

**DIRT BIKE**

**TRIPLE SHOOTOUT SPECIAL!**  
**250 MOTOCROSS • 250 ENDURO • 4-STROKES!**

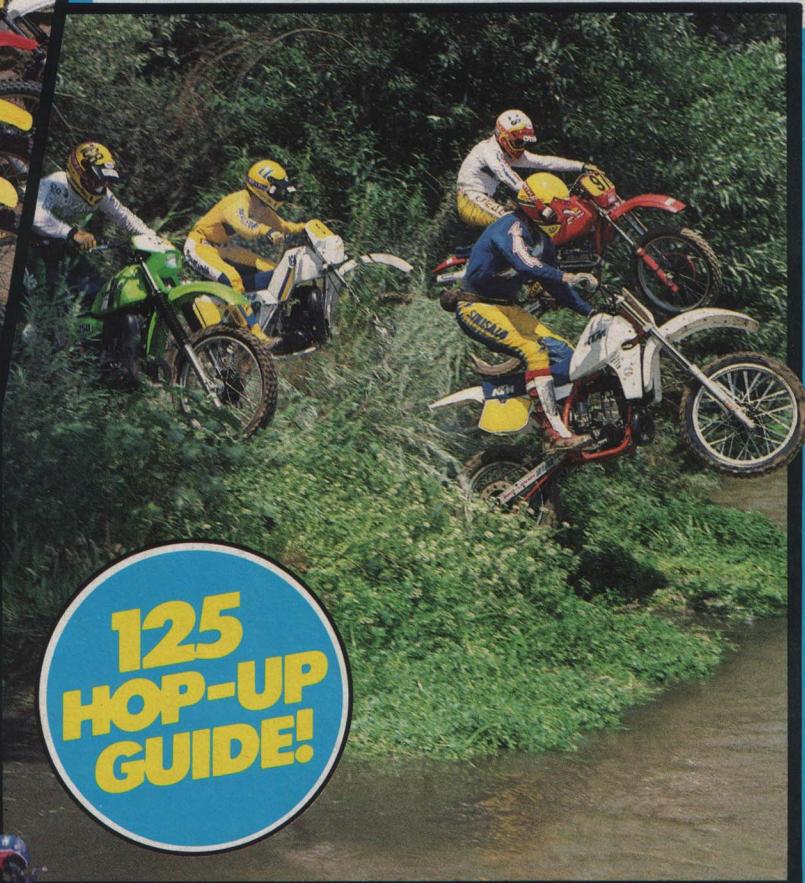
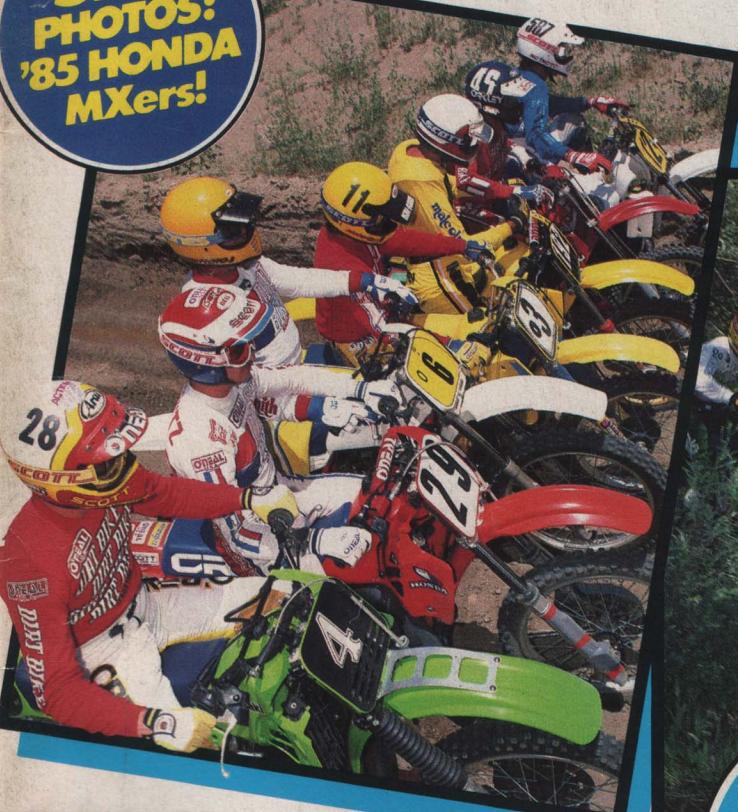
DIRT BIKE

**SPY  
PHOTOS:  
'85 HONDA  
MXers!**

SEPTEMBER 1984 \$2.00  
UK £1.25

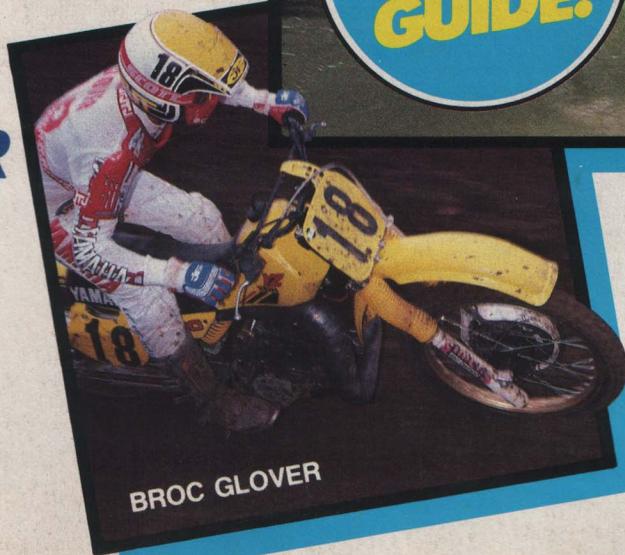
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**HOW TO HOLESHOT:  
BAILEY REVEALS HIS  
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**125  
HOP-UP  
GUIDE!**

