



# BIG MAN

I WAS 11 YEARS OLD THE LAST TIME I RODE A 500. IT WAS 1985 AND MY BROTHER DAVID LET ME TAKE A SPIN ABOARD HIS FACTORY HONDA. IT WAS QUITE A RIDE, TO SAY THE LEAST, BUT I WASN'T QUITE AT THE LEVEL BACK THEN TO REALLY ENJOY IT. BY THE TIME I WAS OLD ENOUGH AND ABLE ENOUGH TO RIDE A 500 TO ITS POTENTIAL—WELL, NEAR ITS POTENTIAL—THE CLASS HAD STARTED TO PHASE OUT, AND HAS SINCE BECOME NEARLY EXTINCT. IT'S FOR THIS REASON ALONE THAT I HAVEN'T GIVEN A SINGLE THOUGHT TO THROWING A LEG OVER THE MIGHTY TWO-STROKE BEAST IN YEARS, SO WHEN I GOT THE CALL FROM 7WVX TO COME OUT AND JOIN THEM FOR A DAY IN THE SUN ON THE 2004 SERVICE HONDA CR500AF LIMITED EDITION, I WAS PRETTY STOKED. THIS WAS MY OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FIRST-HAND THE TYPE OF POWER THAT LED MY BROTHER TO TWO 500cc NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS IN THE 80S. I WAS EQUALLY STOKED THAT WE WOULD BE RIDING AT MY FAVORITE LOCAL TRACK, CAHUILLA CREEK. I KNEW THE 500 WAS GOING TO BE A LOT OF BIKE TO HANDLE, AND CAHUILLA'S FAST, LOAMY, TRACTION-HEAVEN CIRCUIT WOULD BE JUST THE PLACE. IT WAS ON, AND I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET THERE...

Before my big day, however, I decided to do a little research on this Limited Edition CR500AF to see what I was really getting myself into. It seems that the folks at Service Honda have been experimenting with putting CR500 motors into Honda's perimeter aluminum frames since 1997. What was a garage project back then has now evolved into one of the baddest production bikes on the market. They released their first production version in 1999, and have continued making improvements every year since. In 2001, Honda dropped the CR500R from their production line of MXers, but through a unique arrangement Service Honda now assembles the CR500 engines in their own facility to Honda's strict quality standards.

So what's the deal with the Limited Edition version in 2004? The LE features a couple of major differences not found on the "standard" CR500AF. The first, and probably biggest change is that the CR500 motor we've been referring to has been placed inside a CR125R chassis rather than the CR250R that the standard CR500AF has utilized for years. By doing this, Service Honda is able to use the Kayaba suspension that the CR125R production bikes boast. The standard version CR500AF uses the Showa equipment that has been a standard on Hondas since the beginning of time. The reason? It's simple... More options for their customers. Those that prefer the Kayaba suspension set-up will also be delighted to know that both front and rear ends on the LE are sprung and valved by MX Tech, utilizing the famous Enzo sub-tanks, to the customer's weight and riding ability, making it an even more customized package. Finally, the LE has been outfitted with gunmetal-anodized rims, billet handlebar risers, custom triple clamps, billet engine covers, and white bodywork dressed in limited edition graphics.

# ON CAMPUS... IN A LITTLE BODY

2004 SERVICE HONDA CR500AF LIMITED EDITION

BY MITCHELL BAILEY :: PHOTOS: MAEDA





that even seasoned riders get a case of white knuckle. The cure? Up shift! I know... Sounds crazy to up shift on a bike that has more power than most of us know what to do with, but that's the only way to smooth this baby out. Once adjusted to the delivery of the strong powerband, I had an absolute blast on this bike. The hardest part was adjusting to how much more quickly you approach the jumps and corners. I found myself having to look farther ahead on the track than usual, much like driving a shifter kart.

