

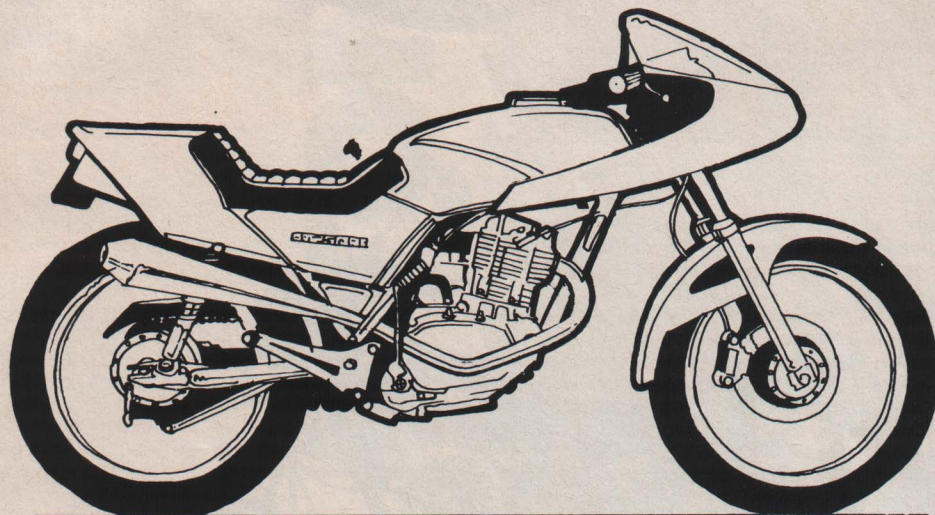
STRAIGHT THROUGH CUSTOMS

Decisions, decisions . . . How to decide what you want in the ever broadening 250cc market can be a dilemma, no, even worse, a trilemma. So we tested Honda's straight CB250RS single, Suzuki's twin 250T and Kawasaki's Z250G LTD single. The result? Some pretty pictures by John Wallace and more confusion.





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Honda CB250RS

HONDA'S SMALL FOURVALVE SINGLE thumped its way into my life for the first time as the powerplant of one of the early XL250s — a rather heavy black and silver 'street scrambler' more suited to street than to dirt, but having a motor of such unburstable willingness that I'll remember the brute forever. We had a seven-acre backyard to play in and turned it into a short moto cross circuit, complete with homemade berms and jumps. Three of us would gangbang the poor 250 around the track until we were too weak to grip the bars but the motor never wilted. This despite the inevitable over-revving and hammering that play moto cross encourages.

After numerous Sunday afternoon orgies of berm bashing, the motor was stripped and rebuilt with a big-bore 310cc conversion. Now punching out hefty spurts of torque, the engine seems as indestructible as ever. When it was first bought, the XL250 had been run in on the road, where it proved itself a very flexible and pleasant road machine too, so the adaptation of the XL250 motor for road-only use just had to be a great idea.

The way in which Honda have adapted the four-valve single for its second debut as the RS shows some skill and imagination. Killing a covey of birds with one stone, they've chosen to use two exhaust header pipes from the two exhaust valves, branching from separate ports in the head to stubby megaphones. This split exhaust layout has various advantages. It splits the ports and allows a cooling gap between them in the cylinder head. A single downtube can be used to hang the motor in the frame, passing neatly between the dual manifolds, and they, in turn, are nice and thin to promote high gas velocities. Having two pipes means a balanced styling effect for the discerning consumer, while two silencers means low restriction at low decibel readings. *Voila*, a simple solution satisfies manifold (sorry)

Above: This is how it could look. Now hold on, this ain't another project thingie surely?

design problems.

Having tucked the small single into an abbreviated frame, Honda chose to go the route they took with the Dream and with later XLs — to damp the thump out of the thumper. This they did with counter rotating balancers, one chain driven off the crankshaft (adjustable on an eccentric shaft), the other mounted on the gearbox layshaft. A whine makes itself heard in all gears on the RS, and probably originates from the anti-vibration mechanism, but it's not too intrusive.

Feedback from the mill is still solid and tight, with just a light drumming felt at the bars. A bonus effect of the anti-vibration measures is a weight loss one would not normally expect from the addition of shafts and bobweights and things. But it's simple, really — a smooth motor can be hung in a lighter frame. Without the heavier support needed to contain a vibrator jerking against its bonds, the surrounding metalwork can be trimmed down to achieve an overall weight reduction. How'd you like that little engineering shakedown, Meriden?

A closer look at the RS mill reveals more than just a trick black paint job to set it apart from the beloved XL ricegrinder I remember so well. For one thing, it's got a fully automatic camchain tensioner to replace the semi-auto mechanism used before. This gizmo operates by having the usual spring acting on two wedges, able to move in one direction only to take up slack in the chain as it develops. Understand? Me neither. Other changes are a 30mm carburettor, up 2mm on the dirtbike unit, and a compression ratio which has been slightly upped from 9.1 to 9.3:1.