**WHITE  
BROTHERS'  
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WEAPON:  
TURN YOUR  
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**NEW '85s:**  
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4-STROKE HUSKY!**

**FIRST USGP PHOTOS:  
AMERICANS HUMILIATE  
EUROPE'S TOP STARS!**



# DIRT BIKE

SEPTEMBER 1984 • VOLUME 14, NO. 9



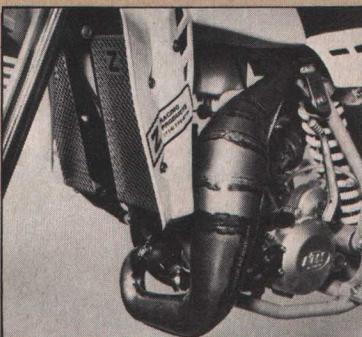
250 MX SHOOTOUT



ALL-NEW KTM



500 USGP



125 HOP-UP GUIDE



BLACKWATER 100



ISDE QUALIFIER



XR250 HOP-UP

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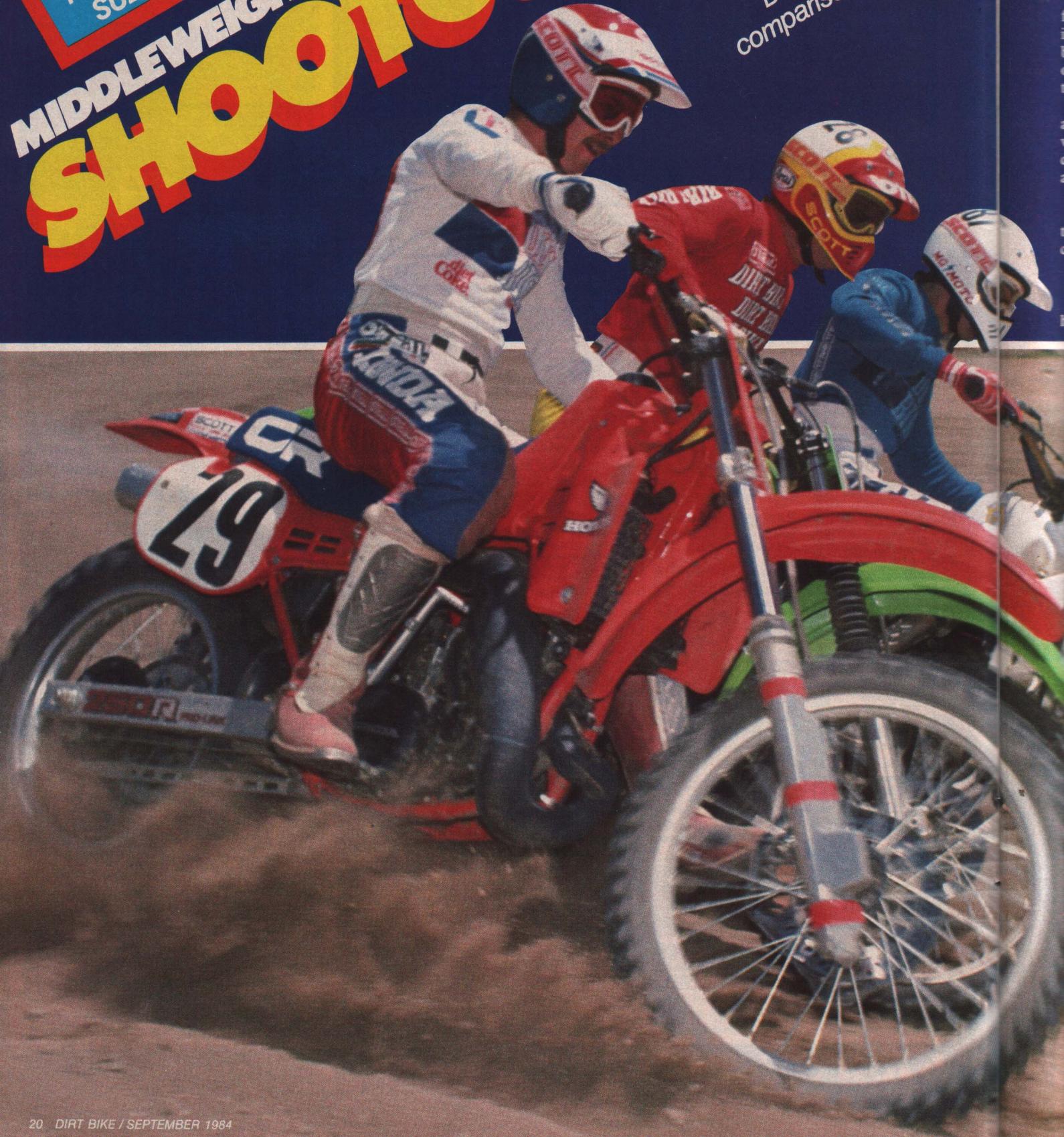
**ON THE COVER:** The test staff lines up for the 250 MX shootout; the top four enduro bikes take time out for a bath; and Broc Glover burns down Carlsbad. Photos by Webb, Clipper, and Webb, in that order; color separation by Valley Film.

**WARNING:** Much of the action depicted in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Virtually all of the riders seen in our photos are experienced experts or professionals. Do not attempt to duplicate any stunts that are beyond your own capabilities. Always wear the appropriate safety gear.

HONDA, HUSKY,  
KAWASAKI, KTM, M-STAR,  
SUZUKI & YAMAHA 250

# MIDDLEWEIGHT MOTOCROSS **SHOOTOUT**

Which one is the best?  
...the most versatile?  
DB's side-by-side  
comparison tells all!



