

Honda's H-100 is the latest addition to the ranks of cheap-to-run, low-insurance-rate lightweights. How does it rate against two other recent introductions, Kawasaki's KC100 and Suzuki's GP100U? Tests by Mark Revelle. Photography by Karin Craddock.

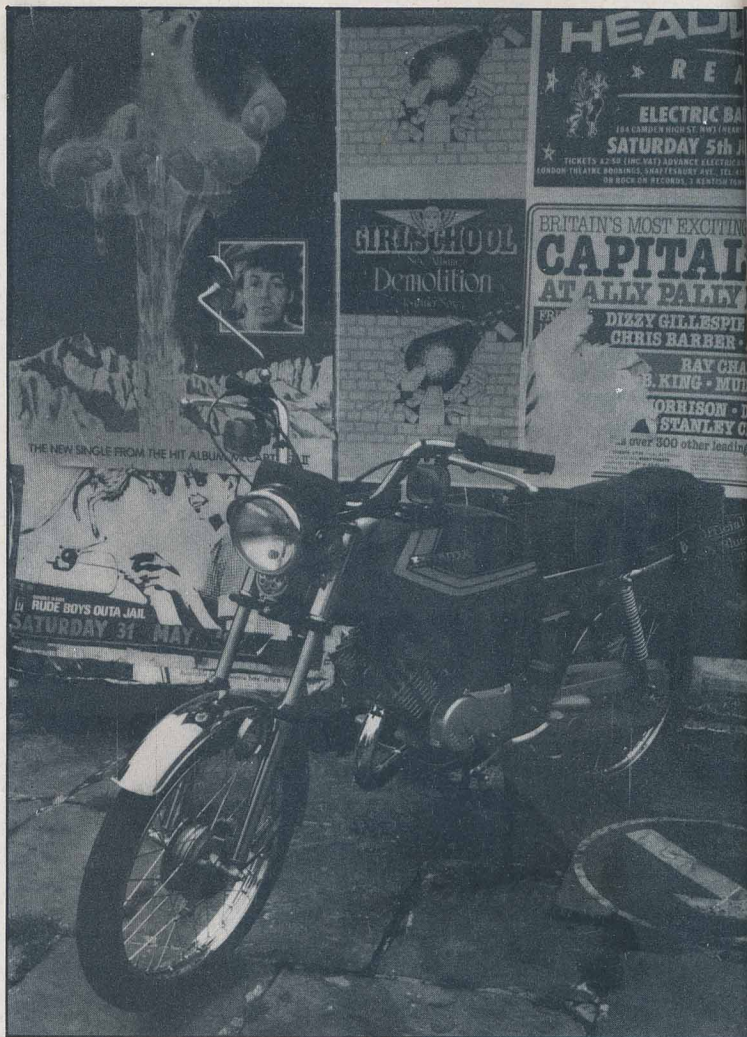
The introduction of the H-100 Honda brings the number of 100cc bikes on the market to fifteen. Only the Japanese manufacturers produce this size of engine which coincides with the maximum engine size allowed before insurance premiums take their alarming, and largely inexplicable, leaps. Of the fifteen, some are pressed steel jobs with the engine suspended apparently in mid-air; some are pseudo trail bikes, for which you pay more; and some are small but real motorcycles. They range in price from £369 for the Kawasaki KC100 to £574 for the Honda XL100S. The H-100 falls into the real motorcycle category, and we decided to test it against two others from the same group, the KC100, the cheapest of the entire range, and Suzuki's low-spec GP100U, nominally the fastest. All three have single-cylinder two stroke engines with automatic oil pumps, all

have provision for carrying a passenger and all have drum brakes front and rear. But there the immediate similarities end.

