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LOOK!**

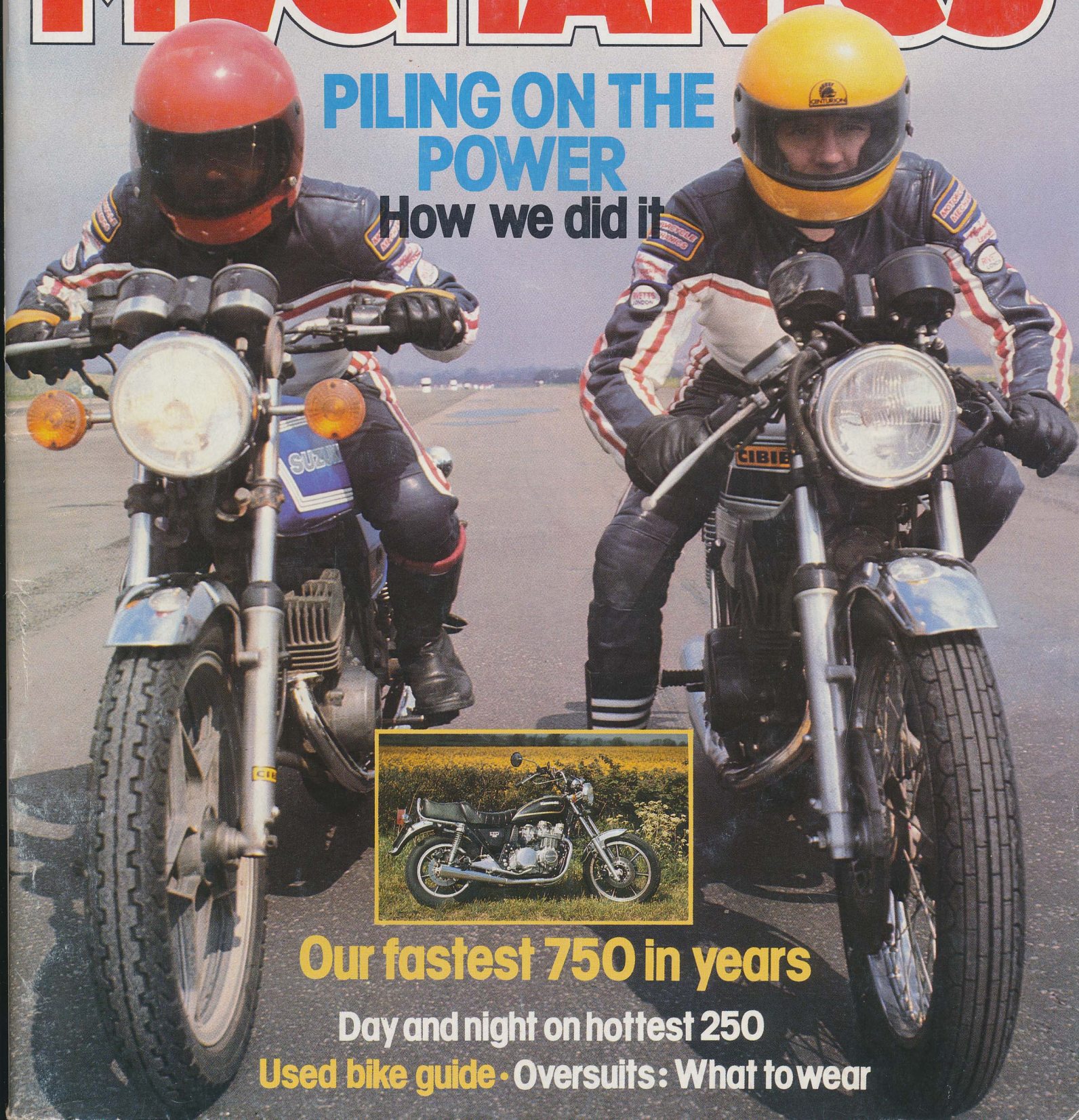
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OCTOBER, 1980 60p (\$2.75 US)

