


bike

DECEMBER 1978 50p

A motorcyclist wearing a white helmet and black leather jacket is riding a silver and blue motorcycle on a paved road. The motorcycle has a large round headlight and orange turn signals. The background shows a landscape with trees and hills under a blue sky.

**Speeding
in Scotland,
England,
France,
Italy
and America**

**XS1100 vs CBX1000
Giant Test**

bike

No. 69 DECEMBER '78

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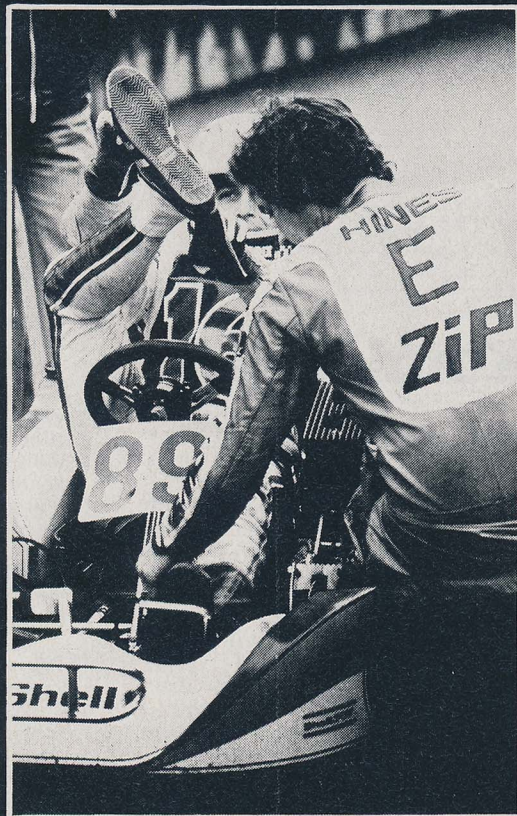
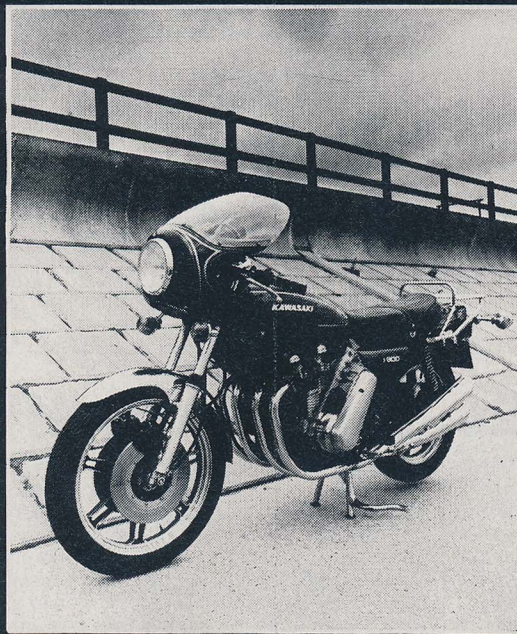
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ULTIMATE is a highly overworked word in the late 1970s, but you have to agree that a clash between Yamaha's XS1100 and the Honda CBX1000 has to be, well, some kind of ultimate Giant Test. Both machines are — as we have coyly hinted in the headline — monsters of the motorcycle world. A mere mention of the Yamaha's weight (632lb fuelled up) or of the Honda's claimed horsepower (105bhp) should be enough to convince anyone that these are the two leviathans of heavy metal biking.

We reckoned that Honda's six would come across as a balls-out sportster, while Yamaha would convince us that they have produced the first, the last, the only official All-American Land Cruiser tourer. But more importantly we wanted to know whether — after attempting to shed all preconception and prejudice — either of these machines has any meaning in the real world of motorcycling. And if not, then why not?

The Incredible Hulk Meets Captain Honda

HONDA CBX 1000

LIFE after CBX will never be quite the same. No more terrifying cornering acrobatics; gone are the 10,000 revs that assailed the ears with a whistle-like exhaust; silenced, the insane laugh that gurgled from beneath my Bell. Hell dammit, for those two CBX-saturated weeks life was real interestin', if a little hazardous. Days after returning the bike to Honda's Chiswick HQ, I still roamed the office ('orming abaht' is the quaint Lincolnshire expression used by Sanderson), looking for excuses not to write.

FIRST time I rode one of those godawful Tiger Cubs at a tender, pimple-ridden age, I almost lost control of the thing while being a little cackhanded turning in the road. It was the most powerful thing I'd ridden during that frightening, incident-filled first year of biking and it made a lasting dent on an easily impressed ego. It was with similar trepidation that I approached the CBX. Wasn't this the direct descendent of the famous 297cc-6 racer, Hailwood's favourite bike? From the cliché-sodden newspaper reports I digested each Wednesday along with the rest of the British motorcycling world, I understood it to have '... awesome power ... an aura which overshadows all ... six cylinders of pure one-upmanship.' It even ruled okay.

We were led to believe that anyone with less ability than a national level road racer would be a public menace on the CBX, on his ear with the slightest untoward twitch of the throttle. Sitting astride the bike for the first time, it seemed a monster jump from the bike I'd been riding just previously, Laverda's 1200, itself no sloped. Swallowing my apprehension and almost ODiNG in the process, that initial ride on the CBX confirmed all suspicions. It's excessive in every direction: size, weight, power, speed ... most especially power and speed. It'll accelerate you up beyond your personal riding limits and drop you — blap! — into a situation of the highest brain-fazing anxiety.

Despite my manic desire not to break any more bones, I found myself elevated to a speed level I'd consider dangerous if I saw it written on paper. So might other, more, er, official types ... Take it that 100mph is just a ten second blast from a standing start. Specials apart, the CBX will zap anything on the road, given the rider's desire to do just that. No production car could stay with it up to 100mph though there are a few (many thousand pounds dearer) that would start to inch past then. And just as nothing can live with its acceleration, so that front view of engine cannot be ignored. Honda have not only produced a bike that goes like a demented dingbat, it looks as though it goes like a ... And that's where Kawasaki have blundered with their recently-announced six. With that huge black radiator obscuring their engine, it could be just another four, albeit a big one.

Two incidents provoked a surprising internal reaction such as I've never felt towards a non-European motorcycle. Coincidentally, both occurred while en route to and from live

music emporiums, a nasty habit rarely attributed to anyone living in Peterborough. The first was while circulating London's maze-like Covent Garden rehabilitation zone looking for the Rock Garden venue (exorbitantly priced on a Saturday night I might warn you). Stopping at the head of a red light queue(!), a Ducati 860GT rider opposite gesticulated wildly to his pillion that the CBX was 47 million times wider than his Duke. Since I holed the lights and was shifting second at eight grand before his pedantic little mind had got into gear, I'll forgive him his trespasses, but not those of the creep outside our local solitary Friday night entertainment establishment. 'Not for me,' was this fink's opening statement. 'What d'yer ride, sunshine,' the bile already rising in my alimentary tract. 'Well, I've a Ford Esc ...' Exiting with a squeal of rear tyre and a crescendo of revs left him in a suitably crushed mental condition. I hope.

