

Cycle

35 JULY 1984 ■

Honda V65 Sabre
It's A Cannon

Harley FXRDG
AKA Disc Glide

Honda VF500F

The Best Interceptor Yet?



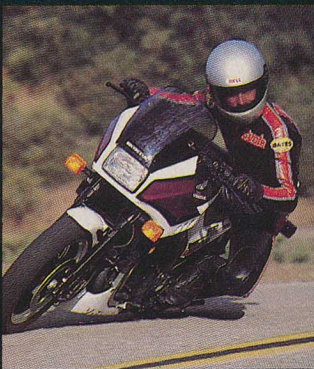
Pocket-Sized
V30 Magna

A Mini-Cruiser
With Jeweled
Movements





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This Month's Cover: Dave Hawkins catches the VF500F Interceptor at full hum, with TW Wolff at the controls. On the panel, five-four Scott Darough used his eight-four camera to make this V30 Magna image, which newboy Art Director, Mark Covault, reduced to usable proportions. The twin test begins on page 24.

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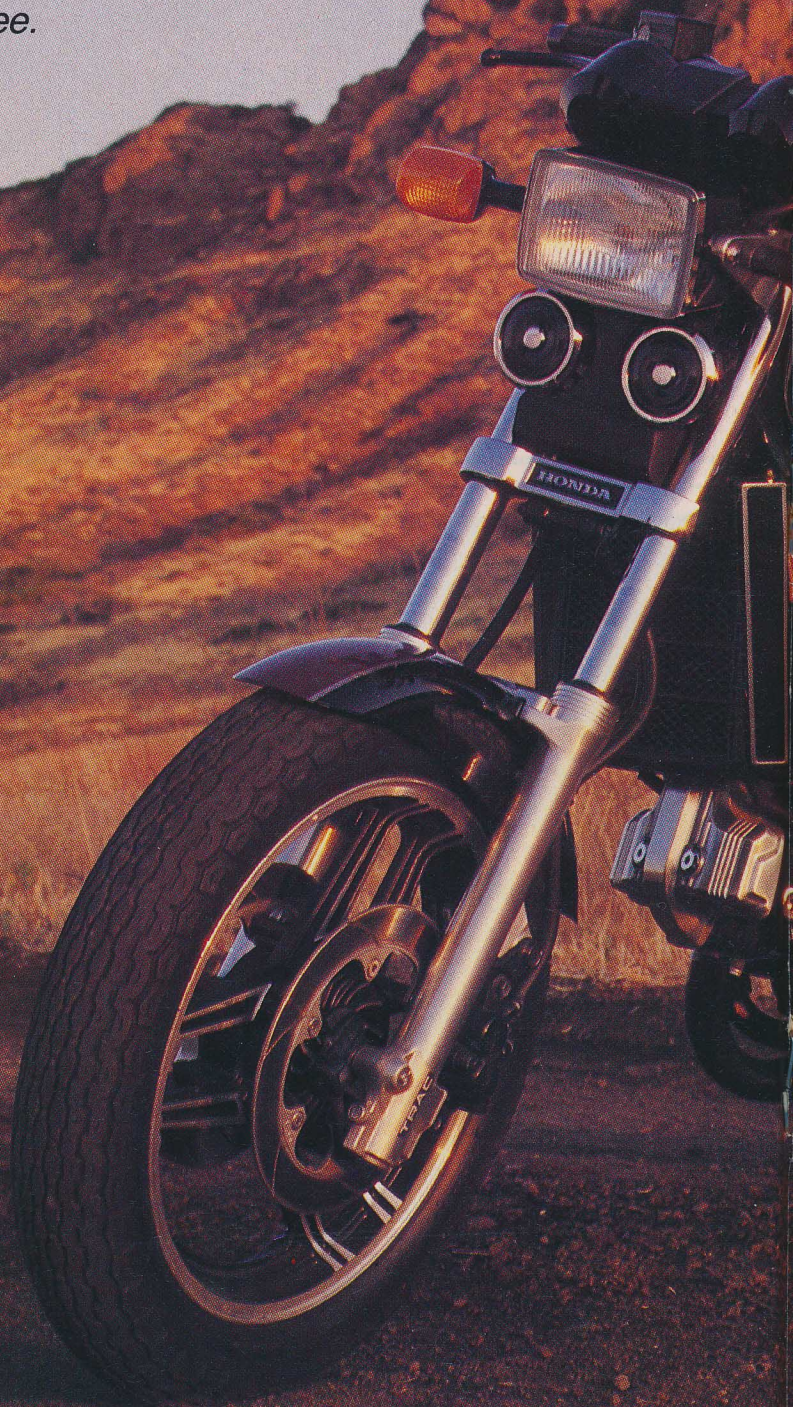
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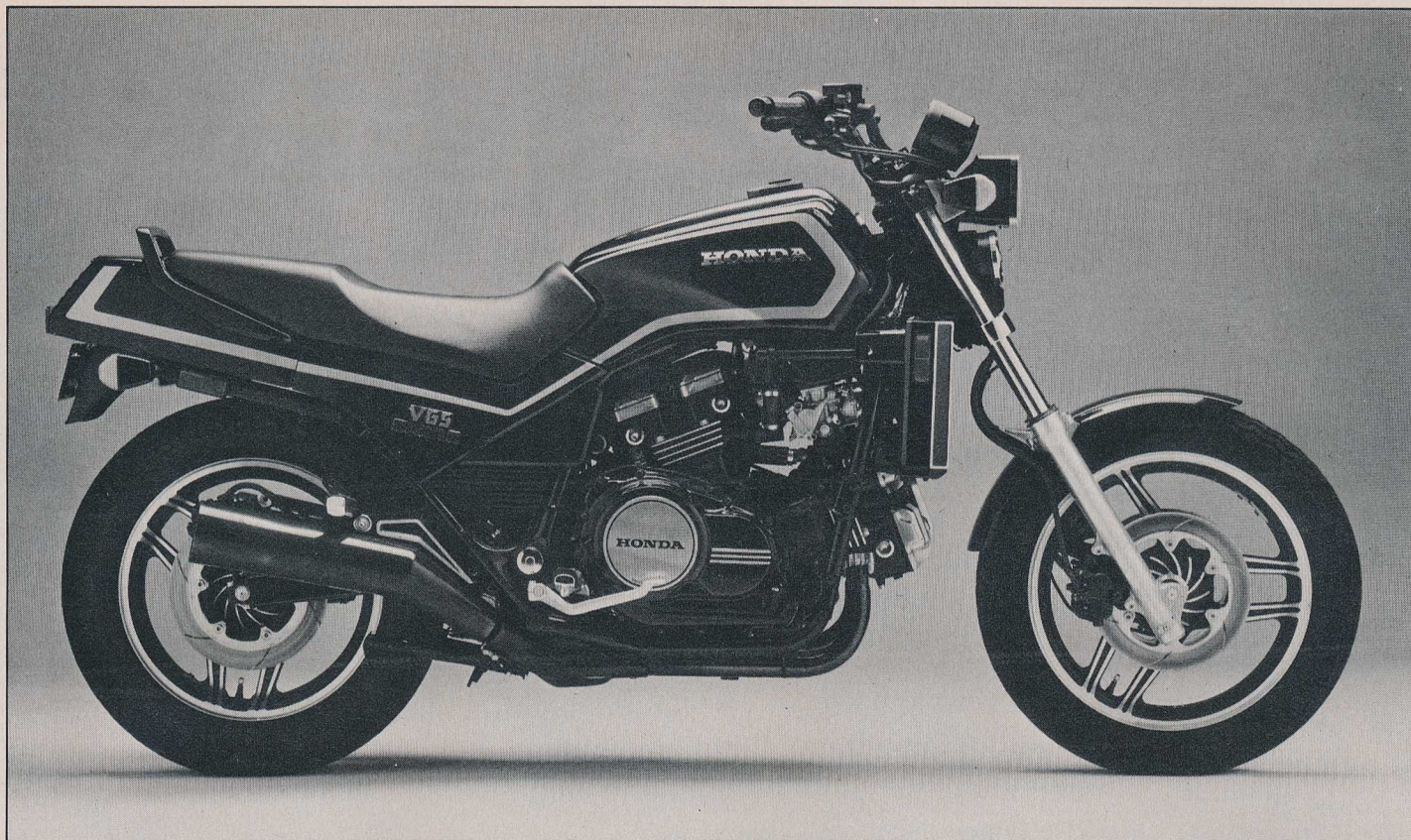
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HONDA V65 SABRE

