

# the Rocketeer

By Chris Cooley



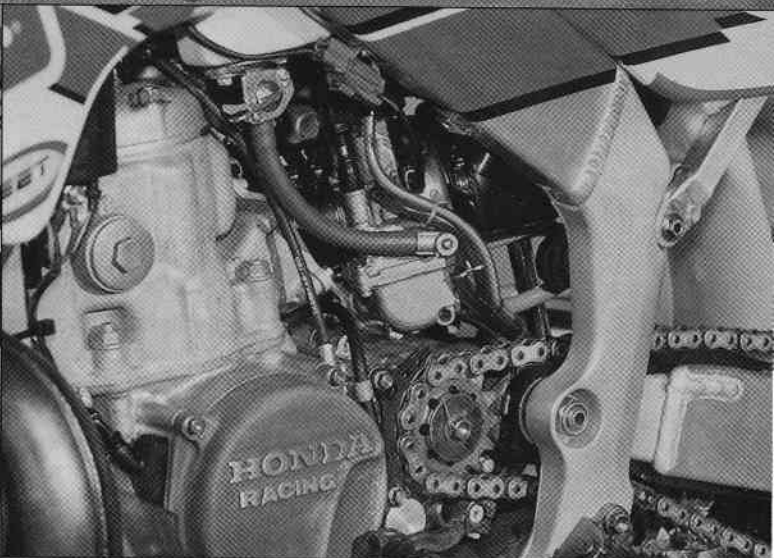
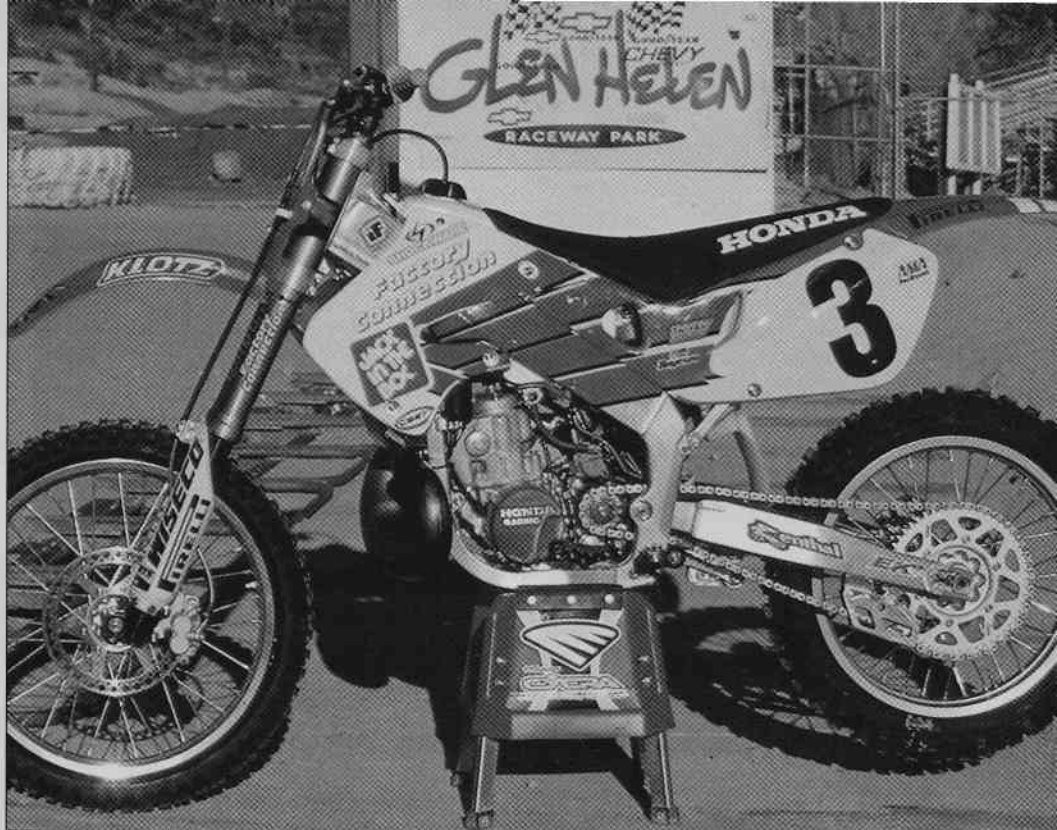
Mike LaRocco's  
Team Factory Connection/  
Jack in the Box/  
Honda CR250



# MXracer THRILL

Let me start by telling you that when the guys at MXracer called and asked me to test Mike LaRocco's Team Factory Connection/Jack in the Box/ Honda CR250, I didn't get all that excited. You're probably wondering why I wouldn't be completely ecstatic to ride the very same bike that carried LaRocco to a come-from-behind third-place finish at the opening round of the U.S. Supercross Series at Anaheim's Edison Field. It's not that I didn't feel honored, it's just that I've never really been a fan of Honda's aluminum-framed CRs. Since I regularly race Kawasakis, the CRs have always been difficult for me to adapt my riding style to.