Coming into corners much faster was a fairly easy task to handle, however, with the incredible turning capability of the CR500. The stout CR500 powerplant nestled inside of a CR125 chassis allows for quick turning and great predictability when diving into ruts, and delivers an unexpected lightness for

a 500. The MX Tech Kayaba suspension felt solid, but the rougher-than-usual Cahuilla track made fine-tuning extremely difficult. With three different test riders taking turns on the bike, suspension settings remained the way they were when the bike was received from Service Honda. For me, the bike felt slightly rigid and wouldn't settle into a straight line when tracking through the braking bumps. Overall though, I felt like I could make some minor adjustments to the suspension and this thing would be magical. Although I felt slower and less able to be aggressive on the bike the way it was set up, my lap times were actually a little over one second faster than those on our modified CRF450R. I guess big power actually does make big gains!

After riding the Service Honda CR500AF Limited Edition you'll be throwing the rest of your bikes around like an XR50. The ride-ability of the big two-stroke definitely varies depending on the rider, however. The 500 requires a great deal of patience and smooth riding. For those of you who have chronic arm pump, the Epstein-Barr virus, or a Supercross-only contract, this is not the bike for you. I would recommend this bike to anyone who can afford an extra practice/play bike, or for the regular sand rider or desert-goers: This bike's for you! Unfortunately, buying a 500 for race purposes would be very disappointing now that the class is all but extinct at most local racetracks. Although... The Mammoth Motocross is right around the corner. Ahh... I can see the holeshots now! 🏆

Once my research was complete it was off to the track. I was so pumped that I left the house early to ensure that I didn't miss a second of track time on the Service Honda. My excitement diminished slightly, however, as I rolled into Cahuilla that morning. From a distance, the track appeared as if it hadn't been prepped at all after the three days of practice sessions and heat just previous to our big day. As I got closer it became an arm-pumping realization that my eyes hadn't deceived me. The track was rough... No, real rough! And from the recent heat wave we've experienced in SoCal, it was dry and slick, too. Luckily, the nightmare I'd gazed into only lasted a split second before I caught first glance of the CR500AF Limited Edition. The bike can't help but put a smile on your face. A brand-new tricked out 500 isn't something that you get to see everyday, and with all of the custom-looking bells and whistles that I already mentioned, this thing was mouthwatering.

When I fired her up for the first time, I heard a sound that was meaner, crisper, and deeper than most of the new school MX kids have even heard in their lives. You don't even need to ride it to know that this bike is no joke in the power department. I immediately threw my leg over and set out to hunt down the perfect spot for Swap's Canon to capture this beast. On the track I gained immediate respect for the fierce power of the Service Honda 500. The power rolls on smoothly at first, but it doesn't take long before the mid-range hit comes on so abruptly

## 2004 CR500AF SPECIFICATIONS

### ENGINE

Engine Type: 500cc liquid-cooled, single-cylinder, two-stroke

Bore and Stroke: 89mm x 79mm

Compression Ratio: 6.8:1

Induction: Eight petal reed valve

Carburetion: 39mm flat-slide

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission: Close-ratio five-speed

Final Drive: #520 chain; 14T/48T

### CHASSIS / SUSPENSION / BRAKES

Front Suspension: 46mm inverted Kayaba cartridge fork with 18-position rebound and 20-position compression damping adjustability; 12.0 inches of travel

Rear Suspension: Pro Link Kayaba single shock with spring preload, 30-position rebound damping adjustability, and compression damping adjustment separated into low speed (18 positions) and high speed (2.0 turns); 12.5 inches travel.

Front Brake: Single 240mm disc with twin-piston caliper

Rear Brake: Single 240mm disc

Front Tire: 80/100-21

Rear Tire: 110/90-19

### DIMENSIONS

Rake: 29.53 degrees

Trail: 101.3mm

Wheelbase: 57.4 inches

Seat Height: 37.3 inches

Ground Clearance: 13.6 inches

Dry Weight: 213.8 pounds

Fuel Capacity: 2.0 gallons

### OTHER

Available Colors: White

Model ID: CR500AF Limited Edition

Price: \$9,630

### THE TRUTH!

AVERAGE LAP TIMES:  
CR500AF Limited Edition VS. CRF450R

#### CR500AF LE

Donn Maeda: 158.69

Mitchell Bailey: 153.44

Ryan Cooley: 149.03

#### CRF450R

Donn Maeda: 159.06

Mitchell Bailey: 155.12

Ryan Cooley: 153.78