



MAICO 490 MEGA 2

A Motor and a Half

□ Not every experienced racer on the track has the wherewithal to appreciate the subtleties and sophistication of today's hyperquazar motocrossers. But, even a deaf, dumb and blind albino midget from Lapland can experience a Maico 490 mega 2! Maico builds the best Open Class motocross bikes in the world. Last year's Maico 450 was the best in its class; the only thing better than last year's 450 is this year's 490.

Maico sells the most expensive mass production motocrossers on the market, but they only build *motocrossers!* There is no drivel about the mega 2 being a fine trail bike, hot-to-trot fireroader or blazing desert sled. The Germans built the mega 2 for one thing—motocross.

Reputations are made through the years by word of mouth, back slapping, out-of-the-wallet experience and cult-oriented aficionados. In the old days, CZ riders were a tight knit, loyal group of crazies. The old days aren't gone. The boys have just switched to Maicos.

The early Maicos were temperamental, slightly unreliable things of beauty. Now, Maico is stone reliable and all dressed up with new duds. A lot of the cobby Werks shop appearance of the old days is diminished by the plastic flash, but none of the performance has been tarnished.

A privateer on a shoestring might not be able to afford the base price of almost \$2700, but when motocross stardom is riding in the balance, can he afford not to have the best?

A NEW PACKAGE

Maico changed almost every piece on the new mega 2. They didn't have to, because they were on top, but the changes they made were spot-on. The big changes for Maico regulars is the new frame, seat, bars and footpeg proportioning. The 1980 Maico 450 was shaped like a banana. Riders snuggled down inside the 1980 Maico, and many old-time Maico shoes could not adjust to the ape-hanger feeling. 1981 has a new frame and seat that feels more like the earlier models. Maico lowered the steering head, raised the pegs, flattened the seat and redesigned the gas tank. Getting up front in the turns and over the back of the jumps is now easier and more natural.

Handling is better than last year, because the swingarm has been lengthened a healthy two inches! There is less tendency to wheelie out of corners on the 490 and a smoother, better tracking chassis. Keeping a motor as powerful as the 490 Maico hooked into terra firma requires spot-on geometry, and the Maico has it.

IS IT FAST?

Maico didn't do everything right in 1981, and we'll voice our complaints soon enough, but in the power department, they get a gold star. We have ridden hopped-up open bikes with more power, but they were scary. Maico puts their awesome ponies into the ground with the broadest, smoothest, most flexible tree stump puller ever sold.

When the 490 is hooked up and pulling, which is from dead bottom all the way to a decent top, there is a lovely moaning sound that keeps spectators on the side of the track ogling. Four-stroke-type power is about as close of a comparison as the 86.5mm by 83mm bore and stroke, piston port, two-stroke 488cc motor can get. Juniors can loll about on the 490 in the bottom edges of the powerband and still turn the fastest laps of their lives, while professional riders have so much of a good thing that they can't believe it. No one will beat a mega 2 to the first turn.

Maico's story for 1981 is power, but not the arm dislocating, wheelie bar, wide-eyed and white-knuckle power. There is so much earth shaking horsepower on tap that it can be dialed in for mild or wild. Either way, it is the best open class engine ever made.

SURE BUT...

