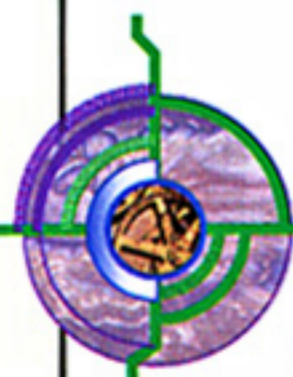




Racing Motorcycles of a Foregone Era

1973 HONDA CR250 ELSINORE

Gary Jones' &
Steve McQueen's
connection



The most ironic thing about the 1973 Honda CR250 Elsinore was that company founder Soichiro Honda had a mandate against two-strokes. But Honda violated its "four-stroke only" policy in 1973 when it released the CR250 Elsinore (named after the sleepy retirement community where the Elsinore Grand Prix was held).

At 214 pounds, the '73 Elsinore pumped out 30 horsepower (good for three decades ago) and was smaller, thinner, sleeker and more modern looking than anything on the track. At a time when European motocross bikes were temperamental and crude, the CR250 came with a polished aluminum gas tank, chromoly frame, five-speed transmission and 248cc

piston-port engine.

Thanks to an ad campaign featuring movie star Steve McQueen, a retail price of \$1145 and the riding of Gary Jones, the 1973 Honda CR250 Elsinore put Japanese motorcycle manufacturing on the map.

"My CR250 had 40 horsepower," says Gary Jones of his National Championship-winning Elsinore. "It had magnesium hubs, magnesium cases, drilled out bolts and lots of hand-machined parts. We had to add weight to meet the AMA weight limit (normally by putting a heavy pipe guard on the down pipe).

"It was very fast, but the front end was way out there. We cut the frames to steepen the head angle and that stopped it from pushing.

By today's works bike standards, we didn't have all that much. We had special fork tubes and an unlimited supply of shocks, but they were just oil shocks—no gas charging—just a few fins.

"I won the '73 250 National Championship on the CR250, but when the 500cc Trans-AMA series came around, Honda wanted me to ride the 250 Support class. I didn't want to. They had promised me an Open bike, but the two times I rode the Open class prototype it broke. Honda didn't want to race it anymore and I didn't want to race the Support class—especially since I was the National Champion. So, I quit. Maybe I was stupid to quit Team Honda, but I was just a kid and wanted to race. It worked out for both of us in the end." □