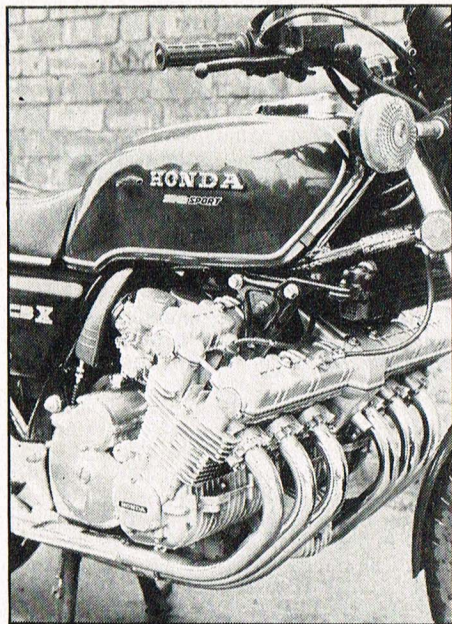
It's just too easy and tempting to write off the CBX as a gargantuan monster with no place in biking — and if Honda hadn't taken the whole deal so seriously and produced such a together package, I'd agree. Having decided upon a straight six, Honda then concentrated upon two linked subjects: keeping the weight and bulk of the engine to a minimum, and making the thing handle. The styling and finish of the machine evolved from the designer's slavish adherence to the function of the bike — as an out and out sportster.

The battle of the engine bulge was won with the use of a 'halfway' shaft between the crank and the clutch. Most conventional multis have an alternator on one end of the crank

and the ignition timing setup on the other. This adds precious inches which Honda could not afford — with the six cylinders in line, it was already two feet across. The idler shaft, as it's known, is driven by a massive Hy-Vo chain — that's the trade name for an inverted tooth chain — and in turn drives the alternator rotor (through its own clutch to protect it from the engine's staggering rates of acceleration), the transistorised ignition and powers the clutch. For good measure the starter motor also engages on this shaft. The oil pump is chain driven from the back of the clutch.

The top end of the engine is complex because of the amount of hardware up there, but conventional in that it uses well established principles. Four valves per cylinder (or three with the 250/400s) is a Honda favourite while the valves and tappets are similar to those used by Kawasaki in the Z1000. The inlet and exhaust cams are each split in half for ease of manufacture and coupled at the drive sprocket. The exhaust cam is driven direct from the centre of the crank by another Hy-Vo chain and the inlet cam has another chain connecting it with the exhaust cam — unlike the XS1100 which has one long chain. Leicester dealer Ken Ives who serviced the bike half way through the test confirmed that checking and adjusting the tappet clearances (by means of inserting shims) is no more difficult than on any other multi — it just takes longer. Honda specify four hours in their servicing time quotas and it takes all that. Incidentally, that 3,000 mile service cost £40 and failed to cure a clutch rattle. Not Ken Ives' fault, it is due to more than just poor adjustment and seems to be the one audible mechanical malady of an





Above: the engine is suspended by those huge steel brackets which also support the oil cooler. The rocker box cover is one piece casting.

otherwise quiet engine.

The bore and stroke are well oversquare at 64.5 x 53.4mm and it is this wide bore that allows optimum use of the four valve design. In other words, there's room to have the valves operating at the most efficient gas flow angle without risk of tangling. The racing heritage of the engine has been carried right through to the feel of the power delivery. The revs just soar as soon as 6,000rpm is reached — and that's when you have to be careful in accelerating out of bends, especially if the surface is poor. It's not that it's slow below 6,000rpm — there's massive torque being developed right from 2,000 — just that here's a motorcycle that for once, is intended to be ridden balls-out. It's a complete turnaround for Honda, that's for sure.

They learnt the technology for the six way back in 1964 when late in the season, they unveiled the six cylinder 250cc to help Jim Redman, then their number one rider, combat the super fast RD56 Yamaha twin of Phil Read. The 250-6 gave an astonishing 53bhp at 16,500rpm and with an eight-speed gearbox was estimated to have a top speed of 150mph. Redman first used the bike at Monza where its superior speed would be advantageous. Unfortunately it was no fairy tale debut and the bike overheated, allowing Read to pass.

Although Redman went on the next year to

notch the first 100mph plus TT lap on a 250, it was Hailwood who took the six to greater glory, especially in 1967 when it was enlarged to 297cc. Then it produced 65bhp at 17,000rpm on a bike weighing just over 250lb. And that was without the benefit of the 1970s frame, suspension and tyre technology. That bike never handled well but it's difficult to fault the CBX. The frame is unconventional for Honda. The engine is suspended from a maze of tubing in classic triangulated fashion around the steering head, and which projects untidily from beneath the front of the tank. The two massive lugs bolted to the cylinder head are heavily gusseted and exposed as they are, reinforce the impression of function-first. The oil cooler, necessary because of the small amount of oil carried in the shallow sump, is bolted also to these front mounts.

It's only at the rear end of the bike that Honda seem to have misjudged — and even this only shows under extremes such as decelerating through a bend. The swinging arm has surprisingly little gusseting and pivots on plastic bushes. Both Kawasaki and Suzuki have realised the need for more substantial rear fork hinging with needle rollers on the Z1000 series and GS1000. A similar move would perhaps solve a disconcerting looseness about the rear end of the CBX. The rear shock absorbers, despite the provision of adjustment of damping rates as well as spring preload, are not as effective as the front forks. The FVQ dampers ('Fades Very Quickly' said one wit) have two compression stroke settings and three rebound settings. Switching to the harder compression setting could be noticed immediately and if accompanied by moving the spring preload to the hardest of the five positions, is a definite improvement for high speed use over smooth surfaces. The rebound adjustment seemed to make little difference. However, Britain's roads aren't smooth, and neither are America's I suspect. The best compromise for solo riding was the softer compression setting and third spring notch. If I was a CBX buyer, I'd think seriously about some after-market shox.

The dual spring forks have a firm, taut feel which helps no end in making the bike steer so well. It can be flipped over from side to side with confidence, though not the gay abandon of a lightweight. No doubt the high centre of gravity is the problem here, created by the need for ground clearance. That same high C of G might also be the reason for the slight instability during the flat out top speed tests on our test strip. Admittedly, the strip — an aircraft runway — has undulations as well as a nasty bump just before the speed trap lights but while the CBX leapt around quite alarmingly, the Yamaha XS1100 was solid as a 30 ton blancmange over the same surface. However, it was a different story on the road where the CBX was so much more manoeuvrable and responsive — nimble even — than the XS. Zapping along in the 60-110mph excitement-inducing zone, the CBX wasn't easy to corner because it's still a huge motorcycle after all, but on the other hand it had no particularly bad habits such as the XS11's desire to go straight on all the time.

However, the fight for ground clearance is worth the high engine — even the tips of the crankcases are chamfered — for it's some hero who manages to touch down anything on the CBX. The problem of what to do with six exhaust pipes was solved by neatly banking two sets of three pipes down each side of the oil filter (one reason for making the sump

so shallow) and pumping them into a single silencer each side. Six tailpipes may look machismo from behind but that would not only add weight and create clearance problems but wouldn't look so cool. Neither are they necessary for the smaller and more even combustion pulses from six cylinders are easier to handle than four bigger ones. That's why the XS sounds throaty compared with the CBX. It's said that Honda engineers made the CBX sound like one of the Pratt and Whitney engine Phantom jet fighters during testing. As it is, you can make beautiful — and socially acceptable — music going through the gearbox with a range of 10,000 notes from which to choose.

Those small power pulses have two other effects: there's virtually no vibration and no transmission snatch. From as low as 2,000rpm in top, you can accelerate smoothly without a hint of a hiccup — until six grand that is. Then the CBX literally throws up screaming power. A sort of Horsepower Honk, I guess (that was in extremely bad taste — Ed). The absence of vibes is what makes the power delivery so deceptive, but in turn leaves you to concentrate on the road ahead.

In keeping with the sports tag, the riding position bumps your knees up high — almost level with the tank top — and you're leaning forward onto the forged alloy clip-on bars. These can be adjusted around the top of the fork legs so shorter or longer armed riders can be accommodated. It's not uncomfortable for longer journeys though since it gives better penetration into headwinds and relieves the arm and neck straining so often felt. The arrogant flip of the seat tail lets you know it means business and it's accordingly firm, totally unlike the XS or other, more sedate, Hondas. There there's no grab rail for the passenger, however, and that's an absolute necessity for a sub-12 second quarter-mile bike. That 11.9 second run, incidentally, was repeated several times but couldn't be improved because of wheelspin at the start. With the C of G so far forwards, it was futile to use the normal testing method of 'dumping' the clutch. We tried, but it just stood still and threatened to eat the rear tyre.

