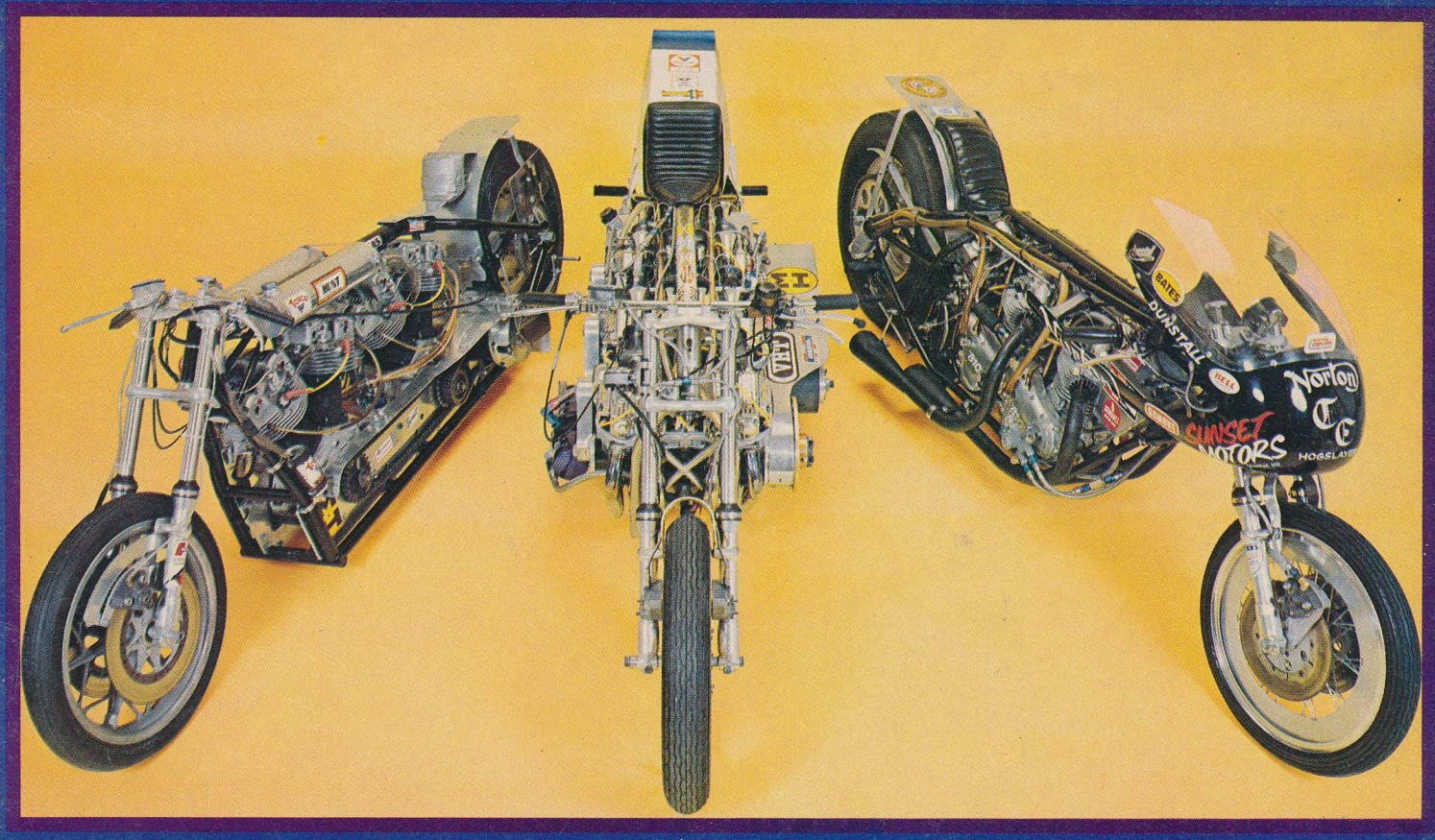
Cycle®
FEBRUARY 1976 75 CENTS

AMERICA'S TOP FUEL DRAG RACING KINGPINS

RUSS COLLINS' HONDA (7.86 - 179 mph)
JOE SMITH'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON (8.02 - 183 mph)
T.C. CHRISTENSON'S NORTON (7.93 - 177 mph)



