



Classic Honda four-stroke Enduro (Dual purpose) motorcycles history and timeline

...or

The history of the Honda “Thumper”

Introduction

I have had a fascination with Honda Enduro and dual purpose “street scramblers” since I laid eyes on one for the first time in the late 70’s. Up until then we were mostly exposed to two-stroke trail bikes, so when I first saw Honda four-stroke ‘thumpers” I was instantly hooked.

The XL and XR models that we were mostly exposed to in South Africa include the 125, 185, 250 and 500 form 1979 into the late 80’s. There were however many other models, especially in markets like the US and Europe, so I started doing some research to learn more about the various “Enduro” models made by Honda.

However, I was unable to find any one reference detailing the history and listing all the models, so I decided to compile such a document myself.

In order to illustrate the evolution of the “off highway” Honda models it would be amiss not to include the **CL models** which were basically road bikes with minor adjustments like higher rear fender, a braced handlebar, and a high-mount exhaust to give them some off-road capability. Pretty much Honda’s first “off-road” bikes, launched in 1962.

This was followed by the Honda Motosport **SL models** in 1969 which featured a high front fender, so beginning to look more like an off-road motorcycle.

The road legal **XL range** was introduced in 1972 with the XL250, which featured the first mass-produced overhead-cam, 4-valve motorcycle engine.

The more “off-road” **XR models** were introduced in 1979. In some markets they were sold as off-road only, with kits available to make them street legal, and in other markets they were sold street legal.

Not all models are covered in this document, I focused mostly on the earlier, classic models, but mention the later models where relevant. As the purpose of this document is more historical, noting the years of introduction and timeline, not much attention is paid to technical specifications. Models are listed by first year of manufacture, and not engine size.

I must declare that this is not entirely my work, but rather a compilation of everything I managed to find on the Internet, in books, magazines and various other sources like old brochures etc. I merely edited all the information into one reference document, and do not claim it as my own. It was not done for gain, and is freely available to anyone who might be interested in reading about the evolution of Honda’s Enduro motorcycles.

I present this as a working document and welcome any input, additional information and corrections from other enthusiasts. I can be contacted at kc@kcsconsult.co.za

What does XL, XR etc. stand for? The following is an educated guess;

XL= Cross country/ Street legal

XR= Cross country racer

CR= Course racer

CRF= Course racer four stroke

The XL and XR “R” models featured the Pro-Link rear suspension.

Summary of models years of production 1962 to present (2021)

Models are listed by first year of manufacture, and not engine size.

CL (Predecessor to the SL)

CL72 (250cc) - 1962 to 1965	CL350 – 1968 to 1973
CL77 Scrambler 305cc - 1965 to 1968	CL250 – 1968 to 1974
CL160 – 1966 to 1967	CL350 – 1968 to 1973
CL90 – 1967 to 1969	CL70 – 1969 to 1973
CL50 - 1967 to 1971	CL100 – 1970 to 1973
CL65 – 1967 to 1971	CL125S (Single cylinder) – 1973 to 1974
CL125 (Twin cylinder) – 1967 to 1969	CL200 – 1974 only
CL450 – 1967 to 1974	CL360 – 1974 to 1976
CL300 (Update of the CL77 - 1968	CL400 – 1998 to 2000
CL175 – 1968 to 1973	

SL (Predecessor to the XL)

SL90 – 1969 to 1970	SL100 – 1970 to 1973
SL350 (Twin cylinder) – 1969 to 1973	SL70 – 1971 to 1973
SL175 (Twin cylinder) – 1970 to 1972	SL125 – 1971 to 1973

XL

XL250 – 1972 to 1987	XL350 – 1974 to 1978	XL80 – 1980 to 1985
XL175 – 1973 to 1978	XL50 – 1977 to 1988	XL400R – 1982
XL70 – 1974 to 1976	XL75 – 1977 to 1979	XL200R – 1983 to 1984
XL100 – 1974 to 1985	XL185 – 1979 to 1999	XL600R – 1983 to 2000
XL125 – 1974 to 1985	XL500 – 1979 to 1984	XL230 – 2002 to 2005