motorcycle **MECHANICS**

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How we did it



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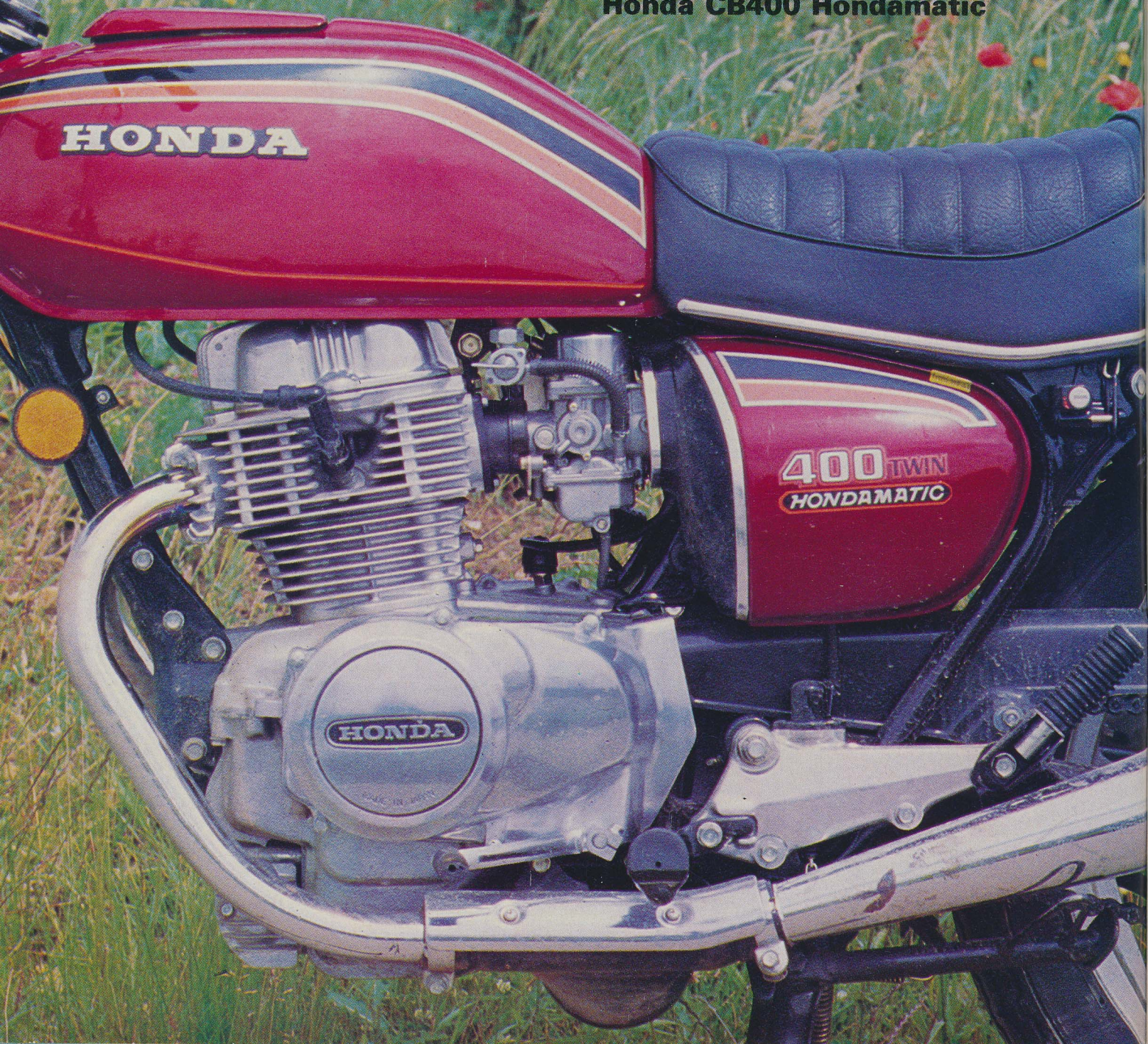
Day and night on hottest 250

Used bike guide • Oversuits: What to wear

On test



Honda CB400 Hondamatic





Automatic choice

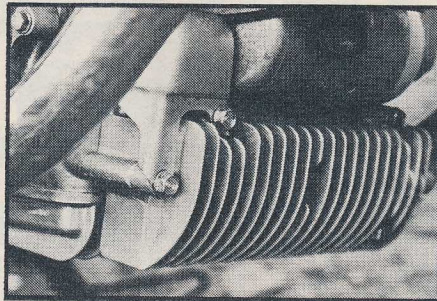
LET'S GET clear right from the start. The 400cc Hondamatic is not an automatic gearbox motorcycle. The gearbox is quite conventional in that it has a mechanical foot change, but only incorporating two speeds. What makes it a Hondamatic is the fluid flywheel coupling the engine to the gearbox.