As they showed with the V-twin CX500, Honda are prepared to sacrifice some performance in the interests of rider comfort and with the CBX they have angled in the six 28mm Keihin CV carbs to accommodate the rider's knees. Ideally, of course, the six carbs should project straight out from the inlets but this would have made the airbox impossibly wide. As it is, there's a two stage air filter neatly sandwiched in the subframe. Likewise, the tank slims to an acceptable width between the rider's knees.

All around the bike there are such touches of the thinking that made a six-cylinder road bike feasible. The paring of weight wherever possible: cast aluminium fork yokes and footrests, plastic mudguards and seat base, magnesium covers over various engine ancillaries, an all aluminium clutch and the camshafts are hollow. There are no gimmicks such as indicator self-cancellers (though Yamaha's system is a definite plus) or fuel gauge though there is a voltmeter which spends all its time indicating 13.6 volts. Even the brake discs have been machined to the thinnest desirable width. Those three discs are clamped by the best brakes Honda have ever made. They persist in the floating caliper principle but the leverage ratio is such that there's more hand-lebar movement and a greater force exerted upon the caliper piston. At first, the front

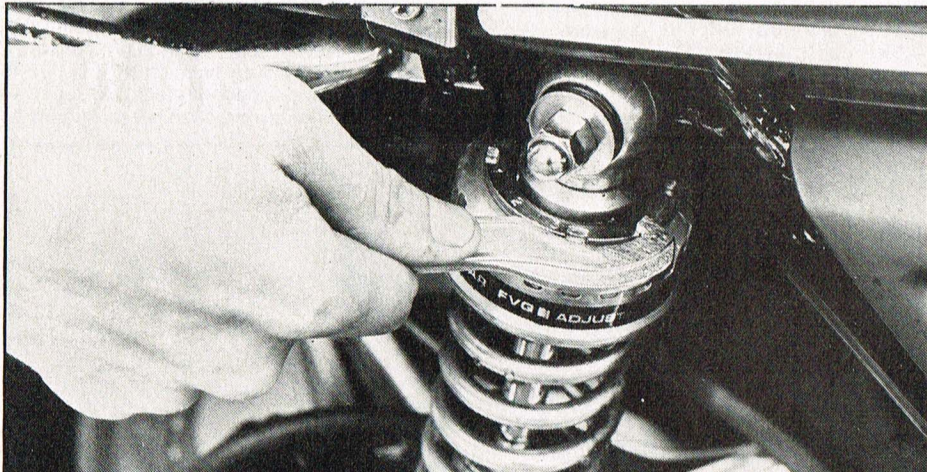
brake seems grabby because it is so efficient but you soon become accustomed to it. Again, it's a welcome change from the usual Honda-heave. They haven't scrimped on the metal for the toolkit though — it's the best ever seen from Japan.

The CBX is a welcome, if exclusive, addition to motorcycling. Honda say it's their ultimate and it's difficult to imagine anything faster though the chassis maybe improved. It's a much needed boost for Honda and bikes in general for it shows that exciting, thrilling, glamorous motorcycles can be made in Japan. I must admit that our pre-test opinions on the machine weren't exactly favourable. We reckoned it was a pointless and irrelevant demonstration of muscle-flexing which the Japanese manufacturers indulge in these days. Yet our preconceived ideas have never been further from the truth. The CBX was quite simply a marvellous revelation which has genuinely elevated the status of motorcycling. And if you want the result of this confrontation spelling out then Honda sucks Yamaha.

Few people will be able to afford to run one, but then the best is never cheap. Above all, such a motorcycle should not be condemned because it's an excess. Manufacturers like Honda need encouraging in certain directions and if the CBX helps rid us of some of the camels lower down in the range, then so be it.
Dave Calderwood

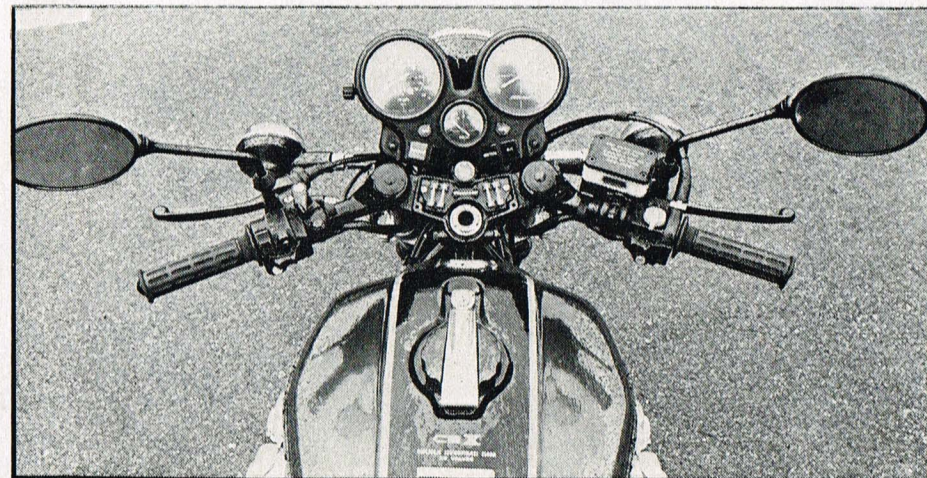
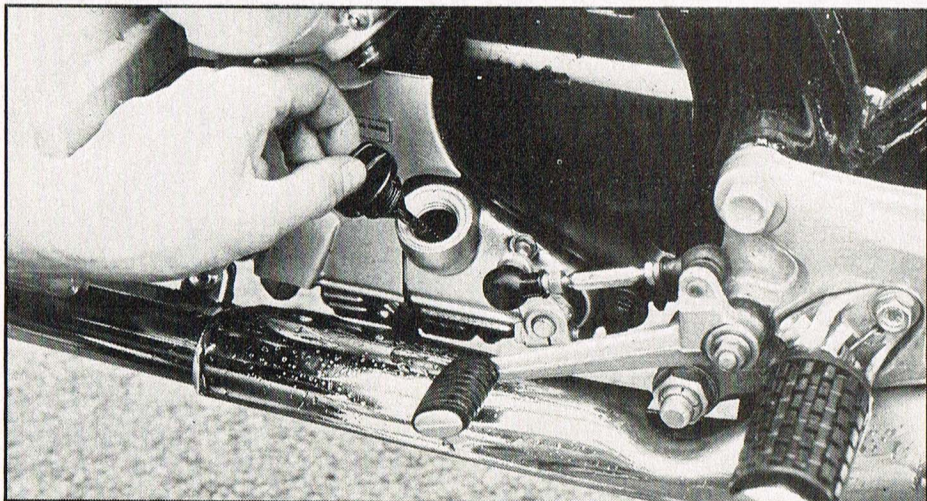


Above: Comstar wheels are all aluminium, tyres are tubeless, discs are from the GL1000 but the caliper is all new having greater leverage ratio.



