Which Bike?

NOVEMBER
75p
52

EVERY MONTH ALL NEW AND USED BIKE PR

TRICKY TRIALS BIKES FROM FANTIC, HONDA, BULTACO AND YAMAHA

SCOOP!
SUPER SEVEN-FIFTY FACE OFF: HONDA CB750FA, SUZUKI GSX750 AND KAWASAKI Z750E

PLUS
WHAT'S THE BEST TWO-FIFTY TYRE?

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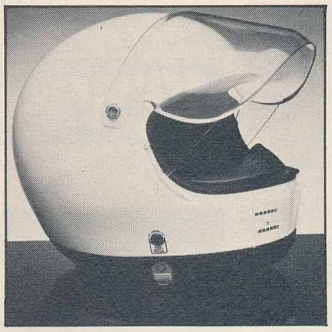
NOVEMBER 1980 **No. 52**

ROAD TESTS

CONSUMER GUIDES



FEATURES

REGULARS

TECHNICAL

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Printed by Southernprint Ltd., Branksome, Poole, Dorset. Distributed by Moore Harness Ltd., 50 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1.


BELL
SUZUKI

MAKING WAVES

With the scramble to build the biggest and best litre-plus roadburner seemingly over, the Japanese factories have turned their attention this year to the 750 class once more. Honda advertise their new twin-cam four as the crest of the new wave, and no doubt Kawasaki and Suzuki regard their bikes as the last word in sporting machinery too. After riding the Suzuki GSX750, Kawasaki Z750E and the new CB750FA Honda, *John Nutting* thinks otherwise. Photography by *John Perkins.*

Way back in the early days of the Japanese bike invasion it was commonly believed that Oriental bikes were the bland, characterless products of computers, and if the human element ever got in on the design act it was merely to punch the button that set the process in motion.

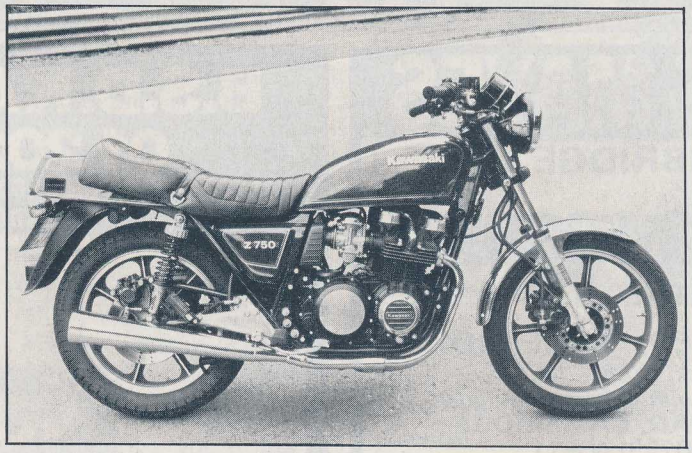
After extensive propaganda, that myth has been blown wide open. Trips by journalists to the Japanese factories has revealed that they house living and breathing bike freaks in their design departments, the only difference between them and their European counterparts being that there are more of them, which is why there are so many different types and styles of Japanese motorcycle appearing on our roads every year.

But if you ever needed evidence of the human factor influencing the process of design in motorcycles, you only have to take a close look at this year's offerings in the 750cc class. A couple of years ago, the emphasis was on flexibility and rideability. If you wanted power, the answer was simple: punch out more cubes. So we found ourselves in the power/weight spiral. Thankfully, that spiral appears to have been checked, as criticism of the bulky behemoths has sunk home in the corporate brain back in Tokyo. And now the pressure is on in the 750cc bracket with a vengeance.

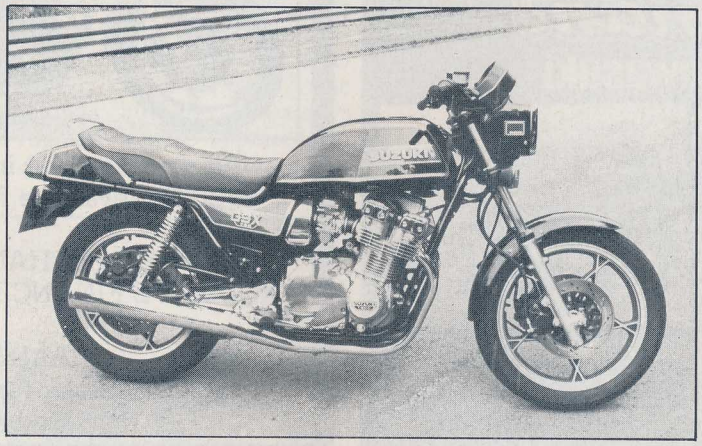
Surprisingly, even now, the production of a new motorcycle is not a matter of plugging in the right customer requirements into the black box and waiting for the perfect bike to emerge at the other end of the factory. If it were, the three bikes we have here would be nigh on identical.

As it is, they are far from being from the same mould, their only common features being that they are 750cc double-overhead-camshaft five-speed fours with triple disc brakes. In every other respect they're as different as three people you'd meet in the street, Which is why you'll find no winners and losers in this comparison test, only suitability for different purposes.

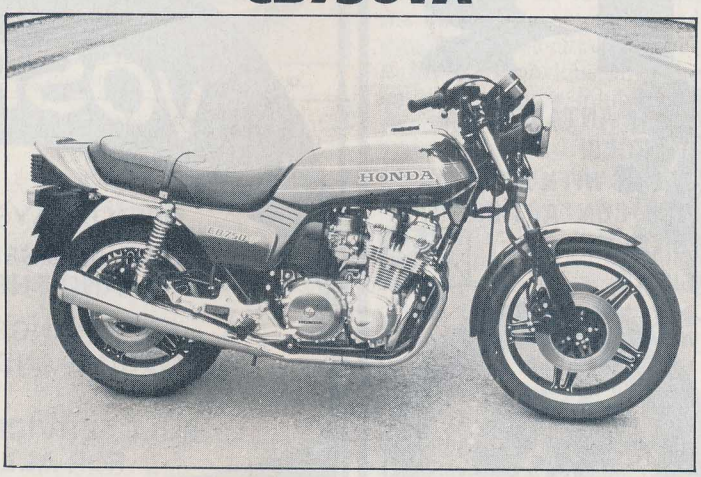
KAWASAKI Z750E



SUZUKI GSX750



HONDA CB750FA

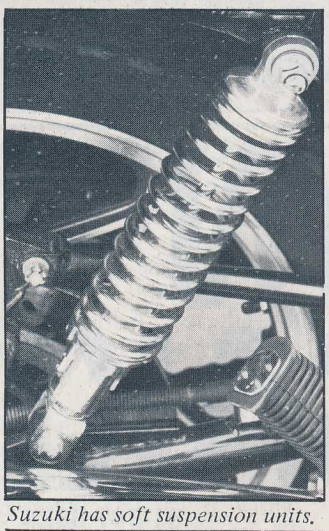


SUZUKI GSX750

After riding Suzuki's new four for the second time in a year, we're still wondering why the factory switched from the old 750 four introduced in 1976. After all, the old bike set a new level for superbike handling and performance. Mere fine tuning would have maintained its position at the top of the pile.

