

Spring Special Giant Test

Metamorphosis of the Multis

Suzuki GT750A v Honda CB750F

Testers: Bill Haylock and Graham Sanderson.

Photography and illustration: Bob Carlos Clarke.



WHAT ROAD TEST could be more suitable for *Bike's* Spring Special, than two machines that have brought good times to more bikers than just about any others in recent years. Especially as Honda's and Suzuki's 750s are contenders for the top selling spot in the big capacity market, and both have undergone facelifts since the last time we sampled them.

Honda's CB750 undeniably holds a very special position as the bike that spearheaded an exciting revolution in motorcycling. Launched in 1969, it was a masterpiece in its time. It offered smoothness and appeal

that had previously been unheard of, and performance to equal, if not better, the twins that had made the running until then. The Honda four also helped to create a whole new market by giving a fresh clean-cut glamour to biking's image.

Suzuki's 750 triple may not have been such an epoch making machine, but it did add a new level of sophistication with its water cooled two-stroke motor, and it put big-inch motorcycling within the reach of a lot more bikers as the cheapest of the new generation 750s on the market.

But the amazing pace of development in

motorcycles soon made multis commonplace, and both the Honda and Suzuki began to look somewhat staid against the fast swelling ranks of exotic opposition. Thus, in an effort to maintain their grip on the 750 market, both factories have revamped their bikes. The Honda came back in more glamorous guise as the CB750 F Super Sport, and the Suzuki GT750 has gained the suffix A to its name, plus more engine power.

As a Giant Test it looked like being a close run thing, but the conclusion held some surprises . . .

Honda CB750F

WHAT'S in a name? Very little when it comes down to the curious imagery motorcycle manufacturers conjure with when labelling their products. What do the words "Super Sport" bring to your mind? Visions of raw-edged power uncompromised by considerations of comfort and good manners? The machismo of brutal race-bred machinery, only half tamed to be let loose on the open road?

Well, that's my concept of what a Super Sport is, but it certainly isn't Honda's idea of what the legend on the tank of the CB750 F means. Brutal and uncompromising is the last thing you could call this radically facelifted version of their original superbike, the 750 cc Four.

And I'm not decrying Honda for that, because the F is one of the smoothest, most mild mannered and manageable big bikes I've ridden. Notice I didn't say fastest. If, like me, you expect that Super Sport means mind ripping performance, you'll be disappointed in that respect.

But the cafe styled Four certainly isn't a disappointment in any other department. In fact, along with its similarly inspired small brother, the 400 Four, the 750 F represents just about the sanest, smartest and most satisfying ideas Honda's design team has come up with in a long time.

The engine is basically the same single overhead cam mill it was back in '69. It certainly doesn't seem the technological wonder now that it did in those days, and the clampdown on noise and pollution has stolen just a little of its fire. But that motor is still as smooth and sweet as any multi on the streets today.

No, the engine hasn't changed, not in any way that matters, at least. But even so the F feels a very different machine to any previous CB750. It feels more compact, more manageable and, hallelujah — it *handles*. The transformation is all down to a lot of thoughtful details — brought about, maybe, because Honda have at last realised that not all bikers have the same requirements as the law abiding American Mr Average cruising down his 55 mph-limited freeway. At least, I'd like to think the reasoning behind the 750 F represents a move away from the company's take-it-or-leave-it approach to European bikers.

For a start, the F looks so much neater than the old Four, which after seven years with little visible change was long overdue for a facelift. The compact look is achieved largely by four-into-one exhaust — strange how four silencers look distinctly demode all of a sudden. With the header pipes sweeping down into the bulky silencer on the right, the left side of the bike looks oddly naked. The silencing of the exhaust system is remarkably effective, incidentally. Shame the funky sounds multis used to make have become strangled and emasculated — me, I like a bit of noise.

The tank is narrow, an audacious shade of yellow, and blends neatly with the seat

and tail unit. Slimmed down side panels, tucked close in beneath the seat, are finished in low key matt grey-black. All somewhat *ersatz* cafe racer, but it does give an impression of functional compactness which emphasises the clean lines of the four pot mill.

