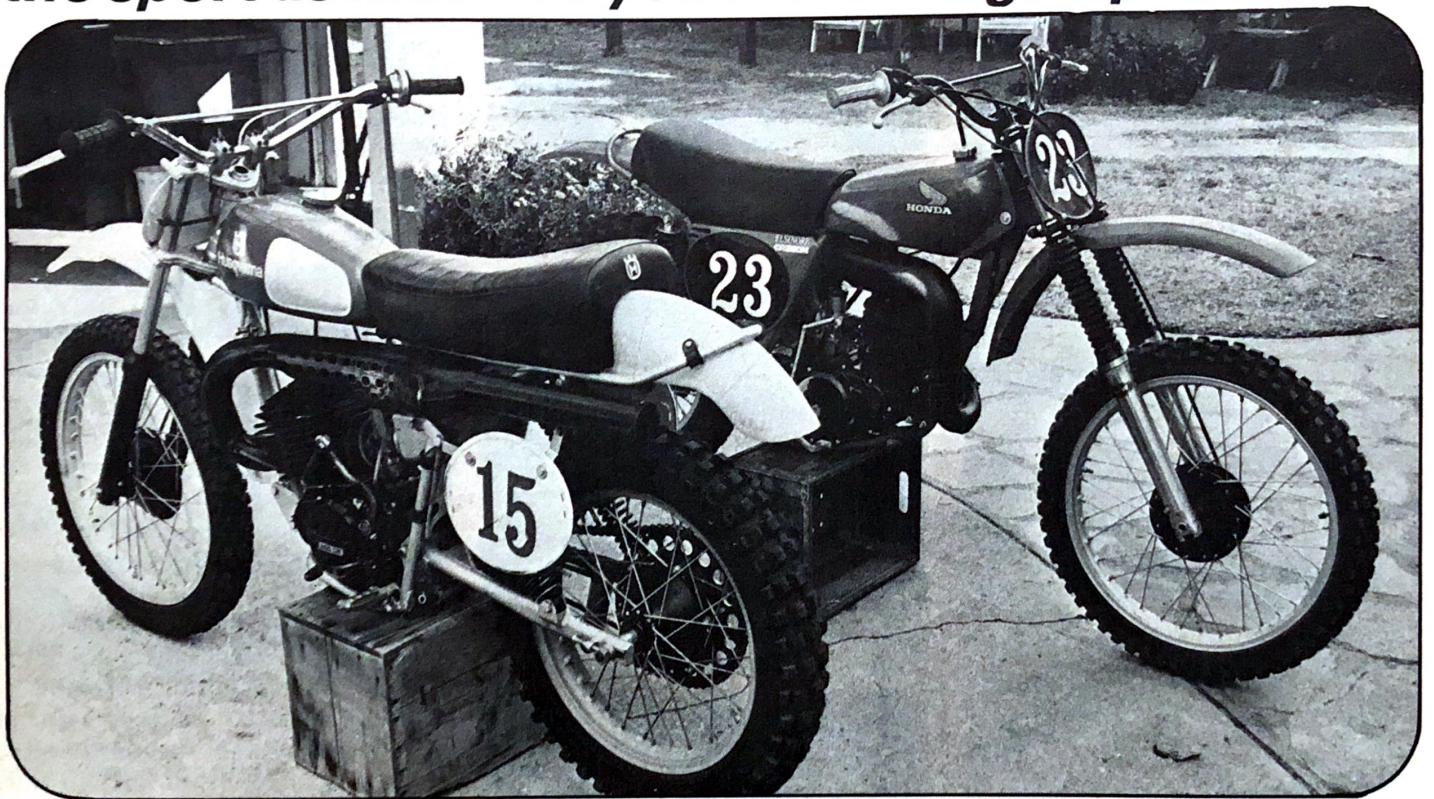


race test

A COMPARISON: HONDA CR250M & HUSQVARNA 250GPCR

Be honest with yourself. You can only get out of the sport as much as you are willing to put in



Buying and successfully owning a racing motorcycle requires the buyer/owner to be aware of his abilities and needs, and the racing motorcycle to nurture those abilities and meet those needs. Thus the prospective buyer must make his first decision not as to which among the "Japanese Four," the "Spanish Three," or the "European Three" he should choose, but rather a much more basic choice between a Japanese bike and a European bike. We have studied the Honda CR250M and the Husqvarna 250 GPCR to illustrate the basic choice.