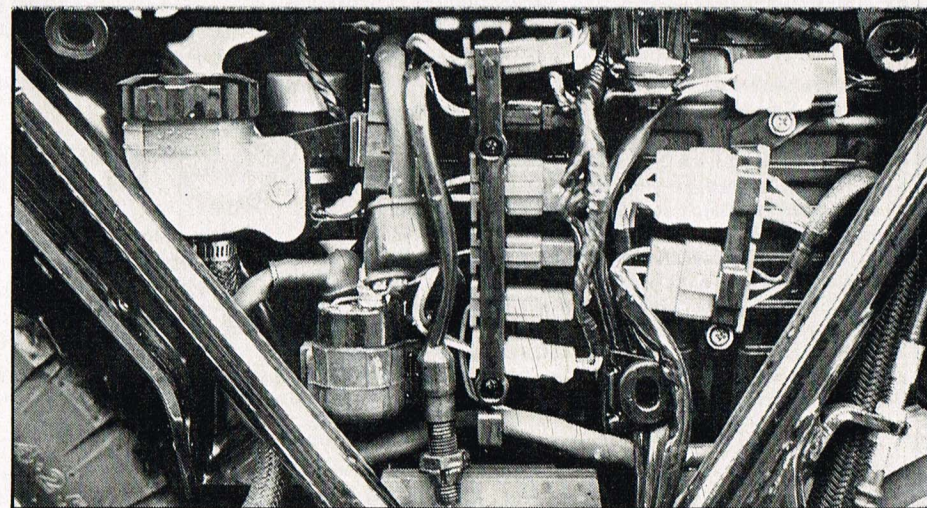
Above: the rear FVQ dampers of the CBX have three rebound settings adjusted by this ring at the top. Bump damping has two settings changed at the base.

Below: dipstick of the CBX is easily reached but doesn't say which is the high level mark. Gearchange is super slick.



Above: fuses are located under a box on the top yoke. Bars are unconventional alloy forgings and adjustable for reach. Switchgear is . . . nice.

Below: Gulp! This is the scene under the right side panel. Left is the . . . er . . . electro . . . something . . . next caption please.



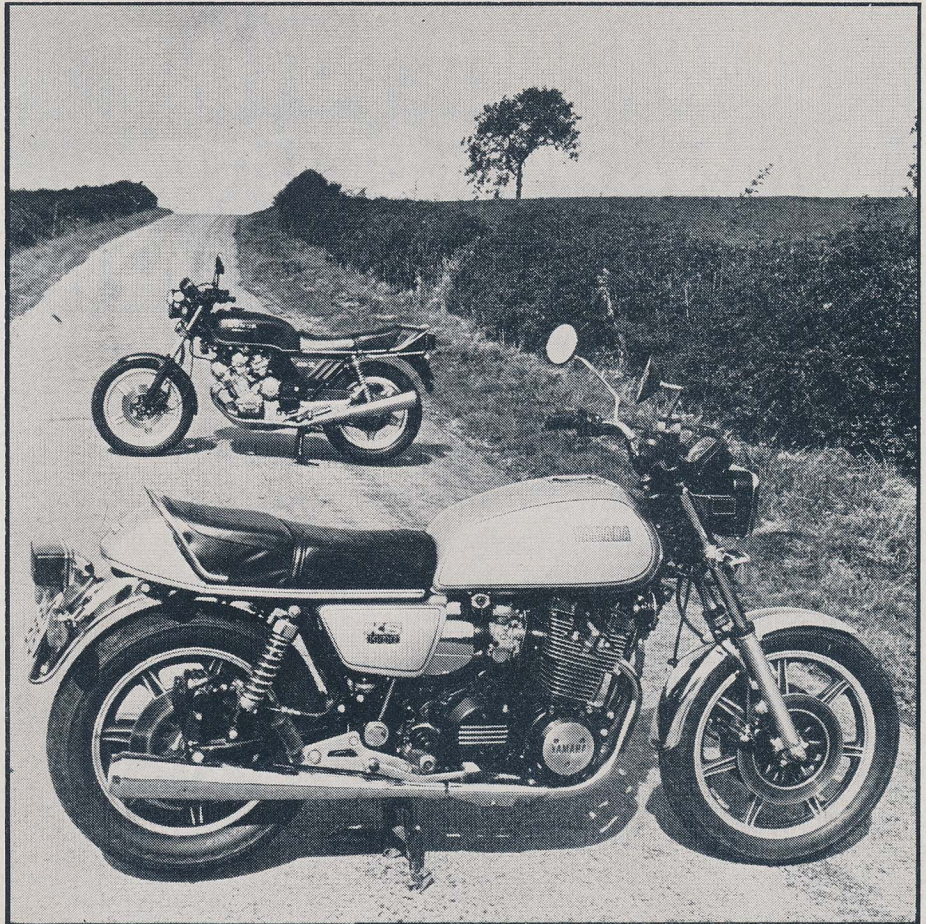
YAMAHA XS1100

SO THIS is how it happens, I thought. This is the first sign: hearing strange angry voices laden with contempt and bitterness. Definitely go and see the doctor tomorrow. Just chance a quick look round before the next bend, though. Make absolutely certain there's no-one around who could have said it. Pointless, really. At 95mph whistling through the Lincolnshire countryside all I could see was sky and fields, all I could smell was the acrid, autumnal scent of burning stubble and all I could hear were my own worries. Then halfway through the next sweeping curve of the A15 it happened again. I distinctly heard someone say 'yeuk'. But this time I felt my lips move. A warm, nervous flush of relief flooded through my body: I was only talking to myself.

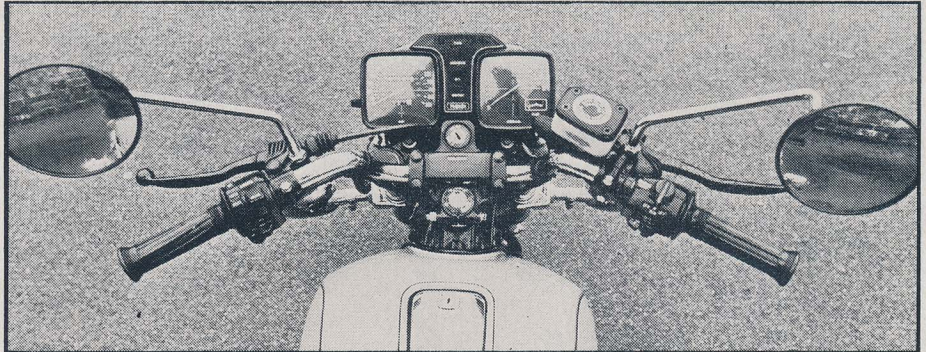
Sub-vocalising they used to call it in those dread-dreary English Phonetics seminars — talking in your head. I suppose we all do it, especially on a bike, out on the road. Hey, this feels so good. Look at that sky. Mmmm, doesn't this thing handle. Uhhhh, those thighs pressing up close, squeezing through the turns. Only rarely does this constant internal monologue break out into speech. The first time it happened to me was years ago when I hollered in involuntary rage at the woman driving the car in front. Unfortunately she had the window wound down. 'I am not a silly old cow,' she screamed back. This time the object of my displeasure remained as mute as only a piece of despised machinery can: real dumb insolence. It's a pity, for how would an XS1100 Yamaha answer the sort of almost incoherent criticism distilled in that squeezed-out 'yeuk'?

I'll declare my prejudice here and now. I disliked the XS before I'd even seen one. Reading its specification, most notably the claimed 'dry' weight, convinced me that as far as I was concerned this was a motorcycling obscenity — a mixture of completely unnecessary weight and power. Riding one briefly in the Isle of Man confirmed that this is not my idea of what a performance motorcycle should be or do. Sat behind an enormous touring fairing I felt like the driver of a JCB might if he'd got a barn door stuck on the end of his shovel. And yet I have to admit that there are some people who are in the market for this kind of motorcycle. And without a doubt employing their criteria and not my own, the Yamaha is the best of its kind — a real numero uno in the All American Land Cruiser stakes.