Rickman's High-Buck Honda 750 and Kawasaki Z-1 Kit Bikes

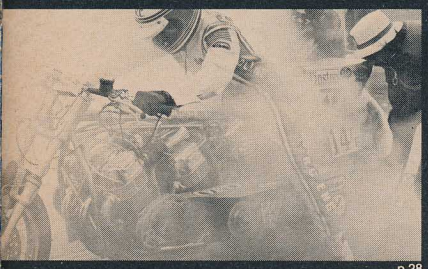
s 3 Ways To Make It A Winner

180 mph Factory Road Racer

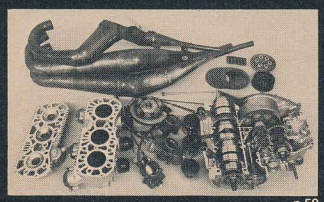
e Talks About the ISDT

Cycle®

February 1976 Volume XXVII No. 2



p.28



p.50

p.44

Road Tests

Features

Competition

Technical

Departments

This Month's Cover: Three bikes, seven engines, and 900 horsepower—that's the substance of the machinery Larry Willett was asked to photograph for *Cycle's* February cover. To assemble that much power any other way would have taken ten Honda GL-1000s, 12 Kawasaki Z-1s, 45 Suzuki 125 MXers or 90 Honda CB-125s.

THE RICKMAN HYPHENATES

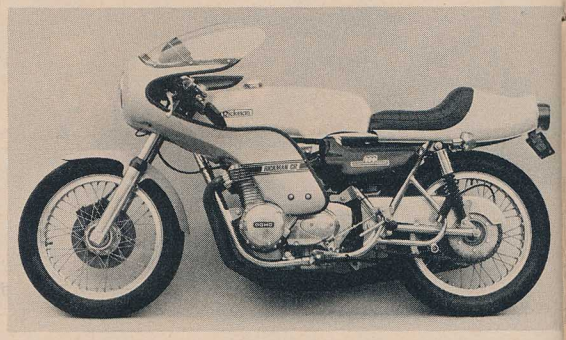
● Motorcycling has its legends, and the Rickman Brothers belong in the official storybook of the sport. But no long recitation of their projects, past and glorified, will be made here. Suffice it to say that the Brothers Rickman have been framemakers *par excellence* to the sport, and their efforts in the past decade have been wide-ranging: scrambles, motocross, road racing, enduro and roadster frames. Readers genuinely interested in the greening of Don and Derek Rickman should consult almost any previous roadtest of Rickman products, wherein the usual litany will have been chanted.

Today the Rickman Brothers are significant because they are survivors in the debacle generally known as the British motorcycle industry. The Rickman operation may well define the future shape of the British two-wheeled industry: small manufacturers of special rolling chassis for Japanese engines. Many students and observers of the British scene now believe it's no longer possible to mass-produce a modern motorcycle engine in England, so British builders must logically stake their future on Japanese engines.

Some time ago the Rickman Brothers sensed the natural logic in an Anglo-Japanese alliance, and consequently keyed their future to Japanese engines. Here in the United States, the Rickman Brothers coupled up nicely with The Vetter Fairing Company, which became the American Rickman distributor. Vetter, the Windjammer company, had a first-rate reputation, a broad dealer network and strong resources—all outside the official British motorcycle establishment in America. In a very fundamental way, the Rickman Kawasaki Z-1 and Rickman Honda 750 Cafe Racers are much more than a couple of British specials. The motorcycles represent the future tense of the British motorcycle industry.

Calling the Rickman Honda a cafe racer shortchanges the bike by suggesting a very limited motorcycle. The Rickman Honda has been optioned right out of the coffee-house-cowboy class, and is a much better motorcycle for its departure. Deleted fairing, high handlebars, relocated foot controls and the Dual Seat Option (which includes a two-up saddle and alternate gas tank) effectively converts the Honda into a sports roadster with some real utility.

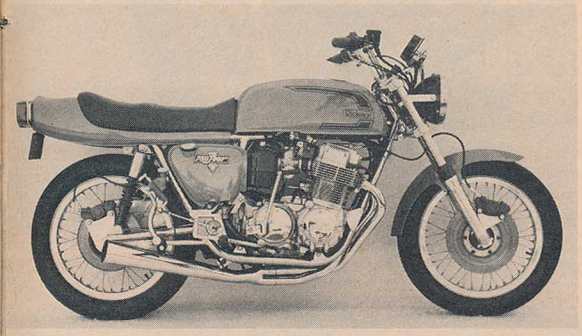
For those who insist upon style rather than function, the Rickman Honda can be bought in pure, cafe-racer form. In fact, it *must be* bought that way and then optioned into more normal roadster trim. As cafe racer, the Honda's appearance would follow the Rickman Kawasaki Z-1's rigging, complete with fairing, slender tank, solo seat, rear sets and low clip-on bars. The undiluted Rickman Cafe Racer is a lovely piece of hardware. The soft, flowing shapes are carefully proportioned



and coordinated to one another, and give the Rickman an easy, handsome grace.