*Be greedy. Ask for almost everything.
Let's say about 100 horsepower—give
or take a team—an engine as smooth
and refined as a parlor divan, and
a bike that's nearly maintenance-free.
Now, take a look at the V65 Sabre.*







HONDA SABRE

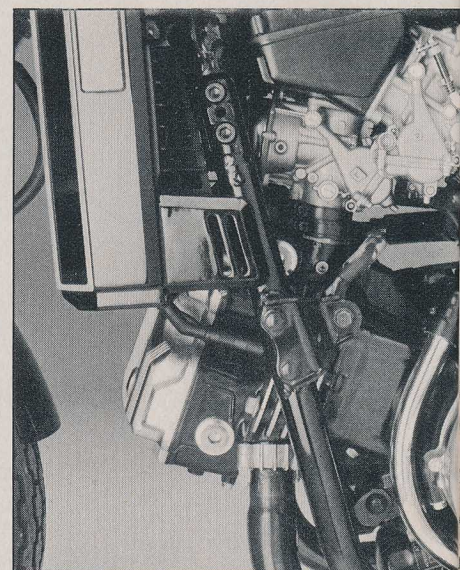
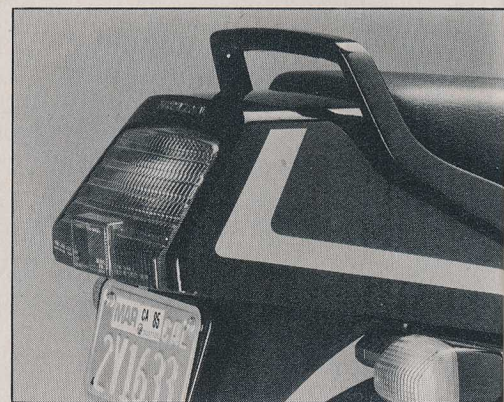
□ Can a single motorcycle offer both comfortable highway cruising and proper backroad manners? Can one bike combine state-of-the-art power with smoothness and reliability? Must maintenance-saving features such as shaft drive necessarily impinge on sporting performance? And, finally, is it possible for a bike to be so well-rounded that it actually answers most of the expectations behind each of these questions? Honda thinks so, and says as much with the V65 Sabre.

Many riders believe liter-plus motorcycles are improper sporting machines. Save canyon dicing for the smaller machines, they declare; 750s and 550s balance handling against horsepower better than the bulky, heavy, overpowered bikes displacing 1000cc and more. Big-displacement streeters are *gran turismo* machines, bikes with high-speed grace and style belonging on open roads. Those who subscribe to this line of thought will love the new Honda Sabre. The VF1100S *isn't* the mythical perfect motorcycle; it doesn't do quite everything with a 10.0 rating. The big Sabre does, however, fulfill a wide range of requirements very well—for all-around road use it's tough to beat.