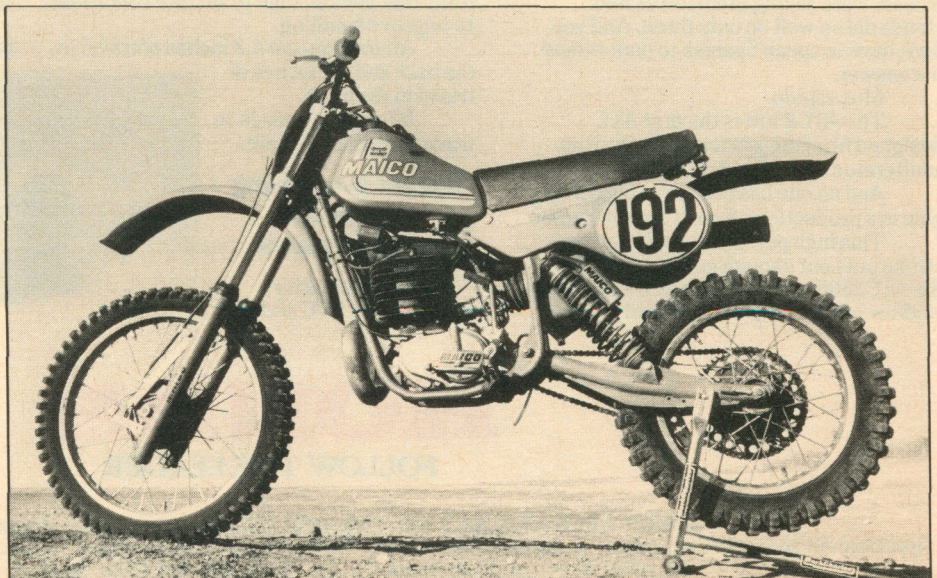
It looks good, runs great and handles perfectly. Doesn't that about cover everything? No. Problems are a way of life in motocross racing, and the mega 2 has a few. The suspension is an area that needs

some work, especially the forks. Last year's forks were better than this year's, and the explanation lies in the fact that Maico changed the frame and conversely modified the forks to fit the new specs. Settings that worked last year didn't work this year.

The major problem was an overabundance of compression damping. Front fork damping was so extreme that hard bumps and big jumps would twist the front end over to one side. The culprit was a form of a hydraulic lock that abruptly slammed the forks to a stop before they traveled their full 12 inches. Our quick fix was to run light viscosity fork oil and relatively high air pressure. The 1981 forks hold 535cc of oil this year, compared to 570cc's last year. The real solution is to send the forks to WheelSmith Motorcycles in Fountain Valley, California for damper rod modification.

Last year, the Corte Cossa rear shocks were way too soft. So soft that the bike was almost unrideable at racing speeds. We switched our 450 over to Fox Factory Shox with extremely stiff primary springs (203 pounds) and put a series of mechanical stops on the secondary spring to move the crossover point up on the dual-spring shocks. This year, the new Corte Cossa piggyback shocks were too stiff.

Corte Cossa's shocks are decent units and don't require replacement, but the spring rate is difficult to dial in. The reason that the spring rate is so touchy is because of the extreme leverage ratio of the Maico



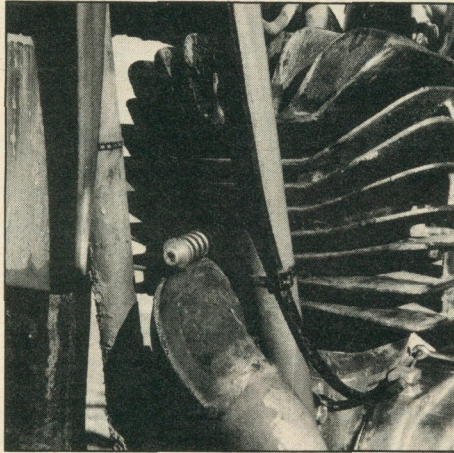
King of the hill? Maico's new 490 puts out all the power that is advertised, and it is all good power.

MAICO 490 MEGA 2

rear suspension. The good news is that Corte Cossa springs begin to sack out after the first few rides, and the spring rate settles right into the ball park.

History tells us that the Maico wheels will probably explode because of weak spokes and a cheesy lacing pattern. Not so! New stronger spokes and a decent cross-three pattern have lessened the problem. Still, the spokes require constant attention and take forever to seat. Watch the wheels.