SUZUKI GP100U

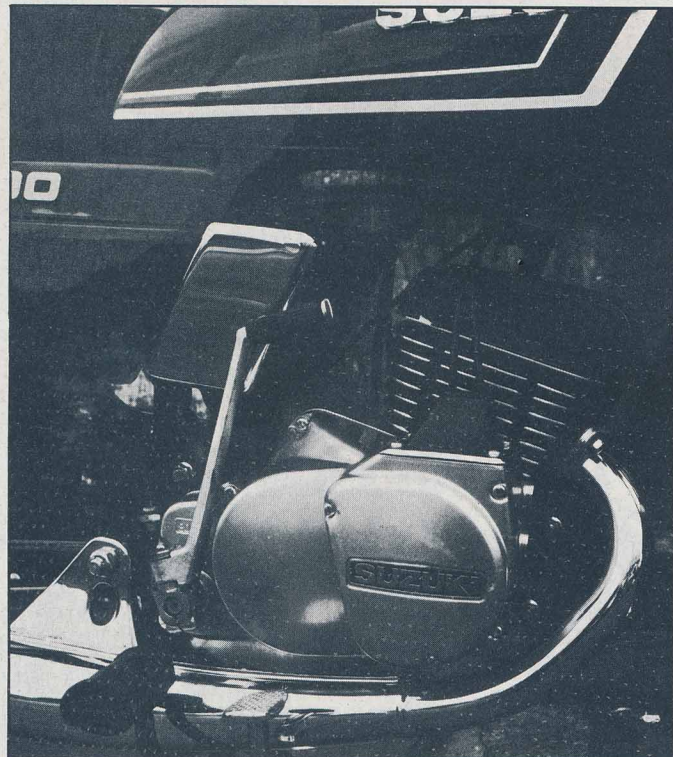
At first sight the GP100U looks impressive. The colour scheme of silver mudguards, red tank and black seat is bright and simple. The machine's size and proportions are striking, as is the large matt-black single cylinder motor in its single downtube frame. The sturdy 'bar and large double seat add to the sense of size and purpose. Closer inspection confirms these favourable impressions. The finish is excellent; the switches are all mounted on the left handlebar and are easily operated; the speedometer has a tripmeter, and is nicely, if perhaps unnecessarily, balanced by a rev counter. It is a good-looking machine.

The choke is also mounted on the left handlebar, beneath



KOST KUTTERS

HONDA H100 • SUZUKI GP100U • KAWASAKI KC100



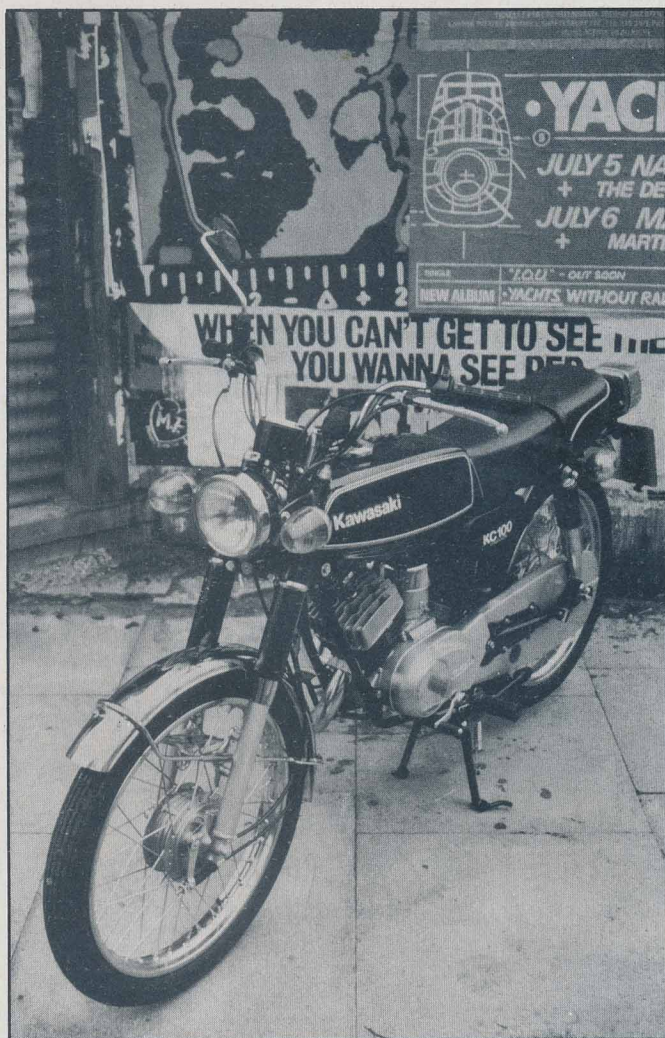
The GP100U's disc-valve motor is powerful but very peaky for town use.

the horn, and full choke is necessary to fire the engine up. The exhaust note proves to be reasonably pitched, even when warming up. Blip the throttle, flick the choke back, tap it down in first and away you go. Almost. Another thousand revs and the bike snatches a bit, whip out the clutch, a few more revs, clutch in, still more revs and finally you roll. And that's downhill!