In keeping with the new image there's low bars and repositioned footrests. Not the clip-ons and rear-sets of British cafe racer tradition, the Honda's set-up is really *comfortable*. The bars are narrow and raised a mere inch or so, and with the footrests set back a couple of inches, give that tireless stance the best European tourers have.

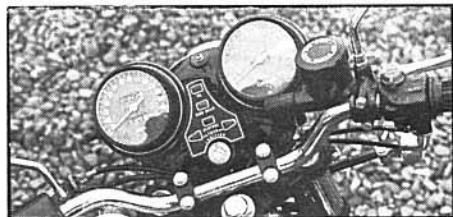
But the most fundamental changes are the least visibly obvious. A half mile thrash down the road is enough to convince anyone that Honda have really tried to get to grips with suspension, never their forte in the past. It's not *just* suspension though. Not only is the bike now more stable over fast bumpy curves, the steering also feels light yet positive even at a traffic snarled crawl. It may be largely due to the reduction in caster angle and the half inch addition to the wheelbase, but anyway, I felt as happy threading the F through London rush hour traffic as letting it all out on an empty country road.

The comfort of the riding position at sustained high speeds, the smoothness of the motor and transmission right through the rev range, and the effortless way it can be confidently flicked through the tightest and bumpiest bends, brings me to the conclusion that the 750 F is my idea of what a fast tourer ought to be, rather than a Super Sport.

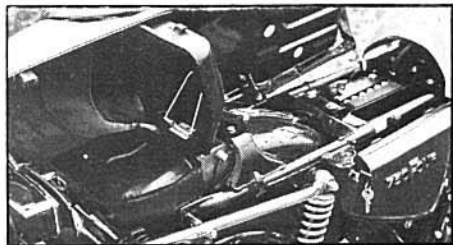
All that marred its qualities as a tourer in fact, was the usual inadequate fuel range, not much over 100 miles at an average consumption of 40 mpg, although the gallon of reserve could stretch that further. I covered several long distance trips as rapidly as I have on any other bike, despite less than shattering overall performance.

Acceleration is smooth rather than rapid, and our electronically timed top speed of 114 mph is pretty mundane. But the unfussy delivery of torque from way down up to the 8,500 red line makes life easy, and you certainly don't need to play footsie with the gear pedal. Should you want to, though, the shift is slick and positive. Only bad point in the transmission is a very grabby clutch that protested just about as loudly at early morning starts as me. We had a dealer strip the clutch to discover the cause of the disconcerting groans, but nothing seemed amiss. By the time the bike had covered a total of 1,500 miles, towards the end of the test, the noises had all but gone.

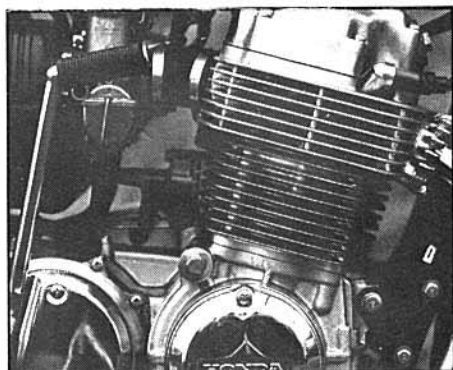
The one thing that diminished my confidence in the 750 F was riding in the wet. A misfire that coincided with wet conditions was eventually traced to a loose coil connection, after we'd tried waterproof plug caps without improvement. But the wet certainly had a dire effect on roadholding and braking. The Bridgestone tyres fitted to the test bike are quite the nastiest I've come



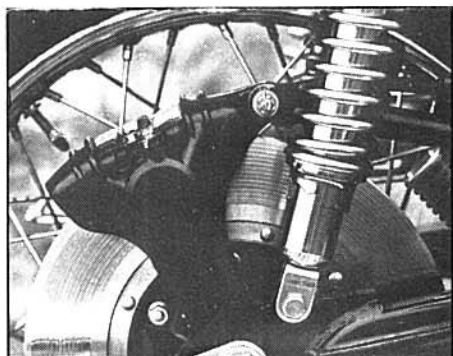
Honda instruments layout is neat and simple as ever.



