

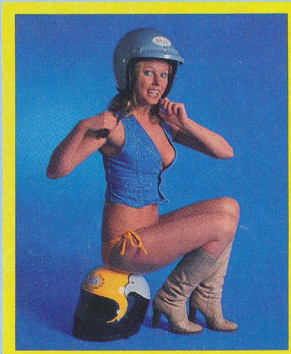
motorcycle MECHANICS

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Tasty MB50...

THE NEW Honda MB50 looks good, sounds good and smells good — in fact, it's pretty tasty! With its limited 30mph performance any sixteen-year special will have to appeal to the senses if it is going to sell; and MB50 does.

Looking more like a road racer than a 30mph 'slowed', the little Honda shouts performance from every viewpoint. The clip-on type bars, the small flyscreen and the cast alloy wheels all suggest that this bike can move — what a pity it's all a sham.

Don't get the wrong idea, riding the MB50 in London traffic is just as exciting as riding any other 30mph restricted machine — in place of "exciting" you could read dangerous!

There simply isn't enough power to keep up with the majority of the traffic which flows nearer to 40mph than 30. Honda have certainly done a good job while working within the limitations of the 30mph restriction law. You do get an impression of speed, but that's all you get.

If the Honda Express can manage its 30mph performance with only one gear how come the MB50 needs five? It's all part of Honda's deception. First gear is very low. In fact, flat out you are going little faster than walking pace — but the take-off is terrific. Even with a modest amount of throttle you can lift the front wheel by dropping the clutch although it's not recommended to help transmission life! The tachometer doesn't exactly whizz around the dial but you can use it to change up at peak revs.

Once you reach third gear, I found it just as quick to prod the pedal straight into top, rather than wring the motor out in fourth. Top speed indicated was 35mph which is about right allowing for speedometer error and the government's percentage leeway.

Honda make a point of stressing the MB50's low centre of gravity and three-spoke Comstar wheels. We can't say how much this contributes to the handling but we can say that the bike handles quite well — for a moped.

The disc brake is certainly more than a match for the performance and it is pretty easy to lose more speed than you intended because of its deceptive power and light action. The chassis could cope with a lot

more performance but Honda claim that it isn't possible to tune the engine.

Basically, the power unit is a single cylinder two-stroke with reed valves controlling the intake. The inlet port has a similar bore to the fuel tap on the 900 and an equally restrictive exhaust port. What is interesting is that Honda have seen fit to design the motor with a "balancer" shaft.

It's difficult to believe any two-stroke this small needs such a device to damp out vibrations and it may just be a way of increasing the flywheel mass without building a large crankcase to house it. The motor also features electronic ignition with its own built-in advance system.

The combustion chamber is a new design and this, Honda claim, allows the engine to run at low, town, speeds without fouling the plug. The massive finning on the engine is also said to aid low-speed cooling. Since the engine produces just about zero power, and therefore heat, we would think that the cooling fin size is designed for looks rather than efficiency.

As for the low speed, clean running, combustion chamber I can't see anyone riding this bike at anything other than a flat-out pace!

...Punchy CB900FA

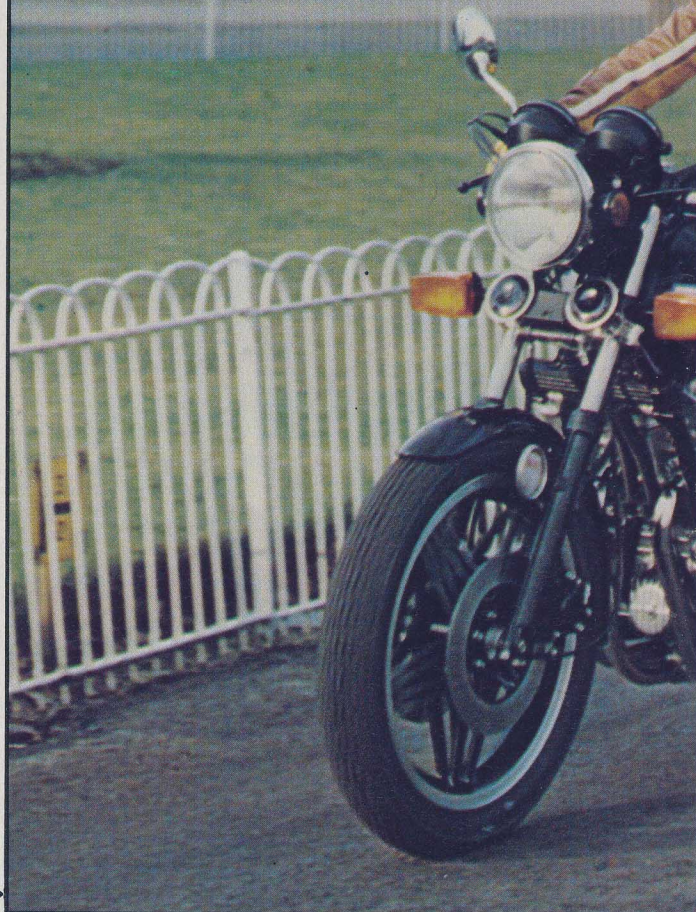
IF THE MB50 isn't quite your cup of tea, you could try the latest CB900FA. Most readers will already be familiar with the Honda 900FZ which has been featured many times in *MCM*.