The Rickman's appeal does not lie wholly in the purity of its lines. The frame and swing arm are constructed of Reynolds 531 manganese molybdenum steel which is far stronger material (in its resistance to permanent bending) than the run-of-the-mill mild steel which is universally employed in frame construction.

Rickman's choice of materials—and the use of thick-wall frame members—would be meaningless unless the tubing was assembled into a structure that provided a strong bridge between the steering head and the swing-arm pivot. The butt-end of every joining member is profiled to fit, and then the joints are formed with a special low-melting-point, high-strength bronze. This process leaves all the brazed joints with very neat fillets.



The Rickman swing arm has no conventional chain adjusters. The aft end of the swing arm holds the rear axle in a single, rigid position, absolutely parallel to the swing-arm pin. Chain adjustment is made at the swing-arm pivot. To alter the chain tension, one installs a different pair of positioning discs which have eccentric holes to locate the pivot bolt. The Rickman kit comes with a box of paired positioning discs.

The swing arm holds Rickman's own hub which has no cush-drive. The hub laces to a Borrani WM3 alloy rim that mounts a 4.25/85 *x* 18 Dunlop TT-100 tire. The rear disc system is comprised of a 10-inch disc, Lockheed caliper and an alloy caliper-carrier. A pair of Girling shocks regulate rear wheel action.

Up front the new Rickman Betor fork keeps the front wheel in control. Rickman has switched from its own fork (with 41mm tubes, as fitted to *Cycle's* test Rickman Z-1) to a Betor-built item (39mm tubes) so that twin dual-actuating calipers can be used in the future without spreading the fork legs too far apart. Betor builds the fork to Rickman specifications, and a dual disc system is in the project pipeline right now. Meanwhile, the single front disc has been sized up one inch—it's now 11 inches in diameter. The disc bolts to the Rickman front hub; a 4.10 *x* 18 Dunlop tire covers the WM2 Borrani alloy rim.

The fiberglass work, with the possible exception of selected German and American components, is the best you can buy. The colors (orange for Honda; lime green for Kawasaki) are impregnated in the jell coat. Should you surface-scratch the fiberglass, some judicious sanding and polishing will restore the finish. The owner won't entirely escape the paint business since he must re-do his own side covers to harmonize with the Rickman colors.

The cosmetics aren't perfect. The decals (Rickman logo and stripping) loosen and lift; the transfers lose their adhesion under normal wear and tear, expo-

Two Japanese engines find British frames in America. A nut-and-bolt union creates the Rickman-Kawasaki Z-1 Cafe Racer and the Rickman-Honda Sports Roadster. Ah so, old chap...

sure to gasoline, the great outdoors and high-pressure washing.

The most disappointing lapse in quality control appeared on the Rickman Honda. The nickel-plating flaked off of a couple of frame tubes; alas, these members were open to view and easily noticed. Apparently the surface had been inadequately prepared before plating, and these areas gradually developed something which looked like a skin disease. Since no remedial steps except replating exist, the gravity of this peeling should be obvious. A painted frame can always be touched up; plated metal forces you back to Step One.

The observant customer will not find himself driven back to that Step-One position. Since the Rickman is a kit bike that the customer assembles, he can inspect his kit before buying, or negotiate refusal rights in case of a special order. While a few Rickman enthusiasts might buy on spontaneous passion, as a rule special-frame buyers are likely to be icy sticklers for perfection, instantly offended by splotchy plating.

