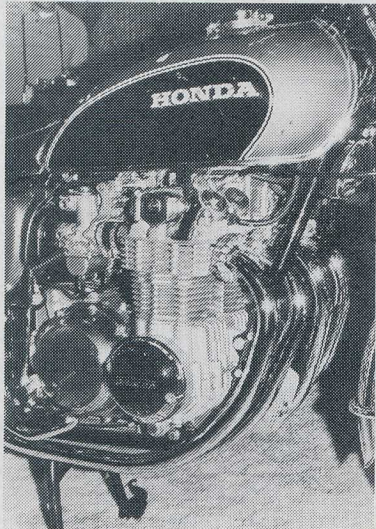


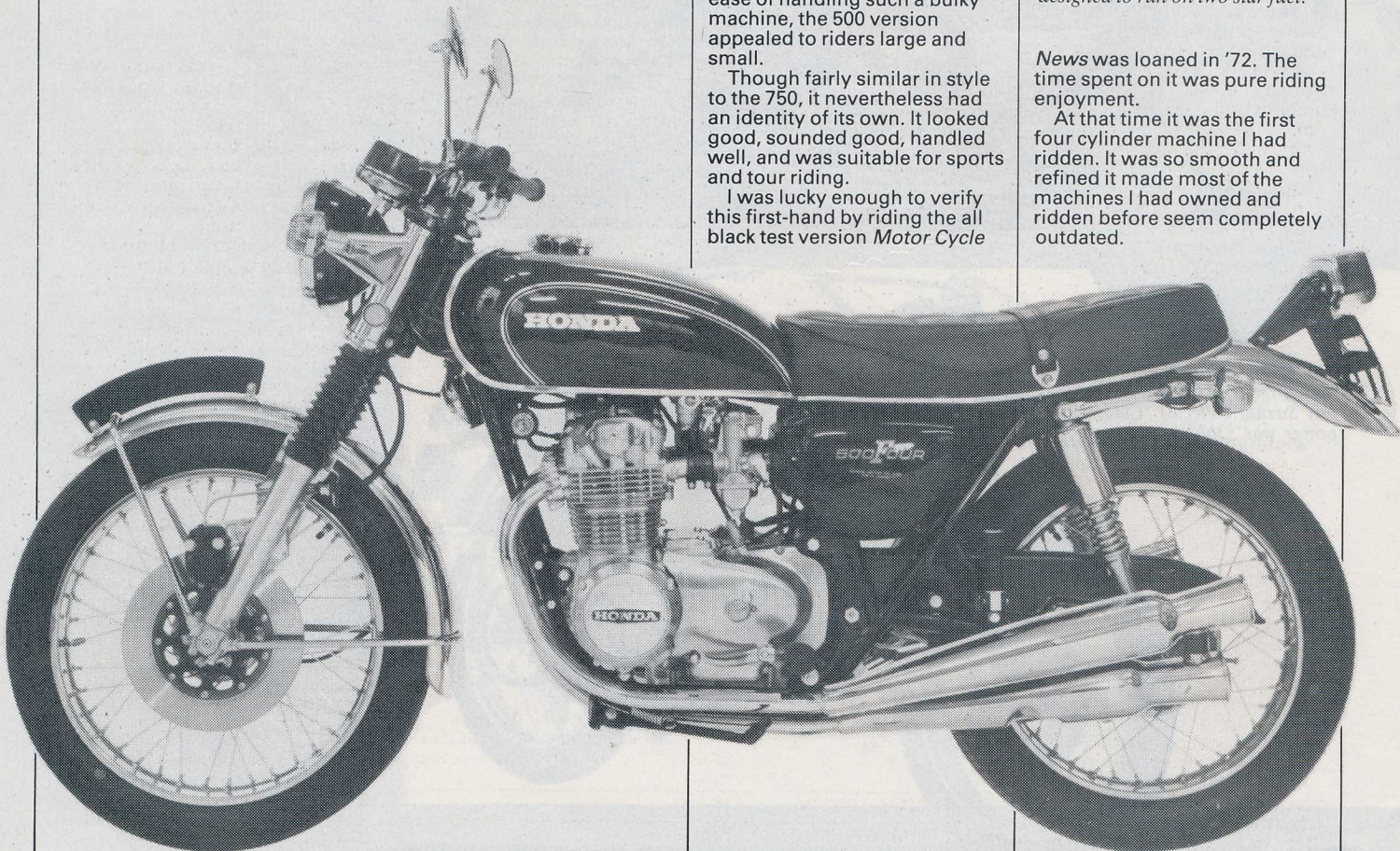
HONDA CB500-4

BIRTH OF A THOROUGHbred

“... probably the finest middleweight motorcycle on the British market.”
Jerry Clayton, MCN tester



SOHC is chain driven. The four carbs are rod operated. Throttle has Honda's safety conscious twin cable push-pull set-up.



WHEN HONDA gave the world its first mass produced transverse four-stroke four in 1968 it not only drew gasps of amazement, some people were also puzzled.

They were puzzled because Honda had chosen to market a 750.

Mike Hailwood's successes on the 500-4 works machine which included the 1966 and 67 Senior TTs, led many pundits to assume that if Honda did produce a road going four it would be a 500.

When the 750 was unveiled race enthusiasts crossed their fingers in the hope that Honda would follow up with a 500-4.

To be able to have a tangible part of the success and unmistakable scream of the works 500-4 now seemed to be a definite possibility.

Sure enough the news came in 1971 that a 500-4 was on its way. A dream was to be fulfilled by British enthusiasts in their hundreds as the first models began to arrive late that year.

A thoroughbred was worn. Obviously heavily silenced and featuring single cam valve gear as opposed to a twin cam system on the works machine, the road four was still very much a direct descendant of the racer. And it represented a generous helping of big-time grand prix action and glamour.

Not only that, it was beautifully proportioned. Where the 750-4 was physically large, making some potential owners think twice about the ease of handling such a bulky machine, the 500 version appealed to riders large and small.