XR

XR50 – 1969 to present	XR100 - 1981 to 2003
XR185 - 1979	XR350R - 1983 to 1985
XR500 - 1979 to 1984	XR600R - 1985 to 2000
XR80R - 1979 to 2003	XR400 - 1996 to 2004
XR250 & 230 - 1979 to 2005	XR70R - 1997 to 2003
XR200 - 1980 to 1984	XR650L - 1993 to present
XR125 - 1980 to present	

Honda CL models (1962 to 2000)

Honda CL series 1962 to 1976

The CL designation indicated this model to be the "Scrambler" version which implied some off-road capability (prior to actual dirt-bikes gaining popularity). The CL series of bikes were actually street bikes with a higher rear fender, a braced handlebar, and a high-mount exhaust.

The dawn of trail riding.

Honda produced a retro version of this motorcycle the CL400 from 1998 to 2000



1998 Honda CL400



1962 Honda CL72 (250cc)



1968 Honda CL90



1968 Honda CL350 K0 Scrambler

Honda SL models (1969 to 1973)

Honda SL90 1969 to 1970

The SL90 was the first SL model released by Honda, being produced for only one year, between 1969 and 1970.

The Honda Motosport 90 or **Honda SL90** was a street/trail Honda motorcycle with a high fender. Its engine was a single cylinder 89cc, single overhead cam configuration. It had a 4-speed transmission and a manual clutch. It was produced only during the 1969 model year and was available in two colours: Candy Ruby Red and Candy Blue. It came with a silver fuel tank stripe and a chrome exhaust system. Its frame was silver with the front wheel measuring 19" and 17" for the rear wheel. The steel fenders matched the basic colours (red or blue).



1969 Honda SL90

Honda SL350 1969 to 1973

The SL350 started life as a styling exercise aimed to cash in on the burgeoning dirt bike craze of the 1970's. Sharing the frame and electric start motor of the CB/CL series, the first SL350 brought out in 1969 was nothing more than a CB350 with off-road down pipes, and cross braced handlebars.

In 1970 the SL350 got a new double downtube frame, and the electric start was scrapped, making the motor unique to the SL series. A 19inch front wheel, and competition designed lightweight cast aluminium fenders.

The 1972-1973 SL350 got a 21 inch front wheel, and the painted fenders got polished.



1969 Honda SL350



1970 Honda SL350



1972 Honda SL350

Honda SL175 1970 to 1972

The Honda Motosport SL175K0 was sold in 1970. Three colours were available: Candy Topaz Orange, Candy Ruby Red, and Candy Sapphire Blue. The fuel tank had white stripes. The "175" side cover decal was white. The muffler heat shield was chrome with lateral slots. The exhaust system was a 2-into-1. The engine was a 174cc OHC parallel twin with a 5-speed transmission and manual clutch.



1970 Honda SL175

Honda SL100 1970 to 1973

The SL 100 enduro motorcycle manufactured by Honda was kept in production for only three years, between 1970 and 1973.



1970 Honda SL100

Honda SL70 1971 to 1973

Honda's SL 70, manufactured between 1971 and 1973, had a 4 speed transmission and a 4 stroke air cooled single cylinder, single overhead cam engine. It was available in Summer Yellow, Aquarius Blue, and Light Ruby red.



1971 Honda SL70

Honda SL125 1971 to 1973

Honda's SL 125 was produced for only 2 years, between 1971 and 1973.



1972 Honda SL125

Honda XL models (1972 to 2005)

Honda XL250 1972 to 1987

The first XL...

In the early 1970s off-highway bikes were selling like cold beer and the sweet spot in the market was the quarter-litre class. Yet, Honda could only offer their CB100-derived SL125 or the SL350, which were based on a street bike (the CB350).

Honda then came up with a ground breaking design that defined dual-sport bikes for at least a decade, anticipating as it did the demise of 2-stroke trail bikes.

Honda created the first mass-produced overhead-cam, 4-valve motorcycle engine.

The Pro-Link XL250R was available from 1982 until 1987.