The Sabre's four-valve, liquid-cooled, V-four powerplant differs only slightly

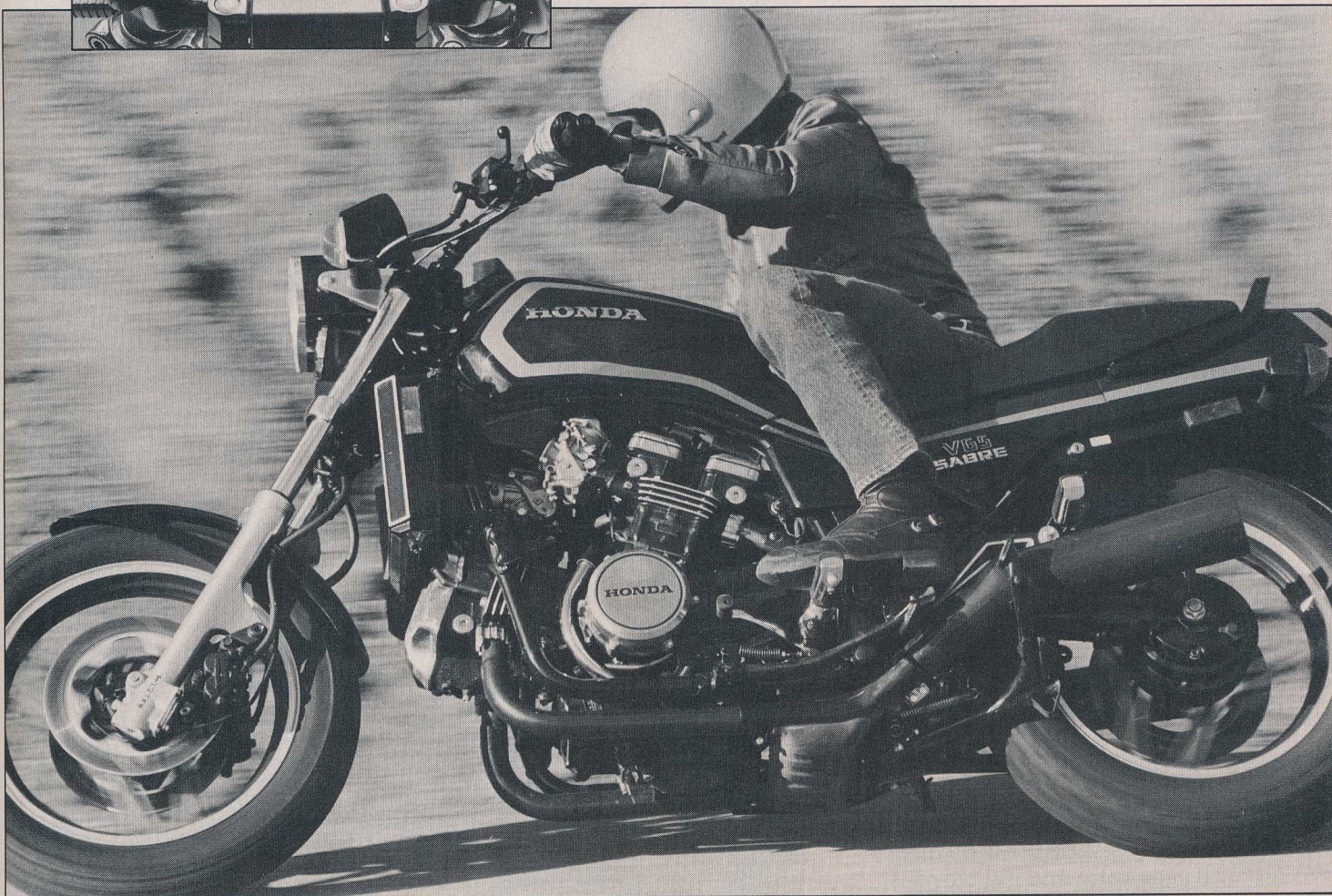


from last year's V65 Magna engine. Like the Magna, view the Sabre engine as a Honda V45 powerplant on steroids; although the designs are nearly identical, the 1100cc bikes have scaled up dimensions. The cylinders, an integral part of the upper case half, have steel liners cast in free-standing bores surrounded by water jackets. Displacing an actual 1098cc through a bore and stroke of 79.5 by 55.3mm, the engine with its extremely oversquare configuration helps the Sabre reach its 10,000-rpm redline, a remarkably tall rev limit for such a large engine. The Sabre's front head casting differs from the Magna's, featuring an extra mounting boss.

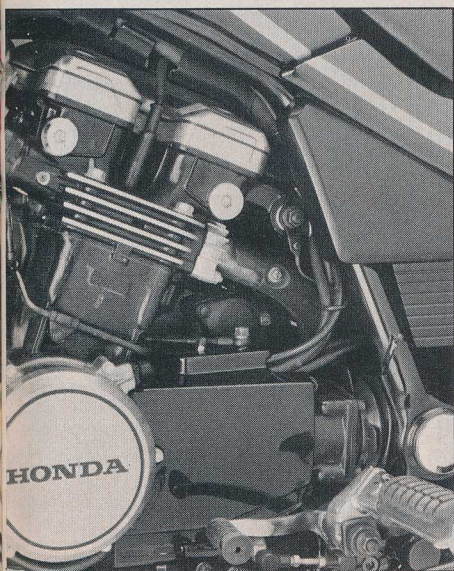




The Honda V65 Sabre is a fine all-around big-displacement machine, but there's nothing middle-of-the-road about its wonderful engine; this V-four is smooth, torquy and hell-for-strong on the top end.



