

THE  
OTHER

# BROS

or alternatively, the other Honda Revere: the hard-nosed Japan-only version. Mike Sweeney gets a special luke (yuk)

**H**ow did Honda UK get it so badly wrong? Two bikes, so much alike on paper, yet so far apart in all that matters. Where the Revere looks as though much of it has been squeezed from a tube, the Bros gives the impression it's been carved from solid.

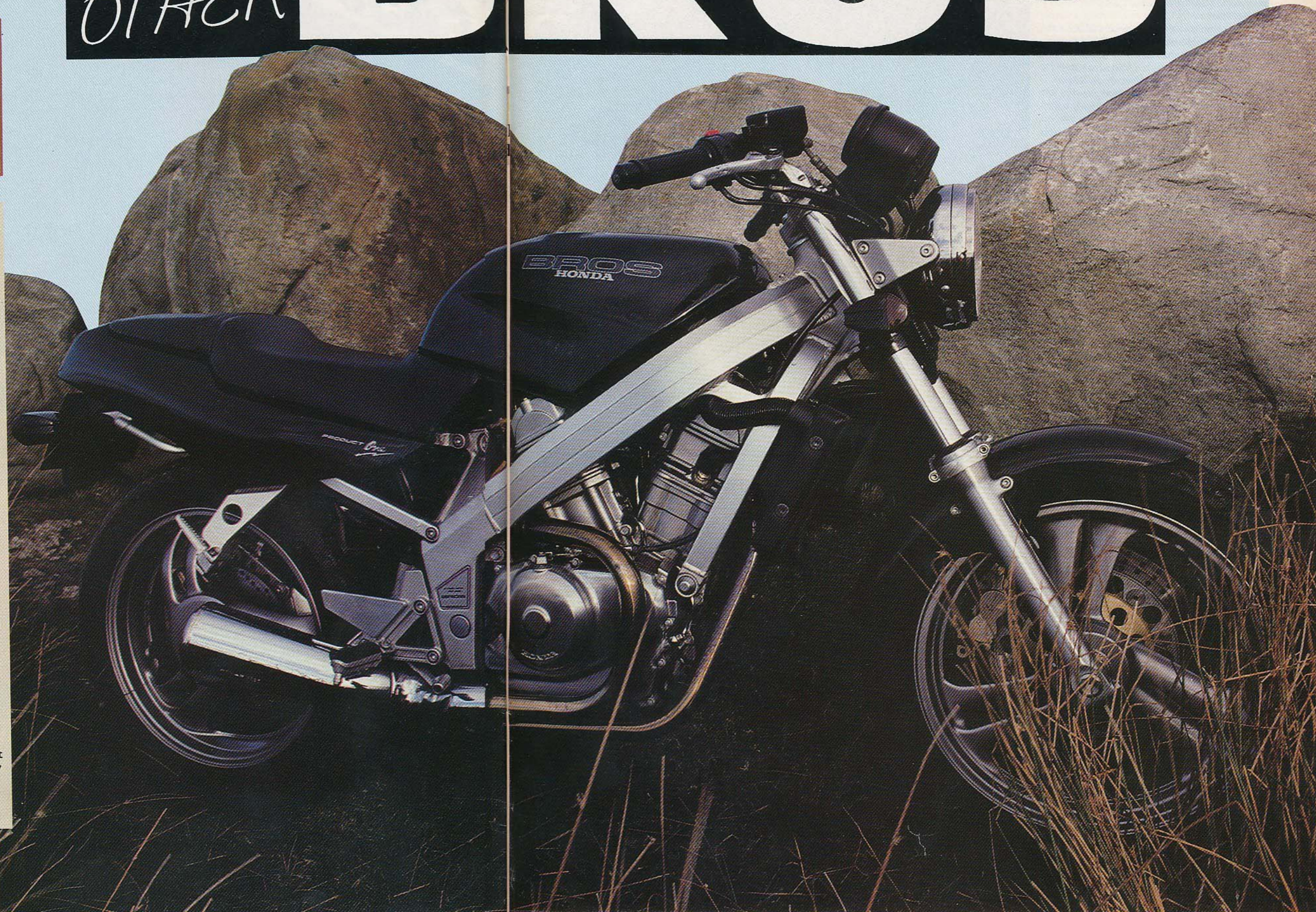
They're like two brothers – one a social worker, the other a prizefighter.