New valve timing puts the power high up in the rev range and gives the RS the breathing of a long distance runner. On the road this shows as a little less topgear response than the Kawasaki LTD at about 70mph, but as considerably more go if you gear down and let the little four-valver pump away into

five-figure engine speeds. The valve timing compares to the XL like this; inlet valve opens 10° BTDC and closes 40° ABDC (XL — 5° BTDC and 30° ABDC) and the exhaust valve opens at 40° BBDC and closes 10° ATDC (XL — 35° BBDC and 5° ATDC). The timing is thus symmetrical, and the overlap allows amazingly high revs — enough to propel the little 250 through our traps at 91.4mph.

When I first collected the bike, I imagined it would be a cheaper and slower alternative to Honda's best selling 250N Dream. I found instead a machine which is lighter, faster, more charismatic and infinitely more charming than the twin will ever be. Even its appearance is an improvement. The slim CBX-ish treatment compares favourably with the Dream's chunky Eurostyling. Despite the rather lurid blue metallflake paint, the RS is a tasteful and compact picture, its stubby exhausts, black motor and wire-spoked alloy rims lending a sporty emphasis.

There's no electric foot on the RS, so it has to be booted out of bed in the morning — not a difficult business, but perhaps enough to deter the more wimpish among us, so a starter motor will appear on next year's thumper. A valve lifter is incorporated in the kickstart mechanism to enable the rider to turn the motor over to its optimum position, just beginning the ignition stroke, before jumping on it. Capacitive discharge ignition ensures a hot spark for easy starts, but our bike still demanded an energetic prod at the lever to spin the single into throbbing life.

A 'dash-mounted' choke and central ignition switch take the fiddles out of the day's first start and the rest of the control layout is similarly clear and functional. Like, you know, man, rider-integrated ergonomics making for quick interface on-line decisions, an' all that. There is one vestigial hassle from long ago before XLs evolved into sporty RSs, and that's a kick start which swings down onto a set-back right footrest. The footrest has to be folded up before the rider can kick the thing over, then he usually forgets that it's folded up and rides away trying to find a perch for his hard worked right foot like a dog with an itch.

If you've got an itch to go road-racing, this is the baby that'll give you all the scratching you need. I haven't had as much fun looning around the roadways as I have recently on Honda's little roundabout racer on many larger, more exotic motorcycles. While the RS is naturally not terribly frightening in the straightline power stakes, it's as exhilarating as a rollercoaster ride in the bendy bits.

Maintaining momentum is all-important on small cube motorcycles and that means trying not to slow down for anything. On the Honda this game can be played to the bladder tingling limit, because it's a sharp handling piece with lots of ground clearance, Pitts Special manoeuvrability and very little weight to wrestle. On one roundabout we were cranked over so far I began to feel giddy, the rear wheel got loose as it ran out of tread, my elbow was on the grass, and I swear Constable, there's nothing to worry

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about. Now, is this the kind of talk to describe a machine with potential high volume L-plate sales? Hell yes, good road manners, low weight and responsive handling are the things to have when you're learning. And when you've learnt.

Other benefits of the simple layout and compact size soon impress themselves on the rider. Washing the bike is easy because of its simplified powerplant, even if it does have twin exhausts. Lots of the bodywork bits are plastic, so resistant to corrosion, and the black engine paint is smooth and thick, looking tough enough to withstand attacks by detergents and brushes. The alloy rims from DID appear to have been lacquered against corrosion, but the rear one is naturally prone to collecting flung off sticky chain lube, which also makes spokes a real pain to clean. Apart from that, the old wash and brush up is a doddle.

Pushing the RS around is also effortless — its 300-odd pounds total weight reducing it almost to bicycle status. In fact, it was sometimes less trouble to do a quick bump start — a few steps and a bounce onto the seat as the clutch is let in — than go through the procedure of folding footrests and swinging kick-start pedals. And even when cold, the little single will happily thud off on a little choke immediately after firing up.

With engine vibrations damped out to barely noticeable levels there remains only slight roughness transmitted through the drive sprocket and chain. Reading five grand on the odometer and with the memory of several clumsy riders doubtless imprinted on its moving parts, the little Honda might have had some undue wear in its drive train. When I got it, the bike had its chain strung tight as a bowstring, and you could really feel messages through the left footrest and gearlever then. Slacking it off a bit helped matters somewhat, but a little roughness remained. It disappears at higher speeds and, to be honest, realistic use of the RS motor puts the rev counter needle a fair way round the dial most of the time.

A slight notchiness was evident in the gear shift mechanism at times, but not annoyingly, while the clutch was always feather light. Flattish bars and set back pegs with remote mounted gearlever promote a comfortably laid forward riding position, from which it's an easy matter to drop flat onto the tank to cheat the air of a few more mph. A vital consideration when you're determined to stitch up the cheeky bastard, who blasted past inches away on his big four, when you get to the next roundabout. Revenge is sweet if you do, as Limp and I discovered when we out-maneuvred a GS850 round a monster island on the A5.