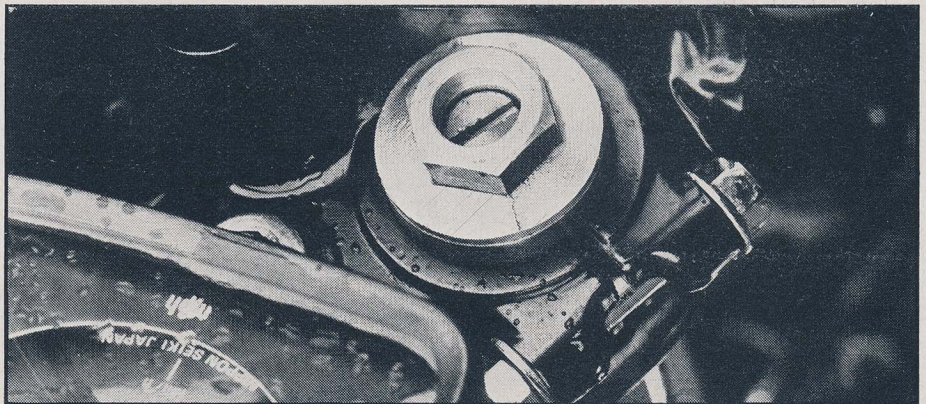
Because the XS1100 is a tourer. It is emphatically not a balls-out rider's machine in the Laverda Jota/Honda CBX mould. Yes, a bike that can turn in — although ours wouldn't — standing quarter times in the eleven-second bracket and tops out at 133mph really is a heavy metal, five-countries-in-two-days tourer. And the reason is not the provision of fairing mounts as standard or a power take-off for your early-morning shave, but 66.5ft/lb of torque developed at 6,500rpm. Now that is torque — real wrist, elbow and shoulder dislocating stuff. It compares with, for instance, a claimed 70ft/lb at 4,000rpm from a Harley FLH1200 and a mere 61.5ft/lb at



Above: And now for something completely different. Yamaha's All American Land Cruiser is more stable at high speed than the CBX but . . .



Above: tachometer of the XS is electrically powered. Gizmos include a fuel gauge, neat dog-leg levers and self-cancelling indicators. Below: front forks of the XS can have the spring preload adjusted to one of three positions by rotating this screw at the top.



YAMAHA XS1100

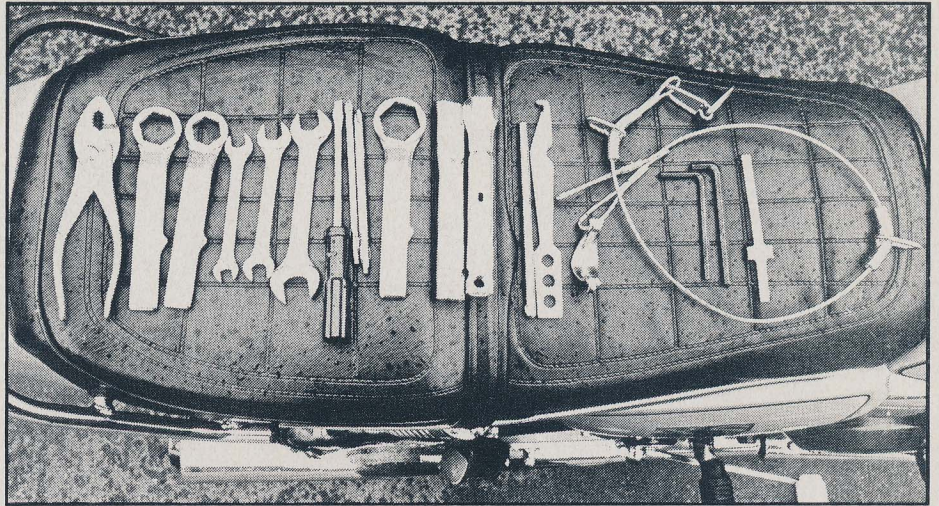
8,000rpm from the CBX. So taking the old lumbering V-twin — top speed 86mph with Light Pedal Assistance — as torque personified, Yamaha have come up with a fair helping of the substance. When you compare their torque curve with Honda's you can see that they've managed to place this power in an accessible location — mainly between 2,000 and 6,500rpm, a good 2,000rpm below the red line. And when I also tell you that 4,500rpm on the electronic tachometer equals 70mph on the speedo, you'll appreciate that chasing revs on the XS is pointless.

When the XS1100 was announced so closely upon the heels of Yamaha's 750 shaft drive triple, many folk assumed, not unreasonably, that here was merely an XS750 with an extra cylinder. But the XS1100 never has had the sort of relationship with the 750 that existed between the Trident and the Triumph twin. The Yamahas share very few common components and although their transmissions are broadly similar there are some important differences even here, and even more within the motor.

As you'll no doubt recall, the XS750 three manages to have its cake and eat it with an across-the-frame crankshaft and final drive by shaft and gears. It accomplishes this by the rather complicated expedient of adding to the driveline a countershaft which turns the power through two 90 degree angles in its path to the rear wheel. The XS1100 uses the same trick but although its primary drive also consists of an inverted-tooth Hy-Vo chain, it is taken off the centre of the crank, alongside the cam chain sprocket, instead of the right hand end. Obviously this is more satisfactory from an engineering point of view, as it dispenses with needless torsional stress.

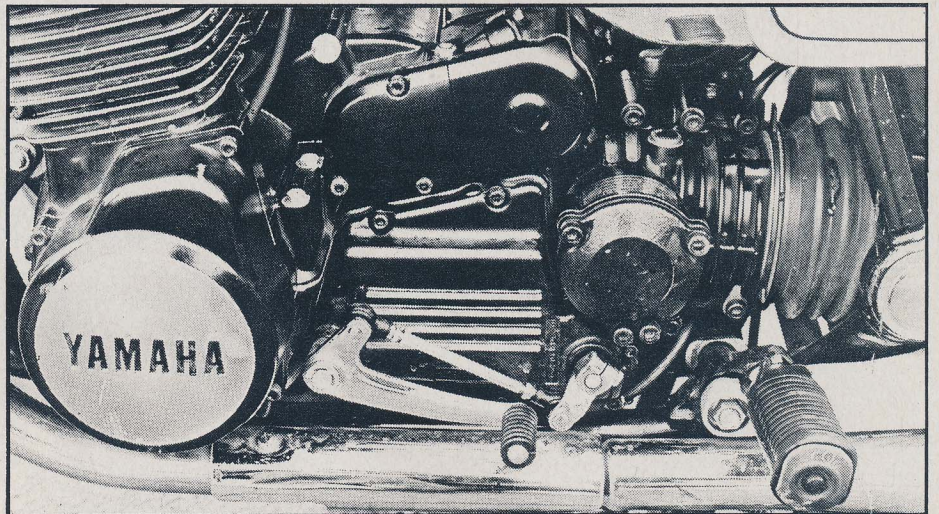
We were also informed that the whole drive train on the 1100 had been significantly strengthened to cope with the difference between the original 750's 64bhp and the 1100's 95 horses. And the feel of the transmission on both machines couldn't have been more dissimilar. Where the triple has a pleasantly light and positive five speed box and snatch-free transmission, the four has a rather clunky set of cogs and an amazing amount of slack in the final drive just waiting to be wound up. We suspect that this may be due to the different ways in which the transmission is damped.