The new GSX750 is a completely new machine, though. It has very little in common with the earlier bike and, while faster, also feels totally different on the road. It shares most of the equipment found on the big GSX1100, which is why the GSX750 is such a large machine. Like the 1100, it has a long 60.2 inch wheelbase, a feature that provides most of the bike's handling characteristics. It also weighs slightly more than the old 750 at a claimed 514lb dry.

That, in itself, doesn't dictate the essential feel of the GSX. For it is the engine that stands out and, if anything, puts the chassis into the shade. As we explained in our test earlier this year (*Which Bike?* March 1980), the engine, despite at first appearing to be peaky, with a chunky claimed 80hp at 9,400rpm, is in fact one of the more responsive motors in the mid-range. With an excessively oversquare bore and stroke of 67mm by 53mm, its revving possibilities are further enhanced. The real advantage of big bores, though, is found in the sophisticated Twin Swirl Combustion Chambers with their four valves per cylinder.

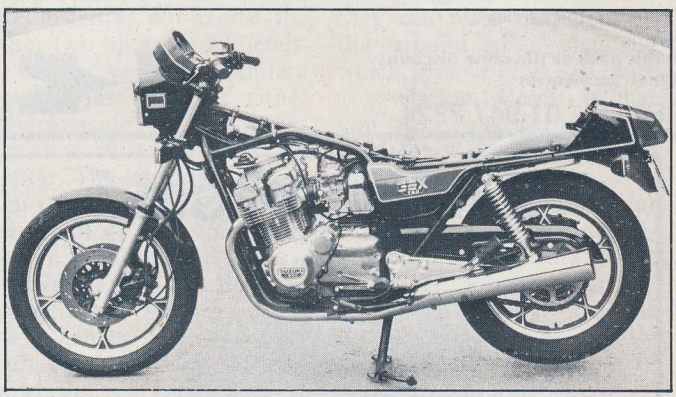


Suzuki has soft suspension units.

Though these valves are smaller than those used on the Honda four-valve heads, their more vertical disposition provides for less cramping of the combustion space so that a high 9.4 to 1 compression ratio can be used, while less masking of the heads by the squish areas and cylinder walls occurs.

approaching 130mph in the right conditions. Acceleration at 12.4 seconds for the standing quarter mile, only a tenth of a second down on the Kawasaki Z750E, puts it right in the ball park.

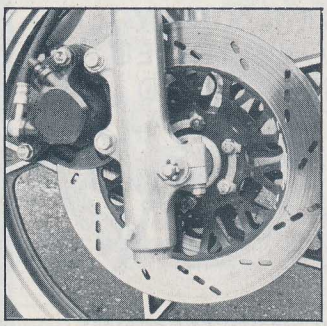
Mid-range flexibility is where the Suzuki shines. Cracking open the throttle provides instant response, and, being so smooth, the effect of the bike's strong low speed torque is doubly impressive. This makes the bike particularly pleasing for cruising over long distances, as the rider is less fatigued. The bike allows this, too, because it's got a big 5.3 gallon fuel tank and, with 51mpg possible, as we got on one run, a range of over 250 miles can be achieved. Due to the engine's better torque, fuel consumption was generally better than the Honda but the Kawasaki's lighter weight appeared to help its fuel consumption over the heavier Suzuki.



GSX750 has good frame and cornering clearance but soggy springs.

Throttle action of the four 34mm constant-velocity Mikuni carburettors is light and sweet and the plain-bearing crank spins smoothly. So the Suzuki is a delight to use. Very little vibration reaches the rider. The bike, for such a high performer, is a paragon of refinement.

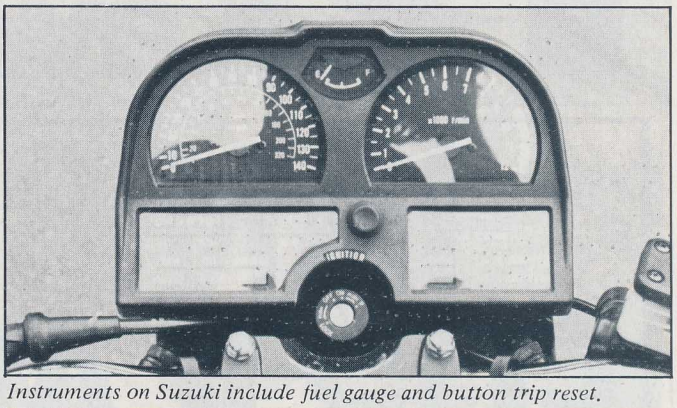
Gearing is high for a 750 with 5,400rpm at 70mph in top gear, but the motor can pull it with a top speed



Super brakes are the high spot of this year's Suzukis.

'Simple and direct' would best describe the Suzuki's transmission. Quiet helical gears take the drive from the crank to the clutch and five speed gearbox. Gearchange action is precise but, like all the Suzuki chain-drive fours, clunks into bottom gear from neutral. Final drive is by a sealed 3/4 x 3/8in No630 roller chain.

As you might expect from the bike's wheelbase, the first impression of the Suzuki is its size. And the factory haven't attempted to lessen the effect by altering the riding position. With the low and straight handlebar as fitted to the European models, the rider has a long reach (1½ inches more than the Kawasaki, an inch over the Honda) from the seat, and it's not helped by the width of the tank's rear. The seat, which locks at the tail fairing and



Instruments on Suzuki include fuel gauge and button trip reset.

can be removed complete, is broad and comfortable and, again, reinforces the touring potential of the bike.

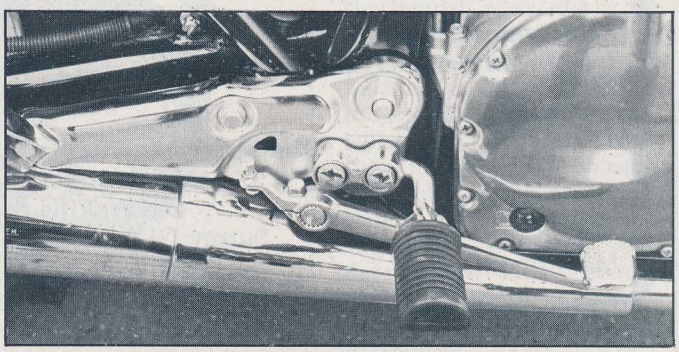
So does the suspension. Suzuki GB have made some changes to the earlier models that came into the UK but the springing is still on the soft side compared to the Honda and Kawasaki. While this gives a good ride it means that, despite the extra cornering clearance provided by the tucked-in exhaust system, the bike still squats when you're riding hard and eats up the tarmac. There's plenty of travel front and rear and, being able to use it all, the bike pitches on bumpy surfaces if you're not careful to hold a constant throttle opening, which, of course, uses up more clearance.