That might seem like an unnecessarily butch attitude, but while the former misses the concept of a no-frills "real motorbike" by light years, the latter almost rewrites the definitions. And Power Road has sentenced us to the wrong one. The Revere has been available over the counter now for three years, but you can only get a Bros through the "grey" importers, from Japan or the US (Bros is its name in Japan, Hawk in the States).

When we tested it back in November '88, the Revere was dismissed as gutless, ill-handling, considerably less than the sum of its parts and instantly forgettable. The Bros is punchy, follows the gameplan, and offers so much more than you'd expect from a 650cc V-twin built by Honda. It has a few faults, but it also has something that makes you forgive them all; something very rare from Soichiro's boys and girls – it has *character*.

Styling is brutal without a hint of excess (weight, at 400lb, is 50lb down the Revere) and this "stripped-down" theme carries through into the engineering – the bike is exactly the right mixture of simplicity and refinement. So, a fuel pump is needed because of a low slung tank with the attendant benefits for handling – but there's no question of hiding it away. The thing is just bolted on somewhere convenient in full view of the shocked bystander (this is a *Honda?*).

A single-sided swing arm wrestles the enormous rear tyre into submission via ►



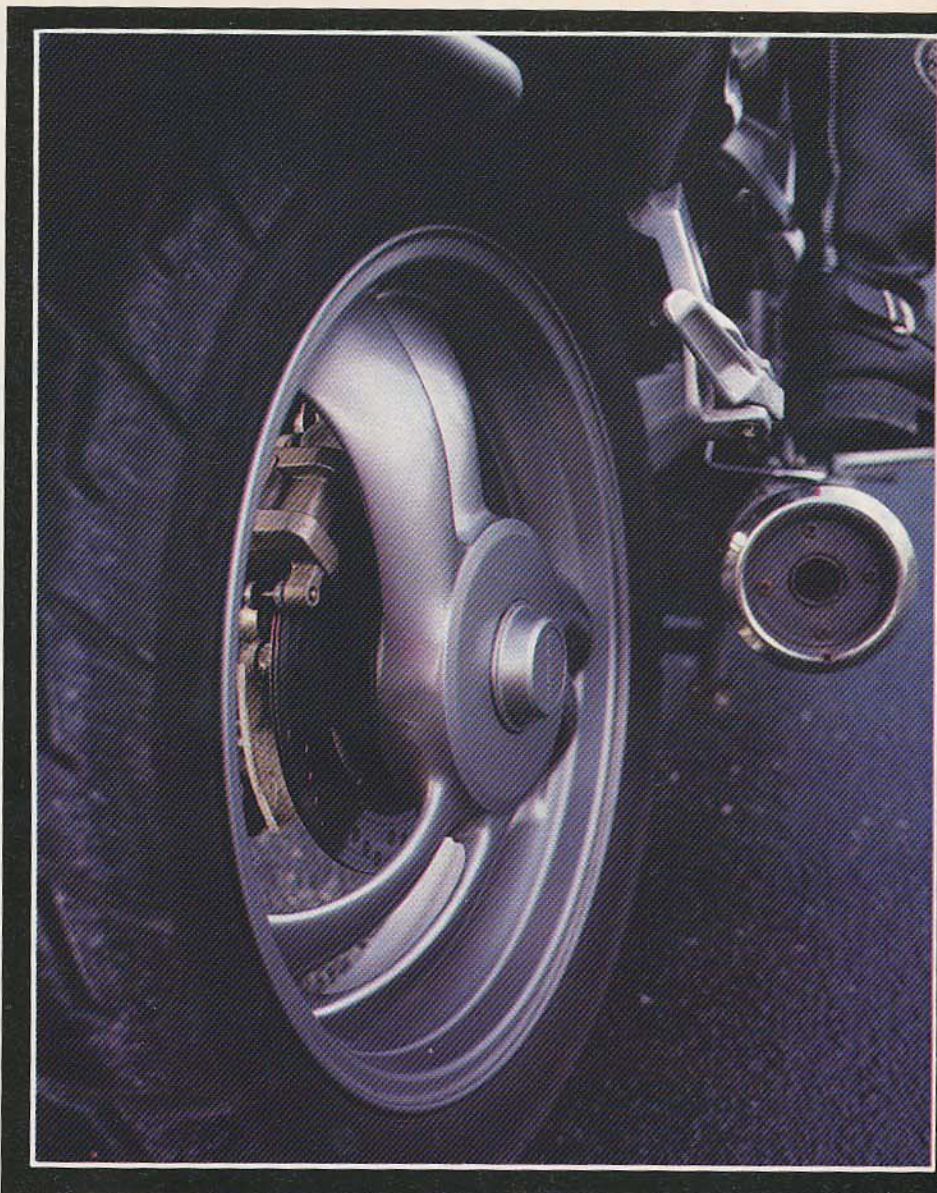
hollow wheel spindles. Extruded aluminium frame beams are welded to a machined steering head and rear engine plate/footrest hanger castings. (The Revere's frame is steel.) The top steering yoke is another beautiful chunk of alloy – in fact nearly all the metalwork is either aluminium alloy or stainless steel.