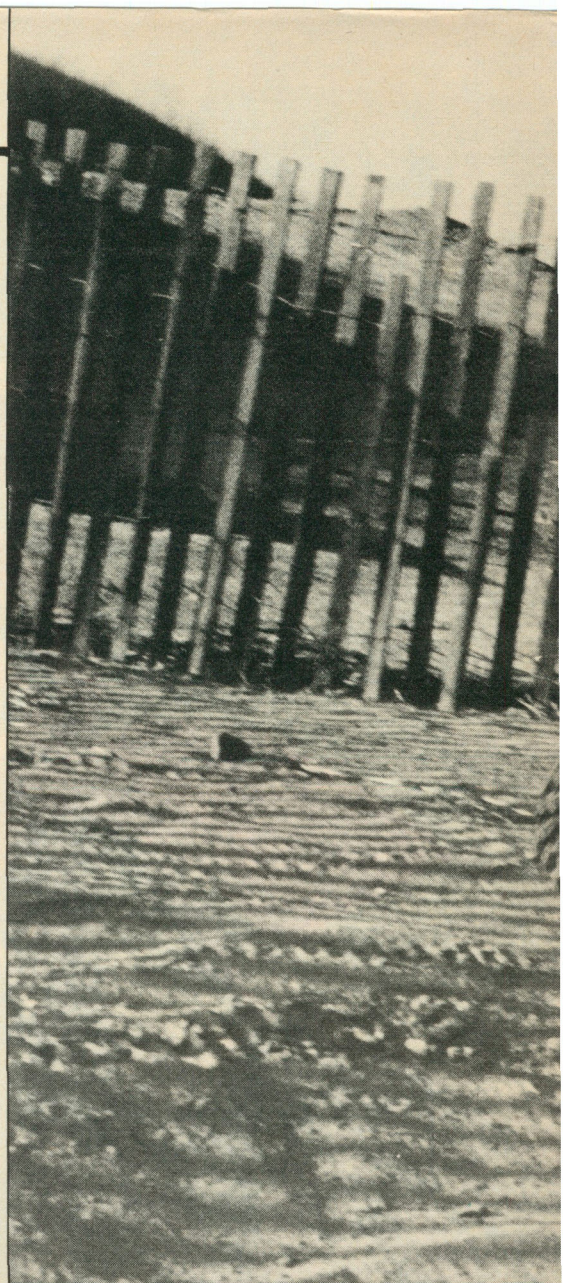
The front brake cable has been known to suck into the front wheel, but the life saver is to simply flip the cable loop on the front number plate outward. The cables that come stock on the Maico stink. Your local dealer will set your bike up with Terry Cables. Do it. The front backing plate has been reinforced and strengthened. It was known to break off at the brake stay mount-



The pipe cracked around the flange and on the back bracket. Springs would work better than the current spring loaded Allen bolt.