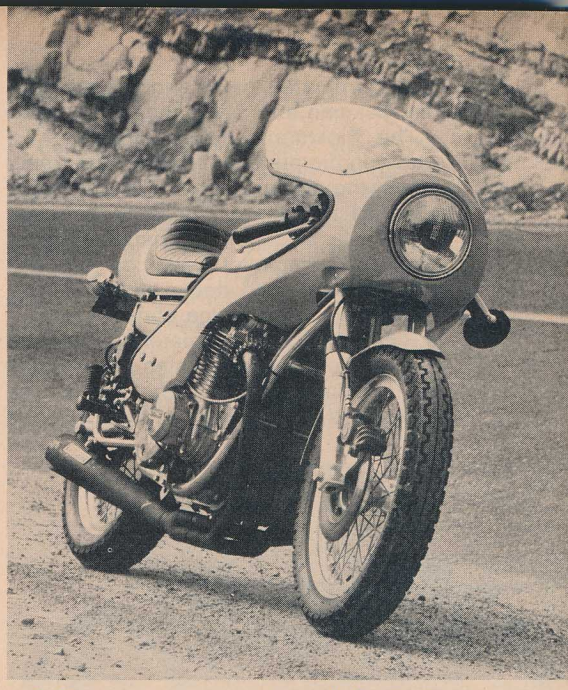
To construct a Rickman Honda roadster, one should begin with the basic Rickman CR kit and K-series 750 Honda. The test bike, as supplied by The Vetter Fairing Company, had a Honda CB-750F Super Sport engine. The late model powerplant was a natural pick; the Super Sport unit has an eight-horsepower edge on the K-model. But the Rickman running gear was designed before the introduction of the Honda Super Sport. For that reason there are several items from the F-bike which are not compatible with the Rickman kit: oil tank, exhaust system, battery box, gauge/ignition switch module, handlebar switches and wiring harness. Larry Coolidge, the Rickman Technical Specialist at The Vetter Company, pulled these parts off a Honda CB-750 K4 roadster, except the exhaust system which is a standard Bassani four-into-one. Although the tucked-under system rules out the center stand, the Bassani won't ground—and it is acceptably quiet.

For the time being, the paying customer who wants a Rickman two-up roadster will probably have more Rickman parts than he really wants. The first $1735 buys the Cafe Racer; $1987 is the tag for the Cafe Racer *plus* the Dual Seat option. But you're not finished yet: you still need a fork crown to which normal bars can be attached ($68.98); or a handlebar-clamp adapter kit, which requires that you drill and tap four holes but costs only $12.60; handlebars ($13.95); headlight arms ($9.00 ea.); hardware to relocate the pegs ($86.98); and (if you want it) the Bassani exhaust system ($160.00).

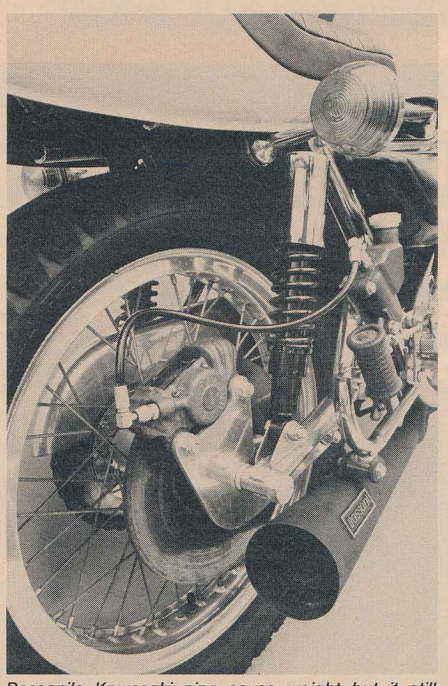
While you may be able to bolt the bike together with standard tools without hacking, sawing, welding and other jiggery-pokery, you'll be in the used motorcycle parts business for a time. You'll have left-over Rickman parts (rearsets, clip-ons, fairing, solo tank and seat) and extra Honda parts.

There are at least three ways to do the Rickman project, and all of them require horse-trader instincts unless you're prepared to own a very expensive Rickman. 1) Buy a wrecked CB-750 K-model (or maybe you've wrecked your own) and sell the left-over parts to a salvage yard. 2) Buy only the Honda parts you need at a salvage yard. 3) Cut a very detailed deal with a motorcycle agency which will order the kit, sell you a new or used Honda 750, and buy back all unwanted/unneeded parts for their inventory. An expert trader could put himself on the Rickman Honda two-up roadster for under $3000 . . . and have a clean garage. On the other hand, the inexperienced builder could spend more than $4000 on his Rickman project and still have a garageful of "brand new but extra" Honda and Rickman parts. No matter how you deal, the Rickman Honda will probably cost a thousand dollars more than a new Honda 750 Super Sport.

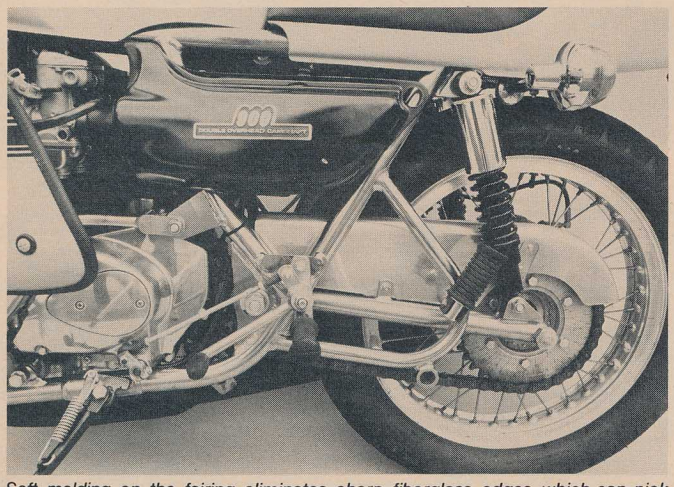
What does the extra thousand dollars really buy? First, the premium buys individuality: if it's important, you'll probably have the only Rickman on your block, or for blocks around. Second, though some might quarrel with the proposition, the Rickman bikes are more handsome motorcycles than their standard counterparts. Third, the Rickman derivatives are lighter than the originals. At 475 pounds, the Rickman Honda is fully 63 pounds lighter than Honda's Super Sport. The Rickman Kawasaki weighs 479 pounds,



