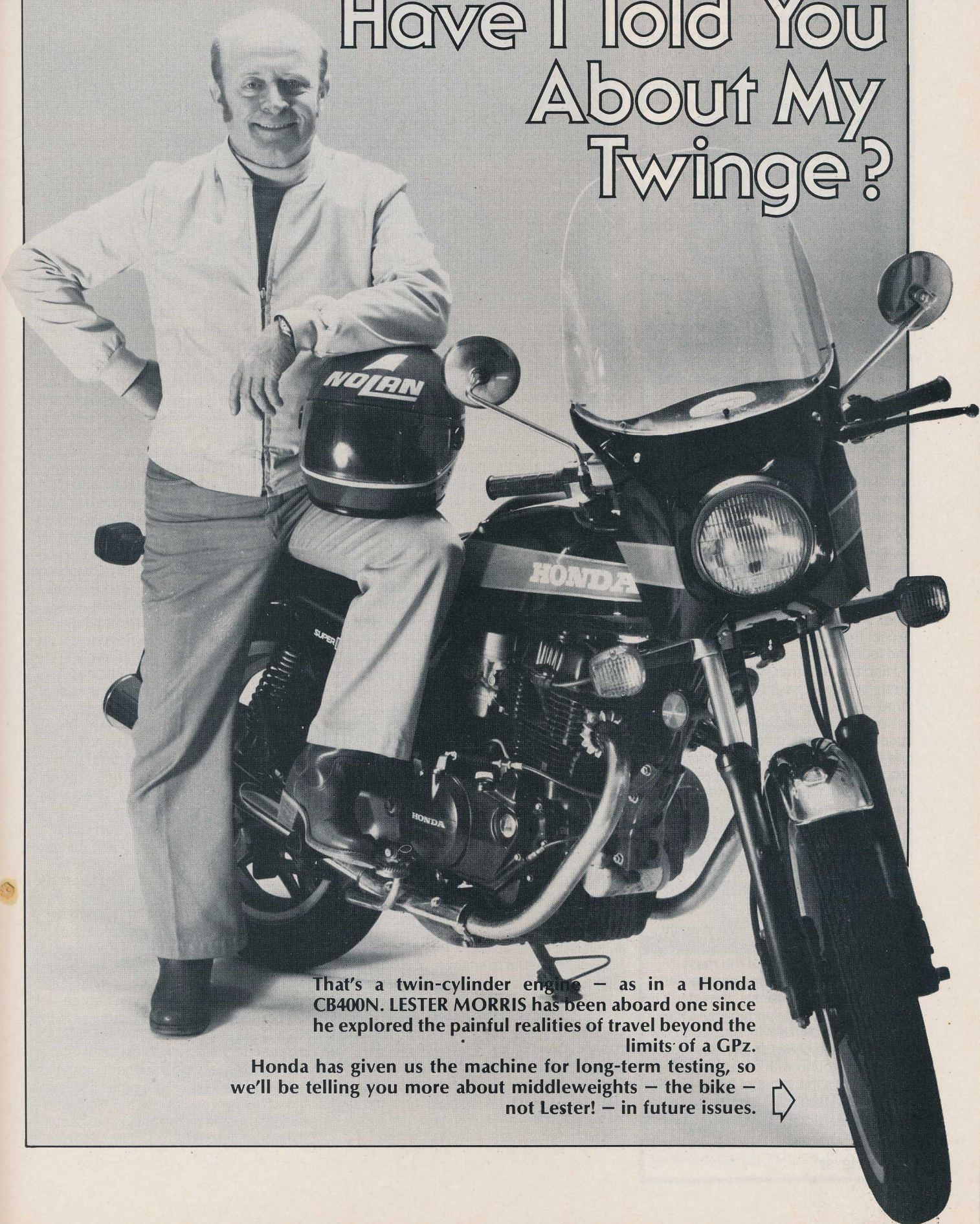


Have I Told You About My Twinge?



That's a twin-cylinder engine — as in a Honda CB400N. LESTER MORRIS has been aboard one since he explored the painful realities of travel beyond the limits of a GPz.

