

MOTOR CYCLE WEEKLY

ON SALE WEDNESDAY
WEEK ENDING 14th MAY 1983

50p

BRITAIN'S
ONLY
WEEKLY
BIKING
MAGAZINE

BMF rally preview
V-Twins on test:
Ducati 900S2,
Honda VT250F

Reports:

Scottish Six Days Trial

West German road race GP

England v USA speedway

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4 WEST GERMAN 500cc MOTO CROSS GP: Round three of the chase for the premier off-road title.

6 NEWS: Too much, too late? Honda are to build a double overhead camshaft, 250cc single.

7 SEVEN ON 7: The iron man of British racing, Barry Sheene, reflects on his fourth grand prix of the season.

8 WEST GERMAN GP: Has "Fast Freddie" Spencer made it four 500 GP wins on the trot? Has Britain's Ron Haslam clinched second spot in the title? Has Kenny Roberts acquired a larger petrol tank? Read our report from Hockenheim and find out.

13 RACE GOSSIP: Two pages of the latest news and views from the road racing front.

15 SPEEDWAY: How the Brits halted the American onslaught to tie the test series.

20 STREET TALKIN': Personal views from Dave Richmond.

23 BMF RALLY PREVIEW: The biggest road riding event in the country takes place at Peterborough this weekend and we'll be there in strength. Dave Richmond, doyen of the rallying set, gives you all the gen.

26 AUSSIE RULES: Honda Britain's tame antipodean, Wayne Gardner, talks to Nick Harris about his grand prix ambitions.

31 HONDA VT250F: Editor Graham Sanderson reckons Honda have struck the right angle with this lightweight.

38 FLYING FIFTY: Storm in an eggcup-sized cylinder. Phenomenal speeds are extracted from 50cc grand prix racers, and Peter Clifford talks to the man behind Stefan Dorflinger's world championship-winning machine.

40 WRITE LINES: The usual mixture of castigation, criticism, commendation and commotion from our readers.

41 WHAT'S ON: Your guide to motor cycling events over the next two weeks.

42 ROAD 'N' RALLY: Want to know what's making news in the street riding world apart from the BMF Rally? Find out here.

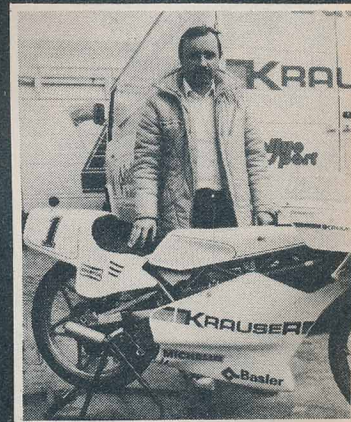
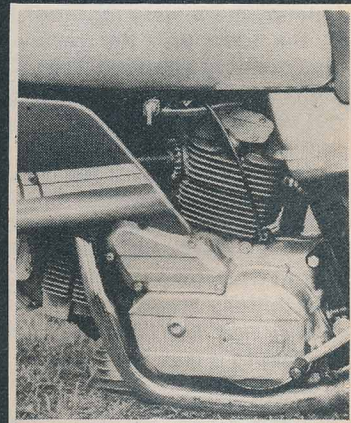
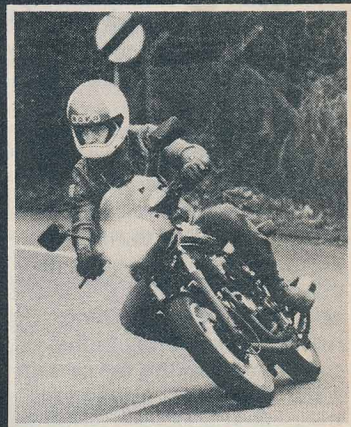
46 DUCATI 900S2: The story of how road tester Paul Carroll was converted to the Italian way of life.

49 TIME TRAVELLER: Bob Currie delves into his memory for more motor cycling stories.

50 CLUBMAN'S GOSSIP: Who's been doing what in the competitive field of club road racing.

51 CUSTOM CACHE: More individual ideas on how a motor cycle should look.

67 SCOTTISH SIX DAYS TRIAL: The siege of Fort William is over and Alan Wright reports. Find out who was first to scale the walls.



