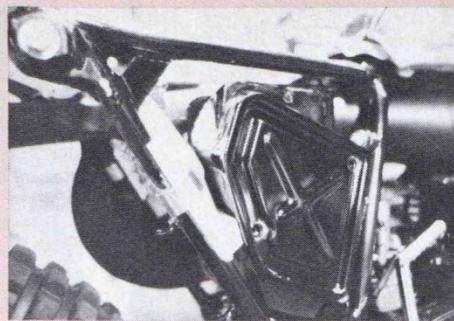
That rear tire is a 4.00x18 and there's a good reason why. If you over-tire the bike, it's hard to keep it on the power. You find yourself floundering from corner to corner, rather than accelerating. The bike just gets too much traction. That might seem a bit far-fetched, but it's not. What would happen if you put a 4.50 on the rear of a 125? Sure it might pull the extra tire, but it puts too much drag on the motor. You just don't need it.

Blasting over jumps is a thrill. The lightness of the bike is felt greater here than any other place. You can move the bike from one side of the course to the other with little effort. If you feel like you're getting out of shape, you can easily compensate with a little body movement.

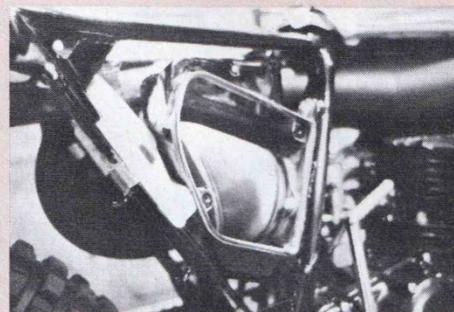
DETAILS

Elsinore have always had good brakes, a bit touchy, but they stop well. This year is no exception; the brakes are right on top of the heap for stopping power; front brake especially. It'll lock the wheel with good lever feel, so you can drop your speed in a big hurry.

The cables are as big as most cross-



Air box assembly is much improved over last year's. The fuzzy foam is gone. Good.



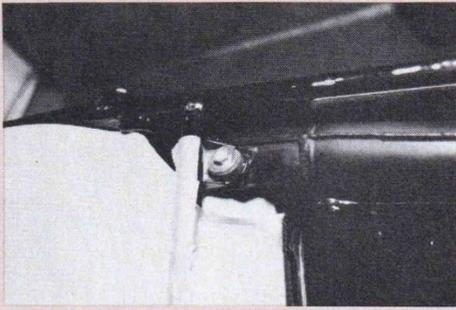
Tank mounting is superb. Tank does not touch the frame anywhere; it's fully suspended.

Test rider, Rick Salmon, liked Honda; said it turned much better than the 250 Husky. Until the shocks got hot, that is.



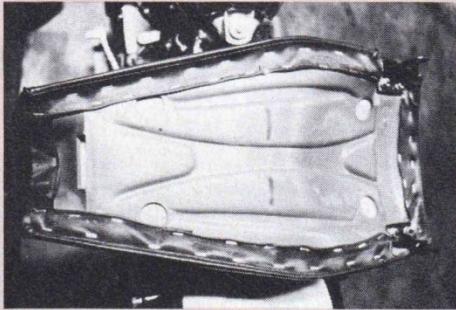






Rear pipe mount broke on our bike. This appears to be a chronic problem on the new bikes, according to other owners we've talked to. Factory claims next batch of bikes will have this corrected. We'll let you know.

Seat base is plastic and is the lightest we've ever felt.



Steering head should have more gusseting, in our opinion.

Front end washout of the old Elsinores wasn't present in the 1975 version. In fact, whole frame is changed.



bars on your run-of-the-mill racer, and never in our testing time did they stretch or fray.

Routing of the front brake cable is done through a series of guides. Three to be exact; one on the slider, the next on the lower triple clamp and the final one on the center mounting bolts of the number plates. This keeps the cable from wandering into the front wheel. The only problem we had with any of the cables, was the throttle cable. It kept dropping down below the top triple clamp and hung out just waiting to be snagged. A Zip-Tie on the front brake cable will hold it up and out of the way.

They have the rear brake operated by a cable, but it works surprisingly well. The rear anchor arm is hooked to the swingarm only a few inches in front of the hub. We first thought it would chatter under heavy braking, but it doesn't. In fact the rear brake works almost as well as the front, sure and positive.