On smooth surfaces, such as you find on race tracks, the Suzuki is more controlled though in these circumstances it becomes obvious that the longer wheelbase inhibits the steering response and the bike is slow to react when you're pitching into a turn. We weren't too impressed, either, by the front fork. The leading axle legs felt sloppy (which was part of the reason for the slow steering reaction) and spoilt the straight-line stability of the bike. The upshot is that the GSX falls far short of the handling of either the Honda or Kawasaki, and also the old GS750, though it makes up for this in comfort. Your own priorities should dictate whether this is desirable or not.

There's no doubt that the Suzuki's brakes were excellent stoppers, as we've said of all of this year's models from the stable. The dual front discs have superb feel and power, the only criticism (and I'd hardly call it that) being that the slots cut into the discs cause an unnerving humming while adding perceptably little to the performance. During heavy braking the forks almost bottomed, but this can be lessened by using heavier 30 weight oil in the legs.

It seems that Suzuki attempted to make the bike the cheapest (at £1,699) of the 750 fours by cutting the sophistication of the suspension. You won't find air fork legs or adjustable damping as on the GSX1100, but the GSX750 needs them to fight the CB750FA and the Z750E, particularly as the GSX hits back with such dubiously useful items as a fuel guage that isn't all that accurate, a digital gear indicator and a trip reset button in the instrument face that any little nurd can press as he passes by. The general consensus was that the Suzuki wasn't all that good looking, either.

But it's got a great engine.



GSX750 uses pressed-steel footpeg hangers unlike the 1100's alloy units.

Maybe next year we'll have the best of both worlds, performance *and* handling, in the GSX750 four.

KAWASAKI Z750E

Kawasaki had the right idea when they first introduced the Z650 four. That was to offer a compact and pokey 650 that would aim at the soft under-belly of the 750 sportsters of four years ago. Trouble was that, lithe and lusty though the Z650 was, and still is, it didn't quite have the punch to blow off the bigger bikes as Kawasaki claimed it would.

They'll have no trouble with the 750cc version of the four, though. Boring out the engine to 738cc and returning it to provide a healthy 74bhp at 9,000rpm while retaining what is essentially the same chassis as the 650 means that not only can the Kawasaki out drag both the Honda and Suzuki in a straight line, it can in most circumstances out-handle the other two bikes in the bends.

Okay, so its maximum power falls short of either claims made by the other factories. But that's of no matter. The important fact is that the Kawasaki, with a dry weight of 463lb, is not only lighter than its 650 sibling, but weighs 50lb less than the competition. That makes up for a hell of a lot of power and enhances the way in which the bike handles.

The Z750E, as you might expect, is a smaller motorcycle than the Suzuki or the Honda. It seems that recent practice has been to enlarge the chassis along with increases in power to retain a semblance of stability both in cornering and a straight line. Naturally this means the bike becomes heavier. But because the Z750E retains the same overall chassis geometry of the Z650 with a 55.9 inch wheelbase, it feels what it is: a middleweight bike. If you need any confirmation of that, a Honda CX500 weighs barely 20lb less and has a 57inch wheelbase.

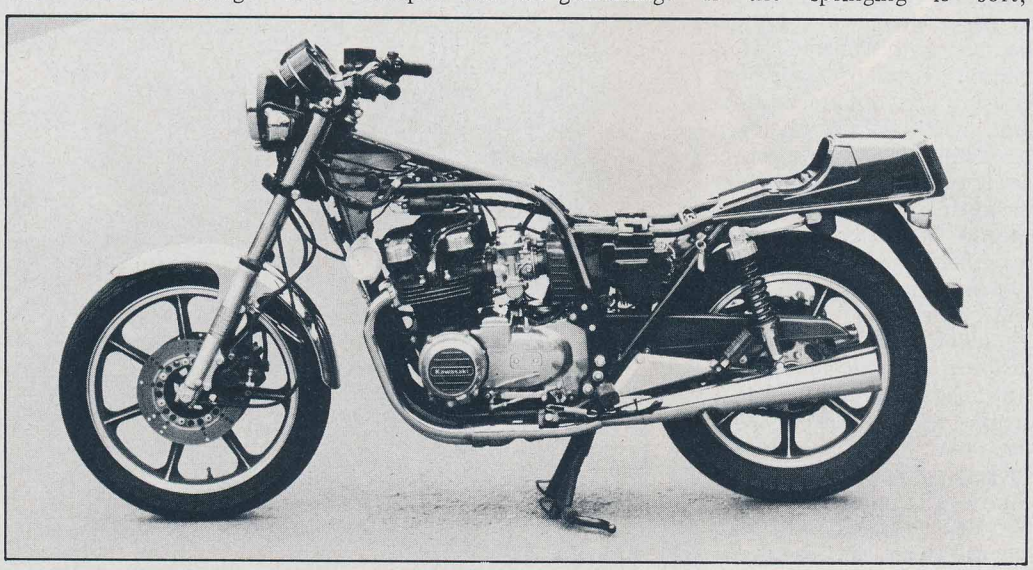
There is perceptibly less effort required to flick the bike through a series of bends or through traffic and the only time the steering drew attention to itself was at low speed with a tendency to drop into corners.

Kawasaki have gone to pains to compress the size of the riding position at the same time as bumping up the capacity. The seat has been dropped to a full inch lower than the other two bikes'. Short legged riders will find they can place both feet on the ground at a standstill which, for a 750, is quite a revelation. Result is that you seem to be sitting in the bike. Only drawback is that the seat has had to be stepped to retain useful rear wheel clearance and passengers tend to slide down onto the rider. S/he'll be pretty cramped anyway, because the footrests are slightly higher than on the 650 to improve cornering clearance. Riders taller than 5 feet 6 inches will find that, because they're more or less forced to sit at the front of the seat, their legs will be cramped and the gearchange will be awkward. This is operated by a reverse linkage and cannot be adjusted enough because the Rose joints interfere with the lever. By the way, the rear joint broke during the test, a fault that appears to be common to the model.

Simple styling and specification of Kawasaki provide sharp performance.

Because the bike is so easy to flick about, it's easy to overcome the shortcomings of the suspension. If that sounds surprising in light of its sophistication, then consider this. A shorter wheelbase machine will tend to pitch more, so if the springing is soft, this will be exaggerated. And that's what we've got with the Z750E. Unfortunately, it can't be tuned out using the various complex adjustments offered on the bike: it's just a characteristic that has to be accommodated.