PHOTOGRAPHY: SCOTT DAROUGH, STEVE BROADDUS

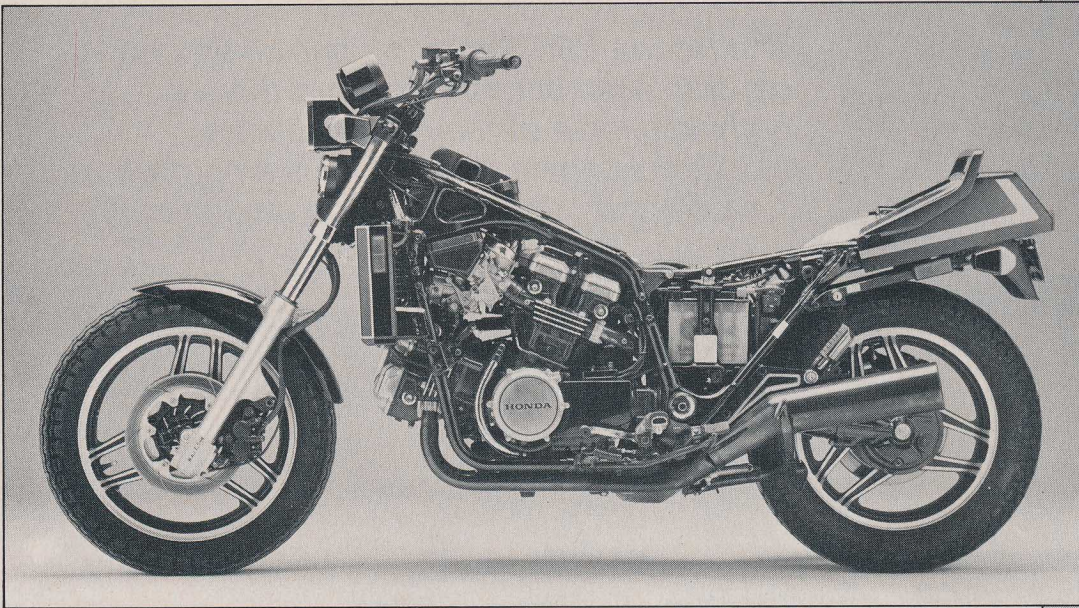


The four-point system solid-mounts the engine and makes it a stressed member for extra chassis rigidity.

As does the Magna, the new V65 uses dual overhead camshafts, but the Sabre features slightly more valve lift, duration and overlap to improve power output. Other changes include an oiled foam air filter in place of the Magna's paper element, and larger airbox and muffler capacities. In addition, the head-pipe diameter and the carburetors' venturi diameters have grown to improve flow. The VF1100 bottom end, clutch and gearing remain unchanged from last year's Magna. A six-speed gearbox is superfluous with such a muscular engine, but the overdrive sixth cog reduces the engine speed to a leisurely 3384 rpm at 60 mph, great for

both comfort and fuel economy. Finally, the Sabre retains the Magna's hassle-free shaft final drive, and the final reduction ratio remains 3.18:1.

Last year's V65 Magna boasted an engine more than strong enough; the few improvements to the Sabre powerplant are gravy. Set up as a cruiser, however, the 1100C chassis needed improvement for wider use. No problem—with the Sabre, Honda gives the riding public all-new running gear. While the frame is completely new, the Sabre's key chassis numbers are nearly identical to the Magna's. The new V65 has a wheelbase of 62.6 inches and steering rake and trail of 30.5 degrees and 3.7 inches. The Magna, in comparison, measures 62.8 inches in wheelbase with steering figures of 30.3 de-

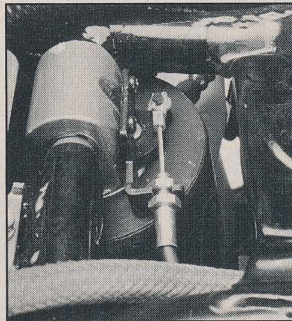


HONDA SABRE

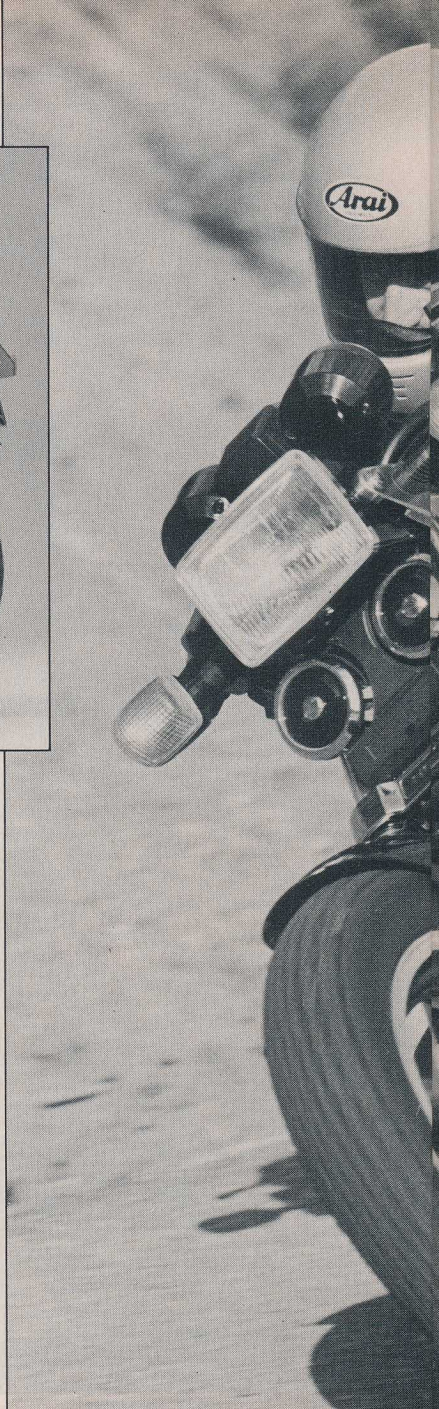
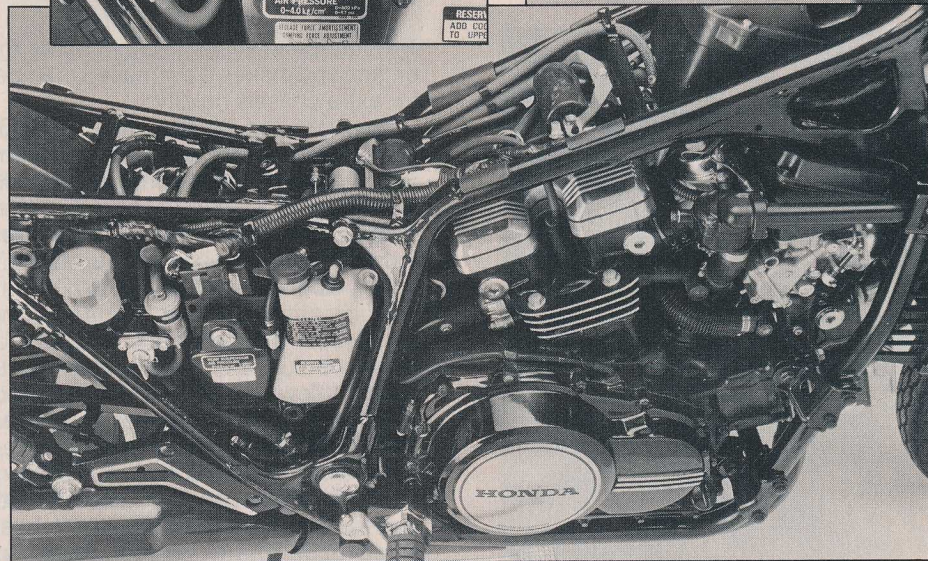
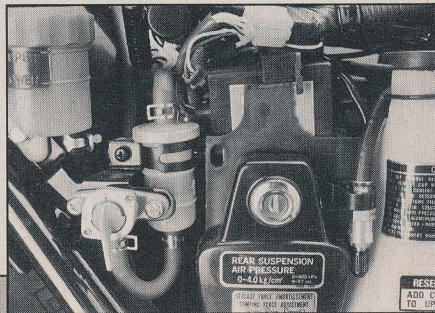
degrees of rake and 4.1 inches of trail. The big Vee engine dictates the substantial overall length to a great extent in both cases. In the instance of the 1000 Interceptor a short chassis was paramount; hence, Honda designed the big Interceptor's engine around the V45 powerplant rather than the V65 mill.