Threading through traffic is an art that the RS has perfected, feeling always as if it's on its toes, able to change direction at the flick of a wrist. Its lack of sheer size helps a lot in this department too, since at 29 inches wide all you need worry about is doorhandles and kneecaps. The relatively narrow Yokohama tyres feed back the feel of the road right into the handlebar grips and the seat of the pants, and as the bike is so sensitive to balance and

weight shift, the rider is constantly aware of what it's doing.

All this nimble agility and joy is provided with frugal use of juice, because the RS would wring 58 miles out of a gallon of petrol even when it was being whipped along as fast as its wheels would carry it. A kinder hand on the throttle can stretch a gallon out to seventy miles, which is no mean mileage on £1.30. The distance it would go on reserve was similarly hard to grasp for us mainly big bike riders, and makes a mockery of most four-cylinder middleweights and their reckless fuel consumption.

A single disc brake on the front wheel does a respectable job of stopping the lightweight Honda, aided by an adequate drum astern. The disc suffers from just the slightest touch of wet lag in the rain, but at least the Jap rubber behaved itself on wet tarmac.

Honda have got their act pretty well sorted out when it comes to motorcycle equipment and the construction of a complete integrated machine. Things like rubber mounted flexible indicators, alloy footrest mounting plates, side and centre stands, mirrors, switches, and lights. Did I say lights? Yeah, well, I don't care much for the square headlight trend, but I have to admit that it's remarkably bright for standard equipment on a two-fifty. Must stop thinking like that — a two-fifty is now a complete vehicle module with full ancillary backup. Mr Honda said so.

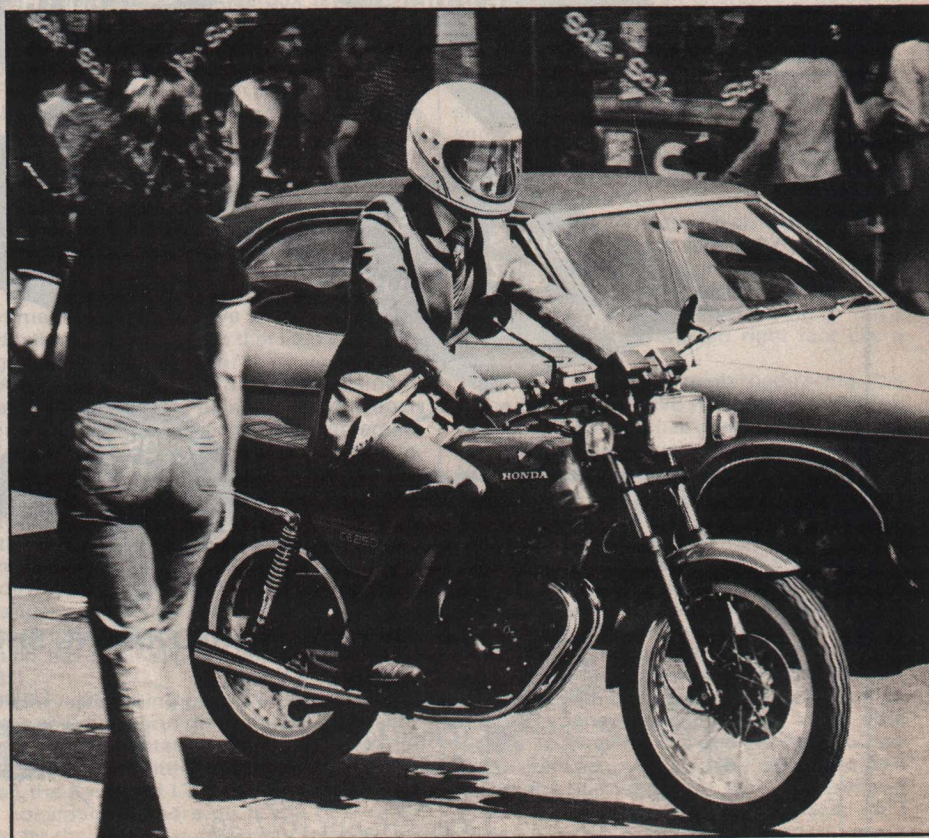
A very silly touch is a toolkit canister mounted below the plastic sidecover in full

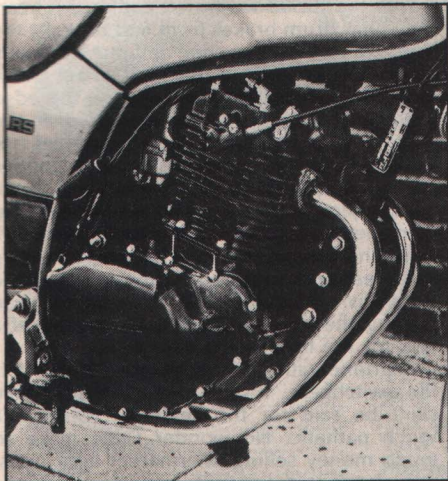
view of any clothed git who'd like to increase his collection of Japanese adjustable set-spanners. Unfortunately, there's no room anywhere else, so owners will have to rely on threatening stickers or take to carrying tools around with them.

