

Four-Taste for the Future



and
other things

by
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THE MOST BASIC law of economics is that of Supply and Demand. As long as a demand exists for goods and services, then someone is going to attempt to supply those goods and services. The price and quantity produced of those goods and services must be carefully balanced to ensure that the supply never exceeds the demand.

When regressive, non-thinking, plebs badger me about the Japanese going mad and producing monster bikes that nobody in their right mind will buy, I simply say 'Supply and demand, old man', or words to that effect, and walk away. We have seen the 1000cc twenty-four valver and the 1300cc watercooled six cylinder Hyperbikes, and as sure as eggs is eggs, we will continue to see far more impressive(?) specifications in years to come. As long as the demand for them exists.

I sometimes wonder whether it is just pure spite that makes people condemn the motorcycle factories and their unending struggle to upstage one another each year in an effort to produce the ultimate super-duper, hyper-dyper wonderbike, simply because they can't afford one themselves, but somebody else can.

In accepting the fact that there is a demand for these flagship models, it may well be fair to say that this demand is based on pure egotistical desire rather than the practical advantages that owning such a machine may offer.

The true subject of this article (just in case you were beginning to wonder) is the new range of Honda Fours: the CB900Z, CB750K and CB650. It is interesting, however, to bear in mind the supply and demand

Handlebars are readily adjustable, as per the CBX1000. Spare fuses are housed in plastic fitting above fork crown. Petrol cap is securely clamped down — and locked.

philosophy and the role of the flagship model when discussing these latest additions to the Honda range.

You must realise the fact that these modern day Press launches only allow a quick spin on the machine concerned (1½ hours each in this case) and it is simply not possible to get into the *feel* of any bike in such a short time. Therefore it is only first impressions that can be recorded herewith, full tests will naturally follow in due course. The other point to remember about a press launch is that the testers are wine and dined in expensive far-off places, then placed upon very well prepared bikes in a strange environment, on a route pre-planned for him by his generous hosts.

The European Press launch for the new Honda machines was held in Germany at the end of September. At that time the all-new CB900Z was not in production although it was 'thumbs up' for early '79 delivery. The CB750, now with DOHC, 16 valves and four into four exhausts, along with the CB650, which is basically an enlarged CB550, were expected to be in the shops by late October.

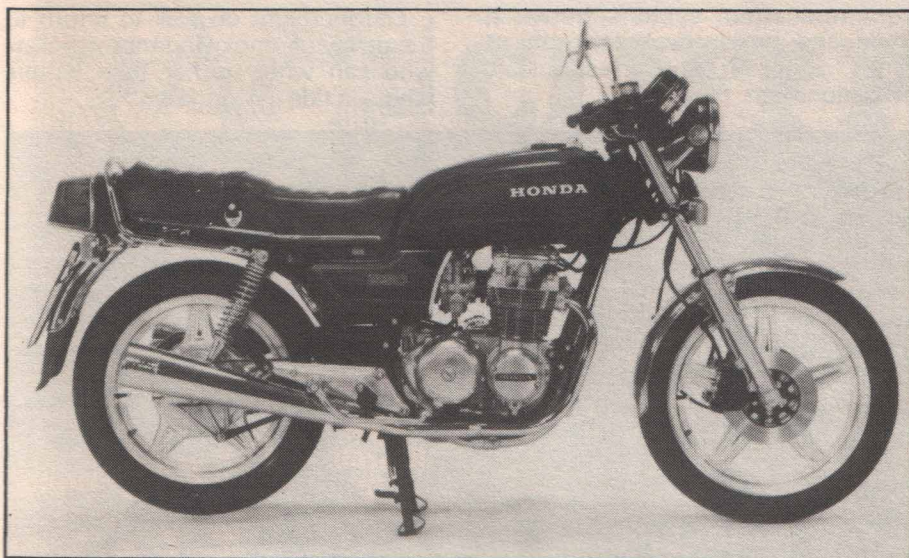
The CB900Z will undoubtedly be compared with the CBX1000 flagship, and indeed some may question the reasoning behind the production of two machines which are apparently so similar in both conception and performance.

The answer from my point of view is that the 900 is a far better 'bikers bike' than the CBX by virtue of the fact that although it has a less impressive specification (which in itself may be looked upon as an advantage), it still performs just as well, and handles better. Needless to say the 900 will cost a large chunk less than the 1000, but Honda will still sell as many CBX's as they like because the demand for it as THE ego-bike will still exist.