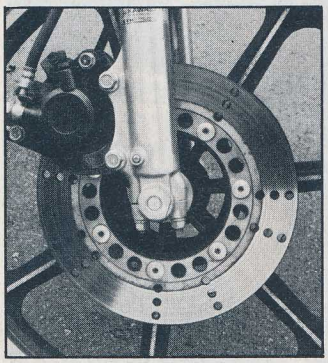
Those adjustments are currently the most offered on a 750. The front fork has separate air valves at the top of the legs and the recommended pressure is between 7 and 13 psi, so some degree of compensation for load can be made. If you're inclined to experiment with damping oil volumes you'll no doubt be able to up the effective spring rate and reduce the amount of pitching that occurs during braking. You'll be hard pushed to find any way of improving the rear units. These have four damping rates which can easily be selected by rotating the knurled alloy ring at the top of each unit. In fact once you've got the hang of the indents, you can adjust the units, the heaviest damping of which is 60 per cent more than the lightest (a substantial variation), while you're riding. The springs used are very soft, though, and despite the heavy preload applied to them, provide a good ride without too much bottoming.



Kawasaki Z750E's chassis is visually similar to the Z650 four's. Seat rails are lowered and all-up weight almost identical.

MAKING WAVES

If you think that the aforementioned pitching will inhibit your way out cornering antics, don't worry. Kawasaki have managed to endow the Z750E with a remarkable amount of clearance. Only the footpeg ends touch down regularly during crazier moments and then you'll be on the outer edges of the Dunlop Gold Seal tyres. These are fitted to seven-spoke alloy wheels with large hubs to which the brake discs are mounted direct.



Kawasaki's sintered-pad discs are mounted direct to cast wheel.

The brakes are great. They're Kawasaki's latest discs with metallic caliper pads that operate well in rain with plenty of feedback. There's two perforated discs up front with a similar one at the rear.

The main impression of the bike is that Kawasaki have recalled much of the old 750cc two-stroke triple with the Z750E. The old bike was quick in every way, with the very slightest action of the rider on the controls being rewarded by instantaneous response on the part of the bike.

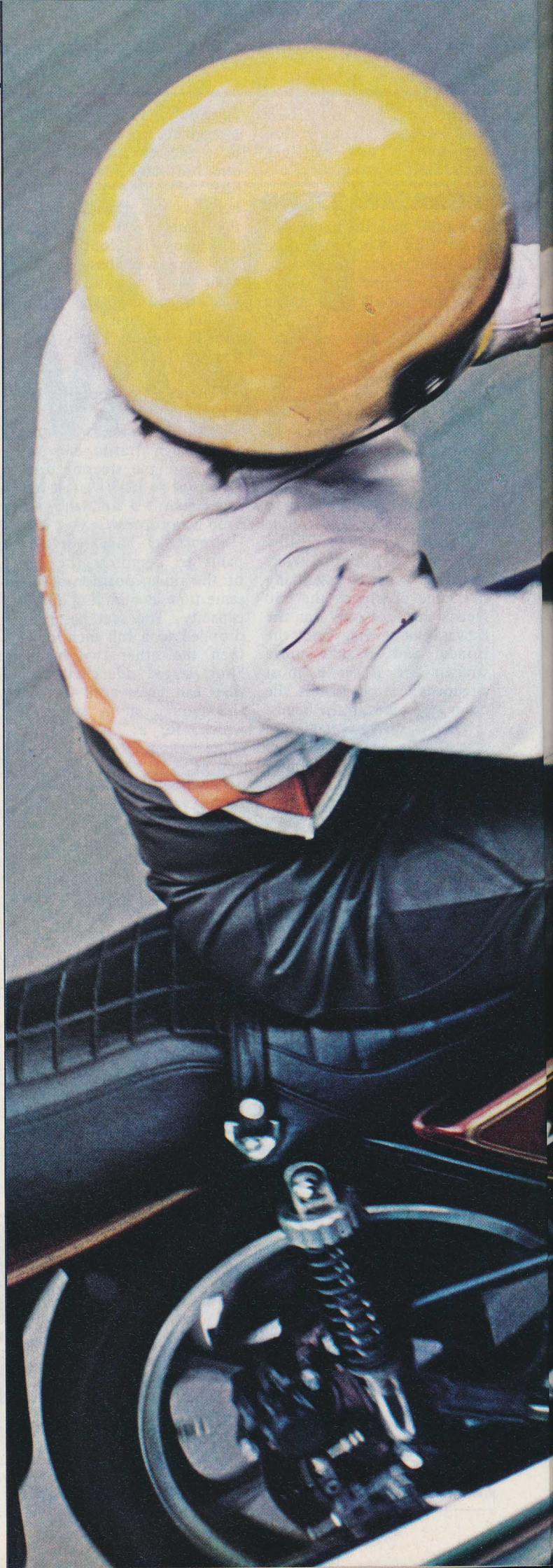
Much of that comes from having a powerful engine in a small chassis. And the Z750E is powerful. Buzzing the motor to its 9,500rpm red line will demolish the quarter mile in 12.3 seconds and it'll reach 60mph in about 4½ seconds, figures that belie the simplicity of the Kawasaki's engine layout.

You won't find the four valves per cylinder of the other 750 fours, though new to the Z750E is the use of a Morse-type chain for the double-overhead camshafts. The upped capacity results from 4mm larger bores of 66mm diameter. That in itself would boost the torque throughout the rev range but the valve timing has been lengthened and the valve sizes increased so that the power has been improved at the top end. Though maximum power is at 9,000rpm, 1,000rpm over the Z650 motor's, nothing has been lost at the bottom end. There's a 4bhp bonus at 4,000rpm that drops to 2bhp at 6,000rpm while the total advantage at 9,000rpm is 12bhp. Some of the extra urge may come from the use of four 34mm-choke constant velocity Keihin carburettors but we weren't too happy with the sharp off-idle operation of the units which was accentuated by transmission snatch. Starting up on the button was okay but it was difficult to maintain constant revs during warm up.

The Kawasaki proved to be the more economical of the 750cc fours to run. One tankful was used at just under 47mpg on three-star fuel, giving a potential range on the 3.8 gallon tank of over 180 miles.

On function alone, there's no denying that the Kawasaki offers superior performance to either the Honda or Suzuki. It's quicker from a standstill though it has a slightly lower top speed of around 122mph with the rider chinning the fuel tank. In general use, too, the bike performs well with a lively and snappy feel. It's also got a rorty note from the four-into-two exhaust system that somewhat makes up for its dull maroon finish.