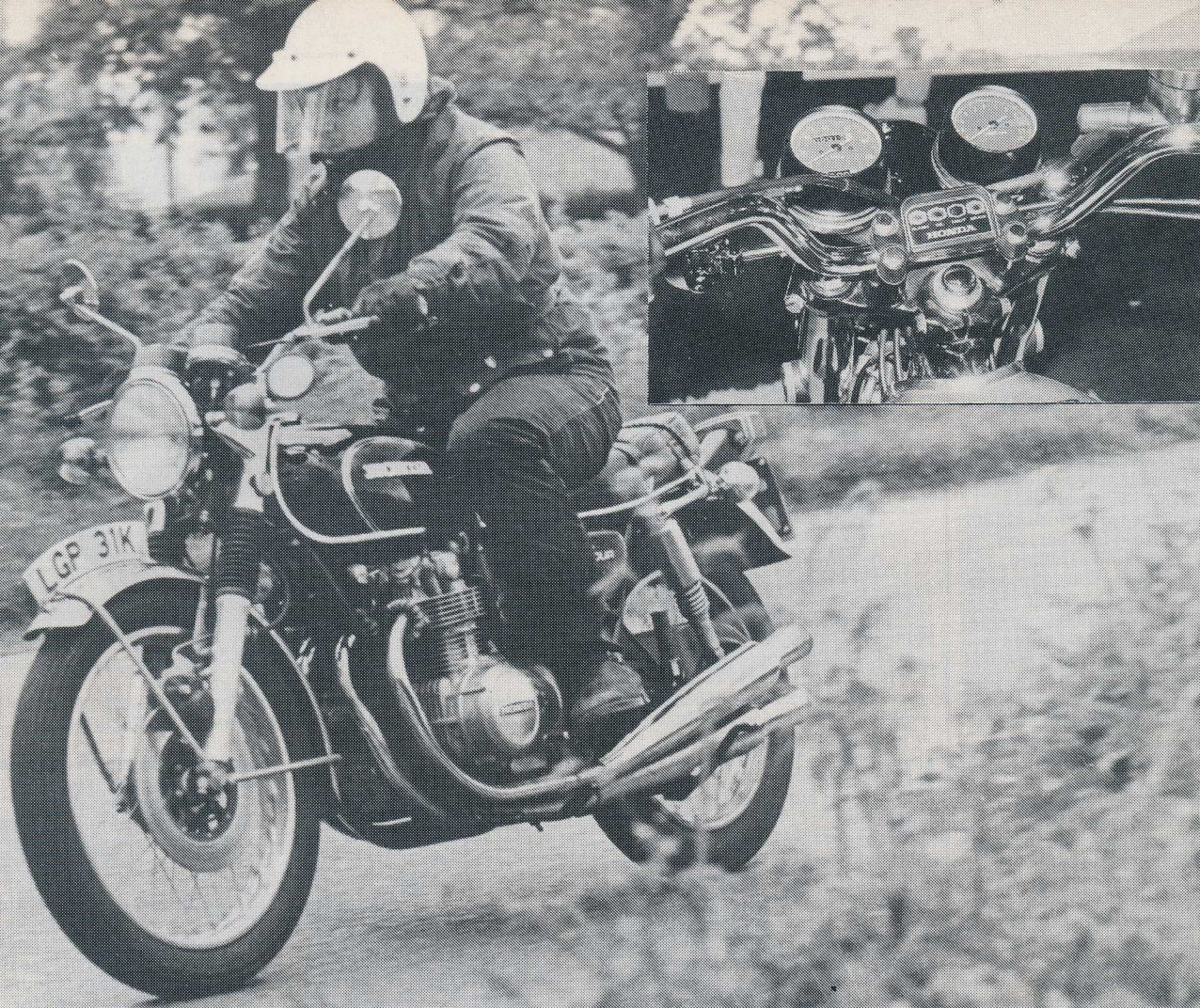
Though fairly similar in style to the 750, it nevertheless had an identity of its own. It looked good, sounded good, handled well, and was suitable for sports and tour riding.

I was lucky enough to verify this first-hand by riding the all black test version *Motor Cycle*

Above: Tester Jerry Clayton gets the envious job of testing the 500-4 back in '72. The engine was designed to run on two star fuel.

News was loaned in '72. The time spent on it was pure riding enjoyment.

At that time it was the first four cylinder machine I had ridden. It was so smooth and refined it made most of the machines I had owned and ridden before seem completely outdated.



Humming along the road on this beautiful piece of grand prix technology produced such a mental tingle that between rides it was hard to concentrate on anything other than when and where I could ride it again.

A riding friend with a 175 Honda at the time also came under its spell and later bought one.

The 500 differed from the 750 in two major respects. It had oversquare bore x stroke and wet sump lubrication.

By 1973 Honda were claiming a 50 per cent share of the British market for 401-500cc machines thanks to the 500 which many regarded in 1972 as Honda's finest machine so far.

Honda added 350 and 400cc four cylinder machines to their range before increasing the CB500's capacity to 550cc in 1975 with the four-pipe CB550K1 and a sporting version, the CB550F with four-into-one exhaust.

Naturally the first 500 is the most collectable. Original colour scheme was either all black, or black and gold.

Motor Cycle News tested one in July 1972. This is what staffman Jerry Clayton had to say:—

I T'S USEFUL when you're testing a road bike to listen to the comments of that most knowledgeable of creatures — the Average British Onlooker.