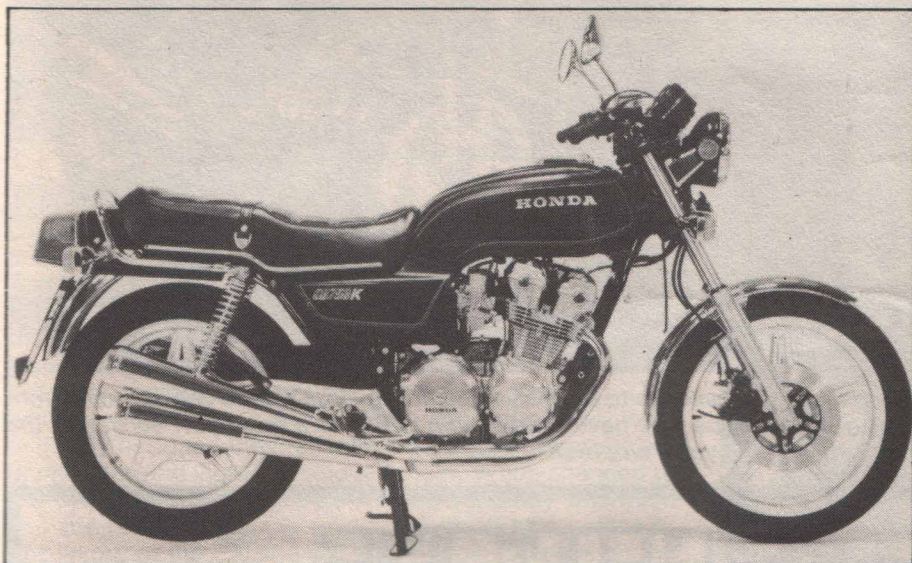
Unfortunately, my stint on the 900 was first thing in the morning on wet roads, and so my personal deep rooted desire to avoid close encounters of the hard road kind prevented me from attempting to wear the footrests right away. Performance is what you might logically expect from a 95 bhp, 520lb machine. Its very fast, and just a shade fierce. The owner of a CB900Z should take a little time to come to terms with this machine, and then after a while take on anything on two wheels in any type of road-going. Attempts to moto-cross it could prove fatal.

The CB750K was my favourite. It seemed to give only a little away to the 900 in terms of outright performance, but won it back on instant rideability. To myself it possessed that certain natural charm that Japanese machines seem to lack through every detail being so mathematically correct.

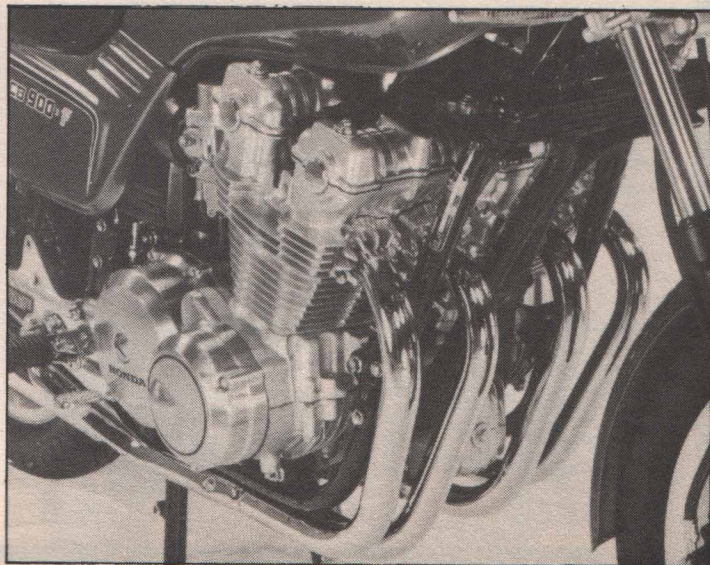
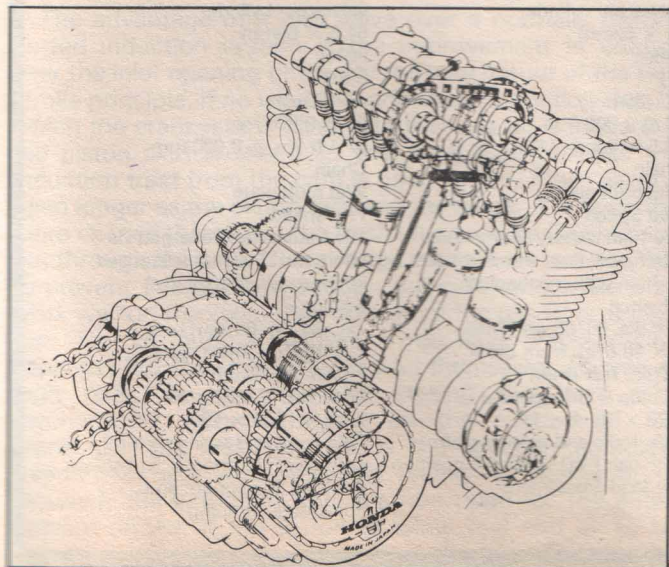
It is interesting to note that the new 750 continues alone as a K-series touring type, with 4 into 4 exhausts. The 750 F1/F2 range of Super Sports series has obviously been superseded by the 900. It should be interesting then to see if Honda came out with a K-series 900 Tourer, or an F3 type



CB650 above is the latest (and last?) enlargement of the original CB500 four. The new 750 variant below won our rider's approval as the 'nicest' of the new machines. Still features the 'touring' idea of four separate silencers.



Cut-away engine drawing shows the CB750K powerplant, with DOHC and four valves per cylinder, which is nearly identical to that used for the 900, seen below. The latter has a slightly lower compression ratio of 8.8:1.