The motor was smoother overall than the Honda though not as pleasant as the Suzuki. Enough vibration was transmitted through the handlebar to the mirrors to blur the images behind at speeds where you'd feel happier with reliable information. Level of equipment is up to contemporary standards with a quartz-halogen headlamp and the novel addition of a voltmeter between the rev counter and speedo. Maintenance is minimal thanks to the use of the self-adjusting camshaft chain and electronic ignition. Should the time come to adjust the valve clearances, the Kawasaki is nothing like as simple as the Suzuki with its screw adjusters on the rockers. The Kawasaki's shims are underneath the bucket followers so, to change them, the camshafts have to be removed. For your peace of mind, though,




Kawasaki
Z 750

these will stand being revved much higher than the bucket and shim arrangement on the Honda.

Verdict on the Kawasaki: a great bike but awkward if you're tall or carry a passenger.

HONDA CB750FA

The only thing that surprises us about the Honda CB750FA was that it wasn't introduced in the UK earlier than this year. The bike has been a popular 750cc sports model in the States for two years following the appearance of the new 16-valve dohc four, and not without good reason: it's quick, handles well and looks good.

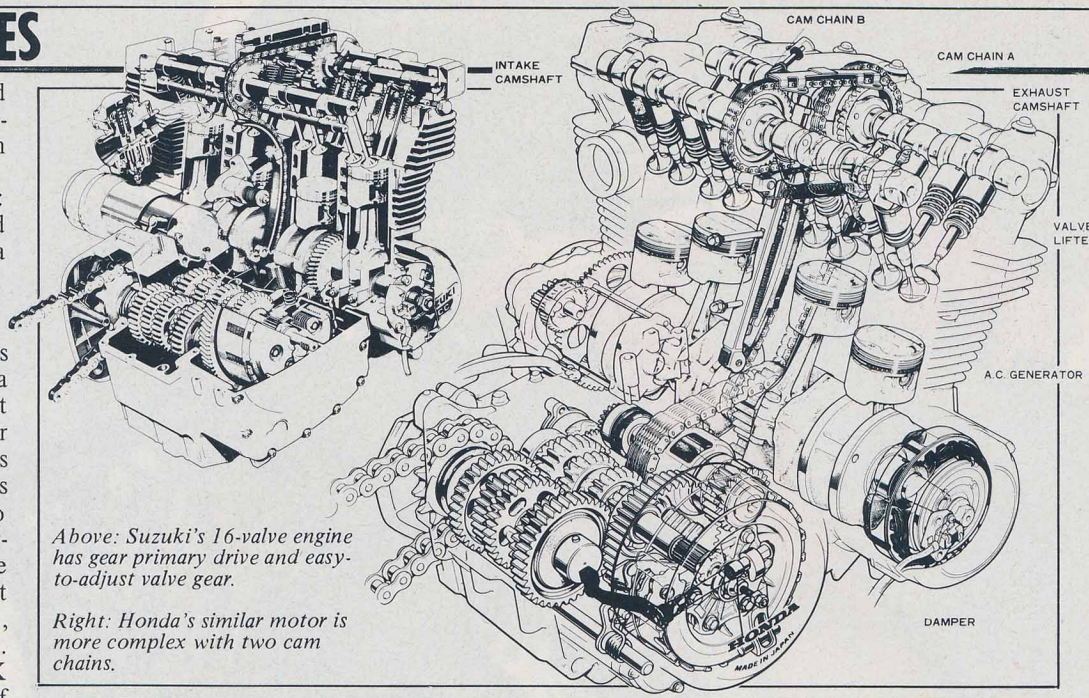
No doubt Honda UK were happy with the sales of the CB900F which wasn't offered in the USA, and which provided the all-out sports image for cashing in on the factory's endurance racing successes. The version of the 750cc model sold in the

Honda CB750FA has CBX-type rear dampers with rebound and compression damping adjustment.

UK, the CB750KZ, turned out to be nothing like as appealing. For a start, it had four exhaust pipes and a podgy touring look and a confused riding position born from the use of the forward mounted seat (normally used with complementary forward footrests) and the rear-set pegs from the CB750F.

But the CB750FZ lacked nothing in performance and could demolish the quarter mile in 12½ seconds, while almost matching the CB900's 128mph top speed.

The CB750FA, though using what is virtually the same chassis and engine as the KZ, is a completely new machine and has all the aura of the 900, only with slightly less performance. In appearance, the CB750F could be confused with the 900, the major difference being the use of a conventional handlebar instead of the alloy clip-ons of the 900 and the KZ's instrument



Above: Suzuki's 16-valve engine has gear primary drive and easy-to-adjust valve gear.

Right: Honda's similar motor is more complex with two cam chains.

Model:	HONDA CB750FA	KAWASAKI Z750E	SUZUKI GSX750E
Price inc. VAT:	£1,780	£1,729	£1,699
Warranty:	12 months/unlimited	12 months/unlimited	6 months/10,000 miles
Engine:	Dohc 16-valve four	Dohc four	Dohc 16-valve four
Capacity:	749cc (62x62mm)	738cc (66x54mm)	747cc (67x53mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump	Wet sump	Wet sump
Comp. ratio:	9 to 1	9 to 1	9.5 to 1
Carburation:	Four 30mm Keihin CV	Four 34mm Keihin CV	Four 32mm Mikuni CV
Ignition:	Electronic inductive	Electronic inductive	Electronic inductive
Max. power:	79bhp @ 9,000rpm	74bhp @ 9,000rpm	80bhp @ 9,200rpm
Max. torque:	48lb-ft @ 7,500rpm	46.3lb-ft @ 7,500rpm	46.4lb-ft @ 8,400rpm
Primary drive:	Hy-vo chain & gears	Hy-vo chain & gears	Helical gears
Clutch:	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five speed	Five speed	Five speed
Final drive:	630 sealed chain	630 sealed chain	630 sealed chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	12.9 in top	13.4 in top	13.3 in top
Fuel capacity:	4.4 gal inc. 1 gal res	3.8 gal inc. res.	5.3 gal
Electrics:	12v 14ah battery 260w alternator 60/55w H4 headlamp	12v 12ah battery 238w alternator 60/55w H4 headlamp	12v 14ah battery 250w alternator 60/55w H4 headlamp
Frame:	Duplex cradle	Duplex cradle	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with five-pos. preload, three-pos reb & two-pos comp damp adj (r)	Telescopic air fork (f) Swing arm with five-pos. preload and four-pos. damping adj (r)	Telescopic leading axle fork (f). Swing arm with five-pos preload adj (r)
Brakes:	Dual 10.8in discs (f) Single 11.6in disc (r)	Dual 10.25in discs (f) Single 10.25in disc (r)	Dual 10.8in discs (f) Single 10.8in disc with dual piston caliper (r)
Tyres:	Bridgestone Mag-Mopus tubeless 325H19 S703 (f) 400H18 S710 (r) on Comstar wheels	Dunlop Gold Seal tubeless 325H19 F8 (f) 400H18 K127 (r) on cast wheels	Bridgestone Mag-Mopus tubeless 325H19 L303 (f) 400H18 S714 (r) on cast wheels
DIMENSIONS			
Wheelbase:	59.8in	55.9in	60.2in
Seat height:	32.5in	31.5in	32.5in
Handlebar width:	28.5in	29.0in	29.0in
Ground clearance:	6.5in	6.5in	6.5in
Rake/trail:	62½deg/4.4in	63deg/4.2in	62deg/4.05in
Dry weight:	512lbs	463lbs	514lbs
EQUIPMENT			
	Mirrors, electric start, steering lock, tank lock, helmet lock, speedo, rev meter, toolkit, turn signals, trip meter.	Mirrors, electric start, steering lock, tank lock, seat lock, helmet lock, hazard lamps, turn signals, voltmeter, speedo, rev meter, toolkit, trip meter.	Mirrors, electric start, self-cancel turn signals, vacuum fuel tap, seat lock, steering lock, gear indicator, fuel guage, trip meter, tank lock, rev meter, speedo, toolkit.
PERFORMANCE			
Top speed:	125mph	122mph	128mph
Speeds in gears at max. power revs:	44mph, 63mph, 80mph, 97mph and 116mph	45mph, 65mph, 83mph, 101mph and 120mph	46mph, 66mph, 85mph, 105mph and 123mph
St. ¼-mile:	12.5 secs	12.3secs	12.4secs
0-to-60mph:	4.6 secs	4.5 secs	4.5 secs
Actual speed at ind. 60mph:	na	56mph	na
Av. fuel consumption:	42.5mpg	45.3mpg	44.3mpg
Tank range:	178 miles	172 miles	235 miles
Importer/Manufacturer:	Honda UK Ltd, Power Road, London W4	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd, 748 Deal Ave Trading Est, Slough, Berks.	Heron-Suzuki GB Ltd 87 Beddington Lane Croydon, Surrey