A 250 MX shootout is best done after a lot of time has been put on the bikes. The initial joy of fresh horsepower has a way of diminishing with a few months of work on the track. Chronic problems crop up. Weaknesses are exposed. Some of the bikes that seem weak at first, take on a renewed life as they are dialed in and the riders adjust to idiosyncrasies.

As you read our comparison test, you'll find out that some of the bikes have more information on how to make them work better than others. This is because the staff of *DB* wanted to ride these bikes more than the others.

This, in itself, is implicit endorsement that a bike is basically desirable. Other bikes were ridden, tested, then parked a great deal. We simply did not want to ride them as much.

This is implicit downgrading.

Sorry, but that's the way life is. Some of the bikes we like; others we ride and test because that's our job.

#### WHAT MAKES A BIKE WORTH WORKING ON?

We look for certain things. Some bikes have tremendous turning manners. Others

have a kick-butt motor. A few have great suspension components and track well.

These traits endear various factions of the staff and make them want to perfect the machine according to what they think is correct. We vary in our opinions, as do all human beings.

Webb likes tons of low-end and mid-range power and ultra-sharp turning. Clipper likes mellow power and straight-line stability. Sieman likes supple suspension and easy shifting, with rev-monster motors. Talbot is caught up with technical trickery.

#### WHAT MAKES A BIKE DEPRESSING?

Try suspension components that defy tuning and dialing in. How about a motor that doesn't respond to basic tuning or hop-up approaches? Or maybe a bike that displays headshake at higher speeds. These are the sorts of things that turn off the *DB* staff and, probably, most riders out there in the real world.

One last thing: The *DB* crew likes versatile bikes. We know that MX bikes are used for a whole lot more than just motocross. In the East and Midwest, hare scrambles is a big sport. On the West Coast, desert racing and even enduro riding is often done on slightly modified MX bikes. And all over

the country, MX bikes are used more for fun riding than for racing. The hard-core MX magazines might not like to acknowledge this fact, but that's the way it is. Here are the bikes in alphabetical order:

#### HONDA CR250R

A rolling test bed of technical innovations, the Honda is water-cooled, sports an exhaust (ATAC) gimmick, front disc brake, Showa suspension parts front and rear, spacey red plastic and an electric-blue saddle.

It has a superb engine, flawed suspension, fine turning manners and a wobble at high speeds that would turn your hair gray.

#### HUSQVARNA 250CR

A first-year water-cooler, the Husky has a versatile six-speed gearbox, distinctive twin Ohlins shocks and its own 40mm forks. White plastic and frame tubes are touched off by bits of yellow and blue.

Good straight-line stability (a Husky trademark), a mild engine and dead-meat brakes mark the Hoosky. A great airbox and a multitude of bolt-on components allow the bike to be as versatile as you want. Look for them not only on the MX tracks, but in the woods and deserts of America, as well.



# SHOOTOUT

## KAWASAKI KX250

A slightly updated 1983 model, the green streaker is a good all-around bike, with no real outstanding virtues or vices. It's decently fast, has a tremendous front disc brake, very tunable front and rear KYB suspension parts, and sports the usual radiator for cooling. It's a five-speeder, and the power delivery hits more down low and mid-range than the other offerings around.

## KTM 250LC

A second-generation water-cooler from Austria, the KTM is lightning fast, with a five-speed gearbox. Power comes on good down low and mid-range, and it revs out far enough to give the Honda a hard time through the gears. Marzocchi forks (average at best) ride up front, and a tunable White Power shock does the bounce-handling chores. A hard saddle, crisp white styling and an orange/red frame make the Katoom a looker. Double-leading-shoe brakes do the slowing at both ends.

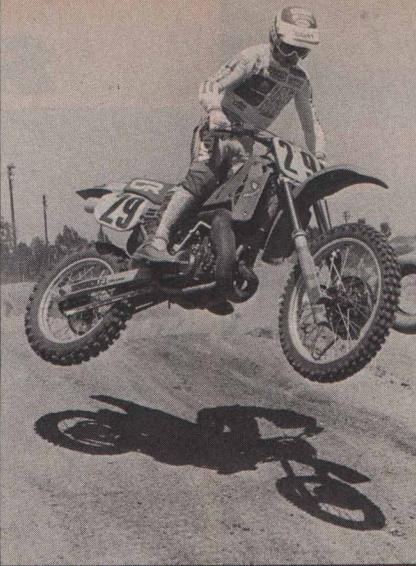
Many enduro and cross-country items bolt right on the KTM, making it very versatile for enduro, hare scrambles and desert work.

## M-STAR 250 SUPERCROSS

In reality the first water-cooled Maico, the M-Star, is a fast five-speeder with sluggish response down low. New plastic, 42mm forks and an Ohlins shock are trademarks. Average brakes can be found at both ends. The bike tracks extremely well at high speeds and turns with the best of them. A huge airbox makes it very waterproof; too much metal makes it ten pounds heavier than it should be.



The M-Star had plenty of power and the longest travel of all the bikes, but the throttle response was poor at low revs.



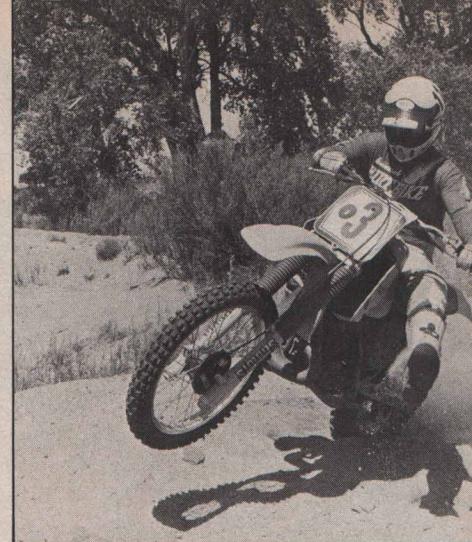
A hot motor and poor forks and shock were the prime traits of the Honda.