Rather than delving into great lists of technical advantages, the ABO looks more to the practicalities of

SPECIFICATION IN 1972

■ ENGINE:	Air-cooled in-line transverse four-cylinder four-stroke with chain-driven single overhead camshaft. Capacity: 498cc. Bore and stroke: 56mm x 50.6mm. Compression ratio 9:1. Claimed output: 48bhp at 9,000 rpm. Torque: 29.6 ft lbs at 7,500 rpm. Carburation: Four piston valve type 22mm Keihin. Lubrication: Wet sump, pressure fed. Capacity: 6.3 pints.
■ ELECTRICAL:	12-volt battery fed by alternator — 12v 0.2kw at 5,000 rpm. Electric starter.
■ TRANSMISSION:	Primary drive by Morse chain to five-speed gearbox. Wet multi-plate clutch. Overall ratios: 1st 15.28, 2nd 10.62, 3rd 8.24, 4th 6.73, 5th 5.84.
■ BRAKES:	Front: Single 10.8in diameter disc hydraulically operated. Rear: internal expanding shoe type, diameter: 7.08ins.
■ TYRES:	Bridgestone 3.25 x 19 front; 3.50 x 18 rear.
■ DIMENSIONS:	Wheelbase: 55.3ins; overall length: 83.9ins; overall width: 29.3ins; overall height: 42.1ins; seat height: 31.5ins; footrest height: 12ins; ground clearances: 6.3ins; weight (with half tank of fuel): 440lb.
■ CAPACITIES:	Petrol 3.08 gal; reserve 1.05 gal.
■ PRICE:	£629.00
■ PERFORMANCE:	Maximum speed (slight headwind rider wearing two-piece suit): 102.7 mph. Standing start quarter mile: 14.57 secs. Speeds in gears (at 9,250 rpm): 1st, 42 mph; 3rd, 60 mph; 3rd, 82 mph; 4th, 102 mph, 5th, 102.7 mph (at 6,300 rpm). Braking: From 30 mph, 26ft 3ins; from 60 mph, 134ft 1in. Speedometer accuracy: At 40 mph, true speed 38.3 mph; at 70 mph, true speed 67.7 mph.
■ FUEL CONSUMPTION:	46 mpg.
■ OIL CONSUMPTION:	500 mpp.

Above inset: Neat understated instrumentation features panel with flash, oil, neutral and high beam warning lights.

owning a machine. And it would appear that many would love to own the Honda CB500.

For start the K500, "looks" right. For a "four" it is extremely compact and being so, can be laid over so far that you'll go through your riding boots before anything on the bike will ground.

The bike has that inbuilt feeling of quality normally associated with machines costing far more than the Honda. It's a difficult thing to define, and possibly the test CB500's all black garb had something to do with it.

As it is, it's something of an experience, to wheel the Honda out into the morning sunshine, switch on, press the button, and give the bike a few minutes to warm up before zooming off. Like a cornflake ad!

But, dropping the flippancy, Honda have now far surpassed those old "oriental buzz-box" jibes. This is a quality motor cycle that goes as well as it looks.

In top gear, the CB500 will comfortably top the ton and will cruise indefinitely in its upper eighties.

The exhaust note is hardly more than a burble — an angry burble when roused — and I doubt whether even under hard usage, the Honda would cause offence.

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The single overhead camshaft is driven by a chain which runs between the centre cylinders. The engine delivers 48 bhp at 9,000 rpm and the red line is drawn just 250 rpm higher.

You might expect a weight of 440 lb, including a half tank of fuel, to suck off some of the Honda's power. But it ran through the standing quarter mile test in 14.57 seconds, an excellent time for a touring 500.

The bike's big brother, the mighty CB 750, has already proved more than popular with hardened rally types. It is obviously a machine for forceful rides, but for others it can seem rather bulky. Now, the 500 fills the gap. It can easily be managed by a rider of smaller stature and yet still provides enough mile-eating performance to suit most tastes.

In first and second gears there is a very real risk of over-revving, for which hardly any flywheel action from the engine, the revs build up extremely quickly. But the gear change — one down and four up through a left hand lever — is crisp and slick.