Apart from silly, pathetic nit-picking niggles like those above (I don't have to do this job, you know — could be working for the civil service) the lil' Honda is just about right. Indeed, we thought of getting one as our next project bike, but there isn't enough on it that needs putting right. We'll have to get a Dream instead. So, in line with current nationwide cost-cutting procedures, we've designed a more dedicated cafe racer version. On paper, of course — it's cheaper that way — but it's a good indication of how the RS could look after some careful customising. None of yer stick-on Airfix stuff from fringed black leather wonders will do the trick, either. The RS deserves better.

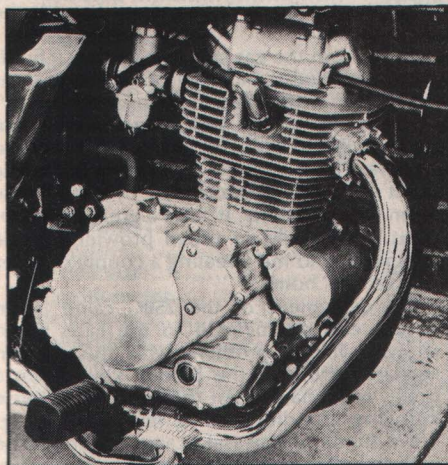
The RS has made the transition from dirt bike to lightweight sportsbike with real aplomb. It's light, fast, cheap, and practical, looks sharp, handles well, and uses petrol with a holy reverence to finite fossil reserves. It'll be a shame if potential legislation shifts the learner market to 125cc machines, because that's clearly where the buyers are for Honda's RS, but I think it'll probably come through on its own merits anyway. At £760, its future looks rosy.

Barry Winfield

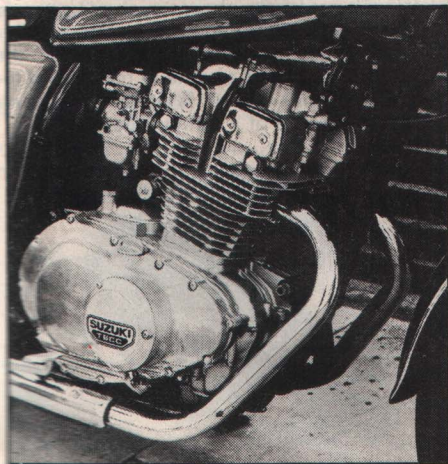




Above: Compact and pokey RS mill has inherited twin exhausts from the XL. Kinda cute ain't it.



Above: Not as quick as the Honda but the Kawasaki mill has the edge in low range pulling power.



Above: Same as the GSX250 this one and we all know how that baby can sing out high notes.

Kawasaki Z250B

WE ALL HAVE OUR PRE-CONCEIVED notions and I'm no different. So when Barry said we had to go to London the following day on a pair of 250cc singles my immediate response was why don't we strap them into the back of the *Bike* pickup truck and ride down in comfort with music, smoke and all the other ingredients one needs to make the hundredth trip down the A1 to London bearable. Unfortunately the truck was being used to pick up another bike that day so at 8 o'clock sharp the next day there I was knocking on Barry's door all ready to pick up the Kawasaki 250G and head townwards.

He was piloting the ever so nimble and pretty Honda RS250 and we set off as cheerfully as could be expected in the circumstances. The point is that the ride turned out to be great fun as did every other jaunt that we took together on these small fry. Boring down the dual carriageway, the Kawasaki made no fuss about keeping the speedo needle at and above the 70mph mark. That was the first thing to impress me. The single cam motor has enough torque to bang along in top for all but the most severe of hills so long as you don't mind losing a touch of momentum on the way.

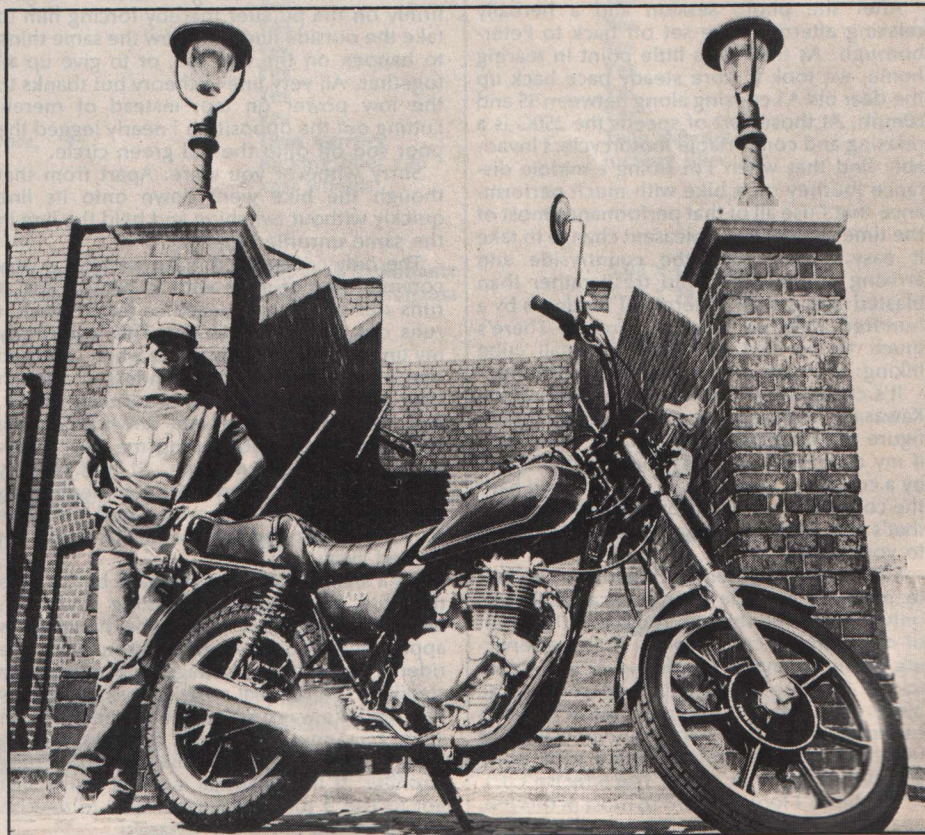
Almost exactly one and a half hours later we pulled on to the A41 and stopped by the side of the road to let the tingling in our hands and feet die out before pushing on through the