IN COLOUR

Cover: John Lampkin, high above Kinlochleven, 20 miles from Fort William, attacks the last section of Altnafeadh on the first day of the SSdT. He finished the week in fourth place.

IT IS one of the great ironies of motor cycling life that since the 250cc class was seriously mauled by British legislation, the most zealous period of quarter-litre development has ensued.

While our licensing laws now restrict learner riders to 12bhp machines of half the capacity, the Japanese legislature has ensured the popularity of the 250 on their home market.

And it's Honda, with their superb 90-degree V-twin VT250F, that has given the market a refreshing buoyancy in Japan that could well be interpreted in Britain.

Our learner laws left the 250cc market in a state of limbo, importers themselves not sure whether the newly-qualified rider would skip over a 250 and go for something more exciting.

Yet machines like the new Honda, the inevitable RD250LC Yamaha and Suzuki's stunningly attractive RG250 Gamma Suzuki two-stroke twin should ensure that the quarter-litre motor cycle becomes a recognised class in its own right, rather than being judged as a cage from which to escape to bigger machines.

And with bikes like the VT250, the graduation from 125cc to a quarter-litre machine seems not only so logical but a distinctly enticing

A degree of excellence

ROAD TEST: Graham Sanderson rides the Honda VT250F V-twin

process.

Even after 15 years of motor cycling, I was excited by the Honda. I was seduced by its tasteful rhythmic styling and after using an editor's prerogative to gain control, it was used daily for a thoroughly enjoyable three weeks.

I've never been one to lightly dismiss the attributes of smaller motor cycles, but the Honda proved a deal more practical than I hoped.

If for no other reason, the Honda is a great motor cycle because of

the ease with which it copes with longer journeys. It's something I first really noticed with the comparatively modest Suzuki GSX250 twin which would cruise quite easily two-

up at 70mph.