The little Suzy uses a rotary disc valve which gives good response from mid-range up, but leaves the engine pretty powerless below 4,250 revs. Which makes uphill starts from traffic lights interesting. It should be said that the gear ratios don't help, in that the two lower gears are straining all the time, and the leap into third leaves you suddenly with no pulling power between 25-35mph, which is where you need it most in traffic. The trick of commuter

travelling is, after all, to spot the gap and accelerate quickly and safely into it. With the Suzuki acceleration is initially retarded then tends to come in with a bang just when you've arrived in the gap. The complete lack of engine braking puts more strain on the brakes and suddenly you start thinking twice about any manoeuvre that doesn't take you into a clear stretch of road.

There however the Suzuki improves. Acceleration over 40mph is quite healthy as the engine spins freely and the box can be used to exploit the 6,500-7,500 rpm power band. An indicated 70mph is possible, with 1000rpm in reserve. This is only advisable on dual carriageways or motorways, not so much because of the legal limits as because of those imposed by the machine itself. Despite a 5-position preload on the rear shocks, the bike is underdamped and undersprung. Solo, the Suzuki

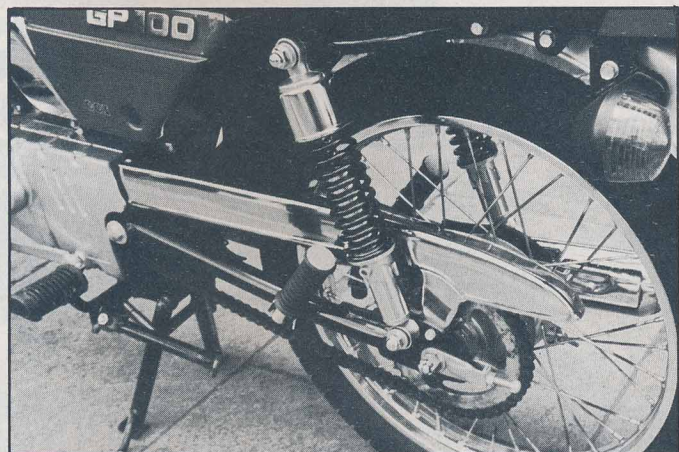


is unsure of itself on bends, and bumps would easily knock it off line. Two up and it became positively skittish on anything but good surfaces. Bumps became individually memorable!

The brakes however were well up to the mark, smooth and strong, which was doubly reassuring as the horn sounded like a mouse having its tail trodden on. The electrics provided reasonable lights, (although the pilot light could not be switched on separately) and a strong turn signal flashing, except at low revs when it would just stick on. The switch for the

signals had no secure central position, and it was too easy to switch from left to right and think you had merely cancelled the left turn flasher. There was also no stoplight on the front brake, which, since that brake provides the lion's share of stopping power is at best a curious oversight.

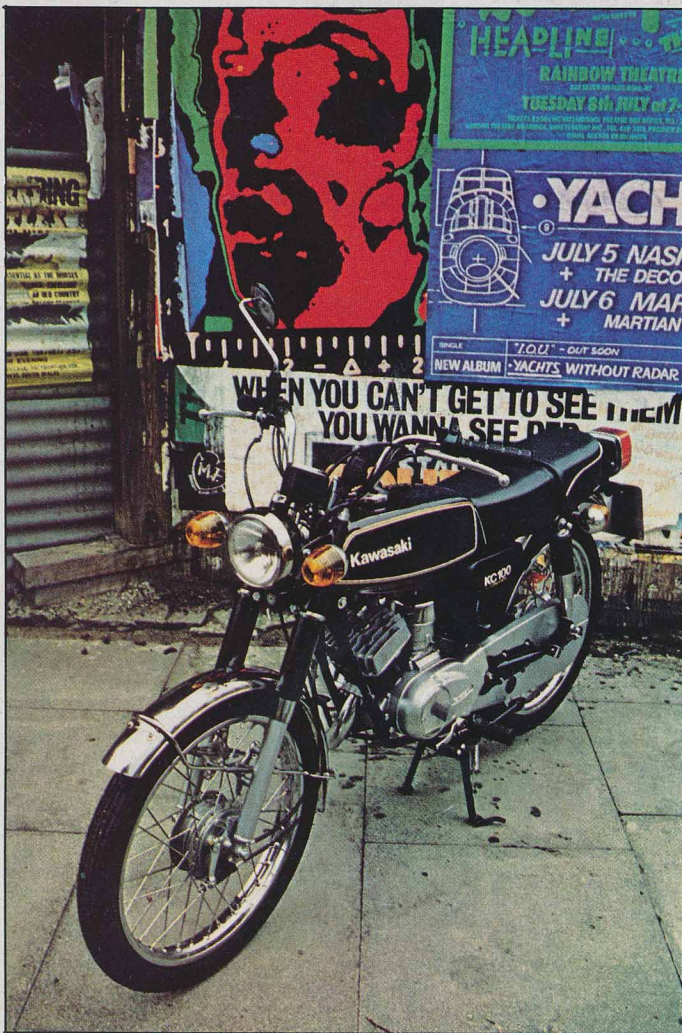
I managed 83 mpg over the test which was almost exclusively in town; a more reasonable estimate, given the propensity of the bike to buzz, and say a few miles of A3 or A40 on your daily journey, would be in the low seventies. At £385 the middle