At the top end of the 1101cc motor there is a significant difference in the shape of the cylinder heads. These are 'polyspherical' with the sort of weird contours you might normally associate with the top of a Morini's pistons. The aim is the same in both cases: more efficient combustion with the additional benefit for Yamaha of the ability to run well on just about anything down to paraffin without fouling the plugs. Even for a four this twin cam engine is remarkably smooth and very quiet. In fact the two massive silencers are joined together underneath the motor, with two of those odd little 'expansion chambers' (as used on the SR500 single) at either end of the balance pipe. It's boringly inoffensive to the ear and all you pick up on the overrun is gear whine. The automotive drone of the



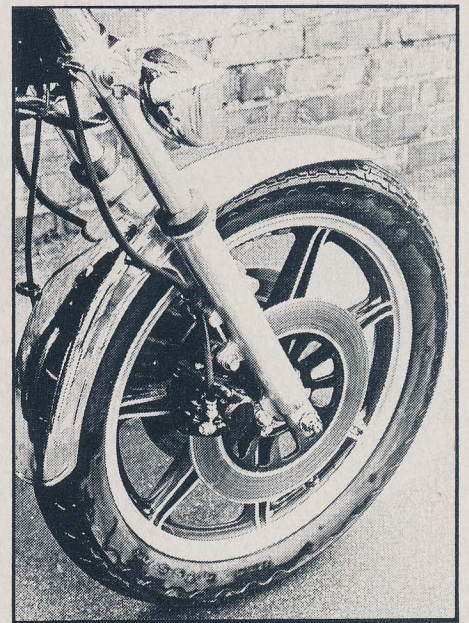
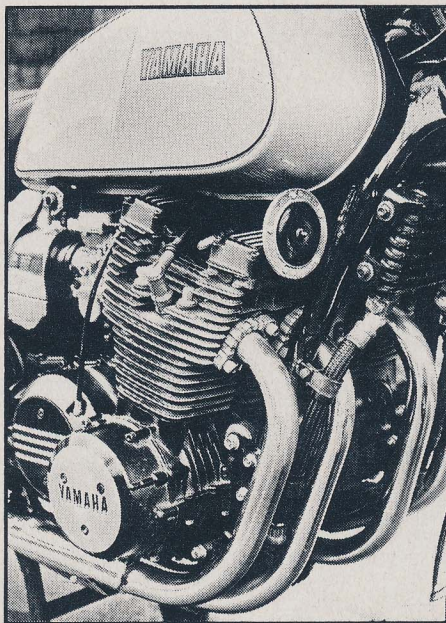
Above: toolkit of the XS includes a bit of wire to aid changing the rear wheel. Talk about Heath Robinson . . . No, that's not a crucifix.

Below: that end cap is where the drive is turned 90 degrees for the shaft. From there rearwards, it's based on BMW design.



Below: oil cooler of the XS looks an afterthought with its exposed, clumsy plumbing. Note kink in the tank for the rear cambox.

Below: brakes of the XS are good in the dry but useless in the wet . . . the same old story but this time they're attached to 600lb-plus.



YAMAHA XS1100

engine caused one member of staff to opine that it really belonged under the bonnet of a Ford Cortina.

The other factor contributing to the engine's smooth response under all load conditions is its ignition system. This is an inductive discharge electronic setup with a magnetic trigger but it is also linked on advance and retard to the intake manifold. This allows the ignition system to read precisely what the engine is being asked to do not just by rpm but by manifold depression as well, a much better guide to the prevailing load conditions. It is better — and you can feel the difference — than any other stock setup but it's also automotively orientated and as such adds yet more complication to a not exactly straightforward engine.

Such a brutal-looking package, with its black cases and row of 34mm carbs, is in need of some substantial support between its cast wheels. The 1100's frame is total over-engineering, consisting as it does of a massive duplex cradle braced crosswise in nine places and heavily triangulated around the steering head. This must add greatly to the machine's overall gross weight. A little bit of imagination here might have saved the day for the 1100's weight problem but perhaps it was too much to expect. Instead, the Yamaha's salvation as a tourer is this chassis and some highly efficient if rather conventional suspension. It's a super-stable machine.

Not only does the swinging arm — which consists of a single box section on the right and the tubular drive shaft housing on the left — move on tapered roller bearings but so does the head stem. And in addition to some rather stout Kayaba shocks at the rear and Teflon-coated bushes in the front forks, the springs at the front are pre-load adjustable. Or at least they are if you can find a screwdriver with a blade broad enough to turn the screw head under the plug at the top of each fork leg. Not only does the toolkit not possess such a device but I was unable to locate one anywhere. In fact, I wasn't especially perturbed by this failure as the 1100's ride is more than acceptable with a well-damped fluid movement at the front and enough damping at the rear to cope with all but the most unexpectedly abrupt changes in road surface. However, do not confuse 'ride' with 'handling'; they are two very different things and it takes a trip on an XS1100 to really point out the differences between the two.

For my dissatisfaction with the 1100 as I sped swiftly northwards across Lincolnshire had everything to do with this very difference. I was heading for the small Yorkshire village of Hackness in the hills above Scarborough. Yamaha had invited us to go and spend a day sampling their whole range of trail bikes on the moors and heaths around Hackness and so I had selected the A15, with its wide, sweeping curves and good surface, as a fair test of the 1100's capabilities. I just packed my trail riding togs in a stuffer bag and took off.

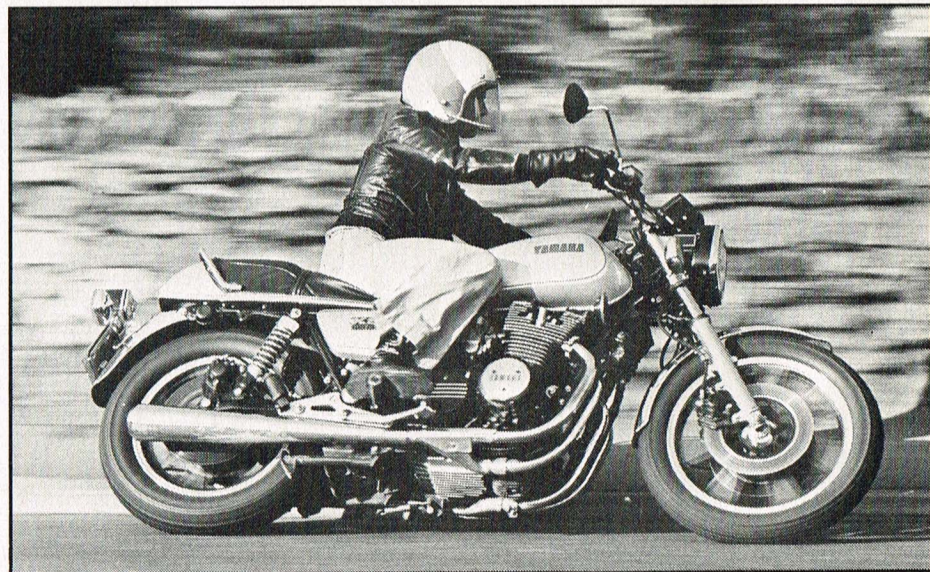
The 1100's low speed handling can only be described as feeling very odd. Some people have said that it falls into bends at very low speeds which is not quite true. Below 35mph

the bars feel heavy, tiller-like and . . . odd. It's something that you get used to after a while, something that we believe is down to the way in which the Yamaha's steering geometry is set up for high speed. Although the comparison is almost laughable, a Ducati V-twin feels much the same at similar speeds.

At rather more respectable velocities the front end switches to a neutral feel while you concentrate on putting the bike into each curve, holding it down while you stuff it through and hoping to hell that you're on the right line. You never, ever, lose the feeling that this is a big, enormously heavy, 600 pound motorcycle. Its mass does not cooperate in the act of cornering in the way that the CBX's does. At rest the Honda feels heavy, push it around and it feels even heavier. But once you're on the move it seems to shed pounds. Yamaha have not mastered this conjuring trick and the XS1100 suffers for it. Naturally it is a handful on quiet country roads but it's not much fun on fast sweepers either. And as for shutting off halfway through a turn . . . I tried it once as an experiment and I cannot recommend the experience.