We met Mike and his mechanic Paul Delaurier at



A black and white photograph of a motocross rider, Chris Cooley, leaning into a turn on a dirt track. He is wearing a full racing suit, helmet, and boots. The motorcycle is a Honda CR250, and the number 3 is visible on the front. A cloud of dust is kicked up behind the rear wheel. The background is a blurred dirt track with some structures in the distance.

**CHRIS** COOLEY

Glen Helen Raceway Park the Thursday between the Anaheim and San Diego rounds of the SX series for the test. Another reason I wasn't all that excited was that I figured we would be testing Mike's practice bike or a replica, because what top supercross rider would bring out his personal race bike for some magazine tester to ride? My excitement level rose when Paul unloaded the real deal, complete with the trick, factory ignition switches on the handlebars and the funny smelling race fuel. It was then that I also learned that LaRocco's bike is actually a Honda just like the ones that Ezra Lusk, Kevin Windham, Mickael Pichon and Sébastien Tortelli ride.

Before riding the bike I made minor adjustments to the lever position since Mike likes his level with the handlebars and I like mine slightly lower. Mike and I are about the same size so the rear suspension sag was already set correctly. As

I began circulating the track, I immediately felt at home on the potent CR. At first, I expected the bike to rip my arms out of their sockets because of all of the hype associated with most pros' bikes. Well, fast it is—very fast—but not exactly arm-ripping fast. Expecting my arms to pump up from the explosive power delivery, I was shocked to feel how smooth and electric the power really was.

It was also quite obvious that LaRocco's motor was built for supercross only, as the transmission has taller first and second gears and shorter third and fourth cogs. Mike informed us that he uses the first three gears in supercross races with first being used for tight corners, second for starts and jumps, and third for the start straight. I preferred to use second gear in tight corners because the CR's potent yet smooth power made for less work.

The gear ratios were great for the tight sections of the

## Inside Mike LaRocco's CR250

Mike LaRocco is not riding out of the factory Honda camp, but he might as well be since his bike is nearly identical to Ezra Lusk's works CR250. It was known that LaRocco had been receiving some factory Honda parts last season, but for '99 American Honda stepped up immensely in support of Team Factory Connection/Jack in the Box/Honda by supplying LaRocco with all of the trick factory goods from HGA (Honda Gijutsu Asaka). Last year, LaRocco's race bike tipped the scales at 227 pounds, while this year it weighs in at just 219—a

scant four pounds over the AMA limit. Here's what's inside:

**Cylinder:** HGA

**Head:** HGA

**Cases:** Production

**Carburetor:** '98 Production 38mm Keihin PowerJet

**Transmission:** HGA

**Ignition:** HGA with two ignition curves

**Pipe:** HGA

**Silencer:** HGA

**Sprockets:** Renthal 14/54

**Chain:** EK 520 MRD



track, but a bit of a hindrance on the longer sections of the outdoor style track we were testing on.

It was unbelievable how well-tuned the motor was. I rode LaRocco's CR back to back with *MXracer's* test bike and the two of them do not even compare. LaRocco's machine was jetted perfectly with amazingly crisp and quick throttle response. I could simply roll up to a jump, grab a handful and clear the obstacle without even the slightest hesitation. The stock CR test bike took quite a bit more work on my part to clear some of the jumps that LaRocco's bike leaped over with ease. The smooth powerband allowed me to lay the power down, without the rear wheel breaking loose even in loose or slick conditions.

With a bike this fast, you certainly need an efficient way to stop it. Honda has always had excellent brakes, but the brakes on LaRocco's Honda put the stockers to shame. It's almost like comparing the brakes on your grandma's old station wagon to the brakes on a Formula One race car. If you ever wondered how supercross riders land those huge jumps and then make the tight corner at the bottom of the landing without flying over the berm and into the crowd, these brakes are the explanation.