Though the Suzuki doesn't have an enclosed chain, the suspension units are preload-adjustable for load.



There's big-bike instruments on the Suzuki GP100U complete with a rev counter, trip meter and repeaters.



KOST KUTTERS

HONDA H100 • SUZUKI GP100 • KAWASAKI KC100 U

Top left: Kawasaki's KC100 is ultra cheap and ultra light for £365; that's less than some fifties. Above: The Suzuki GP100U at £385 is fast but temperamental. Below: Though nominally most expensive of the three at £409, the H-100 Honda is punchy and nippy, and it looks good too.



priced machine of the three, the Suzuki comes with six months warranty, unless you're prepared to pay extra for 12 months. If you want more chrome and a disc front brake the price is £439.

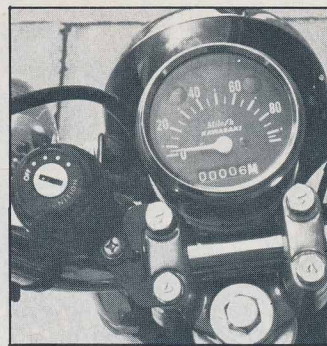
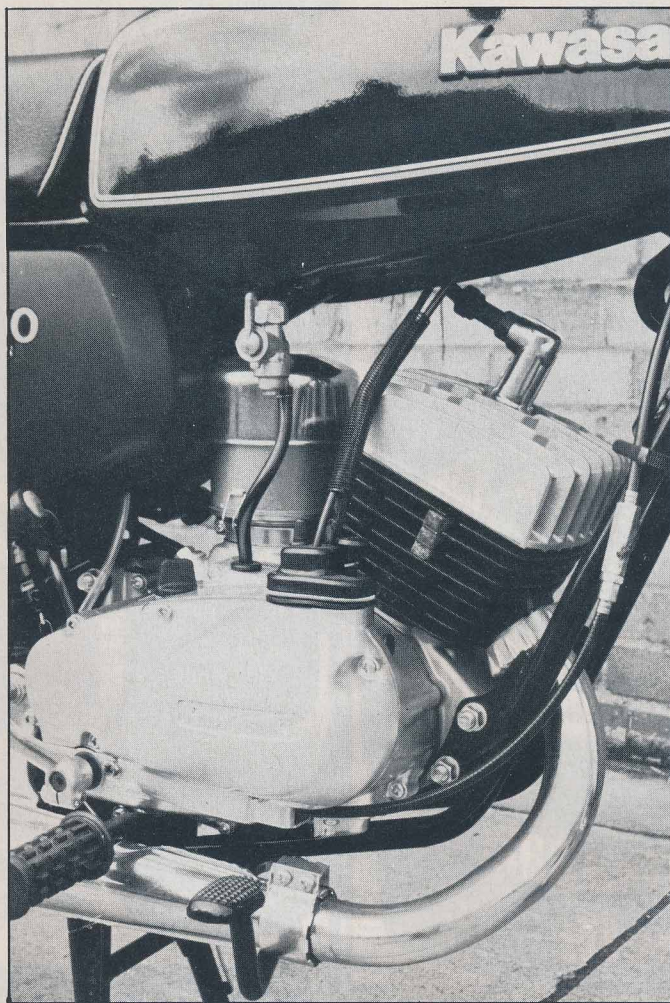
KAWASAKI KC100

Where the Suzuki looked substantial, the Kawasaki KC100 looks flimsy. The seat and tank are pitifully thin; the overall dimensions small; and the colour scheme – dull black with old gold coach-lining and chrome – unfortunately only adds to the impression of looking at a large insect. The huge bug-eyed indicators heighten the effect, which is completed by the spindly twin frame tubes and skinny wheels.