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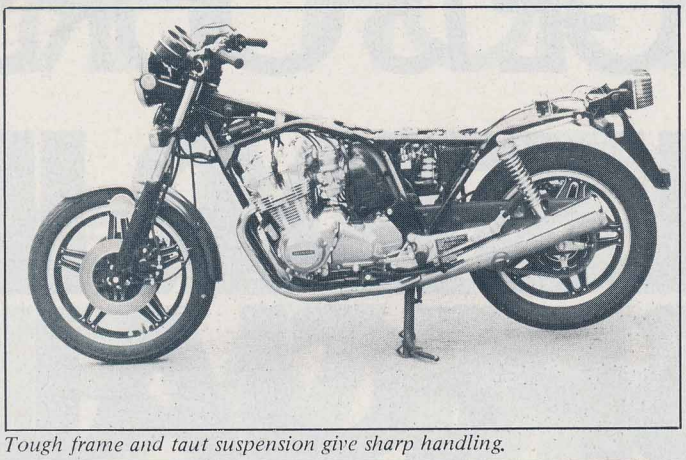
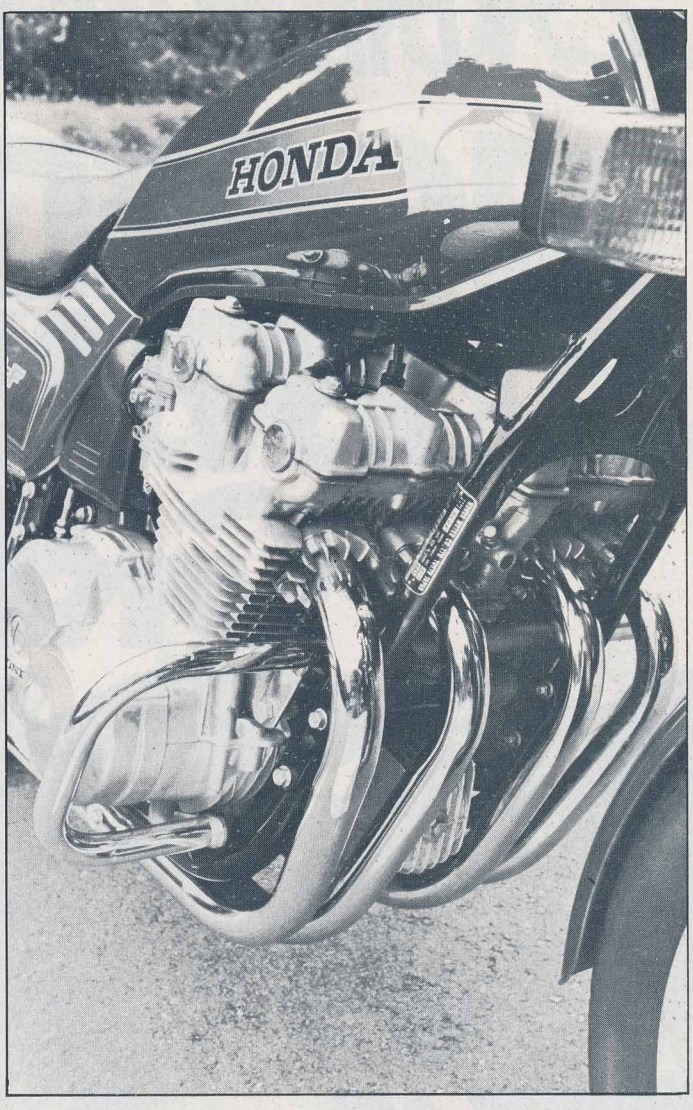
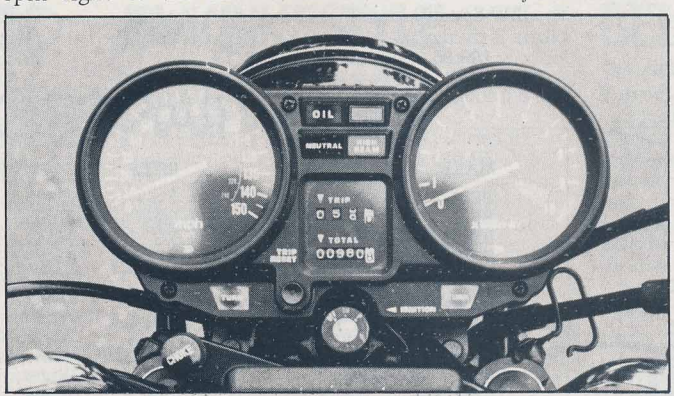
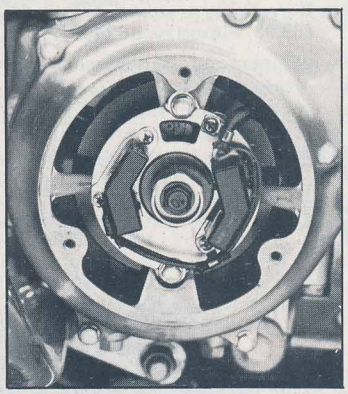