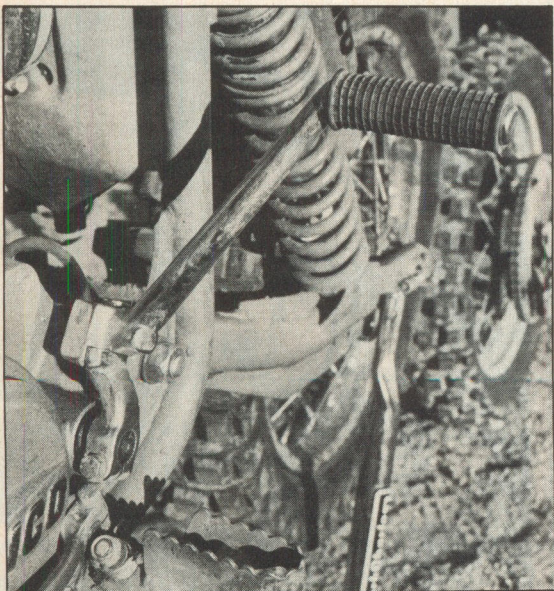
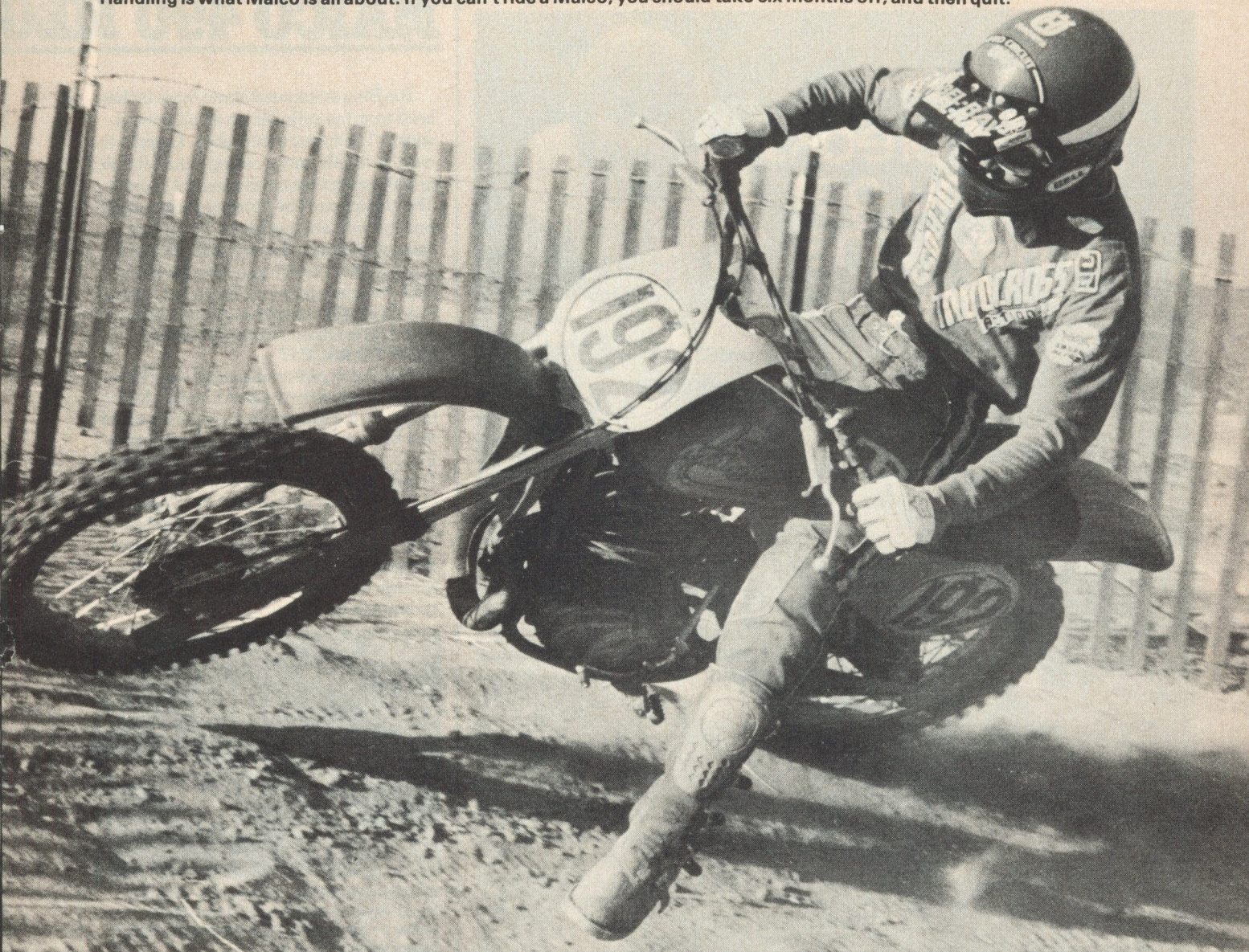


Staying forward on the big German mount helps keep it under control. Hang back over the rear end, and you'll end up hanging off.



Corte Cossa supplies the piggyback shocks. They work well. The springs start out too stiff but sack their way down to soft.