Like any other machine the engine is started in neutral, but you lift the pedal to obtain either of the two gears. The left hand, "clutch" lever is a parking brake and is fitted with a lock-out device so that you can't pull it on when riding. Pulling away for the first time is a strange experience, using the first, low, ratio initial take off is very quick because all you have to do is snap the throttle open. However the flywheel slips for quite a time and first gear can be used up to an indicated 55/60mph if the engine is screamed quite hard. With no tach fitted you have to play the engine revs by ear.

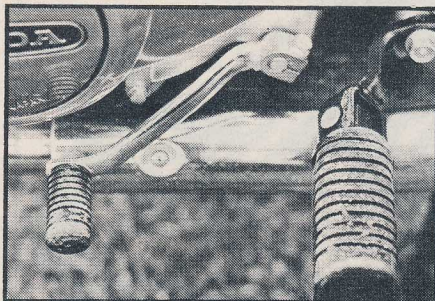
For normal riding I found it best to change up at around 30mph although the higher ratio can be retained at speeds well below this. Once you get used to the bike you get quite lazy and on a couple of occasions I found myself pulling away in high gear! The motor and flywheel can cope with this quite well but performance isn't exactly shattering.

Neutral is very easy to select since it is at the bottom of the pile. From top gear you just press the pedal down twice. This can lead to problems because in a tight situation you stop thinking Hondamatic and revert to normal bike riding actions. Approaching a corner or a roundabout you might change down once and then need a bit of extra power to accelerate out of trouble, down goes the gear pedal once more and you find yourself with a high revving engine and no more forward motion at all!

Cornering with the Hondamatic is quite



Lots of fins are needed to keep the oil cool. Its use in the fluid flywheel raises the temperature considerably.



The gear pedal looks conventional but you press down to locate neutral and lift it twice to find the driving gears.

Top left: The pod for the tach houses the neutral and gear warning lights — hardly necessary with only two ratios to choose from!

Top right: The "clutch" lever is actually a parking brake which features a lock out button. We never actually used the device.

deceptive. Initially you tend to go around with very little throttle, almost free-wheeling. The technique is to use the lower ratio and power the bike through the turn. You have to crack the throttle early though, because the drive takes a fraction of a second to reach the back wheel. Once you get the hang of it the footrest can be touched down and the bike still feels quite steady.

Engine braking is another area that needs to be re-learned, sometimes you have it and other times you don't! In high ratio you can cruise at 70mph and just ease back the throttle to lose speed. However, once the speed drops to around 50mph you start to free-wheel. Dropping down to low ratio gives you engine braking once more until the road speed drops to about 10 to 15mph.

With the "now you see me, now you don't" engine braking you have to rely a little more on the bike's brakes, the single disc on our test model was just about up to the job. The lever lacked some feel and I got the impression that the pads weren't quite fully bedded in. The twin discs of the

On test **Honda CB400 Hondamatic**

400N would have been nice although a lot of riders would have then found the bike overbraked. I assume the 250N set up is used because the bike only delivers 250cc performance.

The standing quarter times and the top speed are about par for the current 250cc state of the art. Getting the bike off the line for the standing start times was a piece of cake. There was no need to experiment with different engine speeds and throttle settings to get the best take-off. All you have to do is plant your right boot firmly on the back brake pedal and give it full throttle. When you want to go you just release the back brake.