traffic to our destination, the Stockwell Skateboard Park. Travelling at a constant 65-70mph produces an ultra high frequency buzz, toe tinglin' stuff.

Perhaps the best facet of the small Kawasaki is its tremendous agility in heavy traffic. It's a flyweight, tipping the scales at well under 300lb so you can pick it up and throw it down in a manner that would give a heavier machine a severe dose of the wobbles; ideal for diving and curling through the rapidly opening and closing gaps in the metropolis traffic. The motor has enough pulling power to take you through if you happen to be aiming for a hole in a gear too high.

The last 250 single that I rode way back in my youth was a BSA Starfire that wheezed and rattled its way around the countryside barking disconsolately through its reverse cone mega. That bike was an absolute disaster. Slow, unreliable, oily... you know the scene. Well, the only similarity between machines of that vintage and the new crop of Japanese singles is the fact that they have one cylinder and share the same cubic capacity give or take a few ccs. The Kawasaki represents a well planned revival of an ancient concept with all the warts carefully burnt away and replaced by the soundness of modern technology.

The 250G is derived from the more conservative looking 250C and it wears its mini custom grabber garb well. You'd perhaps expect a tiny bike like this to look a trifle sick with huge pullback bars, a step up seat and fat back wheel. But not so, it looks neat 'n' clean



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if a touch pretentious. And who doesn't need a bit of pretension from time to time? It sure as hell looks better than Triumph's new Low-rider unveiled at the Earls Court Pink Meat Buffet this year. There's little point offering an opinion on the styling, it's too much a matter of individual preference. What Kawasaki have done they have done well so that the lines of the bike flow smoothly into one another and that's good enough.

Probably the biggest bonus of the custom version is the low seat height which allows even diminutives to lay the soles of both nogas flat on the ground. If you remove the seat and tank then take a look at the frame construction you will see a fair sized step down at the point where the seat support rails meet the main cradle of the chassis. So as not to lose out on strength, the joint area is reinforced by some meaty gussets.

In everyday terms, the low seat makes a number of tasks easier — the most obvious being the paddling we all have to do on nearly every ride that we take. You know what it's like trying to push a bike along with your feet when you can only just touch your toes to the floor. The same also applies when you're trying to worm through a thick clog of rush hour traffic. A useful advantage with the only drawback being that you have to bend your knees more than usual when you've put your feet on the pegs. Perhaps my knees have been knocked on the tarmac a few times too often but whatever the cause, they were stiff and aching by the time I'd ridden from Peterborough to London.

After the photo session and a herbally relaxing afternoon we set off back to Peterborough. As there was little point in tearing home, we took a more steady pace back up the dear old A1 cruising along between 55 and 60mph. At those sort of speeds the 250G is a relaxing and comfortable motorcycle. I invariably find that when I'm doing a middle distance journey on a bike with much performance that I use all of that performance most of the time so it makes a pleasant change to take it easy, appreciating the countryside and arriving at the other end fresh rather than blasted into a state of terminal tiredness by a hundred mile an hour slipstream. There's much to be said in favour of small cube biking: it's such a sane way to get around.

It's cheap as well. Over the test period the Kawasaki achieved an overall consumption figure of 64mpg which is amazing really even if my own SR500 regularly betters that figure by a couple of units or so. Even thrashed hard the consumption only dropped to 60mpg and that's not about to cause serious weight loss to your wallet.

Still on the cost theme, it's gotta be cheaper to maintain a single simply because there's only one of everything to replace in the event of metallurgical catastrophes. Routine servicing is much simpler too, like only two valves to set up, one carburettor and so on. The more you look at it the more sense it makes especially if you live in town and only want to undertake lengthy two wheeled trips occasionally. ('Scuse me, this is *The Biter* isn't it?)