Handling is what Maico is all about. If you can't ride a Maico, you should take six months off, and then quit.



The footpegs bend backwards a little, and the kickstarter shaft is a weak link. Every kick must be as strong and healthy as possible to avoid letting the engine kick back.

ing point. This is a problem solved at the factory. The rear brake doesn't use the brake stay arm anymore. The brake panel on the back wheel has a notch on it that slips over a lug on the swingarm. The system is trickier, cleaner and easier to work with. The brakes work, although the front brake squeals until you take the time to arc the shoes in with a file.

Most of the plastic parts were better than last year. The rear fender is wider by about two inches. It mounts with normal bolts instead of last year's row of counter-sunk screws. A new air box graces the gap between the Metzeler and motor. The new air box is red plastic and is much better than last year's. The air filter is held in by a coat hanger type loop similar to last year's. Although better thought-out, it should still be zip tied in place.

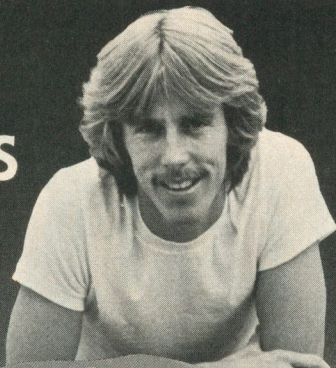
This year the gas tank isn't painted. It is clean and neat red plastic. The decals fall off, of course, but, unfortunately, the gas cap won't fall off—it won't come off, either. Put it on loosely and gas pours out around the poor seal. Put it on tightly, and it will take water pliers to get it off again.

A new pipe and silencer grace the mega 2, but problems with the mounting system remain the same as last year. The pipe has three mounting points. This year, the mount that consistently broke off last year, broke off again this year. Maico reengineered the mount and even used a rubber bumper to lessen fatigue. Being critical of the pipe mounts because of last year's experiences, we even relieved the mounting holes to take the strain off the bracket. It broke anyway. Last year, the pipe could be run without the back bracket. This year, it can't. We wrapped a hose clamp around the frame to keep the pipe from vibrating like a 27,000 rpm Dremel tool on concrete.

Making the power broader and better than any other bike was achieved by decent porting, judicious application of cc's and a 40mm Bing carb. We liked the jetting, although a 40 pilot replaced the stock 50. The 40 cleaned up the low end, but made the bike hard to start. We solved this problem by putting two fingers over the vent hoses on the Bing as we tickled it. The excess fuel made the big mill light up every time.

Bob Hannah says,

"If it breaks
you get
a new one
free!"



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Bob Hannah

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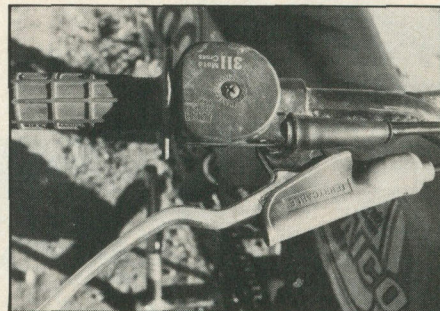
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MAICO 490 MEC

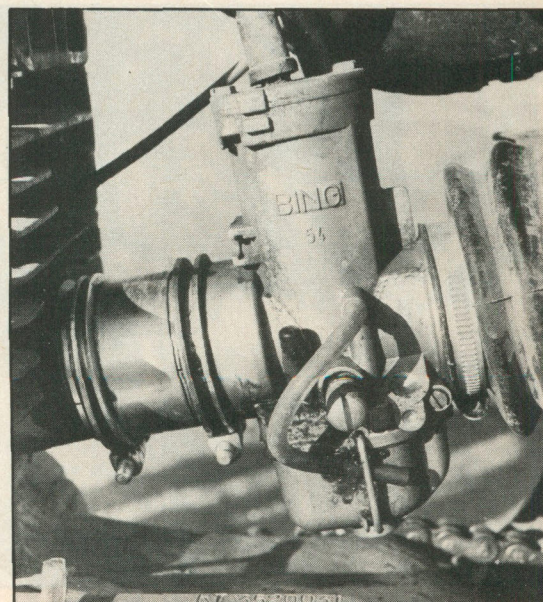
The Bing is mounted about three inches back from the cylinder via an aluminum spigot. The spigot was trouble. Keeping the carb on tightly and avoiding letting dirt slip past the spigot required constant attention. The clamps can't be tightened adequately enough with a screwdriver. The spigot should be removed every race, cleaned and put back on using an 8mm socket to apply maximum torque. Better yet, Maico should supply a thick neoprene rubber manifold to eliminate a touchy area.