1972 Honda XL250



1982 Honda XL250S

Honda XL175 1973 to 1978

The **Honda XL175** was a 175cc, 4-stroke, OHC, dual-purpose motorcycle manufactured by Honda from 1973 through 1978.



1974 Honda XL175

Honda XL70 1974 to 1976

The XL70 was only made from 1974 to 1976 and each year in just one colour; Candy Topaz Orange, Candy Riviera Blue/Silver, Mighty Green /Silver Metallic.

The “sloper” motor was OHC and derived from a long line of similar machines that went back about 15 years



1974 Honda XL70

Honda XL100 1974 to 1985

First introduced in 1974 with the XL 100K0, and updated as the XL 100K1 in 1975, it then became the XL100 until the XL100S went into production in 1979.

The series was discontinued in 1985



1974 Honda XL100

Honda XL125 1974 to 1985

The elemental 124cc SOHC single that powers the **XL125S** is simple, tor-quey, economical and may well be the most time-tested engine in all of motorcycling. The power plant has maintenance-free electronic ignition, a six-speed close-ratio transmission, aluminium skid plate and chain final drive.

The Pro-Link XL125R was available from 1982 to 1985



1976 Honda XL125



1982 Honda 125S



1982 Honda XL125R

Honda XL350 1974 to 1978

The XL350 was a direct descendant of Honda's XL250 single.

In 1976 Honda did a major revamp of the XL350, calling this one the K2, with chassis changes that increased the fork rake to 32 degrees, trail to 5.5 inches. A new cylinder head allowed better intake breathing, and a very neat high-level exhaust system was tucked behind the frame and exited on the right side.

In 1979 the 350 morphed into the XL500S.



1974 Honda XL350

Honda XL50 1977 to 1988

The XL50 was a mini off-road model that took in the design of the XL250S. The 4-stroke engine is from the CB50.



1980 Honda XL50S

Honda XL75 1977 to 1979

The XL75 was introduced to the North American market in 1977, with a more traditional upright single cylinder engine based on the Honda CB50J



1979 Honda XL75

Honda XL185 1979 to 1999

Honda XL185 is an updated version of Honda XL175. It has a 180 cc, four-stroke, SOHC engine. Instrument gauge contains speedometer, odometer, and resettable tripmeter. It has a compression release, also called a decompressor valve, which is connected to the kick starter with a cable, to ease starting.



1979 Honda XL185S

Honda XL500 1979 to 1984

The enduro model Honda XL500 was manufactured from 1979 to 1981 as the XL500S and sold worldwide.

From 1982 to 1984 the modified model XL500R was offered with Pro-Link rear suspension.



1979 Honda XL500S

Honda XL80 1980 to 1985

Similar to the outgoing XL75, the XL80S was launched in 1980 and ran for five years until 1985 with various colour and graphics changes. All models had red fuel tanks, ranging from 'Helios red', 'Monza red' and 'Flash red'.



1981 Honda XL80S

Honda XL400R 1982

The XL400R was the largest XL-R model to adopt the electronic advance angle CDI ignition and the automatic cam chain tensioner. It featured the pro-link for the rear suspension.



1982 Honda XL400R

Honda XL200R 1983 to 1984

The XL200R'83 was sold in 1983 and came in just one colour: Monza Red. The fuel tank, side covers, fenders, and frame were red. The side cover panels, seat, and fork boots were black. The "200R" side cover decal was solid white. The engine was an OHC single cylinder displacing 195cc linked to a 5 speed transmission.



1983 Honda XL200R

Honda XL600R 1983 to 2000

The **Honda XL600R** was a single cylinder four-stroke Enduro motorcycle produced by Honda between 1983 and 2000, featuring the Pro-Link rear suspension.



1983 Honda XL600R

Honda XL230 2002 to 2005

The 2002 Honda XL230 body design was reminiscent of the off-road model of the 70s.

Very little appears to be known about this model, so it is assumed that it was available in only a few select markets.



2002 Honda XL230

Honda XR models (1969 to present)

Honda XR50 1969 to present

The XR50 is a small four-stroke 50 cc motorcycle, introduced in 1969 and still in production as the CRF50 in 2021.