Alas, the bike doesn't just look flimsy, it feels it. The engine is a single cylinder disc-valved two stroke which produces just 10.5bhp. Again there is comparatively little power low down, though a more suitable set of gear ratios helps disguise the fact once you are moving. The engine-mounted choke is a cheap looking affair, but works very well. The engine starts first kick from cold and is very quickly warmed up. Thanks to the gearing, the machine pulls away easily and smoothly, if rather slowly. The exhaust note is raucous and out of all proportion to the bike's potential, but is useful enough in letting people know you're there; once again the horn is useless, sounding like a thrush gargling. Through traffic the bike is zippy enough and a top speed of around sixty is possible, given a long enough run up.

The handling is both less ambitious and more competent than the Suzy. The machine is surprisingly stable, the steering quite taut and the roadholding gives you confidence. The rear shocks have no preload adjustment, and the forks are underdamped, but the springing is more firm; it is only two-up that the bike's inadequacies are glaringly obvious. With a passenger the rider's position is cramped and a series of normal bumps in the road will have you, your passenger and the machine pogoing down the high street like characters from a cartoon. The KC100 was not meant to carry passengers. Solo, it goes well.

Stopping however is another matter. At rest, the brakes have a positive feel;



Above: Pared to the minimum to get the cost down to £365, the Kawasaki has basic instrumentation. Left: Kawasaki's KC100' engine is very similar to the Suzuki's disc-valve five-speed unit except that air filter is mounted on crankcase top.



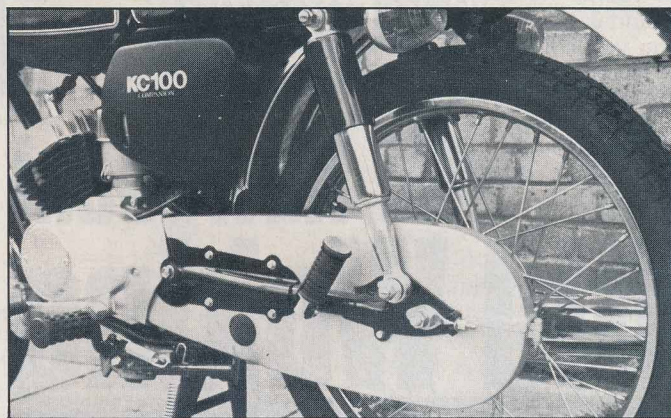
Above: Y'er basic controls don't come any more basic than this on the Kawa with a dipswitch, turn signal switch and horn button next to the clutch lever. Below: Kawasaki has all-enclosed rear chain and non-adjustable suspension units.

moving, they have a positive feel when applied. Altogether they feel fine, but they don't have much effect. Nor do scraping your feet along the ground, hauling back on the handlebars or praying. The light steering however is useful, and combined once again with astute use of the gearbox allows you to negotiate the hazard and resume your place in the commuter grand prix.

In the commuter manufacturer's GP, the KC100 starts at pole position because of its price. At £369 it is the cheapest of the 100cc bike range. It has a side stand, a centre stand and a fully enclosed chain. It does over 85mpg and is simplicity itself to maintain. Despite having a battery no bigger than a milk carton its lights are more than adequate. It carries a twelve month unlimited mileage guarantee. With harder brake linings it would probably stop as well as it goes. On paper it looks a good bet. On the road it just doesn't seem big enough for the job. Perhaps I was expecting too much from a small machine, but then, I found it with the Honda H-100.

