

## MINITEST:

# Honda CB125S

*Life among bookbags and moto-troglodytes.*



PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID CLARK

### Honda's high-school hot rod built for kids

*The big bike on campus has skinny tires and a little engine.*

• There is life at the lower end of the motorcycle evolutionary scale. Despite being invisible to the eyes of Z-1 addicts, moto-troglodytes like the CB125S provide transportation for kids with bookbags who either can't afford anything else or who are denied freeway-legal motorcycles (at least 15.5 horsepower or 150cc) by a conspiracy of civil authorities and parents.

The Honda CB125S has a four-stroke engine, qualifying it as a rarity even at this extreme end of the evolutionary scale. The single-overhead-cam one-lunger has its roots in the CB100, the bike that replaced the famous step-through of the mid-Sixties as Honda's econo-transport model. In 1973 the 100 was advanced closer to *real* motorcycle status with a 22cc displacement boost. It was further legitimized by the addition of a mechanically actuated front disc brake in 1974. In 1976 a 2mm increase in carburetor size and 2cc more displacement brought 70-mph speeds within reach. At the same time, the intake tract was split in half by means of a horizontal divider inside the intake manifold. This effectively created separate low-speed and high-speed intake tracts, thereby improving throttle response at low rpm.

For 1979, the CB125S has changed once

again. A front drum brake from the XL125 replaces the mechanical disc and the seat has a new shape and texture. The footpegs have been moved back to accommodate larger riders and the handlebar switch wires are now routed outside the bars so that simpler, faster switch/bar replacement can be implemented. There is 10mm more travel available from the '79 model's front fork and a pair of Honda's FVQ shocks are hooked up at the rear.

To the average citizen accustomed to having a bank of cylinders at his disposal, a ride on the CB125 is a strange new experience. With a handful of throttle and the engine buzzing like a runaway air compressor, you're tempted to radio the engine room for more speed. Even so, every time I brought it home I was tempted to tuck it under my arm and carry it indoors to announce, "Look what followed me home. Can I keep it?" After a while, I even found it pretty amusing that the CB125S was too light to trigger the automatic switch at traffic lights, forcing me to press the pedestrian crosswalk button to get across the intersection.

Even so, there is some fun to be had on this motorcycle, largely in the area of fulfilling your Angel Nieto 50cc GP road racing fantasies on

the winding roads around campus. Despite the skinny tires, you can tilt the CB125 over without fear until the sparks fly.

The unfortunate realities of 125cc transportation units are brought home, however, as soon as you dart into any metropolitan traffic. Suddenly the rusty, battle-scarred flanks of delivery vans take on a new significance. You see, while this bike functions wonderfully on the lightly-traveled streets where everyone wears a bookbag, it gets sucked under in real traffic. While you can learn to accept that handicap, it certainly makes you feel vulnerable. Furthermore, the CB125S lacks the throttle response that enables similarly-sized two-stroke bikes to squirt out of harm's way. You have to slip the Honda's clutch much more than on most bikes to get away from stop signs, and you must rev its little heart out just to keep up with routine inner-city traffic. Moreover, once you get the CB125S going, its drum brakes don't stop the bike with much authority.

After a while, it becomes clear to me that moto-troglodytes like the CB125S are really meant to be transportation, not motorcycles as I know them. And as such, the Honda is far more fun than any moped, not to mention being safer. The problem lies in the bike's price. A year ago, it could compete against mopeds at a price of \$725. It now costs \$898 because of the dollar-yen situation.

When you've got tuition to pay or the law prevents you from owning a *real* motorcycle, the CB125S is a pretty good deal. But to an enthusiast, this Honda will only whet your appetite for a full-size bike a little farther along the evolutionary scale. —Michael Jordan



### HONDA CB125S

**IMPORTER:** American Honda Motor Co.  
100 W. Alondra Boulevard  
Gardena, California 90247

**CATEGORY:** street

**SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:** \$898

#### ENGINE

Type	four-stroke vertical single
Valve arrangement	single overhead cam
Bore and stroke	56.5 mm x 49.5mm
Displacement	124cc
Carburetion	one 24mm Keihin slide/needle
Gearbox	5-speed
Final drive ratio	2.33:1
Front fork/wheel travel	27mm stanchion tubes/4.5 in. (115 mm)
Rear shocks/wheel travel	Showa FVQ 2.5 in. (64mm)
Wheelbase	46.9 to 48.1 in. (119 to 122cm)
Seat height	29.9 in. (760mm)
Weight	207 lbs. (94kg)
Top speed (observed)	71 mph (114 kph)
Fuel consumption	71.4 mpg (30 km/l)