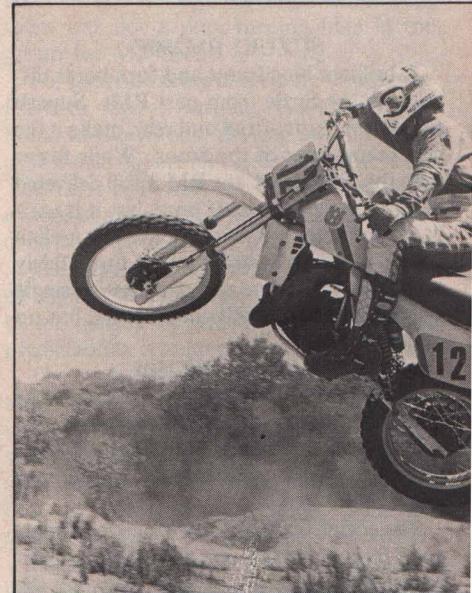
When dialed in, the White Power shock was right on. The KTM was right near the top in the horsepower department.



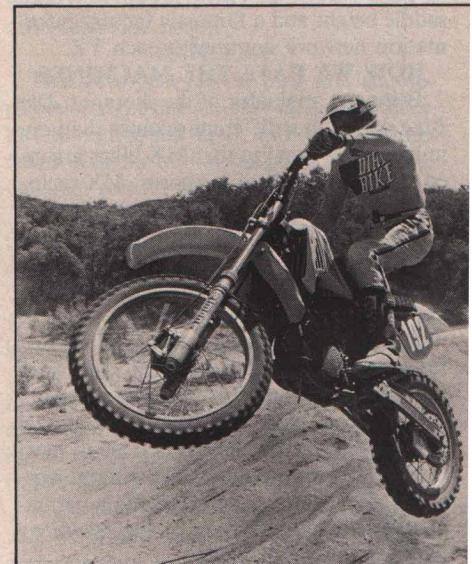
Tallish and slim, the KX demanded attention from the riders to keep from standing up in the turns.



An all-around good handler, the Suzuki needed much clutch work to exit power-sapping turns.



Wide at the middle, the Husky took some getting used to by first-time riders.



Good power, flawed forks and a very tunable rear end made the YZ one of this year's most popular bikes.

# SHOOTOUT



The great low-end snap of the YZ made the Yamaha best on Supercross-type tracks.

## SUZUKI RM250E

A brilliant blue frame and fork boots distinguish the Suzie from past RMs. Superb suspension parts, front and rear, make it the best bump-eater of the group. While faster than the 1983 effort, the RM is still delivered in a too mellow state of tune, but it is easily made faster for low bucks. It's a slick shifter that tracks straight and turns fairly well. The new frame sports a massive single airbox, a flat-slide Mikuni carb and has no major flaws.

## YAMAHA YZ250L

Probably the most improved YZ since the 1980 "G" model, the YZ has proven to be a very popular bike this year. Flawed 43mm forks and a very adjustable Mono rear end mark the Y-Zed.

The engine is stunning, with a staggeringly good blast down low and a near-brutal mid-range. Revs flattened out a bit early, but the engine has proven to be what is needed for modern MX work.

Notchy shifting, a great front brake, low saddle height and a fantastic factory information network come with each YZ.

## HOW WE RATE THE MACHINES

Being the originator of the shootout, *Dirt Bike* does it in a different manner than our imitators. We realize that MX bikes are used for a multitude of purposes, MX racing being just one of them. Thus, we have two rating categories: motocross only and general racing/riding.

We like the availability of optional bigger factory tanks, speedo kits, six-speed or wide-ratio gearboxes and other similarly useful goodies. It's nice to be able to gear your bike up for a Grand Prix or desert race without hunting high and low for optional sprockets. And it's nice to be able to blast through a deep water crossing without worrying about your scooter becoming a permanent fixture in a tributary of the Allegheny River.

## POWER

As far as pure ponies go, the Honda simply has the most. It's fast enough to com-

pete at Pro level, and many privateers are running slightly modified engines at Nationals and not giving away much to the works bike.

Surprisingly close on the heels of the Honda is the KTM. It will run right alongside the CR in a drag race through the gears and will only give away a fraction from corner to corner, because the Honda builds the revs quicker.

The stunning YZ rates third in the power department, with a tremendous punch at ultra-low revs and a super mid-range. The only thing that keeps it from being rated higher than the Honda is the way the stock motor flattens out too early. With not too much work, the YZ can be made to rev, and is then more than a match for the Honda. For stadium MX racing, the YZ's lack of revvability hurts it for getting to the first turn in premier position.

In the power race, the Suzuki is next, with decent low end, a nice mid-range and not enough revs. Once the RM gets going, it has plenty of power to turn good lap times. Getting past the start is a problem, as the RM rider will have to deal with a barrier of red and yellow.

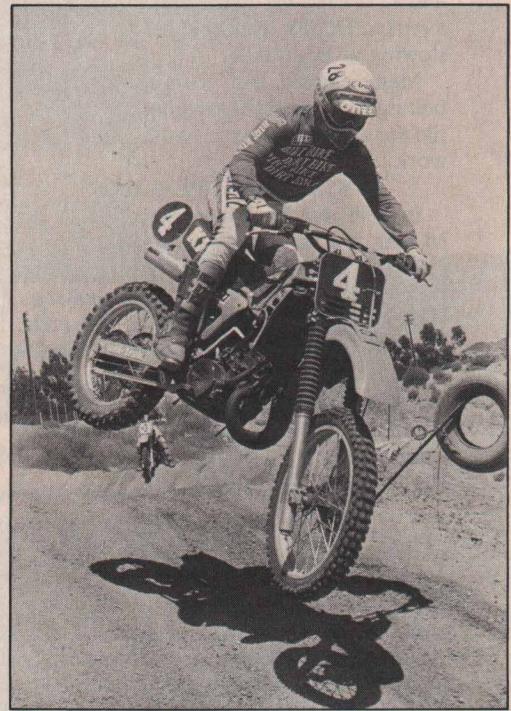
Rate the Kawasaki next. It has lots of low-end and mid-range punch and will rev out but doesn't make much power with the revs. Its effectiveness is limited to low-end and mid-range use.