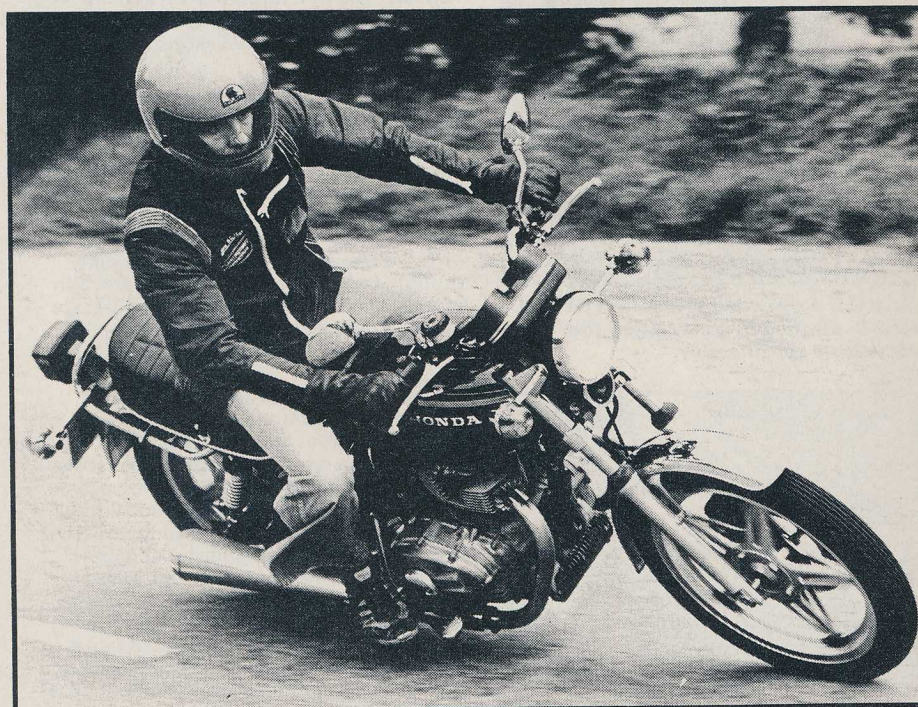
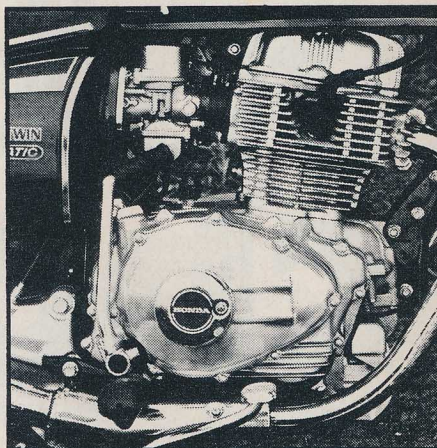
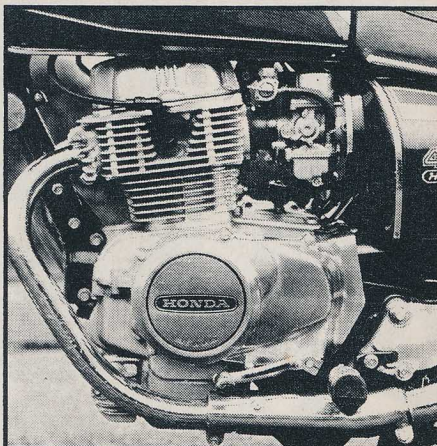
Top speed might have improved, given a couple of miles run up to the lights, but with the Hondamatic such things are academic. The bike will hold a very relaxed and comfortable 70mph all day and the riding position is just about right as a touring/commuter compromise.

With the bike averaging around 55mpg the fuel tank could have been larger. The range to reserve varied from 90 to 110 miles. With the elastic type connection

Tester's verdict

(points scored out of ten)

Performance.....	6
Economy.....	7
Handling.....	8
Comfort.....	9
Appearance.....	8
Equipment.....	7
Braking.....	8
Value for money.....	8



Specification

ENGINE

Type.....	Air cooled four stroke twin
Displacement.....	395cc
Bore/stroke.....	70.5 x 50.6mm
Max bhp.....	N/A
Lubrication system.....	Wet sump
Ignition.....	CDI
Gearbox.....	Two speed with fluid flywheel

CHASSIS

Wheelbase.....	1390mm
Ground clearance.....	165mm
Weight.....	381lb
Fuel tank.....	2.9gal
Oil tank.....	3.3ltrs
Tyre front.....	3.60 x 18
Tyre rear.....	4.10 x 18
Brake front.....	single disc
Brake rear.....	single leading shoe drum

PERFORMANCE

Maximum speed.....	90.75mph
Standing start 1/4.....	16.96sec at 78.06mph
Speeds in gears.....	N/A

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Best.....	57.7mpg
Worst.....	52.1mpg
Average.....	55.0mpg

List price.....£1064
 Importer: Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick, London.