HONDA H100

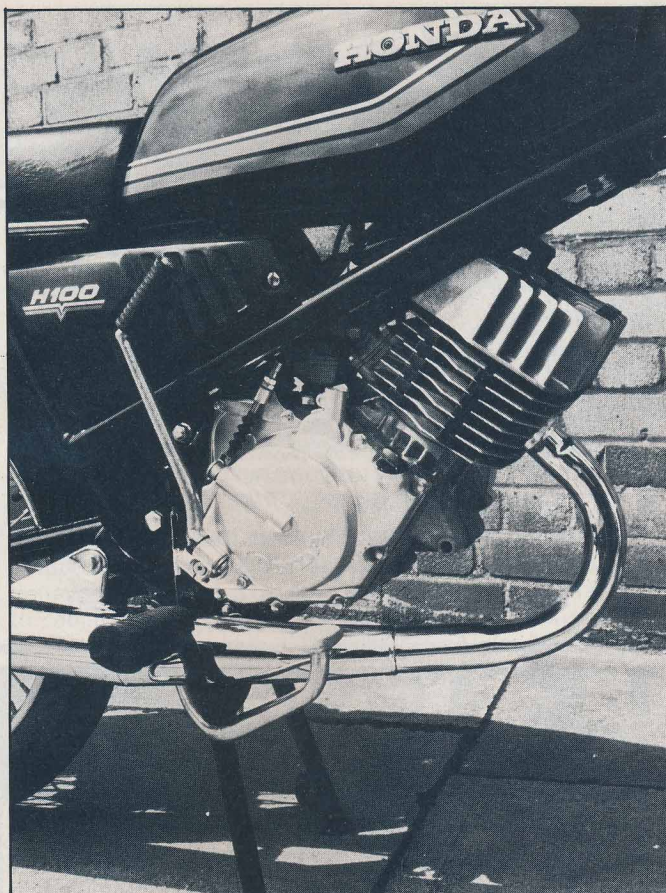
If ever a motor bike had sex



appeal, the Honda H-100 has. Everyone who saw it wanted to sit on it; everyone who sat on it wanted to ride it. People who couldn't tell a camshaft from a kickstart thought it looked lovely. Two heavies on a Norton called it cheeky (no, they didn't mean me.) A cockney chef said it looked 'smashin'. With its high gloss black finish and curiously pointed tank whose lines are boldly emphasised by a strong orange arrow-shaped design along its side the machine has a styling which stresses the courage of its convictions. These are at their most striking in the unorthodox frame design. The factory's MB designation suggests a family connection with the sharp little sixteen, the

MB50. The frame differs in detail, but essentially follows the same lines: the tank is supported on a broad spine, whilst two tubes, braced at the head, follow the base of the tank before angling down towards the swing arm pivot. These tubes provide the mounting bracket from which the engine is suspended to slope forwards and upwards at an angle which echoes the overall aggression of the styling. The cylinder is large and square, and more than fills the large space beneath the tank. The high bar and long chrome exhaust remind you that this is not a machine aimed at the death or glory kids, and the fully enclosed rear chain suggests the commuter model is supposed to,

Left: Honda engine looks and is punchy. Below: Note oil gauge next to filler cap on petrol cap.



be, but the sporty looks were not, as the test week showed, just window dressing.

Nor is the impressive styling just a paint job and a trick frame. Honda's attention to detail is astonishing on this bike. The square-framed speedo is part of a sealed

unit which houses the ignition switch, neutral light and turn indicator. The front turn signals are held by brackets welded to the handlebar, so that they are protected in the case of a fall. The rear signals are rubber mounted on flexible brackets.

All the switches are mounted on the left handlebar, easily operable and clearly marked. Like the flashers and speedo these are square and backed by matt black finished cases. The ignition key operates the steering lock and the petrol cap lock, as well as the oil tank cap lock, which is set into the petrol tank along with its own gauge, and a sturdy helmet lock. The seat is large and comfortable. The paintwork, chrome and all round finish are immaculate.

Starting the bike is simple, once you've found the choke whose siting is so laughable that you feel it must be an oriental joke. Located immediately and squarely behind and against the frame's near-side tube, it takes the fingers of a Yehudi Menuhin to manipulate. Fine on a dry sunny day, but with mitts on...? So allow the engine to warm before moving off. This takes some little time, but is easy on the ear as the machine is silenced to a purr. The single cylinder two stroke employs a reed valve and the difference is quickly apparent; the power comes in straight away with a mini power band around 4450 revs acting like a booster. From standing starts the little Honda shoots away, and the nicely spaced box and light clutch make gear-changing a real pleasure.