Hooked to the rear brake cable is the world's finest brake pedal. No shit, this pedal is one of the finest units you'll ever see on any motorcycle.

Hubs are the same as previous efforts, but still are among the best.

Honda outdid themselves with the design of the pipe. It can barely be seen when sitting on the bike. It snakes over the head, back past the air box and exits over the rear wheel on the left side. The pipe also comes with a built in silencer that isn't too quiet, but it should get you by at the local MX. If you do a lot of trail riding, you'll have to install the spark arrestor that Honda has available; you'll probably get one with the bike. These mufflers are state approved and bolt directly to the frame. After the first test session, we tore the bike down to inspect it and service the air filter. We noticed that the rear pipe mount was broken off right at the pipe/mount junction. A bit of weld and some gusseting cured ours; check yours.

Elsinores have, since their creation, had some problems with the swingarm bushings. The new models are tighter on the tolerances, we've heard, but it's a good idea to keep an eye on them. The DID rims on the bike had some dings in it after a few hours of hard riding, and the spokes came loose all at once.

For some reason Honda has installed this bike with the world's weirdest rear tire. It has an alternated knob pattern. In four places on the tread, the knobs are close while on the other sections the knobs are spaced like a Trelleborg. We dug around and found out that the team riders use this tire on dry, dusty tracks. They claim that it gives a little better traction on zero traction courses. It didn't seem to work that well for

us, but the bike did slide well on dry ground.

Up front, the forks feel very positive and damp well. The caps aren't vented and seemed to pump-up after about thirty hard minutes of racing.

They added a bit of foam to the seat and made it fit the bike better.

Since the pipe now goes over the top of the air box, they were forced to re-design the box and did a sano job in doing so. Servicing the filter is easy; un-do the 6mm bolt on the side and it slips out of a slot, ready to clean.

Every piece of hardware on the bike is in a perfect location; the levers, brake pedal and even the shifter are all in just the right place. You never find yourself reaching for the brake, or searching for the clutch. Speaking of the clutch, it's just like most Japanese clutches—light and easy.

SUMMING IT ALL UP

Most of the Japanese motocrossers have distinct personalities, but the Honda is about the easiest to live with. Sure you have to change a few things in your way of thinking, but this bike can be ridden fast. As fast as you want to go, in fact. If you happen to be died-in-the-wool Maico riders, as we seem to be, then you'll need some time to get used to the special characteristics of an Elsinore.

While riding the Honda, you learn the real reason you started to ride: It's fun. You've got it, the bike is a kick in the ass to ride. Even better than that, it's fun to race. One of our staffers took it to a local MX and nabbed a third expert on his first Honda ride. Right behind Kenny Zhart on a sponsored special.

All in all, the new Honda Elsinore 250 is a great bike for the money. We feel that this bike can be ridden quickly if the owner takes the time to learn to adjust to the explosive power. Take a look, take a long look at guys like Eirestedt and Billy Grossi. These riders have learned to ride "sudden bikes" and seem to flat boogie on them. This seems to be what's winning the races nowadays; explosive powered 250s.

If you're the kind of rider who enjoys learning new things about your bike each time you ride it, then this is your bike. Each time we got on the thing, we learned. Imagine blasting down a flat-out fifth-gear straight, bombing over the worst surface of the moon and still having the confidence to gas it even harder. That's the feeling this 250 gives. Since the brakes are so good you can now dive deeper and harder into corners than you ever thought possible.

Look at the bike as a finished package. It comes with much of the stuff you have to later buy and put on most MXers. As the bike comes it's hard to beat no matter how much you spend.