Both bikes are the latest 1976 production models, the Husky being the one tested in last month's MXA

and the Honda being a red-framed factory replica with gas shocks we procured from American Honda for the purpose of this comparison. Aside from the fact that both are motocross bikes, they are further apart in design, execution and performance than even the expanse of earth separating Japan and Sweden would suggest. However, the abilities and needs of the participant motocrosser vary more widely.

Economically, the bikes fall into entirely different categories. The Honda retails for a reasonable \$1325 and the Husqvarna for a whopping \$1795. But it's what you get for your dollar, not how many of them you

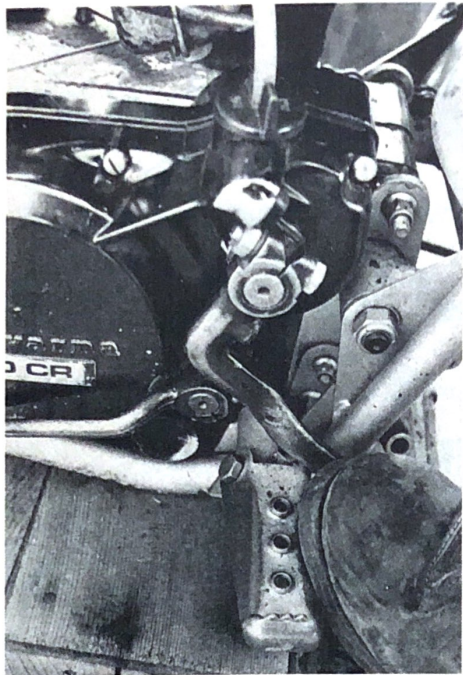
spend. For \$470 more, is the Husky worth the difference? That's what we want to find out.

Simply stated, the Husqvarna does just about everything better than the Honda. For the \$470 you get longer travel, smoother working suspension, a faster engine that sustains a longer drive through each gear, a sturdier frame and swingarm that provides a more stable platform for fast, precise movement over rough terrain and 18 pounds less weight to carry through a long moto.

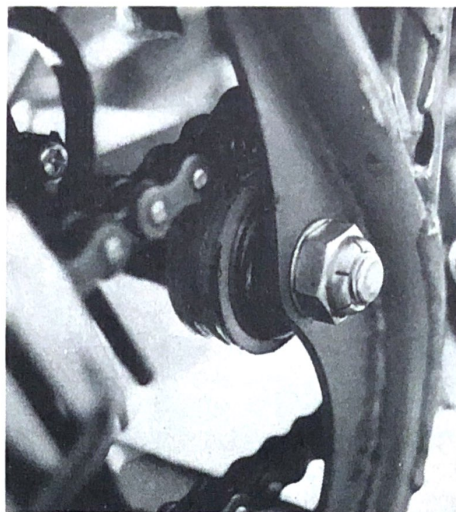
The Husqvarna is, however, not without its flaws. As we mentioned last month, the spoke nipples are of

Continued

A COMPARISON: HONDA CR250M & HUSQVARNA 250GPCR



Husqvarna kickstarter slams into shift shaft, causing damage to case.