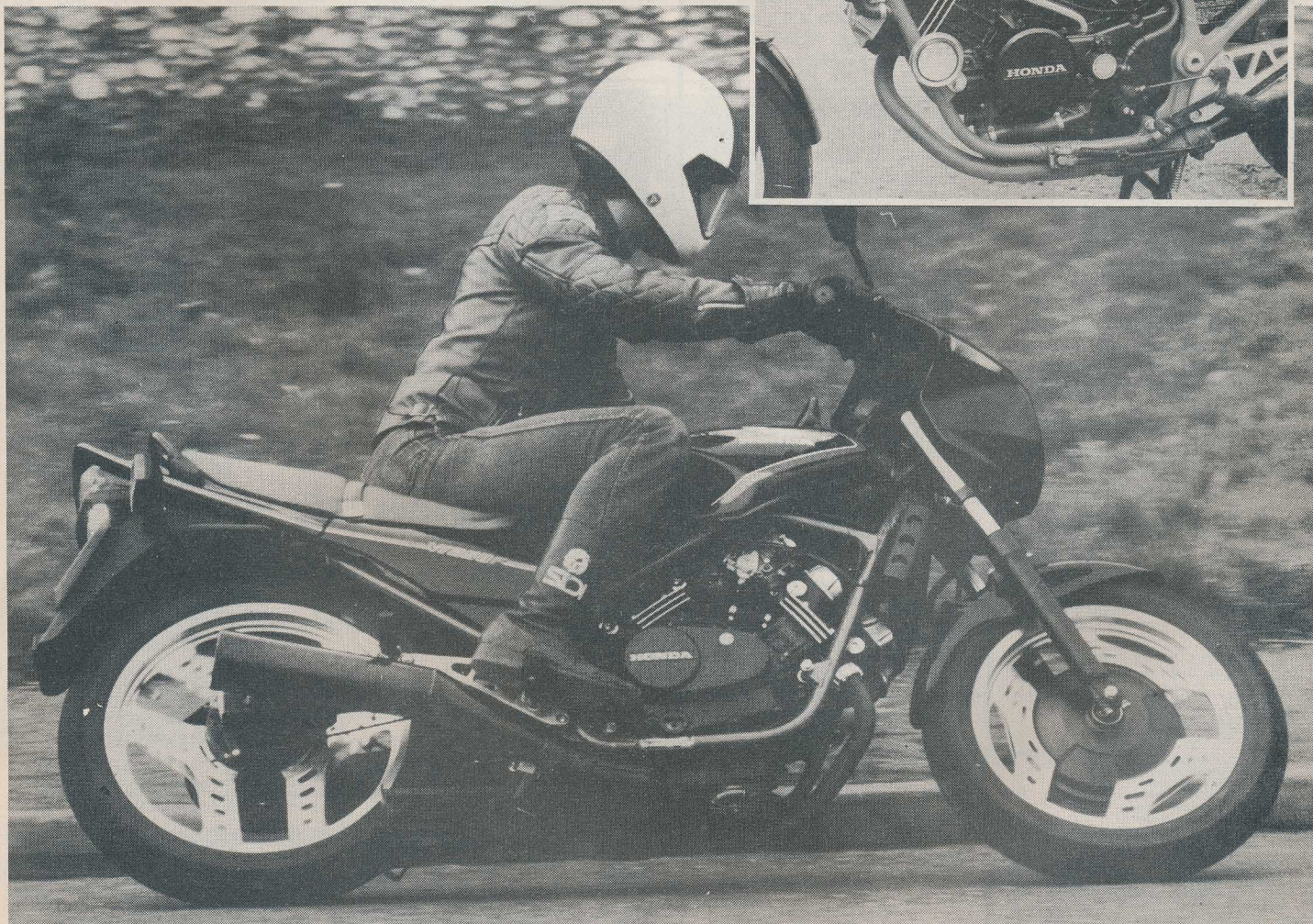
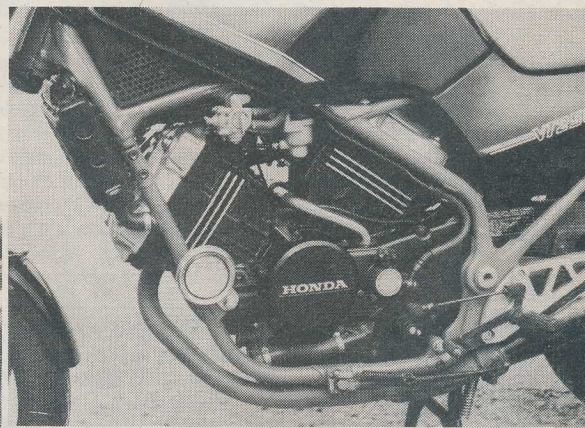
The little Honda took me on several 100-mile-plus journeys to race meetings at Donington Park and Snetterton from my London home without begging for more horsepower or a higher cruising speed.

The riding position and seat comfort were such that I was annoyed at having to stop for petrol after 100 miles because the tank is so small. Three and a half gallons would have been better than 2.6.

Judging by the generally conservative manner in which so many bikers ride much larger machines, journey times compare favourably with bikes of more than twice the capacity. I made 135 miles in two hours ten minutes through London and up the M1, including a petrol stop, when I wasn't even trying.

The legal 70mph limit for the VT comes in about 8,500rpm, but the Honda belies its small capacity and will accelerate freely to an easily maintained 80-85mph in top gear. A

● continued over



Honda handling was very good on smooth surfaces but jittery front suspension could cause a few problems on poor surfaces. The beautiful 35bhp 90-degree V-twin motor is capable of near 100mph performance. Note hydraulic clutch and front left-hand down tube which acts as waterway for cooling.

ROAD TEST READOUT

HONDA VT250F

PRICE: £1,395 inc VAT and taxes

PERFORMANCE

PERFORMANCE

MEAN MAXIMUM SPEEDS:

Rider prone: 97.37mph; Rider upright: 87.5mph

BEST ONE-WAY SPEED: 99.45mph

MEAN QUARTER-MILE: 15.36secs/82.83mph

BEST QUARTER-MILE: 15.3secs/82.71mph

MAXIMUM POWER: 35bhp at 11,000rpm

MAXIMUM TORQUE: 15.91lbs-ft at 10,000rpm

FUEL CONSUMPTION:

Overall: 57.5mpg; Best: 65.3mpg; Worst: 49.7mpg

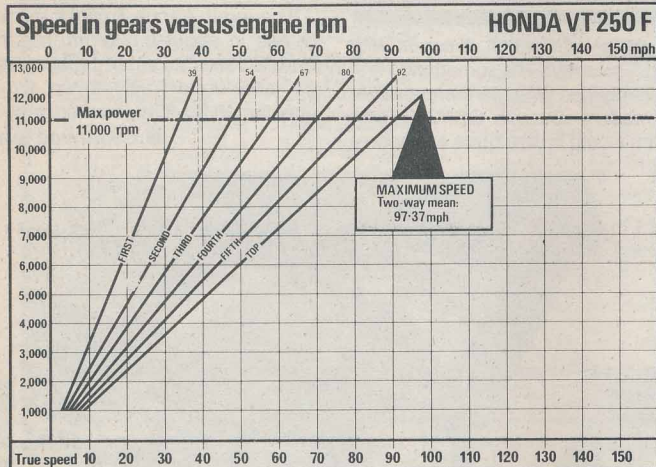
BRAKING DISTANCE: From 30mph: 26ft; From 60mph: 124ft

SPEEDO ACCURACY:

Indicated mph: 30 50 70 100

Actual mph: 29.3 48.2 66.03 93.89

Test conditions: 10; stone rider wearing racing leathers. Dry track, no wind, machine tested at Motor Industry Research Association track Nuneaton.



ENGINE

Water-cooled double overhead camshaft, four-valves per cylinder 90-degree V-twin. Two plain main bearings.

CAPACITY: 248cc (60 x 44mm)

COMPRESSION RATIO: 11:1

CARBURATION: Two constant vacuum Keihin 32mm carbs

TRANSMISSION: Gear primary drive. Wet, multiplate hydraulic clutch and six-speed gearbox. Chain final drive.

OVERALL RATIOS: 23.22, 16.77, 13.40, 11.24, 9.73 and 8.74 to 1

ELECTRICS

Transistorised ignition. 12v 9ah battery. 340w alternator 60/55w headlight. Indicators, temperature gauge

CYCLE PARTS

FRAME: Welded steel tubular duplex cradle type

SUSPENSION: Air assisted telescopic front fork, pivoted rear fork with air adjustable monoshock Pro-Link system

WHEELS: DID alloy rims with Comstar spokes

TYRES: Bridgestone Mag Mopus. 100/90 x 16in, front. 110/80 x 18in, rear

BRAKES: Single inboard ventilated disc front. Single leading shoe drum, rear

DIMENSIONS

WEIGHT: 328lbs (dry)

FUEL CAPACITY: 2.6 gallons including reserve

WHEELBASE: 54.5 inches

SEAT HEIGHT: 30.5 inches

GROUND CLEARANCE: 6 inches

OVERALL WIDTH: 31 inches

OVERALL LENGTH: 80 inches

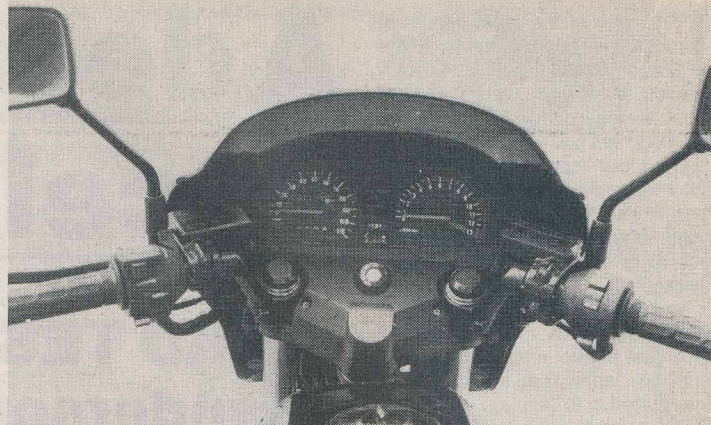
BEST FEATURES

Good performance and fuel economy. Excellent styling and comfort. Distinctive

COMPARISONS

	Capacity cc	Price £	Speed mph	Fuel mpg	St 1/4 mile, sec/mph
Honda VT250F	248	1395	97.37	57.5	15.36/82.83
Yamaha RD250LC	247	1119	99.88	39.00	14.82/87.25
Honda CB250N	250	875	85.90	51.8	17.01/76.20
Kawasaki Z250					
Scorpion	249	829	91.67	51.8	17.04/73.80
Suzuki GSX250	249	820	84.84	59.6	16.86/73.48

Machine supplied by Honda (UK), Ltd, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4



● continued from p31

modicum of patience will see an indicated 100mph at 12,000rpm and once the gutsy engine propelled itself to 105mph with the tacho needle kissing the red line at 12,500rpm.