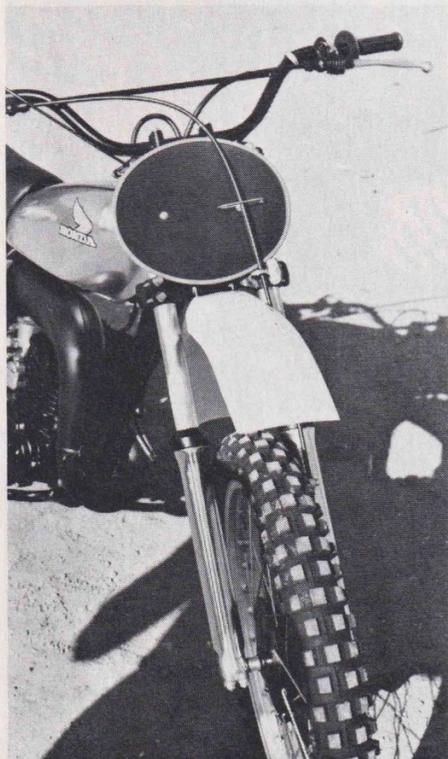


HONDA

NAME AND MODEL .. Honda CR 250 M Elsinore
 PRICE, SUGGESTED RETAIL (APPROX.) .. \$1400
 MOTOR .. Single cylinder two-stroke, air-cooled piston port
 BORE/STROKE .. 70.0mm-64mm
 DISPLACEMENT (CC) .. 248cc
 COMPRESSION RATIO .. 7.2:1
 BRAKE HORSEPOWER (SAE) .. 27.0
 CARBURETION .. Keihin 34mm
 RECOMMENDED STANDARD JETTING
 FROM FACTORY:
 MAIN JET .. 148
 NEEDLE JET .. Fixed, non-adjustable
 PILOT (LOW SPEED JET) .. 30
 NEEDLE POSITION .. Middle
 IDLE AIR SCREW
 (NUMBER OF TURNS) .. One turn from bottom
 IGNITION .. Magneto with points/button mag
 RECOMMENDED SPARK PLUG .. B9ES NGK
 SPECIFIED TIMING .. 1.7mm B.T.D.C.
 PRIMARY DRIVE .. Gear drive, 3.300:1 ratio
 FINAL DRIVE .. 5.20 chain
 GEAR RATIOS:
 1. 2.055:1
 2. 1.571:1
 3. 1.250:1
 4. 1.038:1
 5. 0.862:1
 AIR FILTRATION SYSTEM .. Foam filter in air box
 LUBRICATION .. Pre-mix
 RECOMMENDED OIL AND RATIO OF MIX .. 20:1
 none recommended, racing team uses Pennzoil
 FUEL TANK CAPACITY .. 1.8 gallon
 OIL TANK CAPACITY (IF ANY) .. None
 RECOMMENDED GASOLINE (FACTORY) .. Premium

FRAME (TYPE) .. Single down tube/
 chromoly tubing
 WHEELBASE .. 56.5 inches
 STEERING HEAD ANGLE .. 58 degrees
 TRAIL .. 5.8 inches
 GROUND CLEARANCE .. 9.6 inches
 SEAT HEIGHT .. 33.9 inches
 FRONT SUSPENSION .. 7:1 inches travel,
 internal spring, telescopic
 REAR SUSPENSION .. 4.1 inches travel,
 shock moved forward
 WHEELS:
 FRONT .. Straight hub/21" DID rim
 REAR .. Conical hub/18" DID rim
 TIRES:
 FRONT .. 3.00-21 Bridgestone/knobby
 REAR .. 4.00-21 Bridgestone/knobby
 BRAKES/HUBS:
 FRONT .. 15.5" internal expanding
 REAR .. 15.5" internal expanding
 FUEL TANK MATERIAL .. Aluminum
 FENDER MATERIAL .. Plastic
 INSTRUMENTS (IF ANY) .. None
 WEIGHT (ACTUAL)
 .. 214 lbs.
 FRONT WHEEL .. 94.8 lbs.
 REAR WHEEL .. 119.2 lbs.
 EXHAUST SYSTEM .. Expansion chamber
 SILENCER/SPARK ARRESTER
 (IF ANY) .. Silenced (barely)
 STARTER (KICK, ELECTRIC,
 LOCATION .. Kick/right side
 PRIMARY START .. Yes
 GUARANTEE, IF ANY .. None
 INTENDED PURPOSE OF BIKE
 (FROM MFG.) .. Motocross
 COUNTRY OF MANUFACTURE .. Japan

Yes, Honda finally did respond after a period of apathy. Let's just hope they don't wait another three years before they do it again. ●



New style front fender is wide and well mounted. It's the best stock shape yet.



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