

SUZUKI TS-90 HONCHO

A Powerful, Rotary
Valve Lightweight
with Big Bike Styling.

CYCLE WORLD IMPRESSION

THE SUZUKI TS-90 Honcho exemplifies an ideal of sorts; something sought by enthusiasts and motorcycle manufacturers alike. The Honcho will be desired by the motorcyclist for its spirited acceleration, along with comfort, styling and street-dirt versatility—factors determining one's "fun quotient" out in the boonies.

Those in the bike business will find it appealing as a goal; an excellent blend of styling, mechanical design and a competitive price tag (\$374 p.o.e.).

In appearance the TS-90 shares the basic styling theme of the Suzuki 250 Savage, with an extra-large seat which flips up for access to the oil tank and tool kit, low profile gas tank and motocross type front fork. It also has a new double cradle frame rather than the pressed steel backbone used in most earlier Suzuki small bores. And while the tube frame is a bit more expensive to produce than the pressed unit, it can be somewhat lighter, an important factor in small displacement machines.

But in spite of this the Honcho is not truly a lightweight lightweight. It is actually a trifle hefty for a 90, scaling 213 lb. with a half tank of fuel. But trimming off excess poundage should be an easy chore as lights, horn, steel fenders and such can be removed by the racer-to-be in short order. In this way one could pare away 30 lb. or so.

Further, a high performance kit is available from Suzuki dealers that boosts displacement to 100 cc. In its standard state of tune the rotary valved engine is no slouch, producing a genuine 11 bhp which scoots the bike right along. With a few more bhp the high strung Honcho becomes a rapid little mount indeed.

Early in the test we found that the

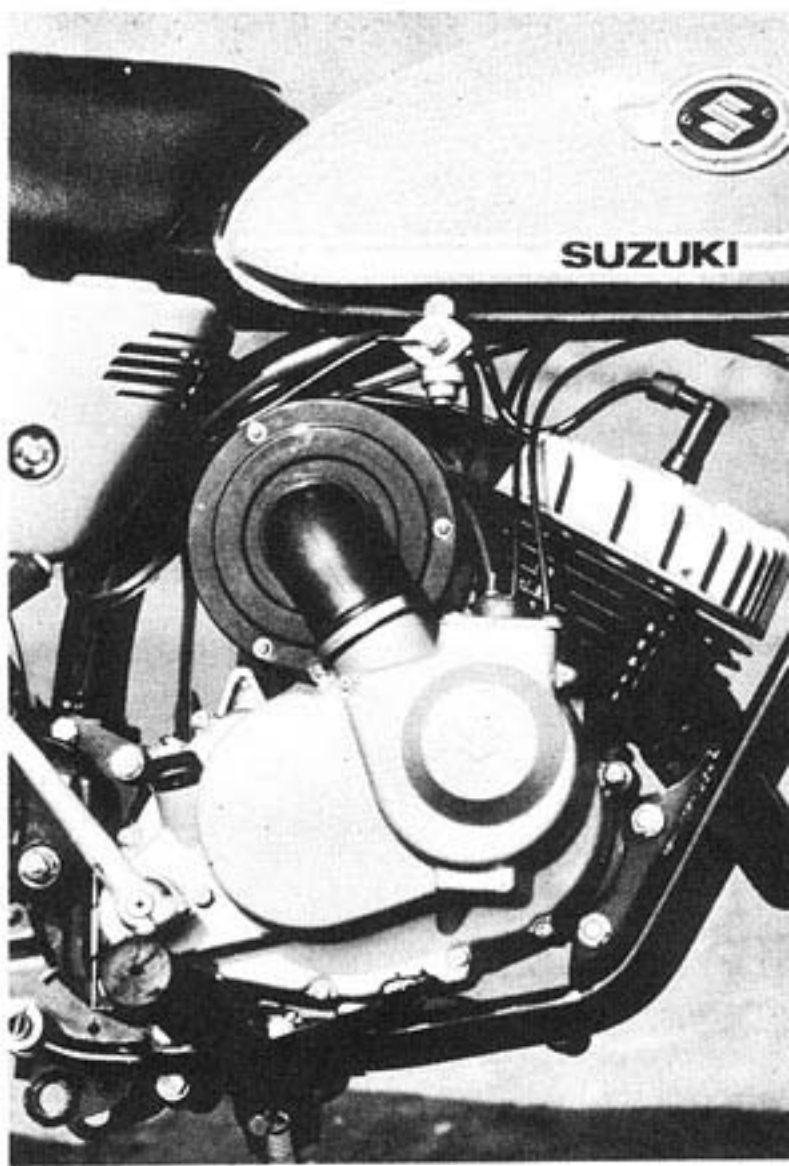
Honcho thrives on revs but comes with gearing a tad too tall for the dirt. It doesn't lend itself to lugging but when engine speed approaches about 5500 rpm, power comes on with a respectable snap.

However, this moderate "peakiness" combined with the TS-90's comparatively short (47 in.) wheelbase makes for rather easy front wheel lifting. This is particularly noticeable under hard acceleration when third gear wheelies startle the unsuspecting rider.

The short wheelbase also allows for quick steering and maneuverability in the dirt, at a slight expense in stability on really rough ground. Here, a rider can pick his way past rustic obstacles with reasonable ease, steering as much with throttle as with fork lock.

We were well impressed with the bike's sturdy suspension. Damping at both ends is good, with generous travel. The front fork provides 5.5 in. movement while the rear travels about 3 in., allowing the rider to challenge some very rough countryside before things begin to clatter and clunk.

Both front and rear wheels were shod with 2.75-18 Trials Universal tires. For the front this is a wise choice of rubber as it bites well and resists sliding away.



But in our estimation, the rear tire doesn't offer a large enough footprint. On the street it is adequate, but for off-road work a fatter 3.00-18 would be more appropriate.

Quite surprising is the little bike's readiness to zing up to its top speed of 60 mph. By using the all-roller-and-needle bearing engine's ability to rev freely, one merely takes a handful of throttle, releases the clutch and begins rowing on the left mounted shifter of the five-speed gearbox. The ratios seem well placed with overall gearing spread between 32.5:1 (first gear) and 10.0:1 in fifth. We'd hesitate to predict what the top speed is with the hop-up kit without actual experience with it, but factory sources indicate the far side of 70 mph is attainable with standard gearing.

In all, the Suzuki TS-90 is an impressive bike in several aspects. The emphasis is on racy, motocross styling, harmoniously combined with street legal equipment. Call it Japanese Neo-Cobby; no doubt the Honcho will be a big seller on that count alone. And it offers plenty of oats for its displacement in standard form, with a kit to extract even more power for the racer. In sum, lots of fun for a good price. 