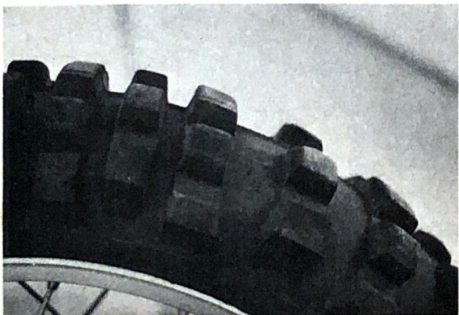
Honda has a trick chain roller that protects the swingarm. Husky's swingarm is unprotected and gouged by the chain.



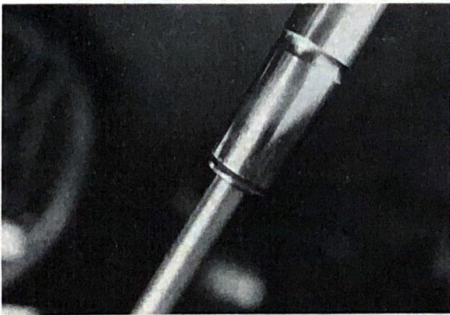
The Honda front axle bent after one race.



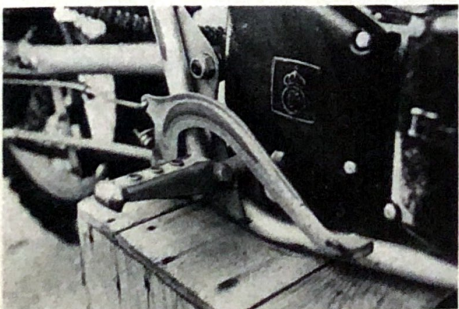
Honda pipe burns right knee, Husky pipe is untouchable.



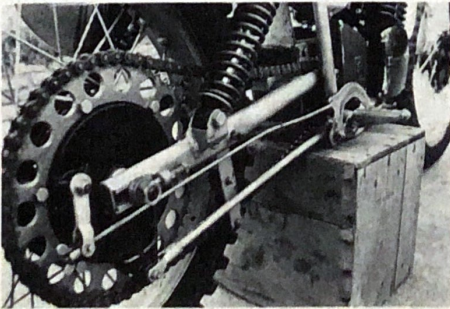
The Honda has a trick tire.



Plating stripped off Honda fork tube.



Many steel parts on the Husky can be replaced by alloy to save weight.



Husky floating brake is superior in the rear, Honda brake is better up front.

very poor quality and don't stand up to fast competition and regular maintenance. In order to get at the carburetor for jetting changes, the pipe and the air box must be removed. This is a quick and simple procedure for the seasoned Husky owner, but it still complicates the job of systematic tuning.

The fork clamps on the Husky offset the forks too far from the steering axis. Although this gives good straight line stability, it makes the Husky suffer some going for the inside line. To get it to respond to the handlebars you really have to pounce on it; slide way up on the gas tank, lay it over hard and use a lot of throttle.

The Honda, on the other hand, is a much easier bike to ride. With half the effort it will turn inside the Husky. Once there, the powerful mid-range Honda will snap it away more quickly, perhaps gaining a half length on the Husky out of a second gear turn. The Honda's mid-range power and quick inside turning give it a distinct advantage on a tight, twisty circuit.

Given room to fly, however, the Husky will wheelie away from the Honda. Honda's piston port powerplant just doesn't have enough on top to stay with the reed valve Husky. Ironically, you have to shift the five-speed Honda *more* than the six-speed Husky to stay on the pipe. Holding the Honda on too long finds a nagging dead spot at the high end of the rpm scale. The Husky, on the other hand, keeps spinning faster and faster up to road race velocities in top gear.

The Honda's ease of riding is due partly to its rider positioning. The seat is flat but padded more toward the front so it can slope down into the tank when you sit on it. The alloy fuel tank starts low at the seat juncture and rises to the fork crown. This provides a cradle so the rider can sit "into" the bike and thus gain more rapport with his machine *when he's seated.*

Cont'd. on page 24

A COMPARISON: HONDA CR250M & HUSQVARNA 250GPCR

Husqvarna approaches this with a different philosophy. Their saddle is more level and very firm. It moves into the alloy fuel tank smoothly and the tank maintains the seat contour all the way to the steering head. When seated, the rider is more *on top* of the bike. He is able to move to and fro more quickly, but he has less contact with the balance of the bike. Only by *standing* on the pegs can the rider really tune into the workings of the Husky chassis. This, of course, follows Husqvarna's ideal of correct motocross without compromise.