Neither do you have to strain yourself or the machine to achieve such performance. Even though the Honda's healthy 35bhp doesn't filter through before 5-6000rpm has been engaged, there's no boring pause while it cranks itself up to such levels. The revs rise rapidly and without conscious effort to where they become of use and pull strongly to near the red line.

As you'd expect, top gear acceleration from mid range isn't exciting, there's simply not the torque, and overtaking often requires

notching down two gears to fourth for best results.

Being a 90-degree V-twin there's no primary vibration, and cynics might argue the motor feels indistinct, almost as if there's no engine at all. Between 3-5000rpm when decelerating, the bottom end feels a little lumpy and is accompanied by an unusual siren-like wail on the overrun.

But technically the motor is a very efficient package. It is water-cooled, to allow tighter tolerances, has double overhead cams and four-valves per cylinder, hence the decidedly oversquare bore and stroke of 60 x 44mm.

Both con-rods share a common big-end and are placed side-to-side offsetting each cylinder from the centre line. It's also a very narrow

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LEFT: Speedo and rev-counter nestle neatly beneath the neat and effective headlamp fairing. Note water-temperature gauge, air front forks and choke lever on the left console.

RIGHT: Gorgeous styling speaks for itself and may help overcome potential customers' reticence to pay £1,395 for a 250.

engine, just 11 inches across, similar in width to many single cylinder trail bikes.

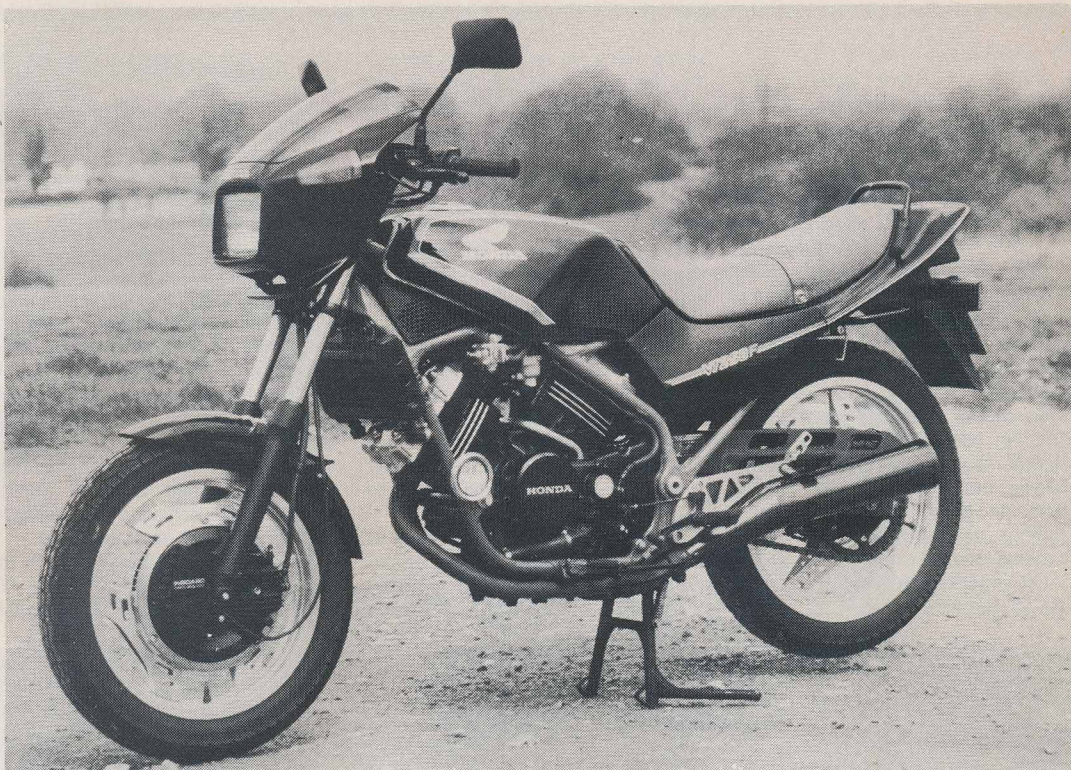
There's also a light and smooth hydraulic clutch and a planetary gear shift system and diaphragm 32mm carbs which manifest their efficiency in frugal fuel consumption.