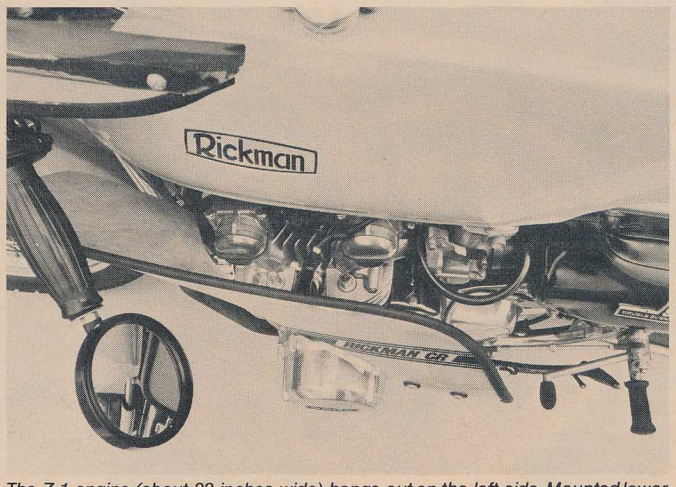
Rickman-Kawasaki Z-1



Bassani's Kawasaki pipe saves weight but it still touches down, though less so than stock Z-1 pipes.



Soft molding on the fairing eliminates sharp fiberglass edges which can nick the rider. Shift linkage uses small heim joints at both ends.



The Z-1 engine (about 22 inches wide) hangs out on the left side. Mounted lower than stock, engine presents a clearance problem for whip-it-on riders.

and that's 65 pounds under the Z-1. These differences are somewhat exaggerated because *Cycle's* test bikes had collector exhausts which are substantially lighter than the stock systems. Nevertheless, the Rickman bikes *are* lighter, and fewer pounds translate into more on-the-road performance. Finally, the Rickman hypenates generally handle better than the Japanese originals; at highly illegal sports-cornering speeds (60–90mph), the Rickmans transmit a stronger sense of security to their riders.

The Rickman Honda has a reasonably civilized seating position, although initially the bars seem a little too wide and far forward. The footpegs are a bit far back for long-legged six-footers; it's just too easy to hang your left foot on the peg by the heel. This toe-down attitude comes to an abrupt end in the first quick left hander—your toe is almost rolled under the foot rest.

The tank, or more properly the tank cover, is fairly wide and angles your legs out. Under the shroud, the real steel tank (British law demands it), a slab-sided monster, holds 4.1 gallons. Since the Honda engine returned 44 mpg, running 145 miles before tapping reserve was possible.

The dual saddle, though firm, is nonetheless comfortable. The rub comes with the harsh suspension, which will rattle your eyeballs loose and encourage frequent stops. Gradually the Honda's Rickman-Betor front fork improved, becoming less jolting and more compliant. The Girling shocks remained harsh.

Precise is the single word which describes the Rickman Honda's steering. The bike responds precisely to steering inputs, and it's accurate to the inch on your intended line. A real sense of stability accompanies this cross-hair accuracy. The Rickman Honda never feels uncertain or unreadable in a corner. This does not mean the handling is flawless. With the shock springs set in their lowest pre-load positions, the Rickman Honda would develop a handlebar oscillation through bumpy corners. Cranking up the preload relieved the problem below 60–70 mph, and moved the oscillation behavior up into the seventies and eighties. It should be pointed out that the handlebar oscillation does not intensify into a loose, hinged-in-the-middle wobble, and the handlebar waving isn't particularly frightening. *Cycle* rated Honda's new Super Sport (tested in May 1975) as the best handling Japanese 750 sports bike around, and the Rickman is still a cut above the Honda CB-750F.