Although the brakes weren't gnarly enough to throw me over the bars when I grabbed them, they were *very* effective. For comparison, there was a high-speed double with a corner immediately following it. On the stock CR, I would have to throw out the laundry in order to keep from over-shooting the berm, but on LaRocco's CR I would simply apply the brakes, turn and be on my way.

The suspension action was the hardest part to evaluate since we were testing on an outdoor MX track. Expecting the ride to be rough, I was surprised to find LaRocco's suspension worked well at Glen Helen, which is known for its

high-speed and natural terrain, not for supercross obstacles.

Although the track wasn't in a very rough condition, there were still plenty of square-edged bumps down the straights and bumpy ruts in the corners. The Factory Connection Honda soaked up small, high-speed bumps very well, which is understandable due to the fact that supercross tracks sometimes develop nasty bumps which aren't visible to spectators in the stands.

LaRocco's CR was also very stable at speed and cornered excellently on everything from high-speed sweepers to tight-rutted turns.

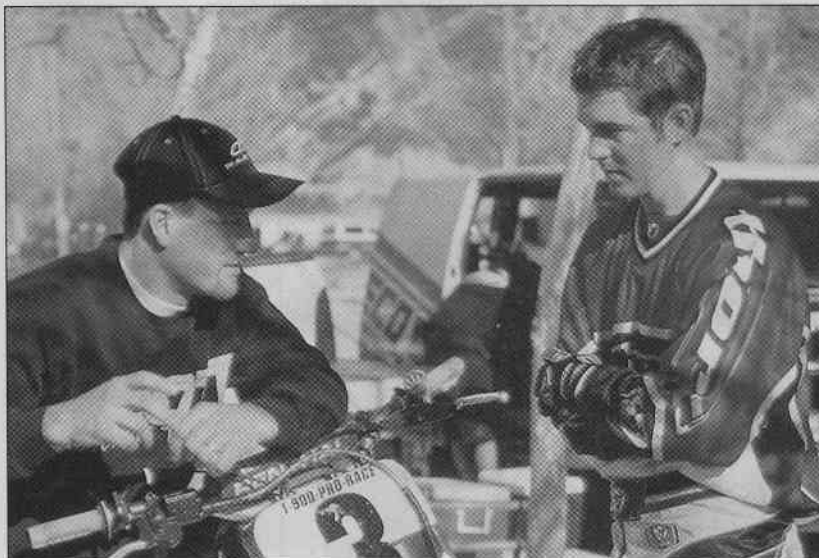
I normally prefer my suspension to be on the stiff side, so LaRocco's Honda was rather comfortable for me to ride. The bike soaked up small take-offs and landings, as well as the large ones, with ease. CRs have always been known as good flyers, and LaRocco's bike was no exception. If I could have only tested this bike on an actual supercross track, then

we could have really seen what the suspension could do!

When the day was done, LaRocco and Delaurier loaded up and headed down to San Diego (where LaRocco took third again). After riding the bike, I understand why factory riders usually retire after losing their rides. I'm not saying that a good rider couldn't win on a highly modified stock motorcycle, but a factory bike sure makes it a heck of a lot easier. Everything on the bike is fine-tuned from one end to the other to total perfection. It's all of the little details that the average racer takes for granted that make this bike so good.

With a bike like this and Mike LaRocco's talent, I wouldn't at all be surprised to see him on the top step of the podium a few times this season. Thanks to Mike LaRocco and all the guys from the Team Factory Connection/Jack in the Box/Honda for the awesome ride and once-in-a-lifetime experience.

**MXr**



## Inside Mike LaRocco's CR250

**Front Brake:** HGA caliper, master cylinder, lever and line with White Bros. pads

**Rear Brake:** HGA caliper, master cylinder and line with White Bros. pads

**Hubs:** HGA

**Wheels:** D.I.D

**Front Tire:** Pirelli MT480

**Rear Tire:** Pirelli MT18

**Frame:** Slightly modified production

**Linkage:** HGA—more progressive

**Swingarm:** Production

**Shock:** Works Showa with Factory Connection valving

**Forks:** Works Showa with Factory Connection valving  
**Triple Clamps:** HGA billet aluminum

**Handlebars:** Renthal 971

**Bar Perches:** HGA

**Footpegs:** HGA

**Grips:** Renthal soft ½ waffle

**Clutch Perch:** HGA

**Clutch Lever:** Modified production

**Plastic:** UFO

**Graphics:** Ceet

**Fuel:** Klotz

**Lubricants:** Klotz