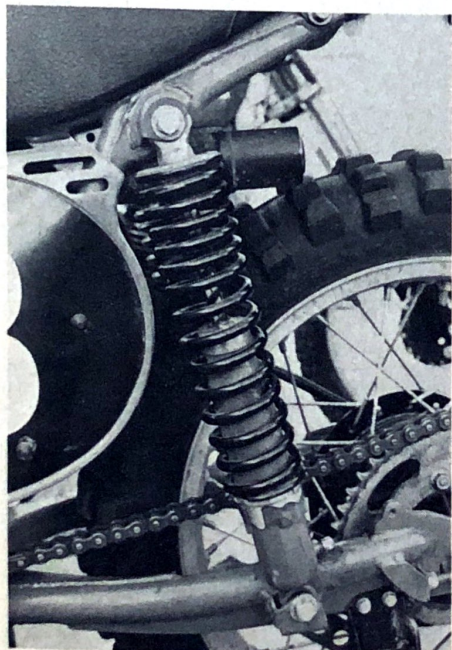
Compromise, however, is what you pay \$1325 for when buying the Honda. Although the red-frame

CR250 is an improved version of the high-pipe black-frame model, with more horsepower, a stronger gearbox, a better air filtering system and sturdier engine mounts, it still lacks sophistication in suspension. Single rate valving in the 6½-inch travel forks causes hydraulic lock-up over severe bumps. The new gas-filled Showa shock absorbers cantilevered

vertically on the swingarm are almost totally ineffective. Their design, standard inner cylinder with foot valve and small-diameter piston, is primitive and the valve work crude. Even though pressurized, they don't work upside down and the charging pressures are in excess of 150 psi, which means you'll need special equipment to service



Sometimes even fine Swedish steel breaks.



New gas shocks on the Honda are dead items.

SPECIFICATIONS

Make	Husqvarna	Make	Honda
Model	250 CR	Model	CR250MI Elsinore
Country of Manufacture	Sweden	Country of Manufacture	Japan
Retail Price	N/A	Retail Price	\$1325

ENGINE

Type: Two-stroke, single-cylinder reed valve	Type	Two-stroke, single-cylinder, piston-port
Bore & Stroke69.5mm x 64.5mm	Bore & Stroke	70.0mm x 64.4mm
Displacement245cc	Displacement	248cc
Compression Ratio12.3:1	Compression Ratio	7.2:1
CylinderIron sleeve, 5-port	CylinderIron sleeve, five-port	
Carburetion36mm Bing	Carburetion	34mm Keihin
IgnitionMotoplat CDI	Ignition	Rotor, points
LubricationPre-mix	Lubrication	Pre-mix; Bel-Ray, 50:1
Air FilterFoam	Air Filter	Oiled foam

TRANSMISSION

TypeSix-speed, constant mesh	Type	Five-speed, close ratio
Ratios: 24.0, 18.1, 14.4, 12.1, 10.2, 9.0	Ratios	2.06, 1.57, 1.25, 1.04, 0.86:1
PrimaryGear	Primary	Gear, 3.30:1
Ratio2.41	Drive Ratio	3.36 with 14/47 sprockets
Drive ChainD.I.D 5/8x1/4	Drive Chain	520 D.I.D G-type

SUSPENSION

Front: Hydraulic forks, springs, inline axle	Front	Hydraulic sliders
Rear: Gas Girling shocks, springs, forward laydown	Rear	Hydraulic, forward mount Showas
Travel: Front7.5 inches	Travel: Front	6.9 inches
Rear7.5 inches	Rear	6.4 inches

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase56 inches	Wheelbase	56—58 inches
Weight Bias: 46% front, 54% rear	Weight Bias	45% front, 55% rear
Track Weight217 pounds	Track Weight	223 pounds

CAPACITIES

Fuel2.1 gallons	Fuel	1.8 gallons/6.8 liters
Transmission1600cc	Transmission	937cc
Forks220cc	Forks	190cc



them. As mounted, they only provide the rear wheel 5½ inches of travel, short by contemporary standards.