HOW TO RACE IT

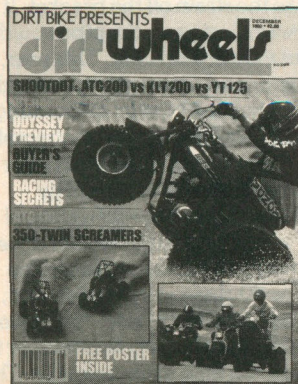
The clutch pull is amazingly easy for a Maico, but it is always best to save a Maico clutch on the starting line. Snick the excellent five-speed tranny into second gear at the last second. Some riders were pulling holeshots with third gear starts. Dump the clutch casually as the gate falls. There is no rush with the mega 2. Once you hit third gear, leave it wide open and tap the lever through as many gears as you're brave enough for. The first turn will appear with no one in front of you.



Wire the throttle cable to the throttle housing and to the top of the carb — unless you want mega horses running away with your bod.



Remove the aluminum spigot and widen the clamp slots to allow the clamps to get a better bite. Clean the nylon inserts weekly.



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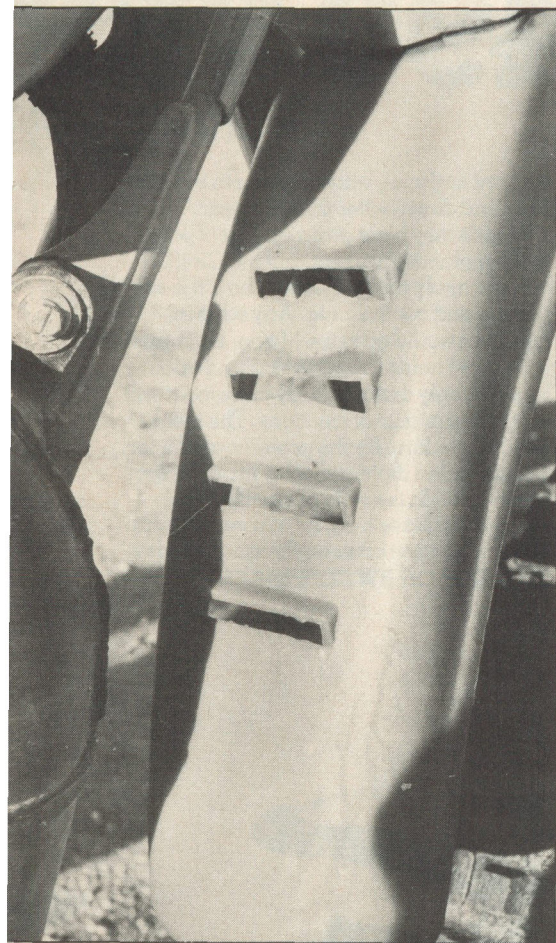
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MXA 3-1



More cosmetic than function, the air slots in the front fender look trick.

Slide forward on the seat and carve the Maico around the bend. When you approach that ninety-degree second gear bend, leave the Maico in third, hit the berm and roll the throttle on. Loose dirt will roost fifty feet behind you. If you are sadistic, slap the clutch a touch and blow the competition out of the saddle. Over the jumps, a good Maico rider stands straight up. No need to get back over the rear wheel, because the Maico flies straight and true. In the rough bumps and whoops, you have to stand up and use the power to loft the front end over each bump. Whoop-de-dooos require getting the motor into grunt-type power and churning through. When the fast straights come up, all you need is the nerve to put the twist to the wrist. Nothing will catch you from behind.