The times I look forward to most in this job, apart from 5pm on a Friday, are the regular

blasts to the MIRA test track at Nuneaton where we subject test bikes to all manner of brutal abuse in the name of the Search for Truth and Better Journalism aided by free petrol and expense account lunches.

Usually of course it pisses with rain on the appointed day, the timing equipment and speed lights take an hour or so to warm up and we fall foul of petty bureaucrats in the employ of the people to whom we make over vast sums of money every year for the privilege of using faulty equipment.

When Barry and I set out to take the 250s however, the sun shone all day, the equipment worked first time of asking and the paunchy security man smiled benignly on us as we passed through the control gate. (Was I dreaming?)

A top speed in the seventies is no disgrace for a bike like this even if it was slightly put to shame by the truly surprising 91 point something mph that the Honda RS250 managed.

The ride back from Nuneaton is often memorable for the occurrence of illegal acts of unbridled lunacy that take place on the way and this time round was no exception. In fact, because the bike was a 250 and therefore gave a feeling of security along the lines of 'Well, this one's not fast enough to be dangerous', I nearly caught a nasty cold on two occasions. The first occurred when a persistent but rather erratic GSX250 owner tried to get the drop on me going into a roundabout. Like all dedicated racers of the street I took the outside line aiming for the central kerb of the roundabout, the object being to close the gate firmly on the pursuer thereby forcing him to take the outside line and allow the same thing to happen on the way out, or to give up all together. All very fine in theory but thanks to the low power on tap, instead of merely cutting out the opposition I nearly legged the poor sod off onto the old green circle.

Sorry whoever you were. Apart from that though the bike went down onto its line quickly without twitching and held the line in the same unruffled manner.

The only criticism I'd make which is a very common one of mine with all bikes is that it runs out of ground clearance long before it runs out of safe leanability. This was nearly my undoing on the way home when I entered one of my favourite righthanders at a touch over seventy, quicker than I normally take it. Just about everything went down unloading the back wheel and hefting me over a few inches away from my line. 'It looked very spectacular,' said Barry later commenting on the trailing stream of sparks. Good it may be to the eye but bad for the health if you get carried away.

It's a shame that Kawasaki have built a bike that has such superb handling and then detracted from that quality by hanging its appendages too close to the ground for the rider to take full advantage of the available stability. The rational reply to that criticism is that the bike was not designed to be ridden in such a manner. To which I would sweetly reply 'Up yours' or maybe something stronger. If the potential is there you've just got to use it to the full from time to time so pick up them old feet, Kawasaki.

Like the Z250B we tested earlier this year, the G has drum brakes front and back. At the front is a twin leading shoe unit that sits neatly in the drum cast into the alloy wheel and it performs exceptionally well having the edge both in feel and stopping power over the front disc of the Honda. It neither fades nor grabs but pulls you up smoothly and as quickly as you'll ever need to avoid those solid objects placed in roadways by a Government hellbent on deleting motorcycle riders from the species living. The single leading shoe rear brake is a good complement to the front giving just enough retardation while making the locking up of the back wheel a task for the lead-booted only.

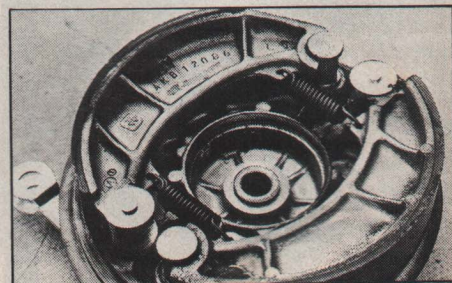
Instrumentation is neat and adequate as is the switchgear. It's a shame that the same can't be said for the headlight which is a touch pathetic. No wonder Cibie make so much money selling aftermarket light units. The clutch is delightfully easy to use, a one finger job if you like. The gearbox has that Japanese slickness that we would be appalled not to find and all the components do exactly what they've been designed to do with the least obtusation.

Apart from the gas tank that is. Sure it holds petrol and doesn't spill a drop of the precious liquid even when filled to the brim but it doesn't hold enough of the stuff to go further than ninety miles to a tankful before running on to reserve. That's a shame on those lengthy, late night journeys characterised by the lack of open filling stations. It's not a great failing for what is primarily an urban prowler but the incapacity had me sweating a couple of times on the way home.

My enjoyment of the 250G came to an abrupt end on my visit to the Earls Court show. I had a problem with the ignition switch. I dropped the bloody keys down a drain. Must have been the sight of all those swinging groodies making my hands shake. Steve Burns of Kawasaki came to the rescue with the offer of a Z750E. Ta, Steve, grov grov an' so on. I was sorry to see the bike go especially considering the vast sucks that the 750's voracious maw made on my expenses.

Were it not for the sheer, inspired brilliance of Honda's RS250 for about the same number of spondulies the Kawasaki would be the automatic choice of anyone in the market for a fuel conscious quarter litre. Now it's going to be a bit more of a difficult decision.

Jim Lindsay



Above: The exposed gizzards of the Kawasaki's twin leading shoe brake. It works a treat.