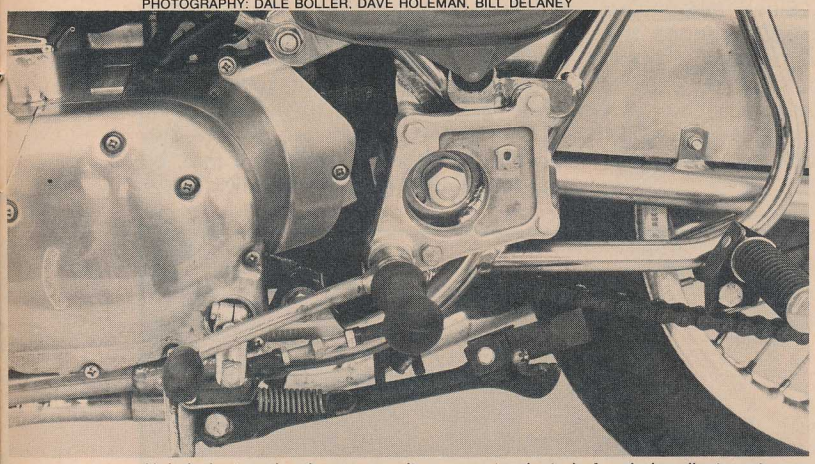
A rider can provoke a suspension oscillation in the standard Honda F-bike with clumsy throttle work in a smooth corner. The Honda engine/transmission unit has a great amount of lash in the drivetrain, especially in the first three gears. The rider should feed the power on and roll it off smoothly. Aboard a standard Honda, you don't want to blitz into a corner, get heeled over, suddenly chop the throttle, and then hit it again. This riding tactic (or lack of it) and the old Honda wind-up/reel-out drivetrain slop can put a stock 750 Honda into a suspension wobble. The Rickman Honda, probably thanks to its stiff suspension, resists this kind of rider-induced galloping—despite the fact that the Rickman has far more lash between the engine shaft and the rear wheel. All the Honda's normal driveline sloppiness is aggravated by the Rickman's lack of any rear drive-cushion assembly. The consequent lurching and yanking becomes unpleasant, at least until you learn to meter the power smoothly.

Rickman's version of the Honda (with the Bassani pipe) has more cornering clearance and better tires than the Honda Super Sport. Grounding isn't a big problem: on the left side the shift lever touches first; on the right the footpeg will eventually make contact. But you can feather the TT-100 rear tire right down to its edges, and you'll feel the tire crawling before anything kisses the pavement.

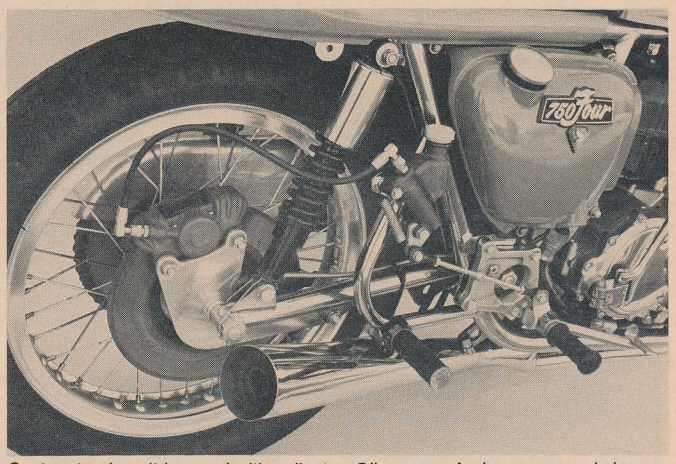
The 11-inch front brake has a reassuring, progressive feel; certainly it's sufficient to retard the 475-pound, 120-mph street bike. The Lockheed rear brake is powerful, but the short tie-rod from the master cylinder leaves the brake lever positioned too high, so the rider gets too much rear-brake action too easily.