Seat hump hides a storage box. Clever idea, but the water gets in.



The four pot, single cam motor has hardly changed. Possibly one of the most successful bike engines ever, it still looks and feels good after seven years in production.



Caliper for the new rear disc brake is cleverly designed as a one-piece casting, with plastic window to check on pad wear.

across in some time. I'm a coward in the wet at the best of times, but despite my usual caution the unyielding Japanese rubber allowed the Honda to slither alarmingly on occasions. And the tyres had the unnerving tendency to be deflected by irregularities in the road surface. Tyres like that are bad for your health in a climate like ours. But doesn't it ever rain in Japan?

Brakes too are affected by the wet. They don't begin to bite until a good few revolutions of the wheel have dried the water off

the disc — too bad if you're not going fast enough for the water to disperse. When dry the front disc emits a piercing, highly embarrassing squeal. You get the impression every time you stop at a traffic light that everyone is looking round and waiting for the crash. Honda might perhaps have made a better choice of pad material. The massive rear disc works nicely in the dry without squealing, however. Up front the single disc looks unfashionable the way bikes have been sprouting extra discs recently but it stops you OK if you grit your teeth and endure the squeal. Wet conditions on our test session precluded brake testing, but I'm sure an extra disc would be a cosmetic improvement only, except that the single front disc does flex the forks enough to slightly affect the steering on heavy braking.

Riding at night is fun, thanks to Stanley illumination. See, the Jap's *can* make decent headlights if they try. Maybe not up to the best QI standards, but not far below. One thing that does annoy me about the Honda's electrics is the thoughtless positioning of the dip switch. It's on the left bar switch cluster out of reach of normal thumbs, which fumble with the horn button while groping for the dip.

Also the black plastic box on the front frame downtube, containing who knows what electrical mysteries, seems a Bad Idea. It's positioned just where it can catch the spray from the front wheel, and a gap in the joint between the two halves of the casing means the electricals within are far from waterproof. It didn't cause any trouble over the test period, but I feel it might be a problem over a long term in weather such as ours.

Seems we're well and truly lumbered with the gimmick of the year — the audible turn indicator. The CB750 F has one too. S'pose we'll have to get used to pedestrians and motorists staring at us — or resort to carrying wire snips around. However, Honda are good at designing unfussy, easy to read instrument consoles, and the F is no exception. The dials are big and clear, and just as easy to read at night.

The fuel filler cap is secreted beneath a lockable lid on top of the tank. It keeps the lines of the tank smooth, but looks just a little cheap. The seat is also lockable and conceals a plastic box for carrying documents and waterproofs, flasks of whisky or anything else you fancy. I wouldn't recommend stashing your lunchtime sarnis under there though, as the box on our bike had about half an inch of water in the bottom.

Although the Honda Four has been upstaged by more recent arrivals on the scene that are both faster and flashier, it retains the prestige of being the bike that set the trend in big Japanese multis. And costing £1,069, it's still within the reach of most bikers capable of putting their mark on a hire purchase form. It may well have been losing ground to the opposition recently, but now the F has rejuvenated the old Four's staid image, the CB750 is about to enjoy a new lease of life. **Bill Haylock**

Suzuki GT 750A

WHOEVER first coined that expression "Superbike" created not only a now over-used cliché but a permanent air of expectancy that surrounds the arrival of virtually any machine over 500 cc. This frenzy reached something of a peak back in 1972 when Suzuki shipped their first GT750J to this country. By then Triumph threes and Honda fours had been around for a while and the announcement of a large capacity water-cooled two-stroke was a novelty in modern-day motorcycle production.