How it compares

Top speed

Hondamatic.....	91mph
Kawasaki Z400B.....	101mph
Honda CB400N.....	114mph
Yamaha RD400E.....	108mph
Suzuki GS450.....	111mph

SS 1/4-mile

Hondamatic.....	16.9s
Kawasaki Z400B.....	n/a
Honda CB400N.....	13.7s
Yamaha RD400E.....	13.7s
Suzuki GS450.....	14.9s

Average fuel consumption

Hondamatic.....	55mpg
Kawasaki Z400B.....	55mpg
Honda CB400N.....	56mpg
Yamaha RD400E.....	45mpg
Suzuki GS450.....	57mpg

Price

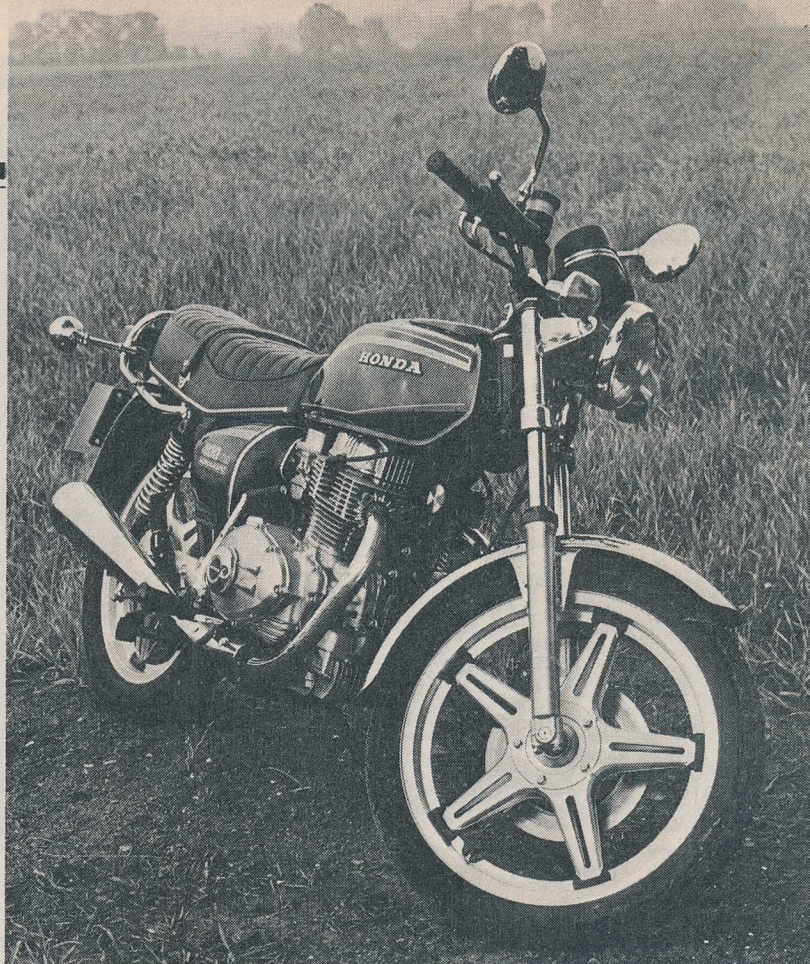
Hondamatic.....	£1064
Kawasaki Z400B.....	£899
Honda CB400N.....	£1053
Yamaha RD400E.....	£999
Suzuki GS450.....	£999

between the engine and the gearbox, fuel consumption is bound to be higher than with a conventional transmission. On the other hand you have a 400cc engine producing 250 type performance which means that the motor is hardly being stretched at all. Some might argue that a 400 ought to go quicker, but judging from some of the dealers' discount prices you are getting the bike at around the cost of the better two-hundreds.

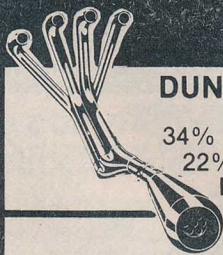
Not having to worry about the clutch leaves you free to concentrate on the throttle operation and this, combined with the clean snatch-free pick up, makes the bike a first class traffic machine. You can trickle along at slower than walking speeds and maintain perfect balance. In the London rush-hour it is the easiest bike to control that I have ever ridden.

As far as I can make out the only real black mark is the slightly high fuel consumption. If you ignore the capacity of the engine, performance is more than adequate for commuting or touring and the price, discounted that is, makes the bike a real bargain. So why have Honda taken two years to get a road test bike to us? Have they been hiding their light under a bushel — or is there a long-term reliability catch? Only time will tell.

Dave Walker



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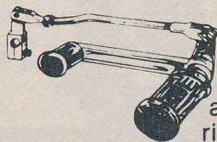
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