The M-Star (Maico?) is fast but very sluggish in response from low revs. M-Star riders will have to be a gear lower than many other riders in the same corner and will have to abuse the clutch, as well, to get the red wagon going back up to speed. On a start, the M-Star will give little or nothing away to the other bikes (we pulled holeshots with our test bike), but the slow-building revs handicap an otherwise stout powerplant.

The slowest bike of the lot, the Husky simply needs more power. It makes decent power in the mid-range and can be forced



The only one of the machines with a six-speed gearbox, the Husky was more at home in the desert than on a modern MX track.



A good rear end and too soft forks hampered the KX. Most of the power was delivered at the mid-range.

to rev out. However, the buzzing of the engine doesn't translate into satisfactory forward motion for motocross. With room to stretch out, the six-speed gearbox lets the Husky work in a more versatile manner, but from corner to corner, it gives away at least a length to all the other machines in the class.

So, knowing how all the bikes deliver their power, we rate them like this:

### MOTOCROSS ONLY

1. Honda
2. Yamaha
3. KTM
4. Suzuki
5. Kawasaki
6. M-Star
7. Husqvarna



**With the best suspension of the group, the Suzuki had the least wrong of all the bikes, making it an easy racer to live with.**



**Hampered by ten extra pounds of weight, the M-Star was still one of the best-turning bikes of the seven.**



**Lightest of the 250s, the KTM proved reliable, fast, and confused in the forks.**



**In the air, the Honda felt the lightest of the bikes. Super-slim midsection and layout gave it a "Pro" feel.**

#### GENERAL RACING/RIDING

1. KTM
2. Yamaha
3. Honda
4. Suzuki
5. Kawasaki
6. M-Star
7. Husqvarna

#### TURNING

For MX use we'd have to rate the Honda tops. It turns snake-quick and the front end bites like a Velcro tire on carpeting. Very close to the Honda, we have the YZ, which steers accurately through the corners.

The M-Star had a typical Maico feel in the turns... very good, with no washout, but slower steering than the Honda or the Yamaha.

Our test Suzuki steered okay—not as sharp as the top bikes, but well enough to get the job done, as long as the rider worked a bit harder. The KTM had no bad manners in the turns but was happier to steer in a slightly slower and more predictable fashion.

Only the tall saddle height of the Kawasaki relegated it to a lower position in the standings, but even this did not make the bike poor... just noticeably less sharp in the turns than the others.

Lastly, we had the Husky. Not a bad-turning bike by any means, the Husky simply has more rake and trail than the other bikes and requires more steering effort and rider input to get the job done. When Husky riders get on other machines, they think the

bikes are too skittish. All things considered, there was not a poor-turning bike in the group for MX usage.

For general racing and riding we rate the KTM as tops in turning. It's as much at home in the woods, darting around trees, as it is carving around a slippery fire road. The YZ is right near the top and can work as well in a rock-filled sand wash as it does on a MX track. Good manners.

The quick-steering Honda was down-rated slightly here because it simply turned a bit too quickly for general usage. A bit more predictability is appreciated in this category.

The M-Star turned well under all conditions, and only a too soft shock let it wallow in bumpy corners. The Suzuki was an all-around decent-turning bike but did demand a lot of rider concentration and responded best to a throttle-on situation. With the throttle chopped, the RM wants to wander.

Husky riders like lots of rake and trail, with the resultant slower turning habits. Others may not be quite as happy with it. The tallish Kawasaki was bothered, as previously mentioned, by a tall saddle with a nosebleed ride height.

#### HANDLING

This goes past just turning and encompasses straight-line stability at speeds, medium- to high-speed turns, and the all-around reaction of the bike when going faster than you feel comfortable with.

In the MX category, we top-rated the ultra-stable Suzuki, mostly because it didn't do anything wrong under any conditions.

When properly dialed in to suit the riders' weight, the YZ was quite good, although less stable than the Suzuki at high speeds.

We rated the Honda below the top two in spite of its superb turning manners, because of a truly nasty headshake when coming down from speed. Still, on most MX tracks the speeds aren't all that high.

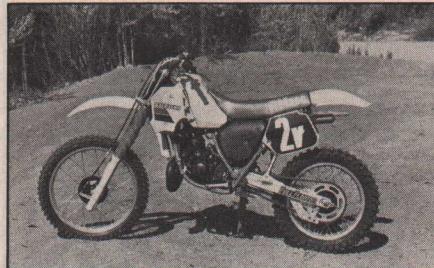
Right behind the Honda, the KTM works well in general and has super-good high-speed stability. The M-Star was close behind it overall. Some headshake was exhibited by the KX, and the tallish bike was hard work on certain types of turns. Lastly, the Husky

was a bit too slow in chassis response for MX work.

For general racing/riding, the extra-good high-speed stability of the KTM gave it top rating. For a combination of decent turning and flat-out hooking it, the chassis of the Katoom is a hard combination to beat.

The RM, another all-arounder, was rated second here. The bike had no real vices and would do what it was told. On sharper tracks the RM could be dialed in more toward sharp cornering, but if there was a need for ultra-high-speed stability, that was available, too, with a simple change in preload, fork tube height and damping.