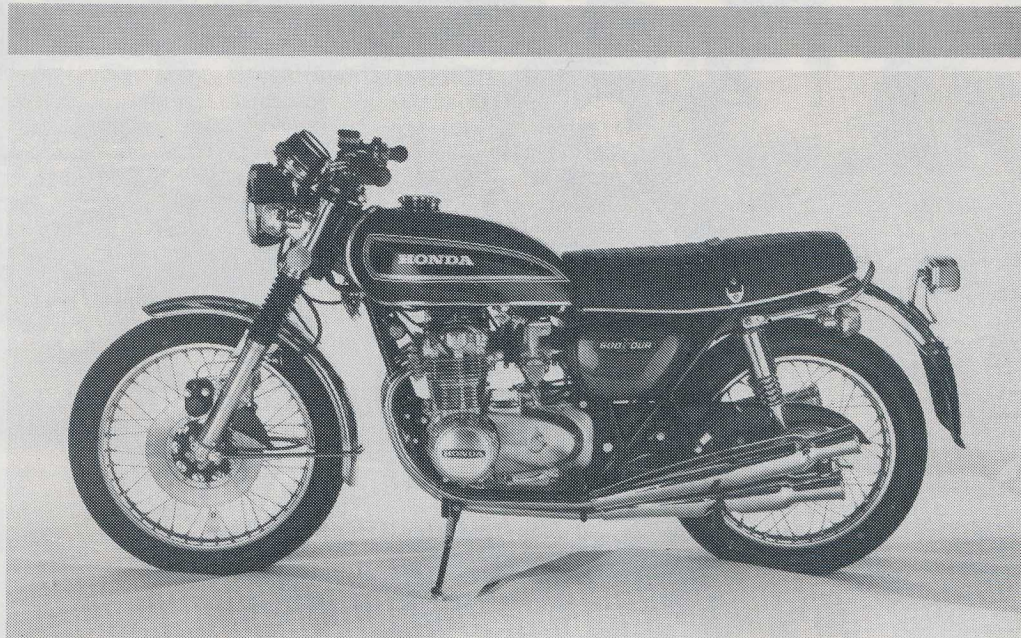
At first I had assumed, incorrectly that the front brake was identical to the 750's but in fact, its diameter is $\frac{3}{4}$ in smaller. The rear drum brake's effective braking power was more noticeable at slower speeds — it was so overshadowed by the front unit.

These days, it's far too easy to expect a full complement of electrical gadgets and then overlook entirely the amount of painstaking design work that has gone into the manufacture and siting of various components.

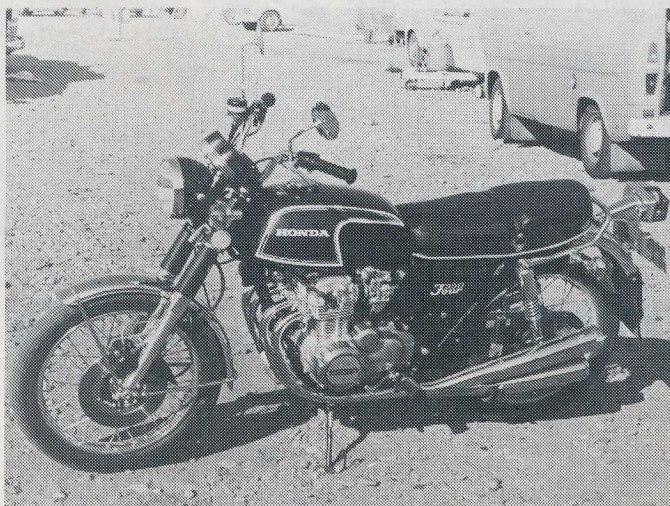
Apart from the electric starter, the Honda 500 also sports indicator flashers, and a headlamp flasher button on the left bar. This, being integral with the horn button, is depressed for sound and moved to the right to flash the light. The only snag with this is that it is almost impossible when wearing gloves to flash the headlight without sounding the horn as well. To my mind anyway, this didn't matter, but some riders might object.