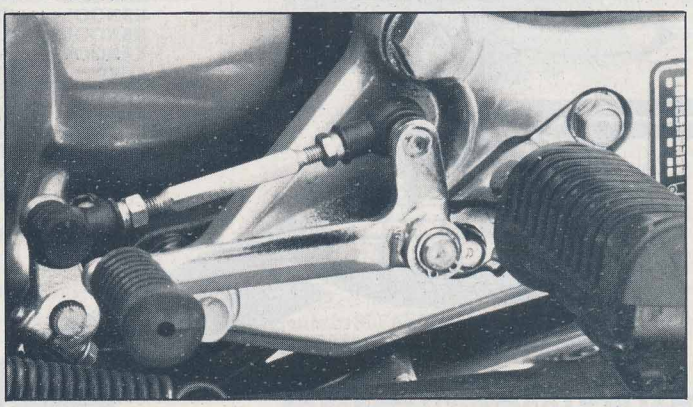
Tough frame and taut suspension give sharp handling.



Above: Crash bars are non-standard on the CB750FA Honda. . . but hot 16-valve twin cam engine brings race performance for road money. Below: Instruments are from CB750KZ with non-reflective dials. Below right: Ignition pick ups are on nearside of engine. Bottom: Gearchange on Honda is best of three bikes.







cluster with separate odometer and tripmeters below the dials. There's no oil cooler beneath the steering head on the CB750FA, either.

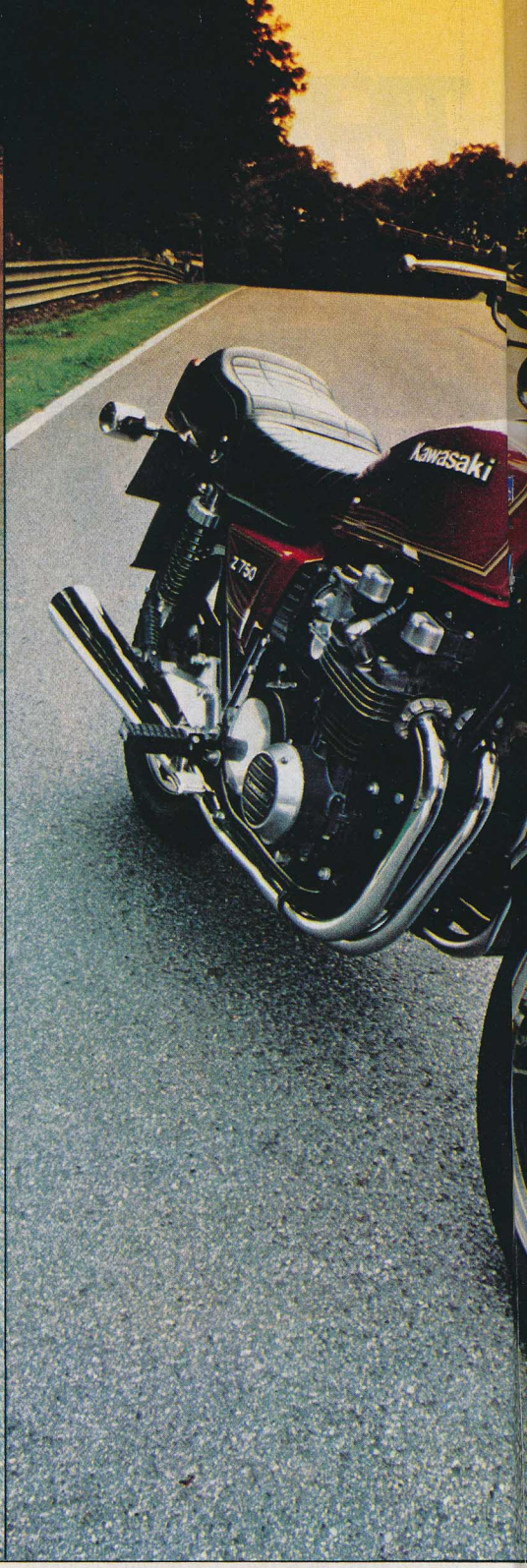
First impressions are the most lasting as a rule and, sitting on the CB750FA, you get the same feel as on the 900: fitness for purpose, the purpose being hard and fast riding.

The fuel tank is slim, so your legs aren't forced apart uncomfortably as on the other two bikes, and the seat is about two inches farther back than on the CB750KZ. Since the KZ's footrests, mounted on alloy plates, are combined with a slightly raised and swept-back handlebar, the rider is well balanced for fast riding. The controls reinforce the feel too. As on the Kawasaki, soft rubber handgrips are used along with sprung and hinged footrests, but the clutch and gearchange are light and smooth and vastly better than the Kawa's.

The motor is almost identical to the KZ's except that it uses the four-into-two exhaust system of the CB900F that, with slightly different resonant characteristics, lifts the maximum claimed power from 77 to 79bhp at 9,000rpm. Bore and stroke are 62 by 62mm and to minimise width, the two camshafts are operated by a pair of Morse-type chains, one driving the rear camshaft from the centre of the crank, the other connecting the inlet and exhaust camshafts. Paired inlet and exhaust valves are used but are set at a wider angle than on the Suzuki, forcing the Honda engineers to use a higher dome on the pistons to get a 9.5 to 1 compression ratio. Like the Kawasaki, drive from the Honda's plain bearing crankshaft is by another Morse-chain to a countershaft containing a rubber shock absorber and a gear on the right-hand end that drives the clutch gear. One major difference between the Honda and Kawasaki crankcases is that the Honda's countershaft is on the horizontal crankcase split whereas the Kawa's is lower in the bottom case. The Honda's mixture from its four 30mm-choke Keihin carbs is fired by electronic ignition with magnetic triggers on the left end of the crank.

On the road, the Honda motor functioned acceptably. Provided it was revved hard it would match the performance of the Kawasaki or Suzuki. Flexibility was impressive, the bike pulling from 1,000 rpm right to the end of the red line at 10,300rpm. Only trouble was that the motor developed more than the usual amount of high-frequency vibration, transmitted mainly through the handlebar. On the test track it was obvious that the Honda lacked the mid-range punch of either the Suzuki or Kawasaki but not so much that it was a serious impediment. Perhaps the best indication of the Honda's lack of low-end torque was the heav-

Suzuki GSX750: Swish dish.



Kawasaki Z750E: Short 'n' rorty.

45◀ ier fuel consumption. At one time it dropped to 40mpg and averaged only 42½mpg during the test, giving a range on the 4.4 gallon tank of about 185 miles.