The best thing I came to say and think about the 1100 was that it handled well for its weight. But it is best to treat its bulk with the respect it deserves. While they are fine in the dry, those three 11.7in discs are heart-stopping in wet weather. Approaching a set of traffic lights in Peterborough at less than 30mph I only just managed to stop with the front wheel right over the white line. Like a doomed ship the bike just glided silently onward while I lined up to go under the side of a truck.

But there are better features on the bike. It not only sports dog-leg levers and the best self-cancelling indicators in production but also clear, rectangular instruments and at last an electronic revcounter. No more silly twisting cables, no more oil leaks where they exit from the cam box. Full marks, Yamaha. Ten out of ten for the rectangular Stanley H4 headlight, too. It throws out a hard white light and a very broad and well-shaped dip beam. I appreciated details such as the locking side panel to protect the toolkit and the combined fuel cap and flap which Honda could well do to copy. A grab rail for the passenger is essential, while at last Yamaha have come up with a decent — 5.3 gallon — fuel tank. I only



wish that the XS750 on which I toured in Ireland last year had possessed such a useful receptacle. The fuel gauge set into the rev-counter is, however, far from being a gimmick if you use the 1100 hard. Definitely a gimmick are the twin horns. They are far too restrained for a bike capable of cruising at 100mph-plus for ever. And that most sensible of OE accessories seen on launch models, the anti-theft alarm mounted under the seat hump, has not been fitted to British models. Shame.

Two detail points struck us as being particularly poor. We didn't like the Kawasaki-like sight glass for checking the engine oil level. These are fiddly to use and make it too easy to overfill the motor. A dipstick is much better in our opinion, as is arranging your silencers and rear wheel spindle so that you don't have to use Yamaha's ludicrous mini-crane idea to lift the swing arm up, using the steel cable from the toolkit, just so's the wheel spindle won't foul the silencer. That's real back-to-front design. At least the guy who put the centre stand together got it the right way round. You just put some weight on the broad pad on the stand and heave gently on the lifting handle; Kawasaki please note.

If anything, my return from trailing around Yorkshire with Yamaha was more interesting than the trip up. Going I had decided to use the Humber ferry for which I had to wait two hours. This necessitated using the Yamaha rather hard once I was on dry land again. I'm convinced that my arms are now slightly longer than they were before and that the sort of roll-on power that the Yamaha provides in top would tow a caravan. With the exception of certain turbo and supercharged machines of my acquaintance the Yamaha has more mid-range clout than anything I can think of, CBX1000 included. But coming back another hack from another magazine persuaded me to tag along with him. I didn't really know the guy — or how well he could ride, more to the point — and he was on a Honda CX500. But I agreed and I'm very glad that I did.

I'd been worried about a strange vibration coming from the 1100's transmission at around 7,000rpm. As this was on the wrong side of 110mph, Yamaha PR man Steve Hackett hadn't noticed it in his ride, and our quarter mile runs finally set the clutch slipping. The vibes were just an early symptom of what was to come but happily the CX hack

and I kept below this speed. Just.

No kidding, this guy wound that CX up as if he wanted to see both rods come exploding through the sides of the crankcases. Sure I had him on power — Jeez, I should've — but there was no way I could get through the turns any faster than he could on a bike giving away 605cc and 45bhp. Okay, so he was using this 500 to the limit and he could hustle. But on the straights we were pulling up to an indicated ton and despite the Yamaha's reasonable riding position that's as much as my neck and shoulder muscles could take. I could certainly have gone rather quicker behind a fairing but that ride hammered home a very important point. The CX500 has many of the features you'll find on the XS1100, like shaft drive, smoothness and general touring appeal. It's also lighter and costs a lot less than £2,110. Really, it's no good having it if you can't use it and there's no way that you can use all that the XS1100 has on offer.

So who is this bike aimed at? It certainly isn't aimed at traditional European riders, despite the large number who have bought it. The guy it's really out to flatter lives in the States. You'll find him, smiling inanely, inside the covers of the *US Road Rider* magazine. He wants a big, big bike. After all, he plans to load it up with a barn-door fairing from Vetter or Bates or Pacifico, with panniers you could pack a corpse into and a camping trailer just to finish it off. Sounds absolutely revolting doesn't it? But you should see these guys. They think it's great. They think it's, uh, adventurous. My god, they probably even think it's motorcycling.

The XS1100 is for them. They will love its dandy touring features. They will revel in its ugliness and croon over its power as they roll slowly across Nevada or Maine, stopping to take their awful photographs of 'my bike and trailer outside the . . .' I'm absolutely certain that these people are nice law-abiding citizens. I just know that they don't kick ass and smoke dope and get bikers a bad name. They ride around in long cavalcades at 40 miles an hour feeling so noble and self-righteous 'cos they are the good guys. This is their kind of motorcycle and they can keep it.

I really do wonder where this crazy helter-skelter is taking us as manufacturers seem unable to look beyond the statistics of top speed and quarter mile times. Don't they know that some of these behemoths are not terribly pleasant to ride if you aren't Clark Kent? After the XS1100 I won't lose any sleep if I never get to ride a Z1300.

Meanwhile, I await with lively interest the arrival of a new British motorcycle with a swept volume of 1200cc, weighing less than 450lb and capable of 130mph. Keep your fingers crossed. It might just make one or two people look ever so slightly silly.

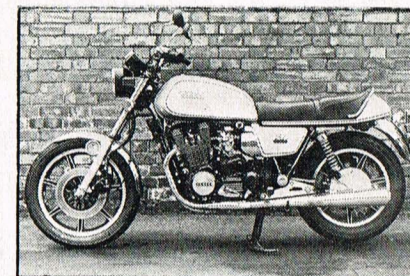
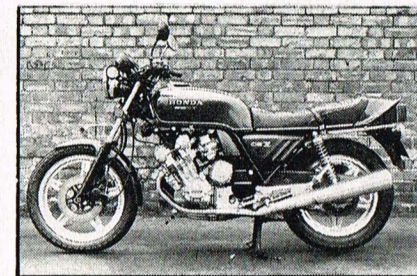
Peter Watson

SUMMARY

A RELEVANT argument against the very existence of either of these bikes came up when we rang two insurance companies, posing as recent buyers. The first company, Devitt DA, refused to quote at all saying that the CBX and XS11 were 'too expensive and too fast'. We later found that they will quote if you write but it seems they're not interested in the business. A considerably different attitude was voiced by Norwich Union whose local