THAT'S THE STORY

Nothing will ever catch you from behind. To get pulled by any other bike, you'd have to dog it, make a mistake or be ready for a room in the home for the terminally slow. That the mega 2 is the best, most powerful and easy-to-ride open class bike on the market is no surprise. Maico knows what they are doing when it comes to ponies. With a little suspension work, the mega 2 is the works bike of production racers. □

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MAICO 490 VER

It's Really a 48

□ The hard-core bottom line off the top is that the Maico 490 mega 2 is a better motorcycle than the Honda CR450R. Both bikes offer prospective buyers completely different approaches to building the ultimate open class weapon. Maico, even with its all-new design, represents a staid, conservative and safe tactic. Honda has gone for technological overkill with a space-age looking and revolutionary concept.

POWER AND STROKES

Making the most horsepower is an honorable goal, but making the best horsepower is the most functional idea. Either way, Maico tromps all over the Honda. The gigantic 488cc piston port German engine

has a piston that is only one-and-a-half millimeters larger than the Honda's, but the Maico stroke is a massive 7mm longer. With the torquey long stroke and 57cc advantage over the 431cc Honda, there is little doubt about the horsepower king. Maico's five-speed tranny and broad powerband is much better matched than the Honda's zingy power and four-speed transmission.

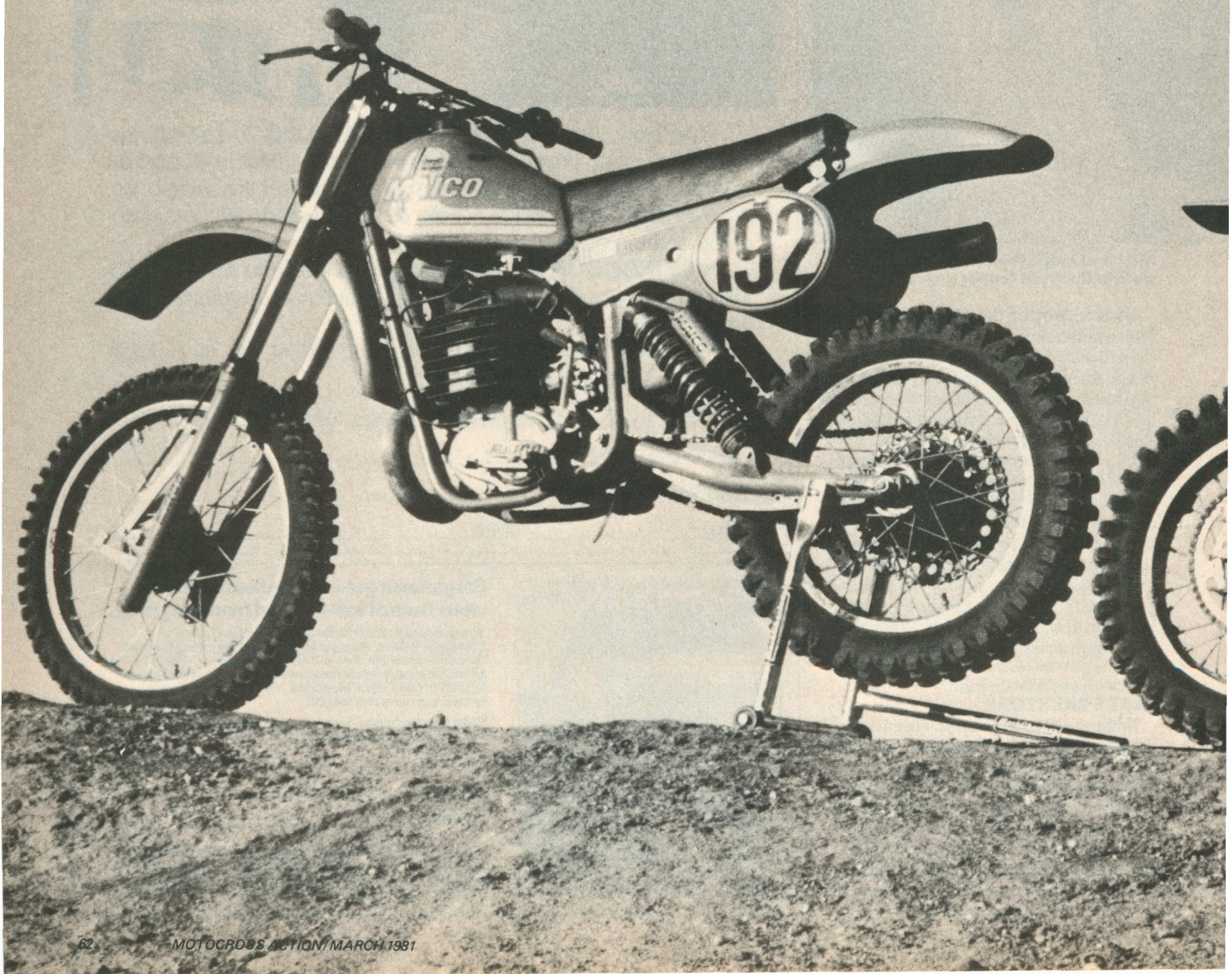
HANDLING

The margin of difference between the Maico and the Honda in the handling department is slim. The Maico is rock-steady very crisp and accurate. The two-inch-longer wheelbase makes the mega 2 track

straight and true, while helping to keep the front end down better than last year.

Honda may have given up a lot of points in the motor department, but the CR450R can definitely turn a corner. The CR is very precise and controllable. Any edge in handling would go to the Maico, because it is the most neutral of all the bikes. Maico requires only minimal body movement and rarely any midair corrections. The mega is a stable platform for the powerhouse motor. Honda dialed their geometry in on the spot, but the Honda is a little busier than the mega. Both bikes turn, fly, carve and jump better than most bikes on the market today.