Locomotion comes courtesy of a 650cc version of the old water-cooled VT500 lump, rather than the anaemic UK-only 600cc derivative in the Revere. It's fickle-free and really stomps once it hits about three-five – firing the bike out of bends in third gear is a real blast, marred only by the thoroughly sensible exhaust note.

In these days of fairings with everything, even trail bikes, it's a novelty to feel the wind on your chest as the speedo reaches for illegal territory. But the riding position, a conservative racer crouch, is spot-on. It avoids you making like a spinnaker while winding it on and yet doesn't trigger the round-town limp-wrist syndrome. The outlook is distinctly less rosy for pillion persons with the high footrests and raised perch. Definitely a 1 + 1.

Matters are not so rosy for the rider either the first few times he or she hits a bump or the anchors. A forward-sloping seat butts against a vertical fuel tank rear giving the inevitable eye-watering consequences for the unwary. Distinctly average forks contribute to this unpleasant scenario. They get very spiky on sharp bumps particularly if these coincide with heavy braking.

In fact the sharp end is the only major weak spot with the bike. It's hard to put a finger on what's up, but the steering had a generally vague, wooden feel and rarely sent back any signals about what the road surface was chucking at it. Nothing untoward ever



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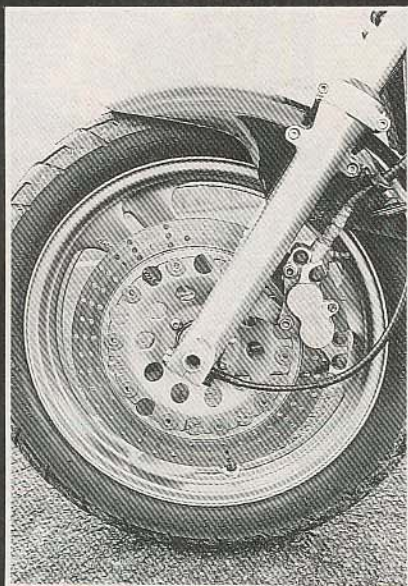