As a sports bike, the Rickman Honda

PHOTOGRAPHY: DALE BOLLER, DAVE HOLEMAN, BILL DELANEY

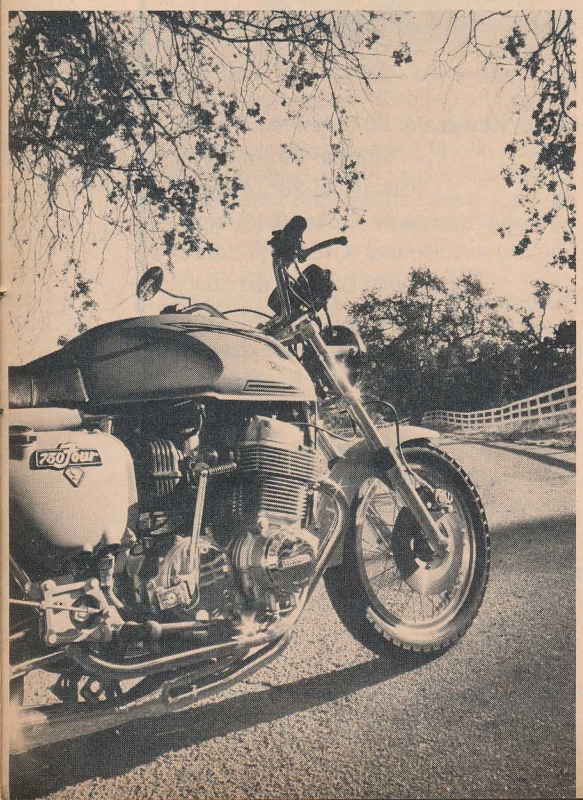


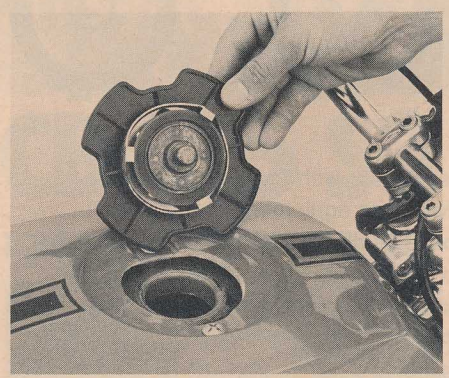
Hole in footpeg hard ware permits access to pivot pin for chain adjustment.



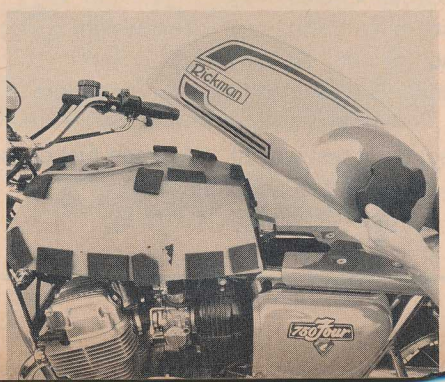
Center stand can't be used with collector. Oil cap can foul a passenger's leg.

Rickman-Honda CB-750





On the Rickman two-seater the large cap opens the steel gas tank under the fiberglass cover. Three screws (one at rear, two at filler cap) attach the shroud to the gas tank. The steel tank holds 4.1 gallons.



succeeds very well. Like Honda's own Super Sport, the Rickman version has very limited touring capabilities. On its sporting merits (cost aside), the Rickman Honda is a better piece than the CB-750F. The Rickman Honda is also a better road-going motorcycle than the Rickman Kawasaki Cafe Racer.

The Rickman Kawasaki is an extraordinarily uncomfortable motorcycle. The low bars, rearsets and hard saddle will put a normal-size American in misery after 75 miles. The clip-ons are very low relative to the seat. Not only is the rider in an uncomfortable stretch, he has the feeling he's going downhill—and putting an enormous amount of his weight on the front wheel through his hands. The footpegs are high too; with only 16 inches of vertical distance between the pegs and the saddle, the rider's legs must fold back tightly to fit. The riding position, such as it is, seems scaled to very supple human bodies under five-nine. Not one *Cycle* editor fit the full-tilt Rickman Cafe Racer.

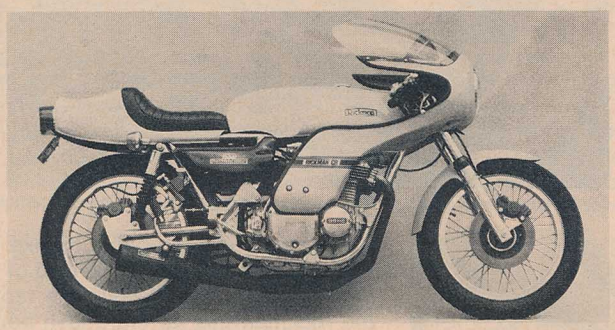
You shouldn't buy the clip-on version of the Rickman without trying the riding position. Before you spring, you should be convinced that your body fits into the CR scheme of things, or that you can modify the riding position to suit your physical dimensions.