SUSPENSION SWEEPSTAKES



SUS HONDA 450

Versus a 431

Neither bike wins the suspension sweepstakes. Both the Maico and the Honda suffer serious (although fixable) flaws in the suspension components. Maico's major problems are centered in over damped front forks. Damping rod modifications are required to clear up the front fork problems. The rear of the Maico works adequately but must overcome a severe leverage ratio that puts a lot of stress on the spring rates.

Honda has the best set of forks that they have ever come with, and the 41mm Kayabas are easily dialed in. Towards the rear of the Honda is a sore spot. The Pro-Link suspension is like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The first half of the travel is too soft and the second half is too stiff. The bike wallows and then bounces. Accessory shocks, like Ohlins or Fox, will probably be a big improvement; after all, that is what the factory Honda riders use.

GREMLINS AND TROUBLE

Amazingly, the Maico was more reliable than the Honda. Maico has poor chain rollers (replace with A&B Super Rollers), bad pipe mounting, sticking gas cap and flimsy carb manifold. Care in set up and some knowledgeable Maico tricks will see the mega 2 through a racing season without a major motc catastrophe.

Clutches fried like eggs on a Phoenix

sidewalk on the Honda CR450R. Clutch plates couldn't hold up to the abrupt power on the 431cc motor. The clutch is identical to the 250 unit and wouldn't take the load. A base gasket blew after several races and could be a perennial problem. Watch the air-filter seal closely to insure maximum engine life.

BOTTOM LINE

The Maico is several bike lengths faster to the first turn, and that is a big advantage, while giving away very little in suspension, reliability or handling to the Honda. The Maico is the big bike that was designed to do the job and then some, while the Honda was designed to do the job, but just barely. □