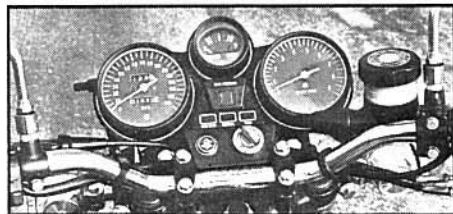
Maybe trade, press and public alike expected too much and although the Suzuki was by no means a failure, it perhaps did not make the impact one might have expected. The first road tests imparted stories of weirdo handling, ineffective brakes and a top speed not much over the ton. It was really just another big motorcycle in both weight and capacity and although it retained a superbike tag it was essentially a tourer.

However, technical and cosmetic and modifications to the bike in the intervening four years have not only improved the Suzuki, but radically altered its once bland character. It's still the pleasant tourer we all knew it was anyway, but now it's also more of an all-round performance motorcycle than its weight and obese appearance would lead you to believe. It's likely to attract the same kind of customer as the Z900 Kawasaki, although I'm not making a direct comparison between the machines themselves. It's a motorcycle for someone who likes big smooth bikes and who is content to cruise along at around 90 mph safe in the knowledge that the motor is still well within its limits.

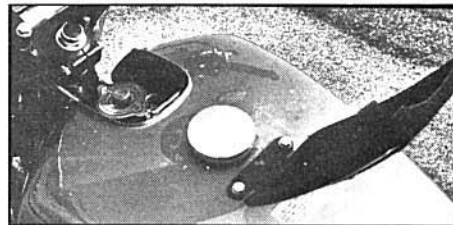
If you need rapid acceleration then the Suzuki can deliver. The GT has now more than ever fulfilled that original potential and although there is still room for improvement, the comparatively modest price tag of just under £1,000 makes the GT not only a viable but an attractive proposition. In fact, it's £80 cheaper than the Honda and the mods to both machines have brought them into direct competition. Suzuki I, Honda O, in the price department.

It wasn't the Suzuki's ability to deal admirably with mile after endless motorway mile that was particularly astounding, because after all that still remains its principal task. What really impressed was the carefree manner in which the GT could be slung around to the point of abusing its touring purpose with some adventurous on-the-limit riding. The test began cautiously, but the psychological effects of various horror stories of GT750 handling soon wore off and before long I found myself moving into corners faster than I would have previously thought safe on a big Suzuki.

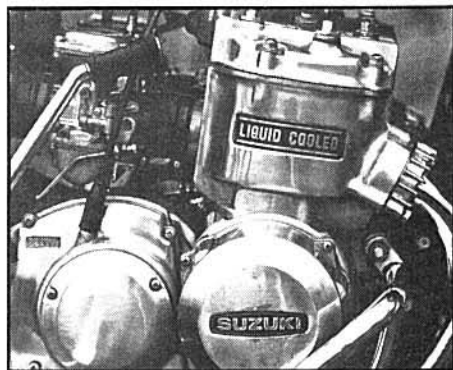
Despite the weight, all 537 lbs of it, the GT was surprisingly easy to sling into and out of bends. It neither fell into them or



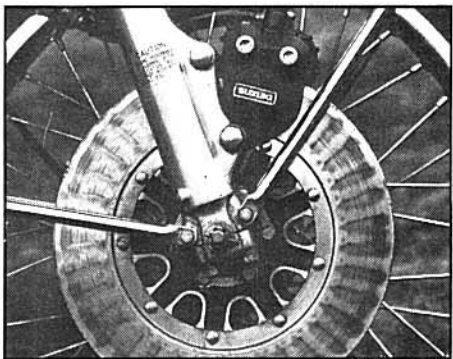
Control consol imparts much information. The proliferation of buttons and switches on the left contrasts with the situation at t'other end of the handlebars.



The tank flap may be a cheap-skate way of providing a locking petrol cap but it keeps nasty little fingers away from the radiator filler cap.



Polished alloy water jacket is good sound proofing and looked nice, too. Engine crash bars are extras.