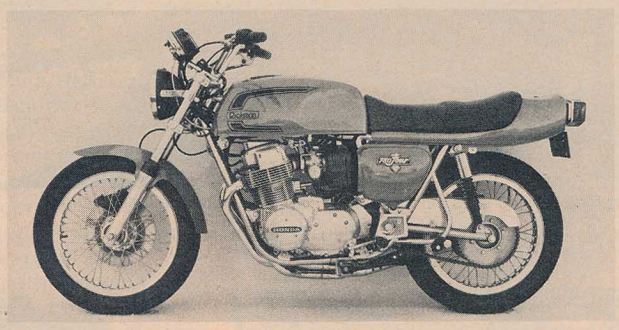
Because the Rickman Kawasaki is a rolling torture rack for six-footers, it's difficult to ride the machine really hard. The bike is very stable in cornering modes, but it also responds quickly to rider inputs. Six-footers are literally wedged on the bike; and when the stiff suspension hits a bump, the shock proceeds through rider's body and into the handlebars, whereupon the Rickman reacts by altering its line in the corner. If you're a full-sized American, there's no easy way to keep yourself from transmitting these unwanted inputs back into the motorcycle. Small, agile riders might not have this problem, but big ones do.

Riders who really enjoy blazing down the road should know a couple more things about the Rickman Kawasaki. You should mount a four-into-one exhaust system which will give more ground clearance than the stock Kawasaki pipes. Our test bike had a Bassani prototype collector, which allowed greater lean angles than stock Z-1 pipes and mufflers. Nevertheless, on bumpy, tight or off-camber mountain roads the Bassani pipe would ground. The Rickman chassis carries the Kawasaki engine five-eighths of an inch lower to the ground than the standard Z-1 frame. Since determined riders (on good tires) can ground the left-side dyno cover on a stock Z-1, exactly the same thing can happen with the Rickman. In fact, California mountain-road riders who already have Rickman Z-1s put ground clearance at the top of their complaint list.

Cycle's preferences should be clear. We like the Rickman Honda with its Dual Seat Option much better than the Rickman Kawasaki. The Honda had more ground clearance and offered far more comfort. And the Honda could be ridden harder with considerably less effort. You can buy the Dual Seat Option for the Rickman Kawasaki; and were it our money on the counter, we'd have the Kawasaki no other way. Depending upon how hard you scratch on the public roads, you still may encounter a clearance problem with the Kawasaki dyno cover, and you should be prepared to cope with this problem.

By reputation, England has long been the place where good handling motorcycles have been built. For the most part those good British earholers were light motorcycles which had modest horsepower—good starting points for fine curve-benders. But the future British motorcycle industry must deal with ever-increasing horsepower. A Kawasaki 903 in perfect fettle is wide, heavy and 80-horsepower strong—exactly the characteristics which sabotage championship handling. Whatever the problems, tomorrow's British motorcycle industry will be bound to one-liter Japanese monster-motors. The British must make the horsepower giants handle, do it before the Japanese, and do it better. It's the only way the British will survive. And *that,* be sure, the Rickman Brothers know. ◉





KAWASAKI Z-1/HONDA CB-750 RICKMAN CAFE RACER KITS

Price, suggested retail	Cafe Racer $1735; with Dual Seat Option $1987; see text for other equipment
Tire, front	4.10 x 18 Dunlop TT-100
rear	4.25/85 x 18 Dunlop TT-100
Brake, front	Honda: 11 x 1.5 in. x 2 (280mm x 38mm x 2)
	Kawasaki: 10 x 1.5 in. x 2 (254mm x 38mm x 2)
rear	Honda/Kawasaki: 10 x 1.5 in. x 2 (254mm x 38mm x 2)
Brake swept area	Honda: 169.5 sq. in. (1093 sq. cm)
	Kawasaki: 160 sq. in. (1032 sq. cm)
Specific brake loading	Honda: 3.8 lbs./sq. in. at test weight
	Kawasaki: 4.0 lbs./sq. in. at test weight
Fuel capacity	Honda: 4.1 gal. (15.5 liters)
	Kawasaki: 4.8 gal. (18.2 liters)
Wheelbase	Honda/Kawasaki: 56.5 in. (143.5 cm)
Rake/Trail	Honda: 29°/4.5 in.
	Kawasaki: 28°/4.0 in.
Seat height	Honda/Kawasaki: 32 in. (81.3 cm)
Ground clearance	Honda: 4.75 in. (12 cm) with Bassani exhaust
	Kawasaki: 3.75 in. (9.5 cm) with Bassani exhaust
Curb weight	Honda: 475 lbs. (215 kg)
	Kawasaki: 479 lbs. (217 kg)
Test weight	Honda: 640 lbs. (290 kg)
	Kawasaki: 644 lbs. (292 kg)
Standing start ¼-mile	Honda: 13.94 sec.; 92.87 mph
	Kawasaki: 12.24 sec.; 108.17 mph
Average fuel consumption	Honda: 44 mpg
	Kawasaki: 42 mpg