We have run one for 24 hours around Snetterton circuit, carried out an extensive road test, and in the February issue we showed you how this machine could be tuned to do 143mph. The latest offering from the Japanese bike giant is basically the FZ but with certain mods made to improve the handling.

Although the first 900 handled quite well you can't have too much of a good thing and the FA model has needle roller bearings fitted to the swinging arm, in place of the original plastic bushes. This should help tighten up the back of the bike and reduce any likelihood of wear spoiling the handling.

At the front end the changes reflect the sign of the times — air suspension has arrived.

You may be forgiven for asking what's such a big deal about



Honda's new two - which one for you?

◁ an air fork conversion, the answer is that Honda have done it the right way. Simply fitting valves to your fork nuts and pumping in some wind doesn't really exploit the full potential of air as a suspension medium.

The great advantage of air suspension is that its spring rate increases as the fork compresses, by a progressive ratio. This means that at small fork movements the resistance of the springing is quite small and the wheel can float over the road. As the bumps increase in size so the air spring pressure automatically increases with it, keeping the bike in a stable condition.

With a simple fork conversion you have to retain the original springs but these have been designed to cope with the full load of the bike and do not allow the air suspension to operate to best advantage at small fork deflections — after all, the steel spring was designed to cope with these in the first place.

Honda have changed the steel fork springs in the FA model and reduced their poundage rate so that the air in the system is allowed to work in the most beneficial way.

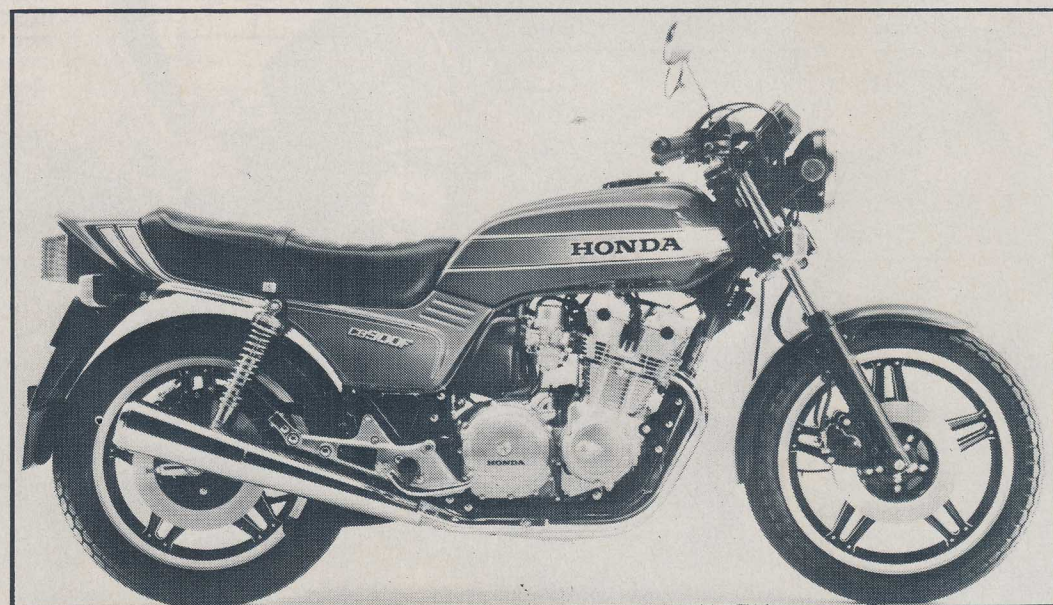
The metal springs are there to assist the suspension, rather than control it, and they also serve as a reserve should the air escape from the system.

Finally, the front fork seals have also been altered. To cope with the pressure of the air springing Honda have not relied on the original seal since it was only designed to keep in the oil. We also understand that Suzuki use a special, three lip, seal on their air suspension models. While we have had lots of satisfactory reports from owners who have fitted air conversions retaining the original seals, we feel that the manufacturers must be worried about this point or they wouldn't bother with special ones themselves.

After a very brief ride on the bike we aren't really in a position to say how much difference the changes have made, but we can report that the FA model has lost none of the FZ's mid-range punch. Giving the 900's eight inlet valves an unrestricted view of the London skyline was a little bit like engaging warp drive — it's good fun if you don't get caught. ●



The Honda MB50's engine is designed to work best at moped speeds. It costs £399.



Biggest four-cylinder in Honda's range, the 1980 CB900 F-A is priced at £2,099.