# SHOOTOUT



<b>Engine type</b>	HONDA CR250R	HUSQVARNA 250CR	KAWASAKI KX250C2	KTM 250MX	M-STAR 250SC	SUZUKI RM250E	YAMAHA YZ250L
Bore and stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke	Single cylinder, water-cooled, 2-stroke
Displacement	68mm x 72mm	69.5mm x 64.5mm	70mm x 64.9mm	71mm x 62mm	67mm x 70mm	70mm x 64mm	68mm x 68mm
Carburetion	246cc	245cc	249cc	245cc	247cc	246cc	246cc
Factory recommended jetting:	38/36mm Keihin PE40D	38mm flat-slide Mikuni	38mm Mikuni	38mm Type 54 Bing	38mm Type 54 Bing	38mm flat-slide Mikuni	38mm Mikuni
Main jet	152	400	320	190	195	300	290
Needle jet	Not replaceable	Q6	R-2	280	278.2	Q-8, Series #389	P-6
Jet needle	28N	6F40	634-3	8L2	6D2	6F40-3	6F45-3
Pilot jet	68	45	30	50	65	50	60
Slide number	3.5	4.0	2.5	215	2103	4.0	3.0
Fuel tank capacity	8.0 L (2.1 gals.)	11.0 L (2.8 gals.)	8.0 L (2.1 gals.)	9.0 L (2.4 gals.)	9.0 L (2.4 gals.)	9.0 L (2.4 gals.)	8.5 L (2.25 gals.)
Lubrication	Oil in gas	Oil in gas	Oil in gas	Oil in gas	Oil in gas	Oil in gas	Oil in gas
Transmission	5-speed	6-speed	5-speed	5-speed	5-speed	5-speed	5-speed
Gearbox ratios:	1. 1.800:1 2. 1.470:1 3. 1.210:1 4. 1.000:1 5. 0.833:1 6. 0.833:1	20:63-1 16:57-1 13:19-1 11:12-1 9:37-1 8:29-1	2.133 (32/15) 1.764 (30/17) 1.388 (25/18) 1.136 (25/22) 1.000 (24/24)	14/28 16/26 18/24 20/22 22/21	22:07:1 17.20:1 13.22:1 11.14:1 9.40:1	2.076 (27/13) 1.722 (31/18) 1.381 (29/21) 1.174 (27/23) 1.000 (25/25)	2.142:1 1.750:1 1.444:1 1.200:1 1.000:1
Gearing, front/rear	14/51	12/56	14/50	13/52	14/52	14/50	13/48
Ignition	CDI	Motoplat	CDI	Motoplat	Motoplat	PEI pointless	CDI
Recommended spark plug	NGK BR8EG/Champion QN-86	Bosch W4C	NGK B8EG/NGK BR8EG	Bosch W08CS	Champion N2	NGK B8EGV	NGK B9EV
Silencer/spark arrester	Silencer only average noise	Silencer only average noise	Silencer only average noise	Silencer only fairly quiet	Silencer only average noise	Silencer only average noise	Silencer only loud noise
Wheelbase	1475mm (58.1 in.)	1498mm (59.8 in.)	1465mm (57.6 in.)	1485mm (58.5 in.)	1490mm (58.6 in.)	1475mm (58.1 in.)	1470mm (57.9 in.)
Ground clearance	335mm (13.2 in.)	355mm (15.2 in.)	350mm (13.78 in.)	350mm (13.78 in.)	372mm (14.64 in.)	370mm (14.8 in.)	340mm (13.4 in.)
Seat height	960mm (37.8 in.)	997mm (39.2 in.)	975mm (38.0 in.)	950mm (37.4 in.)	960mm (37.8 in.)	940mm (37.0 in.)	950mm (37.4 in.)
Steering head angle (rake)	26.5°	28.5°	28.5°	28°	28.5°	27.5°	28°
Trail	105mm (4.1 in.)	131mm (5.2 in.)	118mm (4.65 in.)	105mm (4.1 in.)	128mm (4.98 in.)	112mm (4.35 in.)	119mm (4.69 in.)
Wet weight, no fuel	222.0 lbs.	229.0 lbs.	222.0 lbs.	213.8 lbs.	231.5 lbs.	221.0 lbs.	216.5 lbs.
Rim material	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy	Aluminum alloy
Tire size and type:							
Front	90/90-21 Bridgestone M37	3.00 x 21 Trelleborg	3.00 x 21 Dunlop	3.00 x 21 3E Metzeler	3.00 x 21 Metzeler	100/80-21 Bridgestone M37	90/90-21 Bridgestone M37
Rear	130/80-18 Bridgestone M38	4.28 x 18 Pirelli	5.00 x 18 Dunlop	4.60 x 18 PX Metzeler	4.50 x 18 Metzeler	130/80 x 18 Bridgestone M38	138/80 x 18 Bridgestone M38
Suspension, type and travel:							
Front	Telescopic air/oil, 43mm tubes, 305mm (12.0 in.) travel	Husky, air/oil, 40mm tubes, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	KYB 43mm telescopic air/oil, adj. comp., 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	40mm Marzocchi, air/oil, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	42mm Maico forks, air/oil, 310mm (12.2 in.) travel	43mm KYB, air/oil, adj. comp., 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	43mm KYB air/oil, adj. comp., 300mm (11.8 in.) travel
Rear	Pro-Link, adj. comp. & rebound, 310mm (12.2 in.) travel	Dual ITC Ohlins, steel arm, 345mm (13.5 in.) travel	Uni-Trak, single KYB shock, adj. comp. & rebound, 315mm (12.4 in.) travel	40mm Marzocchi, air/oil, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	Ohlins shock, adj. rebound, 325mm (12.8 in.) travel	KYB shock, Full Floater, adj. comp. & rebound, 330.2mm (13.0 in.) travel	Monocross, KYB shock, adj. comp. & rebound, 320mm (12.6 in.) travel
Intended use	Motocross	Motocross	KYB 43mm telescopic air/oil, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	40mm Marzocchi, air/oil, 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	42mm Maico forks, air/oil, 310mm (12.2 in.) travel	43mm KYB, air/oil, adj. comp., 300mm (11.8 in.) travel	43mm KYB air/oil, adj. comp., 300mm (11.8 in.) travel
Country of origin	Japan	Sweden	Japan	Austria	Germany	Japan	Japan
Retail price, approx.	\$2410	\$2795	\$2299	\$2620	\$2795	\$2399	\$2429
Distributor:	American Honda 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247	Husqvarna Motor Co. 4925 Mercury St. San Diego, CA 92111	Kawasaki Motors Corp. 2009 E. Edinger Ave. Santa Ana, CA 92705	West: KTM America, Inc. 315 W. Bradley El Cajon, CA 92020	Hercules Dist. Co. 740 E. Santa Maria Santa Paula, CA 93060	U.S. Suzuki Motor Corp. 3251 E. Imperial Hwy. Brea, CA 92621	Yamaha Motor Corp. 6555 Katella Ave. Cypress, CA 90630