CHECKOUT



HONDA CB250RS-A

KAWASAKI Z250G

SUZUKI GS250-TT

Engine
 Bore x stroke.....
 Capacity.....
 Compression ratio.....
 Carburation.....
 Bhp @ rpm.....
 Max torque.....
 Primary drive.....
 Clutch.....
 Gearbox.....
 Electrical system.....
 Headlamp.....

sohc single-cyl
 74 x 57.8mm
 248cc
 9.3:1
 1 x 30mm CV Keihin
 26 @ 8500
 16.2 ft/lb @ 9000
 Gear
 Multiplate, wet
 5-speed
 12v 9ah battery,
 110w alternator,
 40/45w

sohc single-cyl
 70 x 64mm
 246cc
 8.9:1
 1 x 26mm CV Keihin
 19 @ 8000
 13 ft/lb @ 7000
 Chain
 Multiplate, wet
 5-speed
 12v 10ah battery
 alternator
 45/55w

dohc twin-cyl
 60 x 44.2mm
 249cc
 10.5:1
 2 x 30mm Mikuni
 27 @ 10,000
 15.2 ft/lb @ 8500
 Gear
 Multiplate, wet
 6-speed
 Alternator, 10ah battery,
 Transistorised ignition
 35/35w

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....
 Seat height.....
 Overall width.....
 Ground clearance.....
 Weight.....
 Fuel capacity.....

53in
 30in
 29in
 6½in
 295lb
 2.9gal

52½in
 29in
 28½in
 5in
 288lb
 1.8 gal

54½in
 31½in
 35in
 6¼in
 358lb
 2.4gal

EQUIPMENT

Indicators.....
 Electric start.....
 Trip odometer.....
 Steering lock.....
 Helmet lock.....
 Headlamp.....
 Others.....

Yes
 No
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Twin mirrors,
 locking
 filler cap

Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Twin mirrors
 locking filler cap
 cast wheels

Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Yes
 Twin mirrors,
 locking filler cap

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres
 front.....
 rear.....
 Brakes
 front.....
 rear.....

3.00 x 18 Yokohama
 4.10 x 18 Yokohama

2.75 x 18 Yokohama
 4.60 x 16 Yokohama

3.00 x 18 Inoue
 3.50 x 18 Inoue

9in disc
 drum

7in tls drum
 5in sls drum

11in disc
 drum

PERFORMANCE

Top speed
 prone.....
 sitting up.....
 Standing ¼-mile.....
 Speedometer error
 at indicated 30mph.....
 at indicated 60mph.....
 Fuel consumption
 overall.....
 ridden hard.....

91.4mph
 81.13mph
 15.87sec @ 76.6mph
 27.26mph
 57.21mph
 64mpg
 58mpg

80.38mph
 72.23mph
 17.11sec @ 72.03mph
 27.63mph
 54.18mph
 64mpg
 60mpg

84.81mph
 79.73mph
 16.9 sec @ 75.2mph
 28.76mph
 57.41mph
 55mpg
 51mpg

PRICE.....
 Guarantee.....

£759
 12 months unlimited mileage

£799
 12 months (24 months optional)
 unlimited mileage
 Kawasaki Motors UK, Deal
 Avenue, Slough, Berks.

£770
 6 months (12 months
 optional)
 Heron Suzuki GB,
 Beddington Lane, Croydon,
 Surrey.

Supplied by.....

Honda UK Ltd, Power Rd, Chis-
 wick, London W4

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Suzuki GS250T

THE WORD 'CUSTOM' IS ENOUGH TO turn me right off any vehicle. It conjures up pictures of jacked-up Mk.II Cortinas with furry orange dashboards and matching dice, or Lambrettas bristling with enough lights to put a Fowler's showman's engine to shame. If a machine has to be customised to look good, it's usually a disaster to begin with. So I was surprised to discover that the Suzuki GS250T Custom is just as fine a machine as its standard sister, the GSX250, tested in *Bike* in June '80.

To begin with, the styling is subtle and restrained — no unnecessary garish chrome or tacky stick-on transfers usually associated with so-called customs. The riding position, although more upright than the GSX, remains safe and comfortable. The handlebars are high and wide enough for perfect control in urban conditions without being so tall that cruising at speed becomes a drag. The seat is low, comfortable and well positioned. The shapely teardrop fuel tank tapers gently rearwards to triangular side covers which are unfortunately still those cruddy plastic efforts that we've come to expect from Japan. They're also a real bitch to fit properly.

A sturdy chrome grab rail runs around the seat unit and is secured by the top damper mounting. The huge rear light unit is a definite life-saver but two bulbs inside would make it even better. Instruments are mounted in a neat black plastic moulding and incorporate oil pressure, neutral, indicator and full beam warning lights. The finish of the paint on the frame and tank is excellent and the chrome plate is quality stuff.