One of a pair of front discs which work well in dry conditions, but not so favourably in the wet.

refused to be pulled out, and the physical ease of such manoeuvres, except on the worst of road surfaces, encouraged scratching. It was all such a revelation that once I'd discovered this bonus I didn't want to stop riding fast. Before long I grounded the centre stand on a right-hander with surprising ease. It left the girl on the back kinda shocked too. One might say, wide legged and eyeless. Next day it was the prop stand on the left that bit the dust, again without really trying. ▶

Japanese machines are not often noted for their harsh suspension but the Suzuki springs, front and rear, were uncharacteristically hard. I reset the rear springs to the softest of their five settings, but the front forks smoothed out the bumps a little more successfully. My daily commuting takes in a stretch of fenland road that must rate as one of the bumpiest this side of the Khyber Pass, and the Suzuki's harshness at the rear end was soon emphasised. Real concentration was needed to cruise over the mounds and gullies at even modest speeds.

The front end would twitch as it skated over a series of bumps while the rear wheel sometimes felt on the verge of a breakaway. On one occasion the rear wheel did in fact twitch dykewards after hitting a bump at around 70 mph. Bumps on the entrance and exit from a smoothly surfaced bend were



also enough to induce wiggles, but never did the handling get out of hand. The frame would snake slightly on such occasions and the weaving would worsen before settling down.

These faults served more as a warning not to be too foolish than as a serious threat to personal safety, and in view of the bike's generally good handling especially in the turns, riding defensively over unknown roads was a concession I was willing to accept.

Now after all those frightful tales about dire Suzuki handling and things turning out the way they had, I decided to enlist opinions from the other Bike staffmen. They confirmed that the test bike handled better than previous models, although not to the same extent as the Honda 750F over its predecessors. We were, therefore, surprised to hear Suzuki GB deny knowledge of any improvement to frame or suspension. Maybe it's all down to good weight distribution or a low centre of gravity after all, but we reckon that the factory has upped the rear spring rating on the GT and forgotten to pass the message on to importers.

In fact, about the only noticeable change between the M and A models is a slightly re-styled petrol tank, wider and flatter than its predecessors but retaining the same capacity of 3.7 gallons. The new tank also features a cheapo lockable flap which covers the petrol cap and also partially hides the radiator cap. The recess digs deeply into

the space that should be occupied by the tank itself to make room for the radiator overflow tank, the reason for the tank's relatively small capacity. You have to look at earlier models to track down more significant differences, especially the engine mods made between the L and M models.

Those changes included raising the exhaust port by 2½ mm and dropping the inlet port by 5 mm, decreasing the combustion capacity of each cylinder, increasing the compression ratio from 6.7:1 to 6.9:1 by thinning out the head gasket, changing the overall gearing from 15:47 tooth sprockets to 16:43, and replacing plastic resin clutch plates with aluminium jobs.

The exhaust system layout has remained constant, the centre pipe splitting into two and sweeping either side of the rear wheel, but the baffling and diameter have been

redesigned to help with the extra five bhp the M was said to have produced. The conical-ended mufflers were first replaced between the K and L models, and jetting for the new constant vacuum carburetors was altered again between the L and M variations. The cooling fan mounted behind the radiator was ditched for the L, but it still remains a superfluous £40 optional extra, such is the efficiency of the cooling system. Incidentally the L itself was favourably tested in *Bike* in November '74. Coo, don't all this get complicated.

A direct effect of the porting changes was to increase acceleration at higher engine speeds at the expense of some torque. There is now a more definite power band coming in at around 4,000 rpm, and once the engine gets on the pipe it pulls eagerly and rapidly to the red line at 7,000. Early Mach 1 Kawasakis were infamous for demanding airspace for the front wheel, and although the GT is not as spectacular it is still exhilarating and a damned sight more dignified. The Suzuki's ability to transform 70 bhp into mph was amazing bearing in mind the immensity of the machine. A standing quarter time of 13.55 seconds speaks for itself, and acceleration up to 90 mph is particularly impressive.

Bearing in mind the fleet acceleration, the test bike's inability to clock more than 112.78 mph on the strip was disappointing. Conditions were good but the GT would not pull more than 6,800 rpm in top. The

mystery deepened when P Watson of this establishment announced that he had timed an M model at 123 mph not so long ago. The only conceivable explanation for the anti-climax with our bike was faulty timing on one cylinder discovered when the machine was returned to Beddington Lane.