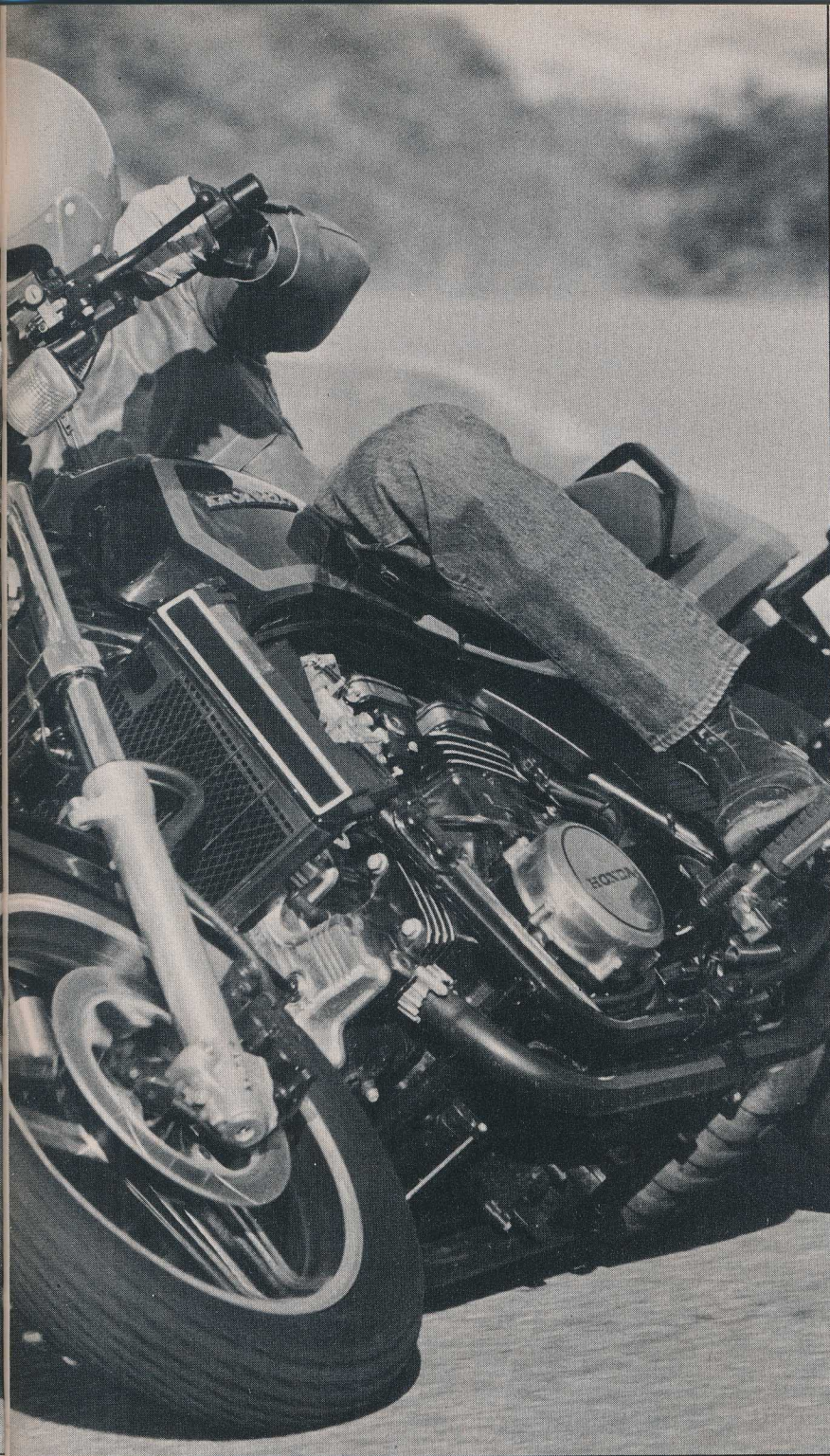
The numbers alone make the two chassis appear similar. A more important change takes form in the rear suspension design, a single-shock Pro-Link system replacing the Magna's twin-shock setup. Like all Honda's Pro-Link systems, the V65's rear suspension produces a rising-rate effect. The Sabre uses a more progressive linkage than the 1000 Interceptor, and this provides a softer initial ride but stiffens more quickly after about the halfway point. This change, in theory, gives the 1100S a softer ride over minor bumps (befitting its sport-touring intent), yet the stiffer final portion of travel accommodates the Sabre's greater weight; with its 5.8-gallon fuel tank brimming, the V65 tips the scales at a hefty 603 pounds.