SS750. The demand for a sporting 750 is evident from the way the Suzuki GS750 remains a good seller alongside its 1000cc stable mate.

The 650 was referred to by everyone as the little 'un. Strange how time and progress alter the accepted standards of what we call big and small, isn't it? Jumping from the 900 to the 750, and then onto the 650 certainly made it *feel* small and slightly dated, as indeed it is. The 650 engine must be the final enlargement of the old original five-hundred four which can still be seen in 550cc form at your local friendly Honda dealer. It retains that same overall feel as the 400 and 550 F1/F2 models. A buzzy motor without a lot of torque, good top speed (approaching an indicated 120) but taking its time to get there once you've hit the ton, flattish narrow bars with a positive feel to the suspension. Honda would have done better to have released this model separately from the 900 and 750: in that way it would have received the greater attention that its heritage deserves. It is again interesting to speculate as to how great an extent the existence of the Kawasaki Z650 influenced Honda to produce a full 650 themselves. Kawasaki pulled off quite a feat by, in effect, re-creating the demand for a 650 class machine, and Honda have now jumped in with another source of supply to satisfy this fabricated demand. It will, of course, depend upon the future price and performance differentials between 750s and 650s as to how long *both* classes can last. It makes ya fink, don't it?

In one sweep Honda have completely restructured their range between the Flagship CBX and the

CX500. The present K and F2 versions of the 550 and 750 SOHC fours will fade away. In place of the F2/750 comes the CB900Z brought in to satisfy the European demand for a high performance race-bred Super Sports machine. The old (ancient?) 750K7 Tourer is replaced by the better all-round Super Touring CB750K and the CB550 grows to 650 to combat Kawasaki in the revitalised 650 class. In short — three very strong muscles in Honda's arm in their effort to stay at number one. Good luck to them.

One last thought that crossed my dim brain as a result of this press launch concerned the changing face of motorcycle journalism. As an ad-man amongst journalists, I felt somewhat of an outsider looking in. I treated it as an educational trip, looking and listening, questioning and attempting to understand the basics of good road testing and motorcycle journalism.

The one point that sticks out a mile is that the 'new wave' of motorcycle journalists are not a patch on the old school when it comes to riding, writing about and understanding what bikes and bikers are all about. The situation that we now have is that the old school of knowledgeable motorcycle enthusiasts who could write about their favourite pastime for a living (I'm talking about the Mintons and Aspels, the Watsons and Haylocks of this world) are being replaced by a new breed of journalist-school trained writers, destroying the carefully built up two-way

communication system between trade and press, by means of, at times, ignorant and irresponsible sensationalism.

Editors might do well to return to the policy of employing motorcyclists who can write, rather than writers who can ride motorcycles.



Honda's latest challenge to the very popular 750 class should win approval from fans of this marque who have waited a long time for a really new version of the original, now ten years old, four.

SPECIFICATIONS

	CB650	CB750K	CB900Z
Engine type	SOHC four cylinder 4 stroke, 2 valves per cylinder	DOHC four cylinder 4 stroke valves per cylinder	DOHC four cylinder 4 stroke, 4 valves per cylinder
Bore and stroke	59.8 × 55.8mm	62 × 62mm	64.5 × 69mm
Capacity	626cc	748cc	901cc
Compression ratio	9:1	9:1	8.8:1
Carburation	4 × 26mm	4 × 30mm	4 × 32mm
Claimed bhp	63 @ 9,000 rpm	77 @ 9,000 rpm	95 @ 9,000 rpm
Claimed max. torque	39.1 ft/lbs @ 8,000 rpm	48.5 ft/lbs @ 7,000 rpm	57.1 ft/lbs @ 8,000 rpm
Primary transmission	Chain	Chain	Chain
Clutch	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate	Wet multiplate
Gearbox	Five speed	Five Speed	Five speed
Electrics	12v 14ah battery, charged via alternator. Fully transistorised ignition with mechanical advance	12v 14ah battery charged via alternator. Fully transistorised ignition with mechanical advance	12v 14ah battery charged via alternator. Fully transistorised ignition with mechanical advance
Headlight	7in. dia. 55/60 watt bulb	7in. dia. 55/60 watt bulb	7in. dia. 55/60 watt bulb
Brakes	2 × 9.45in. front discs 7.09in. rear drum	2 × 10.87in. front discs 7.09in. rear drum	2 × 10.87in. front discs 7.09in. rear drum
Tyres	Dunlop & Bridgestone 3.25 × 19, 3.75 × 18	Dunlop & Bridgestone 3.25 × 18, 4 × 18	Dunlop & Bridgestone 3.25 × 19, 4 × 18
Suspension	Tele-forks and swinging arm with pair FVQ shocks. 5 position pre-load adjustment	Tele-forks and swinging arm with pair FVQ shocks. 5 position pre-load adjustment	Tele-forks and swinging arm with pair FVQ shocks. 5 position pre-load adjustment and adjustable damping