The Suzuki's most endearing quality is just how much fun it is to ride. I found it difficult to ride sensibly, due mainly to the feeling of complete confidence it inspires in the rider. In town, the machine is a delight — so light and manoeuvrable that it can be slid through traffic by just shifting body weight. In fact, for commuting and riding through dense traffic, it's hard to think of a better bike.

Although very softly sprung, and with long fork travel, the Suzuki is well damped and the

handling is almost faultless, effectively destroying the myth that to handle well a machine's suspension must be rock hard. Even with its fairly wide and square 350 x 18" rear tyre, the bike can be leaned well over without losing grip. Both tyres are Inoues, a new name to me. They cling tenaciously to the road in the dry and seem to be made of a softer compound than many Japanese tyres, which should mean that their wet weather grip is also good. The rear tyre, however, showed considerable wear after only 2,500 miles. A classic case of swings and roundabouts.

Brakes are excellent and well balanced with a powerful positive disc up front and a full width drum at the rear. The disc on our test bike was noticeably scored, which shouldn't happen after such a low mileage. This also happened to the GSX and ought to have been corrected by now. The combination of good tyres and brakes gives the bike uncanny stopping ability, which again enhances its suitability for city use.

The ergonomics of the machine are just about right. Dog leg levers controlling the front brake and clutch are light and sensitive to use, while footrest and pedal positions are ideal and minor controls well thought out, though the vertically moved main/dip switch could definitely be improved. It is combined with the indicator and flasher switch and it's easy to move the switch too far down, which instead of dipping the headlight, causes it to flash at oncoming traffic. The headlight is large and bright with a good cut off on dip and two large rear mirrors provide good rear vision that's so essential when looning through traffic.

The GS250T's engine is also used in the GSX and benefits from the now familiar twin swirl combustion chamber cylinder head. Twin camshafts operate eight valves and the motor will spin freely into the red in all gears except top. It's a good idea to keep a close watch on the tachometer, when windgirding — those joyous screamings could all too easily become graunching grindings.

The Suzuki motor does have a reasonable spread of power but it's beyond about 6000rpm that the machine really takes off. This, allied to one of the slickest six speed

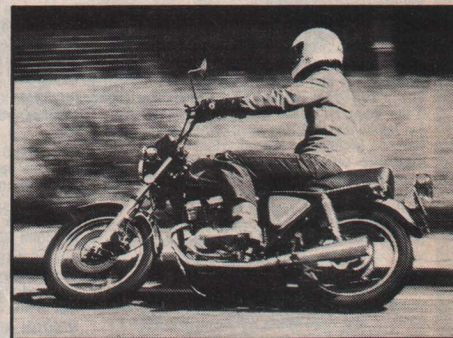
gearboxes we've tested, makes for a very tractable, versatile bike indeed. The engine and gearbox castings are superbly made, totally oiltight and nicely polished and lacquered. The twin Mikuni carburettors open smoothly and the motor has no annoying flat spots anywhere in the rev range. Our test bike did, however, suffer from stalling but this was almost certainly due to being badly set up.

The GS250T has a powerful electric start which spins the engine freely — just as well, as no kick start is fitted. Choke is always needed in the mornings or after cooling down, and the choke lever is on the left hand side of the carbs. Being situated under the petrol tank it's easy to forget to turn it off, 'specially when you're half asleep.

To me, the GS250T is proof that in the 250 bracket, modern is definitely best. It's clean, quiet, stylish, economical (at worst 50mpg), fast, and above all fun. It has a few niggling faults such as the side panels and dip switch, but if a perfect bike were to be built, we'd all be out of a job here.

How boring old veggies can still happily plod around on 250cc BSAs, Nortons, Triumphs etc, and how others can be conned into paying grossly inflated prices for that old 'mystique', I just don't know. Next time you see an oily smokescreen preceded by an ageing Brit 250, why not flag him down, carefully peel away his blinkers and offer him a ride on your GS250T? You'll probably make a friend for life.

Patrick Smith



Half A Dozen

Of The Other

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be well acquainted with the markings on their dipsticks, if you'll pardon the expression. Fuel is lost in three different ways. Primarily through the carbs in the normal way at 34mpg if ridden hard, then also through the fuel cap if the tank is full and the braking hard, and lastly from around the transparent plastic bowls on the fuel taps. When the engine is hot and the bike stationary and not being cooled by the wind, the plastic distorts and copious amounts of fourstar can drip to the ground if the taps aren't turned off. The

importers are aware of almost all the problems that I've mentioned and with the good level of communication they enjoy with the factory, I'm confident that they'll jointly get'em all sorted. But I've got to tell it like it is . . .

£2799 is a lot of bread even for this shapely lump of Italian hardware, but there is now a twelve month unlimited mileage warranty, and spares prices are competitive. The unique duplex rear chain for example, cost about forty quid, no more than a conventional chain for a big bike, and it requires very little adjustment.

The Benelli 900 isn't really a tourer. It wouldn't make much of a racer and it blatantly isn't suited to commuting tasks. So it must be a play bike for the financially fortunate, sort of like a Harley Sportster only different. One thing's for sure, it'll bring out

the poseur in you, and that might just be what you need.

Sam W Totter