The shock uses a combination of a coil spring and air pressure for rear suspension springing. In addition, it offers adjustable rebound damping; the second setting provides 12.5 percent more damping than the lightest setting, while the number three position delivers 19 percent more damping. The air valve and damping control knob reside behind the right sidecover, making access a minor hassle. The Sabre offers 4.7 inches of rear-wheel travel, about a half-



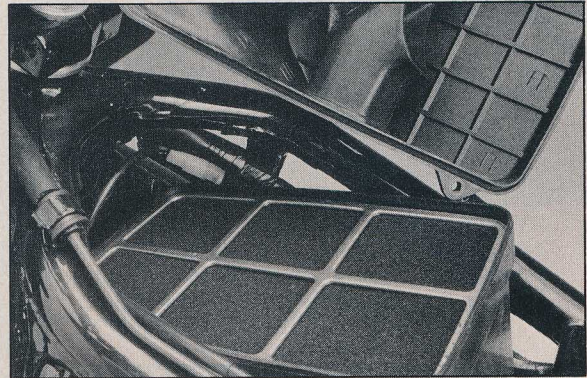
Hiding beneath the right sidecover are the rear brake reservoir, fuel petcock and filter, rear suspension controls and tool kit. The rebound damping knob actuates a small adjuster on top of the shock.





bound damping corresponds to the right leg's number two setting, and the right leg offers about half as much compression damping as the left. A sturdy fork brace ties the whole assembly together, letting all these various forces work in concert and increasing front-end rigidity.

The styling shift from cruiser-esque Magna to middle-of-the-road Sabre dictated changes in control placement. In functional terms these are changes for the better. The Sabre's handlebar is lower and has less pullback than the



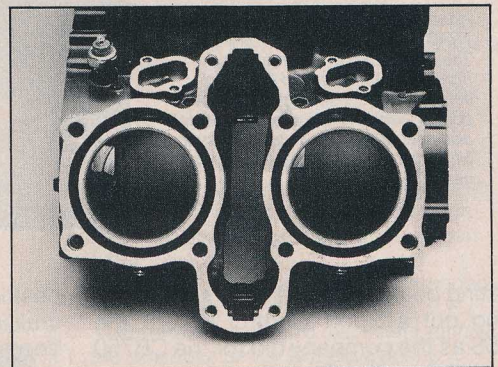
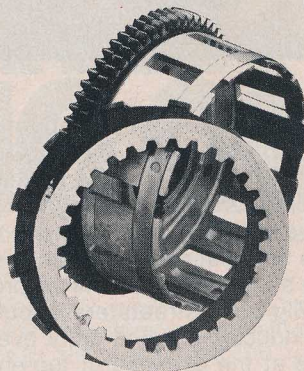
The Sabre's airbox resides beneath the fuel tank, nestled between the top frame tubes. A reusable oiled-foam air filter element replaces the V65 Magna's disposable paper filter element.

Magna's, the footpegs are located further aft and the seat is comfortably wide with only a hint of a step. The pilot's position, though, is still biased toward comfort on the showroom floor rather than providing the correct posture to face a 60-mph airstream on the freeway.

As it stands, the Sabre needs a full fairing or at least a big windshield to

inch more than the Magna.

Like the Magna, the new Honda uses 41mm fork tubes and air-adjustable springing, but the listed 5.7 inches of fork stroke is just a tad less than the 1100C's 5.9 inches of travel. Honda gave both bikes adjustable anti-dive valving on the left fork leg, but the Sabre also features adjustable rebound damping. This three-position adjusting knob rests atop the right fork leg, with the second and third settings offering two and three times more rebound damping than the number one position. The left fork leg's non-adjustable re-

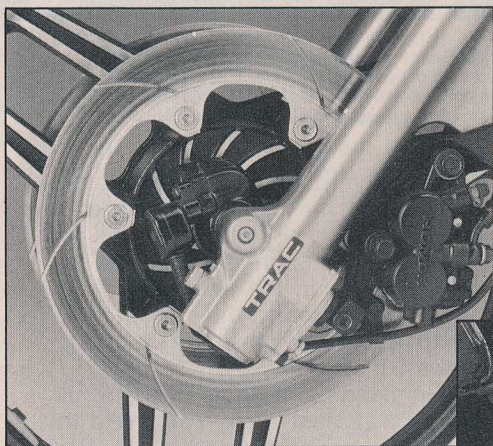


Steel liners are cast into free-standing cylinders surrounded by water jackets. The multi-plate wet clutch uses a split primary driven gear and a diaphragm clutch spring.

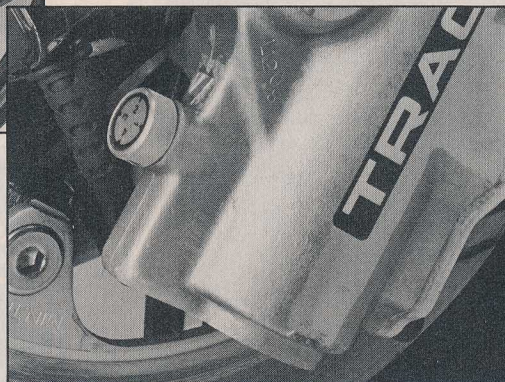
HONDA SABRE

deflect the wind from the rider's torso. Even though the handlebar offers two-way adjustability, its basic shape still misses the mark. Quite simply, it stands too high; the rider must either live with the tallness to gain the correct reach, or rotate the bar back too far to lower the grip level. Either way, it's a compromise. To Honda's credit, this adjustable handlebar clamps onto the top triple clamp in a conventional manner, allowing for easy replacement with an aftermarket piece.