Below four grand power delivery was lumpy and undramatic. Earlier models could be plonked along quite happily in top gear at low speeds. No so the A. It was downright unpleasant to ride through town traffic, and practically impossible to ride within 30 or 40 mph speed limits in top. The motor jerked and pulled nervously at the transmission, yearning for the open road. This two-stroke megaphonitis built up between three and four thousand revs and created a low frequency vibration transmitted through the kick start and onto the rider's right leg.

Traditionally, the GT 750 is regarded as a high speed cruiser and predictably demonstrates its forte on fast roads. It cruised effortlessly between 70 and 90 mph in top, coinciding with a leisurely four to five thousand rpm. Unless you're trying to impress yourself there's little point in revving the engine above six thousand. There's another vibration patch between 5,500 and 6,500 — but most work can be done below five thousand, although it's nice to have that extra reserve power to surge past tiresome knots of crawlers.

The slightly raised handlebars are comfortable up to 90 mph, thereafter becoming more tiring. But there's an air of permanency about the GT once on the motorway. The seat is wide and comfortable for rider and pillion, the twin rubber mounted mirrors are vibration free, and the mechanically quiet engine just makes you want to ride on.

Out front there's the big tacho, speedometer and water temperature gauge, lights for turn, neutral and beam, and the biggest idiot light of them all, the gear position indicator. Maybe next year's model will include a tea making facility in the excellent water cooling system?

Of course there's a price on high speed work, like the disposal of a gallon of petrol every 33 miles under hard riding, which means a frequent necessity for fuel stops. Don't place too much faith in reserve, either. I had to push the big mother to a gas station after 13 miles. More sparing use of the throttle resulted in 38 mpg.

Twin front discs have occupied the front wheel spindle since 1973, and they're powerful enough to bring the quarter ton of machine to a tyre squealing halt. The lever travel was long but it did provide a good measure of control. Unfortunately, in common with the Honda, the brake pads are affected by wet, and don't bite until after those first few important revolutions of the wheel. What's more disturbing is Suzuki's admission of such a drastic shortcoming by plastering a warning sticker on a fork leg declaring, "Brake performance at beginning of the application may change with wet disc

brake". Let's hope manufacturers get to the root of that problem before long.

Although the overall finish was good with a tasty use of chrome on headlamp shell, fork shroud and air filter box covers, the quality was grainy on the underside of the headlamp shell and the rear mudguard hidden by the seat, and some of the welding, particularly on the headstock, still resembles a half-chewed toffee.

A conspicuous absentee from the toolkit was a spanner large enough to fit the castle nut on the rear wheel spindle. Adjusting the rear chain is a finger-skinning task anyway, due to the close proximity of the upswept silencers to the spindle.

I strongly recommend Suzuki to redistribute the switchgear following a heart stopping event when I managed to switch off the lights while groping for the dip switch. The on/off light switch should be moved to the sparsely populated right grip next to starter button and engine cutout. This still leaves dip switch, headlight flasher, indicator switch and horn button on the overworked left (no political innuendo intended). The lights themselves were well above average, giving good illumination under all conditions. Main beam was particularly effective covering a wide area with sufficient intensity for safe 80 mph riding on unlit roads.

The GT750 has changed little in overall appearance during the last couple of years. It still remains a weighty beast, but engine mods have kept pace with today's high performance standards and the bike can now be considered as a serious contender in the sports motorcycle market while still retaining touring status. *Graham Sanderson*

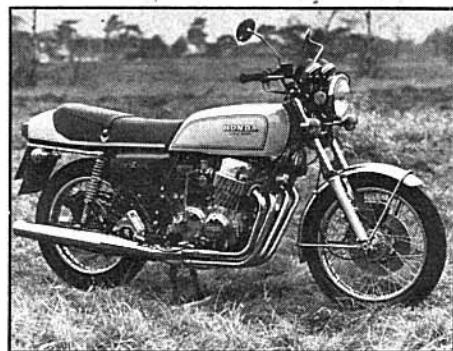
Summary

In its own way the Honda Four is just as much a revolution in biking as Henry Ford's model T was when he fulfilled his vow to build a car for Everyman. The Honda brought exotic, sophisticated multi cylinder machinery within the reach of every biker for the first time.