Riding the Honda fast over hard ground is like firing automatic shotguns with each hand and getting the bottoms of your feet pounded with sledge hammers. Even the smoothest tracks become mine fields, and our test riders reported blistered palms and unusual fatigue after racing the Honda.

Coping with the Honda requires extensive suspension modification (see sidebar) and porting work to bring it up to power. Then the other major Honda shortcoming becomes apparent. Honda, like most Japanese bike manufacturers, uses a low-grade moly steel in its frames, swingarms and other components. One Honda engineer calls it, "Jap-mory." Not so good as "American-mory." Nor even close to the aircraft quality Swedish steel that goes into the Husqvarna. The difference in performance is handling stability. The Honda wanders on the straights, hops from rut to rut in the fast turns, wobbles landing from

Continued

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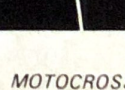
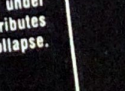
Lower, moly-faced ductile iron, low tension SuperStrength ring provides an excellent seal, and reacts quickly to combustion pressure to reduce blow-by and to increase power.

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Special ground finish reduces drag and further increases piston life.

Elliptically designed to provide a more uniform bearing surface under piston heat expansion. This eliminates localized pressure and distributes thrust loads more evenly, thereby preventing piston collapse.

Designed to provide the best possible path for combustion chamber heat transfer to the cylinder walls.

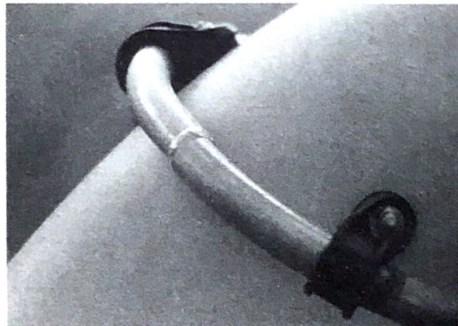


A COMPARISON: HONDA CR250M & HUSQVARNA 250GPCR



Honda steering stem bent like this after only two 15-minute motos. Made from low-grade Japanese moly steel.

jumps and does some hairy tank stops braking over rough ground. Softly speaking, the Honda chassis response is somewhat unpredictable. Even with suspension corrections the swingarm still twists noticeably. This makes the tail snap from side to



Rear subframe tubes on our test Husky didn't line up.

side under acceleration. With reference to last month's test, the tracking precision and response of the Husqvarna is impeccable.

Quality also means longevity. In a grueling test of endurance we raced the Husky at Santa Maria's sandy hoop course, two 40-minute motos at Saddleback, two *days* of play riding in the Pismo Beach sand dunes, plus three or four test and photo sessions at Indian Dunes, *without a single failure*. After two 15-minute motos at Saddleback, the Honda suffered from a bent steering shaft, a bent front axle, a slightly misaligned swingarm and a missing engine mount bolt. Both bikes were meticulously maintained.

But the Honda can be made into an acceptably competitive race bike. The suspension changes noted in this test cost about \$200. Porting to gain the high rpm performance necessary, available at Al Baker Racing and other shops, costs around \$55. A pipe will run you \$70. Throw in another \$100 for miscellaneous chrome moly shafts, axles and locknuts and you've got yourself a boss racing machine.

But you've also made up the \$470 difference between it and the Husqvarna. More equally aligned, the two bikes can now be judged on their physical features.