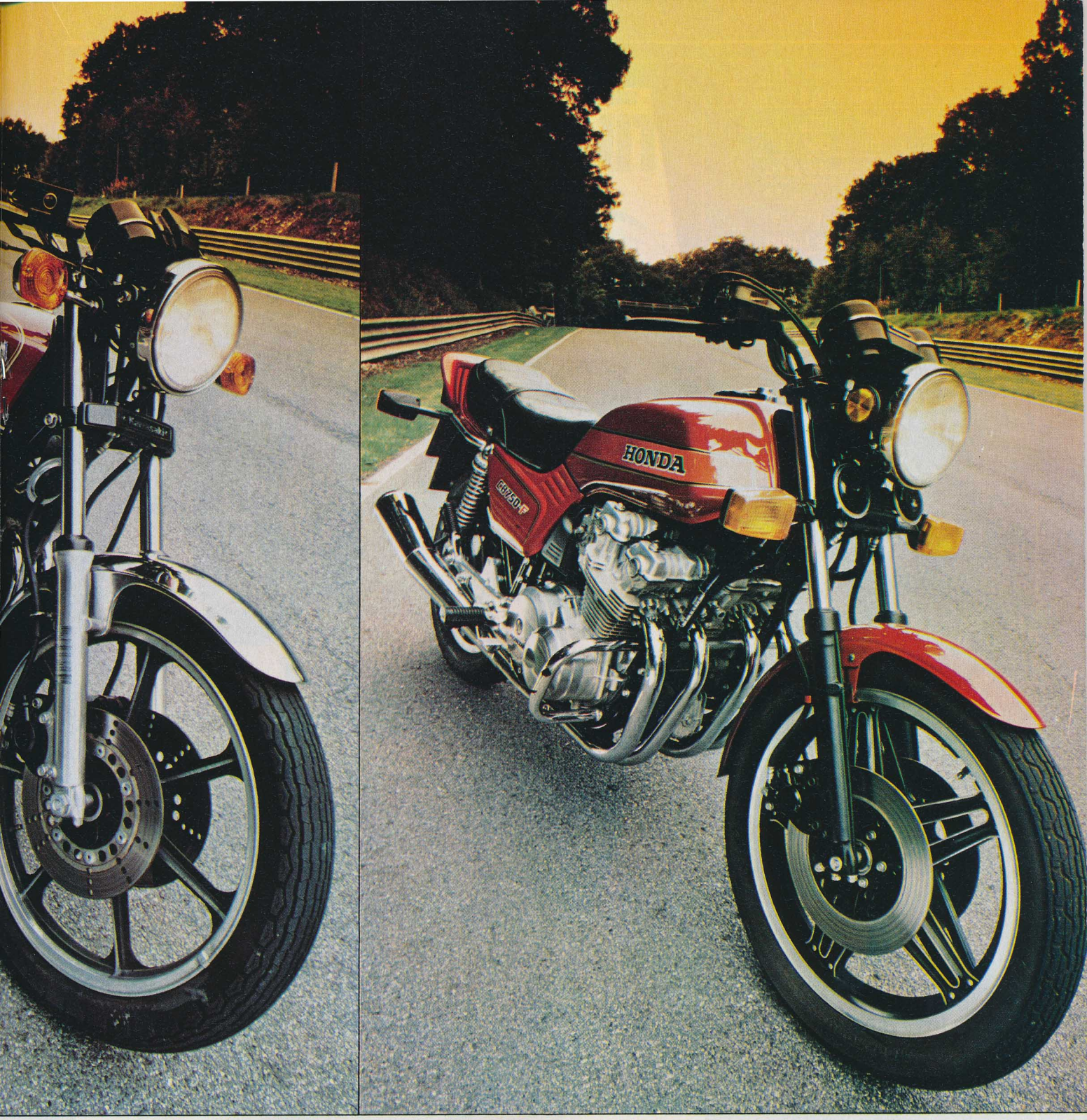
Gearing is lower than on the old KZ: 12.9mph/1,000 rpm in top compared to 13.9. So we would have expected the CB750FA with its extra power to be much quicker than the KZ. As it was, the FA performs similarly over the quarter mile with a time of 12.5 secs and, because of the low gearing (maximum power in top is at 116mph), is slower flat out with a top whack around 125mph.

In general use with such a high top speed you'd never be wanting for extra power. Cruising at the legal limit used 5,400rpm in top gear so there was enough on tap for snappy overtaking. Maximum cruising speed was about 110mph, or more than most riders on an unfaired machine could comfortably stand for long.

If you feel that we were slightly disappointed with the performance of the Honda, then it was only because of the excellence of the other two bikes. Mostly you'd find the power of the Honda more than ample. Any deficiencies were more than made up for by the chassis, though.

The CB750FA's frame, a duplex loop item with the bottom left rail removable to ease engine stripdowns, is virtually identical to those of the CB900F and the CB750KZ. The bike feels taut and agile and Honda have set the suspension more with precise handling in mind than cushy comfort. Unlike the CB900, the front fork doesn't use air pressure to assist the springs but the rear units are the complex FVQ adjustable dampers first used on the CBX. These have, in addition to the normal five-position spring preload adjustment, three-level rebound damping adjustment altered by a slotted ring at the top of the unit and two-level compression damping adjustment changed by a small lever at the base of the damper body.

The handbook explains the method in which the various adjustments should be used. For example, as the



Honda CB750FA: Sweet FA.

rider increases his speed or load, or wants more precise handling, he progressively bumps up the spring preload and damping levels. You wouldn't want, say, maximum preload with the two minimum damping levels, however. Therefore it is arguable that, while the dampers offer a range of adjustment, they also offer a realm of mismatching that could badly upset the handling. We would suggest dampers in which mutually compatible levels of spring preload and damping are adjusted at the same time to prevent the possibility of bad handling. It is possible, but probably won't appear until fashion dictates it.

Braking of the three discs was more than ample but the front discs were often noisy in rain and squealed. Tyres were tubeless Bridgestone Mag-Mopus, the same make as on the Suzuki but with different tread patterns that felt more secure when cranked to the limit. These covers were fitted to black highlighted Comstar wheels that looked good when new but grubby when dusty.

The overall appearance of the Honda was slick and purposeful. Detail finish was good but lacked useful things like a seat that hinged up so there was no place to hide small items like gloves or a security chain. Lighting is provided by a Halogen H4 main beam of useful power and, like the Kawasaki and Suzuki, the alternator has reserves for accessories.

CONCLUSIONS

The Honda was our own favourite because of its appearance and feel. The Suzuki had the best engine overall but its build and soft handling put it more in the style of a tourer, and Suzuki themselves make shaft-drive bikes which are better tourers than the GSX750. In overall performance, the Kawasaki Z750E held all the aces, acceleration, braking and handling. But its strange riding position disappointed our tall test riders. As we said, if you're under five-six, the Kawasaki will be your favourite so long as the bike's subdued looks please you. WBP