The only other control that caused any problems was the dipswitch. This has an "off" position in the lowest point of a tiny gate switch. To get low beam, you merely move the lever to the right. The lever springs up as it leaves the "off" setting. The next position is pilot light, followed by full beam.

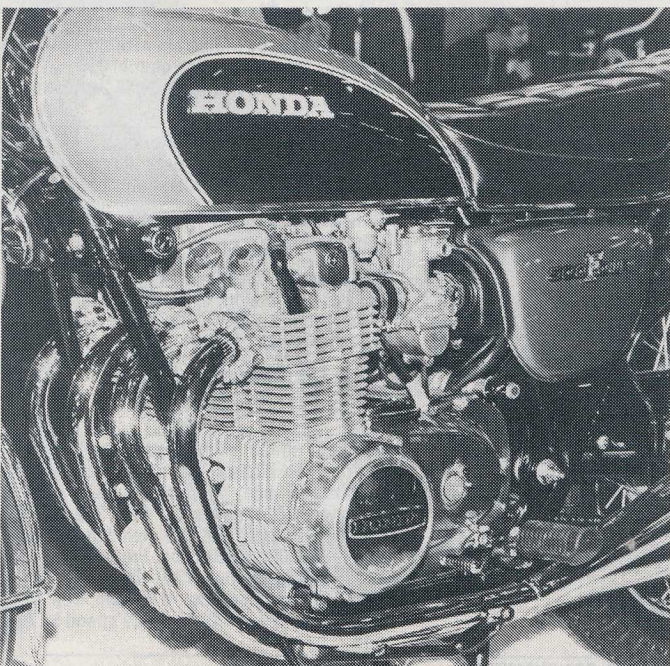
The snag arises when switching from full beam to dip — it is far too easy to crash back through the gate to "off" and plunge into a panic inducing darkness. This really is



Later version of the 500-4 featured new tank graphics, splash guard on front disc, longer rear grab rail, new pattern on seat, new rear light, screwed-on extra rear mudguard section, different hooter, headlight and instruments.



Hot on the heels of the 500-4 came the 350-4 of 1972, later enlarged to 400cc in 1974. Though not imported to Britain this six speeder is definitely collectable.



Typical on Hondas of the time, the ignition switch is under the left side of the fuel tank. Rear shocks have three-point preload.

something on which designers must think again.

Considering that throttle control is via a single cable coupled to a transverse rod connected to all four carburetors, the action was just a little jerky. Whether this was due to a snagging cable or not, I was unable to determine.

Like the 750, the 500 has the very neat panel with coloured indicator warning lights for flashers, oil pressure, neutral, and high beam. The handlebar layout of the machine is generally attractive and functional.

The lights were more than capable of dealing with the 70 mph legal limit. Continental touring types will be able to cruise at higher speeds with no trouble.

Having spoken to owners of the bigger "four," it seems that two things are likely to suffer short lives on the 500 — rear chains and tyres. The endless chain remained intact — the tyre didn't!

It was just a common or garden rear wheel puncture that brought this Japanese beauty slewing to a halt one night. As if that wasn't enough, another awful fact suddenly dawned — the rear wheel is not quickly detachable.

Now, I ask you, wouldn't you think, with all its other refinements, that the Honda should have a qd rear wheel? The endless chain is difficult to move out of the way of the rear wheel spindle as the wheel is taken out, and quite honestly, on a dark unlit road it's a real pig of a job.

But criticisms of this machine are strictly limited. It's built for a discerning market — and already it has scored. It may well be the birth of a real thoroughbred — a machine that will stir the blood of enthusiasts in years to come.

Certainly, it's probably the finest middleweight motorcycle on the British market. □