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CHECKOUT



	HONDA CBX1000	YAMAHA XS1100
Engine	dohc 24-valve six	dohc four
Bore x stroke	64.5 x 53.4mm	71.5 x 68.6mm
Capacity	1047cc	1101cc
Compression ratio	9.3:1	9.2:1
Carburation	6 x 28mm Keihin	4 x 34mm Mikuni
Bhp @ rpm	105 @ 9,000	95 @ 8,000
Max torque @ rpm	61.5ft/lb @ 8,000	66.5ft/lb @ 6,500
Primary drive	Hy-Vo chain	Hy-Vo chain
Clutch	Multiplate, wet	Multiplate, wet
Gearbox	5 speed	5 speed
Electrical system	12v alternator, 18ah battery, CDI ignition	12v alternator, 20ah battery, electronic ignition
Lighting	50/60w H4 headlight	60/55w H4 headlamp
DIMENSIONS		
Wheelbase	60in	62in
Seat height	32in	31.5in
Overall width	29in	30in
Ground clearance	6.5in	5in
Weight (with 1gal fuel)	572lb	598lb
Fuel capacity	4.4gal	5.3gal
EQUIPMENT		
Trafficators	Yes	Yes
Electric starter	Yes	Yes
Trip mileometer	Yes	Yes
Steering lock	Yes	Yes (2)
Helmet lock	Yes	Yes
Headlight flasher	Yes	Yes
Others	Twin mirrors, voltmeter, locking petrol cap, Comstar wheels, adjustable damping on rear shock absorbers.	Cast wheels, shaft drive, self-cancelling indicators, locking fuel cap/side panel, twin mirrors, twin horns, power take-off, fuel gauge, electronic revcounter, adjustable spring preload on front forks.
CYCLE PARTS		
Tyres		
(front)	3.50 x 19in Dunlop (t'less)	3.50 x 19in Bridgestone
(rear)	4.25 x 18in Dunlop (t'less)	4.50 x 17in Bridgestone
Brakes		
(front)	2 x 10.9in discs	11.7in twin disc
(rear)	11.6in disc	11.7in disc
PERFORMANCE		
Top speed		
(prone)	135.13mph	133.33mph
(sitting up)	126.58mph	125.00mph
Standing ¼ mile	11.93sec	12.32sec
Speedometer error		
at indicated 30mph	30.15mph	32.05mph
at indicated 60mph	59.76mph	58.71mph
Braking distance		
from 30mph	28ft	30ft
from 60mph	128ft	135ft
Fuel consumption		
overall	33mpg	37mpg
ridden hard	28mpg	34mpg
PRICE	£2,800 inc VAT	£2,110 inc VAT
Guarantee	12 months/unlimited mileage	6 months/6,000 miles
Supplied by	Honda UK Ltd., Power Road, Chiswick, London W4 5YT	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey

MIDNIGHT COWBOYS

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more akin to a ten lap sprint around Brands than the beginning of a couple of thousand miles of high speed motoring, with riders cutting each other up, smoking tyres and generally getting a move on. Pit action started on lap number one when some unfortunate pulled in with his Kawasaki firing on three. Mechanics pounced and started tearing the fairing off, they and the hundred or so like them wouldn't stop until the sun was well past its zenith the next day.

Almost immediately one of the most controversial bikes in the race took the lead, a full race Yamaha OW 31 ridden by the very slick Patrick Pons and Christian Sarron, backed by the highly professional Sonauto Gauloise team. The bike was so much faster than even the super trick Honda RCB of Leon/Chemarin that everybody went round muttering "It can't last". But it did, the strong Yamaha contingent of Team Bike were euphoric as were the French crowd, even I was happy as the Ducati of Estrosi/Boinet was trundling round in third place giving little away to the leaders yet sounding very relaxed. Rule number one in 24 hour races is that nothing stays the same for long and at around 7 o'clock the Ducati team manager could be seen playing with his calculator, then a board went out saying "allez +500" which presumably meant get a move on, use another 500 revs. The red and silver Duke, similar to Hailwood's Island machine, really started to go, Boinet picking up scuff marks on his knees he was leaning so much.

Just as the sky reddened in the setting sun, one of the midfield Hondas blew a gearbox seal on the Courbe de Signes, a sharp right hander at the end of the half mile straight. The next six machines went down in clouds of dust and glass fibre chips as they braked from 160mph. The Ducati made it, just, there was oil on the next bend too, down it went sliding for a hundred yards. Boinet, bleeding profusely, held down by three marshals and a doctor to stop him trying to push the bike to the pits. That is the spirit of the Bol, nothing matters except keeping going, fast.

When the velvet black night fell, the village really started boppin'. The village is half open

air pub, half restaurant and half racing and sporting motorcycle show. I know that makes 1½ and that's because it's more than anyone can deal with. Food of every kind beckons you with succulent aromas rising from a thousand charcoal grills; fine wines and gassy beers being consumed with no thought for the morning; stunning French beauties wander around in sprayed on leathers and open motocross boots, inserting large hot-dogs into their delicately pursed lips; Star Wars fairings or flash crash helmets can be bought at every other stand, as can alloy swinging arms, trick cylinder heads, even complete racing frame kits.

Midnight comes and goes, the Pons/Sarron Yam is still in front, now three laps ahead of the Leon/Chemarin Honda; the V6 Laverda is still going but has troubles and is in 35th place; a Guzzi and a couple of Kawasakis are having deep engine parts replaced in the pits; Dave Emde is keeping himself amused and the crowd amazed by doing hundred yard wheelies down the start finish straight. Team Bike is plucking juicy roast potatoes from the glowing embers of the fire, everybody has butter dripping off their chins, more than half the beer has gone.



Dawn breaks in technicolour glory, the pit road is stained with oil and petrol, the mechanics stare vacantly into the middle distance, their tools not quite as neatly laid out as the night before. Patrick Pons has had his leathers cleaned with switch cleaner, he looks immaculate but exhaustion make his handsome features a mask. They are six laps ahead. Suddenly it's all over, a broken main has chewed up the crankcases of the OW31 after more than 2500 kilometres of throttle to stop racing. Nobody says "I told you so". Leon/Chemarin take the lead followed by Luc/Rigal and Stan Woods/Charlie Williams — Honda rules. At nine am, 36 out of 73 bikes are still running; Team Bike drinks orange juice and eats aspirins; six hours to go. The sun gets unbearably hot; the stands along the start/finish straight fill up; it's still Honda first, second, third. Japanese mechanics in the Honda pit cease being inscrutable and start to pray. Mistakes are being made along the pit road: fountains of petrol spurt, red hot brake pads are dropped, but the crowd is getting noisier, the teams quieter. Three o'clock approaches, Hondas number one, two and three form up in that order and that does it — the crowd go wild and surge across the track, it's four minutes to three but who cares. Nobody gets to cross the finishing line, barred by a wall of ecstasy. Team Bike is right there, who cares if there's a thousand mile ride home, I'd walk to the Bol if I had to.

YAMAHA XS1100

Continued from page 35

office quoted £90 per year for a fully comprehensive policy for a 25-year-old, living outside London, with no accidents or conviction to his credit. It appears that any bike over 350cc receives the same treatment under the famous 'Rider' policy. Head Office comment was that if they got all the bad risks then they'd have to change their ideas.

This sums up the place that the CBX and XS11 occupy in everyday biking: outside. Neither should be considered by anyone with a normal income or normal biking needs. But that's not to say neither is a useful addition to motorcycling. We've always needed such

glamour bikes — Broughs, Vincents, Harleys. It's clear though that the Yamaha is for the long distance tourer. The sort who takes intergalactic holidays, eating a thousand miles a day and who can afford the fuel. For straight line comfort and effortless speeding, there's little to match it.

The CBX is different. It's unusual these days for its hellfire, uncompromising performance — and that's a welcome change. But it would soon be spoiled as a ride to work hack or for sustained long distance cruising. Luggage racks and panniers just aren't for this bike. It's built for the guy who loves going very fast — and who can afford another form of personal transport for daily commuting.

Perhaps the most worrying thought, particularly with the Yamaha, is that 130mph, 600lb motorcycles are available to all kinds of idiot riders so long as they can rake up the 15 per cent deposit. Can they also afford to keep such powerful machines in top rate mechani-

cal condition and shod with new tyres, chains and disc pads which tend to be consumed with alarming rapidity?

There are features on each worth noting for future models, however: the Yamaha's front forks with its smooth, stiction free action and adjustable spring preload; its shaft drive; its straight line stability (though this is at the cost of manoeuvrability). From the CBX there's its adherence to function as the major design criteria; the imaginative use of technology to overcome the physical barriers of a six cylinder bike; the tubeless tyres and adjustable rear dampers.

For most of us, either bike is beyond our finances so perhaps we should be content to regard them as the pinnacle of the art of building this kind of motorcycle. And to count our spare loot as we potter home, safely, in control, on our 500s and 750s . . . Bollocks! I can hear you shout. I know, I know! I want one too!