Suzuki's 750 entered the fray as a direct competitor in the market pioneered by Honda, and now undercuts the four stroke four by £80, obviously a strong point in its favour.

The new CB 750 F is a great improvement over the old four and beats the Suzuki on handling, fuel consumption and engine flexibility. However, the two stroke triple is an impressive machine with its watercooling, twin front discs and instruments — you certainly get a lot for your money.

A final choice between the two bikes will probably depend on whether you're of two or four stroke persuasion, and on styling tastes. Be warned, though — appearances and labels can be very deceptive as far as these two bikes go. The bulky Suzuki shouts 'tourer' at you — but it performs better than you'd expect, and in actual fact the so-called Super Sport Honda is the best all rounder of the two. ●



	SUZUKI GT750A	HONDA CB750F1
Engine	Three cylinder 2-stroke water cooled	Four cylinder 4-stroke single OHC
Bore x stroke	70 x 64mm	61 x 63mm
Capacity	738cc	736cc
Compression ratio	6.9:1	9.2:1
Carburation	3 x 40mm Mikuni	4 x 28mm Keihin
BHP @ RPM	70 @ 6,500	67 @ 8,000
Primary drive	Gear	Duplex chain
Clutch	Wet, multiplate	Wet, multiplate
Gear ratios		
(1)	12.80:1	14.01:1
(2)	7.81:1	9.57:1
(3)	6.13:1	7.47:1
(4)	5.06:1	6.35:1
(5)	4.33:1	5.43:1
Electrical system	280w alternator battery/coil Ignition	210w alternator battery/coil Ignition
Lighting	50/40w headlight 8/23w tall/stoplight	35/35w headlight 5/21w tall/stoplight
DIMENSIONS		
Wheelbase	56.5in	58in
Seat height	32in	32.5in
Ground clearance	6in	6in
Handlebar height	41.5in	41.5in
Kerb weight	537 lbs	530 lbs
Oil capacity	3.2 pints	6.2 pints
Fuel capacity	3.7 gals	3.7 gals
EQUIPMENT		
Trafficators	Yes	Yes
Electric starter	Yes	Yes
Trip mileometer	Yes	Yes
Steering lock	Yes	Yes
Helmet lock	Yes	Yes
Headlight flasher	Yes	Yes
Kill button	Yes	Yes
Toolkit	Yes	Yes
Spares	No	No
Others	Twin mirrors, gear position indicator, water temp. gauge	Twin mirrors, audible turn signals
CYCLE PARTS		
Tyres (front)	3.25 x 19 Bridgestone	3.25 x 19 Bridgestone
(rear)	4.00 x 18 Bridgestone	4.00 x 18 Bridgestone
Brakes (front)	Twin 11.75in discs	11.5in disc
(rear)	8in drum	11.5in disc
PERFORMANCE		
Top speed	112.78 mph	113.63 mph
Standing ¼ mile	13.55 secs	13.82 secs
0-30 mph	3.11 secs	3.28 secs
0-60 mph	6.69 secs	6.1 secs
Speedometer error		
at indicated 30 mph	28.62 mph	27.47 mph
at indicated 60 mph	56.92 mph	57.36 mph
Fuel consumption		
(overall)	38 mpg	40.18 mpg
(ridden hard)	33 mpg	37.9 mpg
Braking distance		
from 30 mph	29ft	—
from 60 mph	126ft	—
PRICE	£999 inc VAT	£1,079 inc VAT
Guarantee	6 months parts 90 days labour	6 months parts and labour
Supplied by	SUZUKI GB, 87 Beddington Lane, Croydon, Surrey CR0 4TD.	HONDA UK, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4 5YT.