The awkward footpeg position is less easily remedied. The pegs, about four inches too far forward, force the rider's body into a straight-up-and-down armchair posture. (Armchairs are almost never subject to 60-mph headwinds.) Worse, peg position can't be altered. A good fairing will take care of the headwind, but a rider favoring bare bikes can do little to improve the V65's



Honda installed the new-generation TRAC anti-dive system on the Sabre. The adjuster knob now rests on the front of the fork leg, and the Sabre's setup offers four settings. The three-position rebound damping adjuster is also new to the V65, its adjuster knob sitting on top of the right fork leg for easy access.



seating position. We'd like to see Honda bring out a Sport Control Kit for the V65S as the company did for the CB750 several years back.

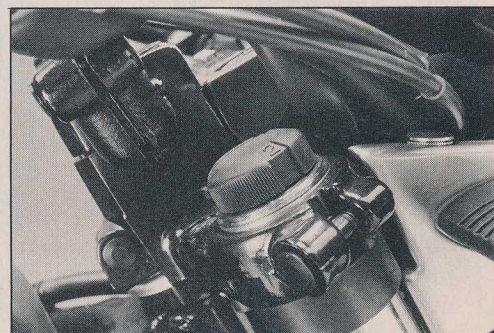
In parking lots the Sabre feels big and a bit top-heavy, though not unmanageable. The 1100 may not be the archetypal bike for errands, but it serves adequately. The tall seat, however, is a little high for short-legged riders; at 33.4 inches, it's way up there. Although the Honda's straight up-and-down seating

position is comfortable for around-town cruising and slow-going, the 1100cc Vee engine is much too good to be relegated to mild-mannered profiling.

Without a doubt, Honda's biggest V-fours have the best power characteristics of any street bikes currently in production. Big-bore streetsters should have fear-inducing low-end grunt even if it comes at the expense of top-end performance, and to the delight of all concerned, the Sabre offers full mea-

sures of both. As a bonus, the solid-mounted engine is smooth; a gentle rumble tickles the handlebar, but vibration has been banished virtually everywhere else.

The Sabre jumps right off idle with grab-you-by-the-throat authority, demanding attention and respect. In some ways the V65 feels like a big-bore motocrosser—the wheel-lifting power in the first two gears and the bike's raw, brute strength give a rider plenty to work with. There's no need to finesse a pass when an entire stable full of



HONDA SABRE

horses is begging to be set free. Tweak the throttle and hang on tight.

Considering its size—with its long wheelbase and considerable weight, the 1100S is fast approaching Gold Wing country—the Sabre handles well. Straight-line, high-speed work is the Honda's forte; set all dampers on maximum, pump the fork full of air and load the rear suspension with about 35 psi—the 1100 will suck up long stretches of straight road effortlessly. The trouble comes in the form of wind blast and the less-than-perfect seating position more than anything else. The Sabre gobbles up fast, smooth sweepers as well, tracking steadily through corners, yet responding willingly to input through the handlebar. With the fuss-free shaft drive and sure-footed high-speed manners, you'd swear the Sabre was at least part European. No Euro bike, though, ever pumped out nearly this much horsepower.

Twisty, bumpy roads are a different matter altogether. Crank the Sabre through a bumpy corner with about 70- or 80-percent effort and the machine behaves reasonably well—brisk to medium-fast is just fine. Cornering clearance is surprisingly good. The bike feels long and heavy but not threatening. As you approach its limits, the Sabre begins to pogo and wallow gently, telegraphing a clear warning. If you insist on pushing the machine's boundaries, however, it gets nasty—this is not a machine for the indiscriminate or foolishly brave rider.

The Sabre rewards smooth riding, favoring experienced pilots when the going gets brisk. A disturbing amount of driveline lash and shaft-drive torque reaction discourages shutting off the gas mid-corner. Instead, do all your braking well beforehand and smoothly dial in the gas through the corner to conserve ground clearance and keep the bike steady. The adjustable TRAC anti-dive handles front-end sag under braking well; we usually used one of the two stiffer settings.

Honda's triple disc brakes perform admirably. The dual front discs provide strong stopping power with good feel through the lever, and brake action is directly proportional to lever effort. The rear disc is strong, but can use a little more feel. Other nitpicks include a small amount of sponginess in the front brake lever and brake-fade during repeated heavy downhill use—not unexpected with such a large and heavy bike.

Tight-tight, dirty canyon roads full of bumps and holes really try the Sabre. With so much power on tap it's almost impossible to keep the Honda's rear end from breaking loose while driving

hard out of corners, and when you do get a solid bite the front end sometimes gets too light to maintain traction—scary stuff. What's more, holes and bumps overpower the Sabre's dampers; with so much weight to control, the bike begins to heave and buck in a

oversprung/underdamped motion. More rebound damping at both ends would help but probably not eliminate the 1100's problems. Do yourself and the Sabre a favor: politely excuse the two of you when your friends want to
(Continued on page 65)

TEST SPECIFICATIONS

Make and model Honda VF1100S Sabre
Price, suggested retail (as of 4/5/84) \$4548

Performance

Standing start ¼ mile 11.20 sec. @ 121.69 mph
Acceleration, 0-60 mph 3.04 sec.
45-70 mph, top three gears . . . (4) 3.12 sec., 273 ft.
(5) 3.84 sec., 336 ft.
(6) 5.12 sec., 450 ft.
Braking, 60-0 mph 122 ft.
Engine rpm @ 60 mph, top gear 3384
Average fuel consumption rate 37.7 mpg (16.0 km/l)
Cruising range 219 mi. (352 km)
Load capacity (GVWR less curb weight) . . . 407 lbs. (185 kg)
Maximum speed in gears @ engine redline . . . (1) 58 (2) 82 (3) 103 (4) 124 (5) 148 (6) 177