Town riding is a joy; the engine is never straining once

	Suzuki GP100U	Kawasaki KC100	Honda H-100
Price inc Vat:	£385	£369	£409
Warranty:	6 months/10,000 miles	12 months/unlimited	12 months/unlimited
Engine:	Disc-valve, 2-str single	Disc-valve 2-str. single	Reed-valve 2-str single
Capacity:	98cc (50x50mm)	99cc (49.5x51.8mm)	99cc (50.5x49.5mm)
Lubrication:	Automatic pump	Automatic pump	Automatic pump
Comp. ratio:	6.9 to 1 corrected	7 to 1 corrected	6.7 to 1 corrected
Carburetion:	22mm Mikuni	19mm Mikuni	18mm Keihin
Ignition:	Flywheel magneto	Flywheel magneto	Capacitor discharge
Max. power:	12bhp @ 8,500rpm	10.5bhp @ 7,500rpm	11.5bhp @ 7,500rpm
Max. torque:	n/a	7.2lb-ft @ 7,000rpm	n/a
Primary drive:	Gear	Gear	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five-speed	Five-speed	Five-speed
Final drive:	Roller chain	Enclosed chain	Enclosed chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	7.4 in top	8.13 in top	7.6 in top
Fuel capacity:	2.1 gallons	1.9 gallons	2.2 gallons
Electrics:	6v 4ah battery	6v 4ah battery	6v 4ah battery
	Alternator	Alternator	Alternator
Frame:	25/25w headlamp	30/30w headlamp	35/35w headlamp
Suspension:	Spine type	Duplex cradle w/spine	Triplex spine type
	Telescopic fork (f)	Telescopic fork (f)	Telescopic fork (f)
	Swing arm (r)	Swing arm (r)	Swing arm (r)
Brakes:	Drum (f), Drum (r)	Drum (f), Drum (r)	Drum (f), Drum (r)
Tyres:	2.50 x 18 (f)	2.50 x 18 (f)	2.50 x 18 (f)
	2.75 x 18 (r)	2.75 x 18 (r)	2.75 x 18 (r)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	48.2 in	46 in	48.2 in
Seat height:	n/a	30in	n/a
Handlebar width:	30.3in	n/a	n/a
Ground clearance:	5.3 in	6½ in	n/a
Rake/trail:	63deg/3.7 in	n/a	63½deg/4.5 in
Dry weight:	187lbs	180lbs	190lbs

EQUIPMENT

	Turn signals, mirrors, steering lock, toolkit, speedo, rev counter, helmet lock, pillion footrest, prop stand	Steering lock, turn signals, toolkit, prop stand, helmet lock, mirror, speedo, pillion footrests.	Turn signals, toolkit, steering lock, helmet lock, mirrors, oil level gauge, locking fuel cap, prop stand, pillion footrests
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PERFORMANCE

Top speed:	68mph	62mph	65mph
Speeds in gears at max power revs:	16mph, 27mph, 40mph, 53mph and 63mph	16mph, 27mph, 37mph, 52mph and 61mph	18mph, 29mph, 39mph, 48mph and 57mph
St. ¼-mile:	n/a	n/a	n/a
0-to-60mph:	n/a	n/a	n/a
Actual speed at. ind 60mph:	n/a	n/a	n/a
Av. fuel consumption:	83mpg	85mpg	82mpg
Tank range:	175 miles	162 miles	180 miles
Importer/Manufacturer:	Heron Suzuki GB Ltd 87 Beddington Lane Croydon, Surrey	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd 748 Deal Ave., Slough, Trading Est, Berks	Honda UK Ltd Power Road, London W4



Neat chain case, only adequate shocks on the Honda.

you are in second or above, but is always willing and responsive. Top speed is not so impressive, at 60-65 according to conditions, but the bike is absolutely at home in busy traffic. There is even reasonable engine braking to supplement the excellent brakes, and the almost perfect balance allows you to negotiate the tightest bends round obstacles at slower than walking pace.

A common factor amongst these 100cc lightweights is the lack of adequate suspension. The Honda can be as jouncy as the others, especially two up, but the bumps aren't as obvious. Certainly the handling didn't quite have the taut feel of the Kawasaki, but it was not far short, and swooping round bends or scratching on roundabouts

CONCLUSIONS

These three single-cylinder two strokes have as many differences as similarities. They share weak electrical systems and slightly inadequate suspension systems. The brakes are average and there is no weather protection. On the credit side they are all light and easy to maintain. They all pretend, with a varying degree of success, to a sporting image. These are real, if small, motorcycles. But who are they aimed at?

"Not at the kids", says Mike Frayn, the genial manager of GR Motors in Hammer-smith, who lent us the Kawasaki. "They won't touch them." Not at the commuting or shopping housewife, who prefers a step-through. Not at the bike enthusiast, who scoffs at such tiddlers, or at best is amused by them. Mr Frayn sells them to "the 25-27 year old, probably married, got a car but wants a bike for work as it's cheaper". So the young commuter is the market.

were always temptations that could not be resisted. A slight sensation of lightness at the front end never developed into anything worse than that, and the steering was not the least affected, even when rapidly switching lines and lanes in London's rush hour. Again the lights were quite up to the task; again the turn signals would not flash at low speeds; again the horn was about as effective as a koala's burp.