Above: clip ons and alloy top yoke give lie to sports nature of Bros

Left: dished wheel and inboard disc same as Revere, but now purposeful

Right: single stopper scores higher than forks and steering behaviour



## HONDA NT650 BROS

<b>Engine</b>	Liquid-cooled, dohc, 52 degree V-twin
<b>Capacity</b>	647cc
<b>Gearbox</b>	5-speed
<b>Brakes, front</b>	Single disc with twin piston caliper
<b>Rear</b>	Disc
<b>Suspension, front</b>	41mm telescopic fork
<b>Rear</b>	Single shock with 7-way preload adjust
<b>Dry weight</b>	181kg (399lb)
<b>Seat height</b>	777mm (30.6ins)
<b>Fuel capacity</b>	12 litres (2.7gal)

happened, but at first you get the feeling that Johnny Macadam was up to something – too damn quiet, old boy.

The bike's owner, one John Radcliffe from Leyland, Lancashire, reckoned that cold weather and the impressive-looking but dodgy tyres might have had a lot to do with it. This was confirmed by Paul English, boss at suppliers-to-the-trade outfit R&R, whose

racing Bros (sometime ridden by his 125 GP protégé Robin Milton) makes contact with the track through a brace of Metzlers. Certainly the uneasy feel seemed to improve the harder you pushed things.

Aside from the bad communications on the fork front, handling was just dandy. The massive frame is as flex-free as it looks and the seven-position rear suspension has the

correct damping and spring rates so conspicuous by their absence from the Revere.

A single front disc has no problems stopping such a lightweight and its counterpart aft is similarly on top of its brief. The bike responds best to being braked deep into corners, tipped over quickly and then powered out on the huge 150-section rear boot – almost like a motocrosser, or these road race GP chappies. Flowing lines and peeling gently off into corners are not its style at all.

An awfully nice Honda-person told us that the bike was made for America (where it's called the Hawk) where Honda sales have taken a nose-dive in recent years. From dominating the market with nearly 50 per cent of all bike sales they've slumped to 23, Harley gaining most of the lost share and building four out of ten bikes sold in the US.

Apparently all the stainless steel and shiny aluminium, as well as the black paint is to hint at Milwaukee. And to be fair, from some angles, there are faint echoes of hawgdom, though if we must drag comparisons in here, the bike is spiritually closer to the Ducati, with its light weight, good handling and torquey V-twin motor.

"Americans like that sort of thing," our source opined about the alloy and stainless steel so liberally applied to the Bros. And we Brits prefer bent tin and steel painted to look like alloy, eh?

Curiously, despite the high build quality of the machine and its muscley look, the Hawk/Bros/RC31 is promoted as a commuter bike in the US and sales have not been too good. Reading the rancid prose in the brochure might explain why. "Commuting on a Hawk GT tells everybody that you're not only upwardly, but outwardly mobile," it says here. Pass the sick bucket, Alice.

It also says that the Hawk is versatile, which is fair enough and that it is "sophisticated technology, V-twin muscle and European styling combined in one unique machine." But 'ere, hang on a minute, it's not aksherly on sale anywhere in Europe...

While the Revere is woolly, ill-focussed and makes you wonder what it's for, the "commuter" Bros has the hard edges and character and that maybe came from having to fight for recognition. Whilst it isn't quite Honda's attempt to produce a modern "classic bike", with its stripped-down functionality the Bros is almost exactly that. It didn't make it to these shores because Blighty's not big enough for it and the Revere, we're told. However, if Kawasaki's new Zephyrs go down well, the Big Aitch could reconsider (particularly if they've got them filling the aisles in US Honda's distribution warehouse, which apparently they have).

If the price is held down to that of the Revere, it deserves to succeed. It's certainly more likely to appeal this side of the pond, with its back-to-basics Harley-esq street cred mated to good design, performance and handling. (None of which is applicable to a Harley, of course, but these days they're all ridden by showbiz fashion victims, who wouldn't know the difference.)

Just as long as the bikes arrive with something other than "Bros" emblazoned on the bloody tank...