Originally it was called the Z-50, then Trail-50, the XR 50, CRF 50, and the Mini Dirt Bike.



1969 Honda Z50



1980 Honda Z50

Honda XR185 1979

The XR 185 Enduro was only available in 1979, in 1980 the engine size was increased to 200.



1979 Honda XR185

Honda XR500 1979 to 1984

Introduced in 1979, the twin-shock Honda XR 500 was the first real "XR" model. The bike had a conventional 18" rear wheel but an unusual 23" front wheel which was supposed to be better for riding over potholes and ruts.

In 1981 Honda introduced 'Pro-Link' models, with rising-rate single-shock rear suspension, a 17" rear wheel and a 21" front wheel.

The 1983 XR500R was thoroughly revised with a new dry-sump RFVC 5-speed engine which was lighter and more powerful than the older engine. Induction was by 2 carburetors, the first in use until 1/4 throttle, whereupon the second started to take effect. Wheels were 21" front and 17" rear.

The 1984 XR500RE model was the last 500cc XR, being superseded in 1985 by the larger Honda XR 600RF.



1979 Honda XR500



1984 Honda XR500RE

Honda XR80R 1979 to 2003

The XR80 came out in 1979, superseding the XR75, and underwent fairly minor changes for 24 years until the Honda CRF80F replaced it in 2004.



1979 Honda XR80

**Honda XR250 1979 to 2005
(Incl. the XR230 from 2005 to
present)**

The XR250 was introduced in 1979, and in 1981 became the XR250R when it received the Pro-Link single rear shock.

The XR250L was a heavier, street-legal version which was introduced in 1991.

There were various models in later years, like the XR250 Baja from 1995, and the XR250 Motard from 2003.

In 2005 Honda introduced the XR230 to replace the XR250R.



1979 Honda XR250



1982 Honda XR250R

Honda XR200 1980 to 1984

The XR200, a development of the XL185 trail bike, was produced from 1980 until 1984.



1980 Honda XR200



1984 Honda XR200R

Honda XR125 1980 to present

The XR 125 Enduro was released in 1980 and shares the same engine as the Honda CG125



1980 Honda XR125 Enduro

Honda XR100 1981 to 2003

The Honda XR100 was produced from 1981 to 2003. In 1985 it received the Pro-Link rear suspension and became the XR100R.



1982 Honda XR100

Honda XR350R 1983 to 1985

The XR 350R was introduced for the 1983 model year and discontinued after the 1985 model year. The 1983 and 1984 models were wet sump engines and the 1985 engine had a dry sump with oil in the frame.



1983 Honda XR350R

Honda XR600R 1985 to 2000

The Honda XR600R was manufactured by Honda from 1985 to 2000, after which it was replaced by the liquid cooled XR650



1985 Honda XR600R



2000 Honda XR600R

Honda XR400 1996 to 2004

The XR 400R was introduced in 1996. Its frame, plastics and suspension components were similar to those of the XR250R, and it had a similar air-cooled engine with RFVC cylinder head technology. The XR400R had more suspension travel and a longer wheelbase than the XR250R of the same year. Many XR400Rs were heavily modified and raced. The 400 was perhaps the most versatile of the XR line-up; many were raced in amateur motocross and enduro events. Equipped with street-legal lighting it also worked reasonably well as a dual purpose bike. It was simple, reliable and long lasting. Hard to break and easy to fix. In 2004 Honda discontinued the XR400R.



1996 Honda XR400R

Honda XR70R 1997 to 2003

The Honda 70 was first introduced in 1997 as the XR70. The engine was basically the same as the Honda 50 with a bigger bore size, valves, and clutch. The gearbox was the reliable 3-speed automatic. In 2001, the little 70 received a plastic update to make it look more like the big CRs. In 2004, the 70 got another plastic update and was renamed the CRF70.



1998 Honda XR70R

Honda XR650L 1993 to present

The Honda XR650L was released in 1992 as a 1993 model. It combines the RFVC engine from the proven NX650 Dominator dual sport with the lighter, off-road capable XR600R chassis.



1993 Honda XR650L



2021 Honda XR650L