The Honda's average of 57.5mpg is excellent particularly as it reflects generally enthusiastic riding, while the best of 65.3mpg was achieved during the confines of city commuting.

Even performance-testing, the Honda averaged almost 50mpg, quite remarkable by modern standards, considering the VT's impressive showing at MIRA.

The head-banging RD250LC Yamaha may be *the* performer in the class but the Honda isn't far away, about 2.5mph separating them on mean top speed and half a second difference over the standing quarter. The Honda only just resisted hitting a 100mph best one-way speed.

What really matters is that the



track performance translates into high cruising speeds on the road and gives something like 18 more miles for each costly gallon than the RD.

The stylish headlamp fairing with its built-in indicators helps to this end. Primarily a styling exercise, the fairing nevertheless deflects wind away from the rider in order that he

will arrive comparatively refreshed, not an exhausted wreck.

Handling, although good, is open to debate. A recent Honda test day at Donington Park race track left me in little doubt that it was superb but that's a smooth track, I hadn't reckoned with the combined forces of county councils nationwide in their conspiracy to allow public roads to

become hard-topped moto cross tracks.

At Donington, the machine's lightness—just 328lbs dry—and ease of steering, made it a positive delight. But stir in generous dollops of bumpy, uneven and differing public roads and it's specifically the suspension which seems confused.

● continued over

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The front end lacks authority and by the time you've bumped, jarred and wobbled a little, it's all over before the front suspension gets its act together to smooth things out.

The springs seem to over-react, pointing to a lack of strength while there's not really enough damping. The rear end, with its now obligatory monoshock Pro-Link set-up, has a clearer idea of its purpose and does well to cope with the additional aggro supplied by the hyper-active front end.

Of course all this is comparative and I'm still prepared to give the Honda high marks for handling. Maybe the Pro-link would benefit from an ability to alter damping settings, as it is, you're stuck with a variable preload only.

On better quality roads, however, the VT remains a convincing motor

cycle with brisk acceleration propelling the rider from one apex to the next and when you need some heavy braking, the Honda can deliver.

The single inboard cast iron disc up front is very powerful and as Honda's publicity blurb boasts, provides a deal of rider feedback, so there's no hidden vices to catch you out. The rear drum has enough bite to keep the machine straight without locking.

Dry weather tyre performance is excellent but a question mark hangs over their wet weather showing. On wet bumpy surfaces they can feel a little wooden and tend to slide before the rider's inclination to slow down manifests itself.

The only other minor criticism is that the handlebar-mounted choke can be slightly awkward to open with a heavily gloved hand since it

fits so tightly against the mirror stem.

On the plus side, I liked the headlight dip switch that works by simply pressing a button to engage dip and pressing again for main beam. A far better system moves switches from side to side or up and down.

Honda's first attempts at the in-line V-twin concept were not altogether successful with last year's shaft-driven VF750S four. But with the latest chain drive version, now supported by the magnificent VF400 four and the 250 twin, Honda seem to have got it right second time round.

The VT is also a whole lot better than the lifeless CB250N Super Dream which achieved such disproportionately high sales success.

All that remains for Honda is to convince motor cyclists that the VT really is worth the high £1,395 list

price. At £275 more expensive than the conquering RD and around £500 more than other four-stroke 250s which are still available, the buying public have got to be dragged out of that price, capacity, performance syndrome.

So it's likely to be 1984 before the 250 market once again becomes buoyant.

Whatever happens the VT250F is by far the best four-stroke 250 roadster to have ever come out of Japan. And so say all of us.