Third slot was given to the YZ. It too had a lot of adjustability available and could be dialed in to suit a large number of riding needs.

For straight-line stability without headshake, the M-Star was excellent. Only a wallowing rear suspension kept the bike from being rated higher as an all-around handler.

It should come as a surprise to no one that the Husky handled dead-true at higher speeds and a bit ponderously on MX tracks. Still, it didn't have any bad habits and never hinted at headshake when coming down from speed.

The higher the speed was, the fuzzier the

KX's handling became. When coming down from speed over rough ground, there was some headshake, but nothing close to the shuddering displayed by the last-ranked Honda. It was truly terrifying bringing the Honda down from a fifth-gear pass over sandy whoops. Even extending the forks helped only a bit.

#### SUSPENSION

For pure motocross use, the suspension at both ends of the Suzuki is tops. Aggressive riders will want an optional heavy spring, as the stocker will tend to sack out after a few months of racing. Those specially plated 43mm RM/KYB forks are the best to come down the pike...period.

We gave the KX second in the MX suspension category. The rear end did a good job, and the forks, while not great, were better than the rest of the field.

The YZ is next, with confused damping in the forks that makes the front wheel bounce off the ground rather than hit and stick. The rear is adjustable enough to make most riders happy.

You might be surprised to see the twin-shock-equipped Husky rated this high for MX. Well, while the suspension is not firm enough for the slamming and bouncing tactics required for Pro-level MX, at least both ends *do* work and *don't* fade.

Next, the M-Star has a very good set of forks matched with a horribly mushy Ohlins shock. Naturally, the Ohlins *can* be dialed in, but the American distributors have absolutely no idea of how to do this, which is unfair to the customer.

In sixth, the KTM has outdated Marzocchi forks that are very harsh in the mid-stroke and insensitive to small stutter bumps. At least they *will* take a big bump well, and their action stays consistent during the entire moto. At the rear is a quality White Power shock that may or may not be dialed in properly. A trip to the White Brothers is often required to get things sorted out. At least the shock is solid and *can* be dialed in.

Lastly, the Honda has the worst forks to be found on any bike in this group. They take the small bumps well and go whacko on anything serious. Matching the poor front is a rear shock that wallows, fades and is undersprung for MX use.

For general racing/riding, much of the rating order is the same. Suzuki first, but the supple Husky gets moved up to second, mostly because of the high comfort rating. Give the Kaw a third slot and the YZ fourth. The rest of the rating stays the same, with the M-Star, KTM and Honda filling out the list.

#### BRAKES

We prefer the feel and convenience of the Yamaha braking system, even though the stopping power of the Honda and the Kawasaki are unmatched. Perhaps it's just because the YZ is less demanding, less sensitive and more forgiving than the disc-braked bikes.

In fourth, the KTM also has excellent dual-leading-shoe brakes, front and rear. YZ



Seven middleweights mix it up for the DB lens. Which one came out on top?

shoes, by the way, will fit inside the KTM hubs.

In fifth, the RM has a weak front brake and a rear brake that doesn't last long enough. The M-Star has the same below-average brakes that Maicos have had for years. Brakes on the Husky are simply the worst available, and fade when immersed in water. Even when fresh and new, they don't haul the bike down from speed any better than the brakes of a 1975 Bultaco. Please, Husky, it's about time you learned how to stop these suckers!

#### COMFORT AND LAYOUT

Sit on a Honda and everything feels right. Control location is natural, and, except for the slightly long distance of the front brake lever from the grip, the rider will not have to think about actuating anything.

The Suzuki, only slightly less slim than the Honda, is a comfortable bike, with the possible exception of too much foam on the forward part of the safety saddle for shorter riders.

An ultra-slim KTM is rated third and would have been at the very top had it not been for a poorly designed brake pedal and a saddle hard enough to pound nails with.

Though tallish, the M-Star is slim in the midsection and everything is well laid out. Not so with the YZ. It has a low saddle swoop with a poorly designed safety seat that takes getting used to. Shifting is notchy, and the bars offer the rider a sit-up-and-beg position.

Kawasaki riders will have to adjust to the tall saddle, forward-located pegs and odd shifting lever position. Last on comfort and layout has to be the Husky with its assortment of bulges from the pipe and poorly designed side panel plastic. Oddly, though, when you first get on the Husky, you wonder how anyone could ride the white machine, but after a few hours in the saddle, you tend to forget everything but the irritating pipe.

#### WEIGHT

Face it, the less pork you have to toss around, the less tiring the bike will be over a long race. With this in mind, the KTM is a clear runaway leader in this department—a feathery 213.8 pounds, dry. All bikes were weighed without gas and with kick stands removed, but with all other oils and fluids present. There's no sense in penalizing a bike on the spec sheet just because it has a larger tank capacity.