The H-100 returns about 82mpg and comes complete with a year's warranty over unlimited mileage. At £409 it's the most expensive of the three bikes tested, but it is in a class of its own. The bike offered the one thing all motorcycles should aspire to: a sense of endless fun and confidence.

But as they stand, these bikes are no more than summer fun bikes. A true commuter should have leg guards and a fairing of sorts; a rack to carry brief case or oversuit; good brakes and more mpg; an electrical system that doesn't break down when fully loaded, as it's likely to be at 5pm on a misty rainy Friday in November; mudguards that keep the mud off your shoes; an engine design which gives you the power where you need it; a light, easy ride in terms of handling and steering; cheap initial outlay and low running costs; minimal maintenance. Only the Honda would score at all on this check list and it wouldn't score many. If the manufacturers are searching for a market, as the profusion of models at this size would suggest, then they must pay more attention to the needs of that market. These 'sports commuters' all fall between too many stools.

HACKS

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to the handlebar, and a lower set of clamps which fit round the fork stanchions. Enough adjustment is allowed by the clamps to adjust height and angle of rake. A couple of days experimentation found the ideal position. You can see *over* rather than through the screen from any seating position, yet the slipstream misses your head entirely, permitting visor-up riding even at motorway speeds. Protection covers everything from the knees up, which is good enough for me.

Luggage was taken care of by the trusty Velter tank bag and a pair of positively huge throw over panniers from Nolan. These proved quite adequate for two persons' light luggage, and well made too; no seams popped and no water got in. The overall effect is a "light-cruiser" rather than the "battleships" one sometimes sees touring. Even two up and fully loaded the handling was unaffected, the only sensation of weight being in city traffic. The Oxford screen produces no unpleasant effects on stability even when cruising at 90 on the auto-route, nor does it accentuate the effect of cross winds. I'm now utterly converted; the increase in your effective daily mileage when screened from the blast is truly astonishing. After a 300-mile day I was feeling as fresh as a daisy. Before fitting the screen I found 100 miles left me buzzing for half an hour.

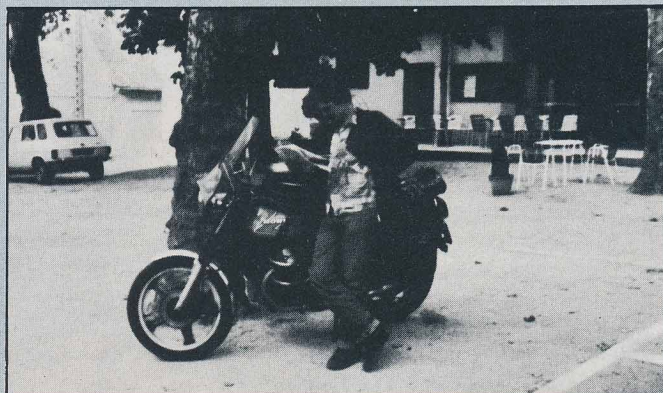
What of the trip itself? Superb weather, marred only by four days of rain in a fortnight. Stayed in cheap hotels, which in France in June is no problem. Stop when you feel like it, walk into any one-star hotel and half an hour later you're sitting down to dinner. The route was made

up by whim from day to day; it took in Paris to Moulins to Macon to Bourgen-Bresse to Grenoble to Grasse. One day's ride in particular was stunning; from Charolles in Burgundy to Sisteron in Haute-Provence. The morning saw the mountains of the Maconnaise, the afternoon the mountains of Haute Savoie and in the early evening over the Alps! It's harder to imagine a finer way to travel, or a better bike to do it on. The CX pulled two plus luggage over the Alps in fifth gear except when baulked by juggernauts or overloaded cars.

In fact no breakdowns at all were experienced; the only mechanical events were the discovery in Grasse that the mountain trip had completely consumed my front brake pads. A trip into Nice to the Honda dealer P. Werther produced a new set on the spot, and a standard of service which is unimaginable in England. The overall impression in fact is that bikers are much better respected and served altogether in France.

The other mechanical hiccup was on the way back. Traversing a particularly vicious B-road through the Midi-Pyrenees the bike began to wallow noticeably through bends. Stopping in Florac, I inspected the aged rear shocks (original equipment) and discovered them to be leaking oil. The mountains had taken their toll. Jacking the springs up to maximum held the situation and we arrived back in England without incident. I plan to replace the dead units with S&W gas ones very soon, making it a both-ends gas job. As for touring I'm hooked. Does anyone want to sponsor me round the world on a three-year-old CX?

Rick Kemp



Map studying in Entraygues.