The Husqvarna has good grade control cables that come with lubrication nipples and can be kept in excellent condition with constant maintenance, but it seems the Honda cables require little or no maintenance to keep their precise feel. It's much easier to clutch the Honda than the Husky. The Honda front brake seems to be more responsive. The Husky floating rear brake works more smoothly than the cable-operated Honda brake. Japanese handlebars bend more easily on the Honda. Honda spokes and wheel assemblies stay together tighter and keep their true longer than the Husky items.

Both bikes are high-pipe models,



Cont'd. on page 61



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HONDA/HUSKY

Cont'd. from page 30

but Husqvarna has their pipe positioning thought out, while Honda doesn't. The Honda pipe goes through the frame under the seat so it doesn't protrude alongside the seat, but it does stick out from under the tank where it takes its bend to the rear. When making a left turn, the rider's knee will invariably contact the pipe when he slides forward on the bike and digs his knee in for control. Through a series of left turns our test riders reported very hot knees.

The Husqvarna sports a side-mounted pipe. Its widest section runs along the side of the seat and sticks out pretty far on the left side of the bike. On the forward part of the bike, however, the pipe tucks in nicely under the tank and never interferes with the rider's leg. Husqvarna has learned through study of the rider in action that his knees angle out somewhat when standing and only angle in when sitting. Therefore their pipe mounting is perfect. The only time a rider will feel heat is when he might be resting his thigh on the pipe shield while straddling the bike at the start. At this point there is no cooling air passing over the shield. Once the ride starts, there is never any distracting contact with the pipe.

As light as the Husky is, there are many ways it could be made lighter. Most brackets and control arms on the Husky are steel, strong but a little heavy for the job. Replacing these parts with alloy items could save considerable weight. In testimony to this idea, Mark Blackwell's stock Husqvarna 360 raced in the USGP weighed in at 212 pounds, as light as DeCoster's factory 370 Suzuki.

The Honda, with many alloy parts, is already as light as it is going to get. At 235, that's heavy.

With an enriching system on the carburetor and a well designed kicking lever, the Honda is a snap to start. The Husky, with a poorly designed lever and no enriching system, is a bear to start. Plus, the Husky gives you the added aggravation of slamming its starter lever into the shifting shaft every time you kick it, thus wearing out the shift shaft seal and housing

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prematurely — which causes sloppy shifting.

The Husqvarna piston is quite strong and with proper maintenance will last for a very long time. You can expect to renew the piston only once or twice in a season. A Husky piston, complete with ring, pin and circlips, sells for \$43.85. The Honda piston assembly is only \$24.60 complete, but the Honda service manual recommends it be renewed every two or three races. A minimum of ten piston replacements in a season would cost the Honda owner almost \$250, with gaskets, while the Husky owner would only expect to pay less than \$100 maximum in a season.

In the final analysis, after all the numbers have been hashed out and features scrutinized, the choice between a Japanese bike like the Honda and a European bike like the Husqvarna must be based on the rider's awareness of his own abilities, his character and his motivation to succeed in motocross. The Husqvarna, because of its higher initial cost, because of its more rigorous maintenance schedule, because it is a more difficult bike to ride well and because it demands the utmost in conditioning and concentration from the rider, is only for the most seriously motivated competitors. For diligence, the Husky will repay with unlimited performance. The pedestrian motocrosser would find the Husqvarna an ego-shattering experience.

The Honda, however, is the motocross bike for the masses. The commonplace motocross enthusiast, the one who considers motocross his hobby, would be much more comfortable with the Honda. A Japanese bike seems to accept the laxities of the nondescript racer. It responds to a softer touch. It's set up looser and seems to thrive on neglect. It's acceptably fast without being uncontrollably fast. It delivers performance in small enough doses so as not to humble the plebeian rider. The only drawback is that the Honda can never be as good as the Husqvarna, no matter what you do to it. But it's more acceptable to the average rider to curse his bike and have another beer than it is to face the fact that he may not measure up to his machine.

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