In second, the scales noted that the YZ went on a diet from last year and weighed in at a competitive 216.5 pounds. Next, the Suzuki was 221.0 pounds, and the Honda and Kawasaki tied at 222.0 pounds. The Honda gained a few pounds over the 1983 model, most of it in the disc braking system and the ATAC hardware.

In sixth place, the Husky approached ponderous with 229 pounds, and the M-Star passed it with a porky 231-pound reading on the blissfully accurate DB scales.

#### GLITCHES/RELIABILITY/HASSLES

We rated the KTM tops here because nothing went wrong with it in over seven months of racing and riding. It still has the same piston and ring. Brake shoes were replaced at the five-month mark (normal wear) and the stock rear sprocket has just been tossed in favor of a Sidewinder. Even the stock Metzeler tires held up super. KTM's might cost more, but after a year of racing, they may be the best bargain in the 250 class.

Our Suzuki was used heavily, and we can report the following: one broken clutch plate, two worn-out shocks, an early death of the stock rear sprocket (replaced with a Sidewinder) and wimpy rear brake shoes.

In third, the YZ was a very reliable bike. We know...it was raced a lot. Spokes started to die after a few months, and the rims dented too easily for our tastes. Fast privateers and factory riders are using stronger Takasago rims. The rear sprocket wore soon. Again we resorted to a Sidewinder. Saddle foam tends to break down and split across the midsection. The rear axle adjuster

(continued on page 70)

can break, and the Power Valve needs regular cleaning and complicates a top-end job.

Fourth rated, the Kawasaki had some cracking frames that were warrantied by the factory. When the forks get some time on them, the bushings get sloppy, and action suffers. The clutch vibrates excessively and will not tolerate abuse without slipping. Chain and sprocket wear were very high. Sidewinder must love this.

Fifth rated, the Husky suffers from a chronic fork seal problem, a suspect water-pump seal and head gasket glitches if the torque is not nuts-on. Tank stickers commit suicide early, the pipe melts the side panel, and some of the Ohlins shocks come with the wrong pressure inside and/or wrong valving.

The Hondas had a spoke/nipple/wheel problem early in the model year that drove American Honda whacko. They warrantied all the wheels. Fork seals seem to be weak; chain and sprocket wear is high, with the rear sprocket being quite possibly the worst on the market as far as wear goes.

Count on the spring and rear shock sagging or wearing out. The ATAC exhaust item makes a basic top-end job true misery, and the top end does wear quickly. Early pistons cracked, taking chunks of the liner with them.

At this point we cannot rank the M-Star. We simply do not have enough time on the bike, and not enough information has trickled into the *Dirt Bike Nerve Center*. The forged piston should give decent top-end life, and the old 250 never had any real problem with gearboxes. The clutch appears to be the same wimpy aluminum plate unit of last year, so it's definitely suspect. Other than that, the bike remains the mysterious M-Star.

#### RATING THE 250s OVERALL

In the MX category we call the Suzuki RM250 the best all-around bike. It's not the fastest, lightest, or best-turning machine. But it has the best suspension by far and can be made ultra fast for very little money (see September 1984 *DB*).

Running a very close second, the Yamaha has the best Supercross motor, and it too can be made faster for relatively low bucks. The suspension, front and rear, while not perfect, is at least in the ballpark.

The powerful Honda is relegated to third, mostly because of poor forks and rear suspension. To get the Honda to take bumps as well as the Suzuki or the Yamaha is going to require big bucks for a shock and another \$160 for a fork kit from Simons.

Almost as fast as the Honda, the KTM must still be rated behind the CR, mostly because the Honda will carve through the turns under the Austrian charger, and the power rush is more sudden and Supercross oriented.

The Kawasaki is a decent all-around MX bike, handicapped by tallness and an unwillingness to snap through turns like the top three bikes.

Rate the M-Star next, handicapped by a sluggish power delivery for the first half of the power range, even though the bike is scary fast in a drag race. And 231 pounds is just too much weight to cart around. Lastly, the Husky is simply too slow to the first turn. A Husky rider will have to win by going through a sea of red and yellow from the back of the pack.

#### RATINGS—MX ONLY

1. Suzuki
2. Yamaha
3. Honda
4. KTM
5. Kawasaki
6. M-Star
7. Husqvarna

In the general racing/riding category, versatility takes the upper hand. Here's how we called 'em:

First, the KTM is not only by far the lightest bike tested, but it's extremely versatile. It can be used for MX, GPs, hare scrambles, woods work, enduros (with the optional parts), desert, cross-country and even play riding. It truly is the one bike to have if you want to do more than just motocross.

We rated the Suzuki second, because its suspension is supple, the power correct enough to ride in the woods, and the saddle height is fairly low. At higher speeds, the RM has good manners and can still be threaded around trees quickly.

With an abundance of low end, the YZ can be ridden happily in the tight Eastern woods with no modifications needed. A good range of gearing is available, and the YZ can be found being used for enduro work (many IT parts are natural bolt-ons) and in the desert. It also makes a great play-riding bike.

The six-speed gearbox of the Husky gives it a versatility that is hard to beat. For desert it's a natural. A number of the CRs are being used in the woods and Western enduros. For Grand Prix work they give away little to the more powerful bikes.

More at home on an MX track, the KX is not an easy bike to ride in the woods, and at high speeds in the desert, it's a handful. Right behind the KX, we have the M-Star with a weak low end wrapped in a tight, close-ratio gearbox. Not the ticket for versatility.

Lastly, the super-powerful Honda has shown that it simply does not like the higher speeds of GPs, desert and cross-country. For woods work, the hyper engine would be a handicap.

#### RATINGS—GENERAL RACING/RIDING

1. KTM
2. Suzuki
3. Yamaha
4. Husqvarna
5. Kawasaki
6. M-Star
7. Honda

There you have it. Another year... a new crop of hot and improved 250s and enough variety to make most dirt bikers dizzy. □

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