Engine

Type Four-stroke, 90-degree V-four; liquid-cooled with dual chain-driven overhead camshafts; four valves per cylinder
Bore and stroke 79.5 x 55.3mm (3.13 x 2.18 in.)
Piston displacement 1098cc (67.0 cu. in.)
Compression ratio 10.5:1
Carburetion (4) Keihin 36mm constant-vacuum
Exhaust system Four-into-two
Ignition Battery-powered, inductive, magnetically triggered
Air filtration Oiled foam element
Oil filtration Paper element, disposable
Oil capacity 3.7 qts. (3.5 l)
Bhp @ rpm 101.98@9500
Torque @ rpm 64.43@7000

Transmission

Type Six-speed, constant-mesh, wet-clutch
Primary drive Straight-cut gear; 70/14, 1.71
Secondary drive . . . Helical-bevel gear; 18/17, 1.06
Final drive Shaft and bevel gear; 35/11, 3.18
Gear ratios (transmission) (1) 39/17, 2.29 (2) 34/21, 1.62 (3) 31/24, 1.29 (4) 29/27, 1.07 (5) 26/29, 0.90 (6) 24/32, 0.75
Gear ratios (overall) (1) 13.19 (2) 9.33 (3) 7.43 (4) 6.16 (5) 5.18 (6) 4.32

Chassis

Type Double-downtube, full-cradle frame; tube/box-section steel swing arm
Suspension, front . . . Leading-axle, air-adjustable fork with 41mm tubes, three-way adjustable rebound damping, anti-dive valving and 5.7 in. (145mm) of travel
rear (1) air-adjustable shock absorber, adjustable for rebound damping, producing 4.7 in. (119mm) of rear-wheel travel
Wheelbase 62.6 in. (1590mm)

Rake/trail 30.5°/3.7 in. (95mm)
Brake, front Hydraulic, dual-disc with twin-piston calipers
rear Hydraulic, single-disc with twin-piston calipers
Wheel, front Cast, 2.50 x 18
rear Cast, 3.00 x 17
Tire, front 110/90-18 Dunlop Gold Seal F11
rear 130/90-17 Dunlop K627
Seat height 33.4 in. (848mm)
Ground clearance 6.8 in. (173mm)
Fuel capacity 5.8 gals. (22.0 l)
Curb weight (full tank) 603.0 lbs. (273.5 kg)
Test weight 758.0 lbs. (343.8 kg)

Electrical

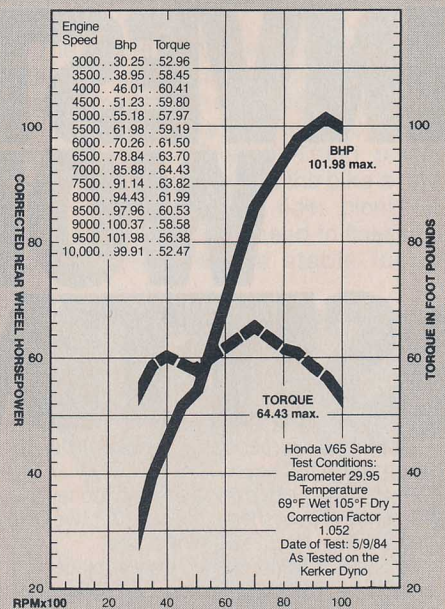
Power source Three-phase AC generator, 350 watts
Charge control Solid-state voltage regulator
Headlight beams (high/low) 60/55 watts
Tail/stoptights 8/27 watts
Battery 12V 18AH

Instruments

Includes Speedometer, odometer, tripmeter; tachometer with 10,000-rpm redline; fuel gauge, coolant temperature gauge, digital clock; indicators for gear position, tail/stoptlight burned out, low oil pressure, high beam, turn signals, neutral
Speedometer error, 30 mph indicated, actual 27.20 60 mph indicated, actual 55.06

Customer Service Contact

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Gardena, CA 90247
(213) 321-8680



Sabre Continued from page 52

play canyon racer.

Soften up the suspension, and the Sabre serves well as a long-term freeway machine. It doesn't quite deliver state-of-the-art touring plushness, the suspension settings caught in a compromise between ability and limousine smoothness. Also, the rear end is stiffer than a touring rider would specify, an attempt to minimize up-and-down shaft reaction. Still, the V65 proves to be a capable all-day mount for both solo and two-up touring. Our passengers found the Honda's seating accommodating.

With the ever-present temptation to wick up the Sabre's throttle for some cheap and very real thrills, we averaged an uninspired 37.7 mpg. More restrained freeway cruises netted results in the low 40s, giving the Honda a cruising range of over 200 miles with its 5.8-gallon tank. The V65 has no reserve fuel supply, but the fuel gauge is reasonably accurate.

Like last year's Magna, the new Sabre has one overwhelming selling point: its wonderful powerband. Honda's delightful V65 engine makes the Sabre an attractive big-inch bike, regardless of a rider's inclinations. The big 1100 Vee's ability to do so many things so well only adds to the Sabre's allure. The V65 so excels as a GT machine, you'd swear *gran turismo* was a Japanese term. ■

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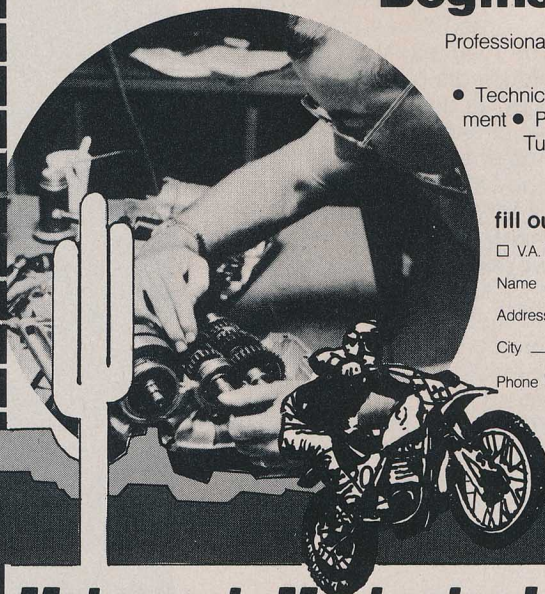
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