Honda has given us the machine for long-term testing, so we'll be telling you more about middleweights — the bike — not Lester! — in future issues. ➔

THERE'S a widespread belief in Australian motorcycle circles that bigger is better; that the idea is to build bigger and more complex motorcycles to up-stage the opposition because big bikes are what this country of wide, open spaces is all about. That feeling is rife from the ranks of the admin offices to some of the motorcycle-press corps. Witness the road-testers who cannot make an assessment of a machine unless it has at least 1000 cm³ of engine capacity, and preferably at least four cylinders.

Well, two cylinders might suffice if it is a BMW, a Ducati or even a Moto-Guzzi, (did somebody say Triumph?).

The fact remains that the most popular-selling motorcycle in Australia is the XL250 Honda off-roader, while the other bread-and-butter light-to-middleweight machines sell in very high numbers in comparison to the heavyweight and expensive Big Irons. The buying public knows what it wants even though many of the glossy full-page ads are slanted towards heavyweight machines.

So what's my drift?

I am currently testing one of the most popular mid-range motorcycles on the market, the CB400 Honda Hawk, and I've put it through its paces up and down the Blue Mountains a few times and zapped it on the Sydney-Wollongong express route a few times as well. As far as I'm concerned, the little Honda fills the bill admirably, setting point-to-point times which are about as good as you'd expect from machines of twice the size and four times the complexity.

I find that a corner which can be taken pretty briskly at, say, 100 km/h on a large — that is to say *wide and heavy* — motorcycle, can be taken at the same speed, or perhaps quicker, on the Hawk, and the amount of physical effort required to do so is in direct proportion to the size of the machine under consideration.

By comparison to the wider Fours, the Hawk is slim and light, and when the power-to-weight ratio is assessed — I haven't done that yet — I'm sure the little bike will not be found wanting by too much.

There are at least two heavyweight motorcycles whose engines are about a metre wide, with most of the mass carried outside the frame and carried high in the frame. Frankly, they don't like changing direction suddenly and they have to be thrown down, and held down, with some effort. Not so the Hawk, which will scrape round with the best, but which enjoys the virtue of being moved about at will through a corner if a line has to be suddenly changed because of some errant top-dressing which strayed



from the grass verge, or the occasional wombat-hole which springs up to catch you unawares.

The Hawk accelerates well (though one of the bigger beasts would blow it sideways, of course) and its lighter weight allows it to be braked to a standstill very suddenly with a double disc on the front and a small drum on the rear. It's a tall bike with plenty of cornering clearance, and its performance leaves little to be desired. For its size.

Riding impressions

Initial impressions are that a wide-ratio five-speed gearbox would be infinitely preferable to the close-ratio six-speeder which was no doubt fitted as a sop to the current fashion. The first two gears are, in fact, too low, for you get nowhere (*fast!*) in first gear and not much further in second.

The gearchange is very smooth going up, if slow in action, and very notchy coming back down again, though a few more kays on the clock could see the 'box settle in a bit.

Even on hot mornings the engine won't fire up without plenty of choke, and it takes a few minutes before it will run happily with the choke open again, a feature not unknown with constant-vacuum carburettors, but a pain in traffic. Front forks are soft and pliable, as they should be on a machine such as this, but the rear is too firmly sprung to be comfortable over sharp bumps, though it handles reasonably smooth surfaces very well.

In the first Australian test report of the Hawk, just five years ago, I said the engine seemed to be inordinately hot, and I must reiterate that the engine sidecovers on the Hawk continue to radiate a great deal of heat for some reason. They are so hot you can hardly touch them after a hard squirt; the

engine apparently doesn't suffer, for the bike has been a model of reliability, so it must simply be a quirk of the model. I suppose it could be handy in winter weather, but the hot air blast in summer is a bit of a shin-sizzler.

Extra bits

The bike has been fitted with two after-market accessory items, one of them quite good, the other not-so-good. Ross Hannan's nylon Anchorit sprocket on the rear wheel has shown absolutely no signs of wear to date, and the rear chain has only had to be nipped up once in the 4000 km since the sprocket was fitted, which is somewhat better than usual. The advantage of this material (developed initially by DuPont in America) is that it is self-lubricating, which reduces friction slightly, and it helps act as a deterrent to the dreaded red oxide which chews out chains which are not maintained regularly enough.

The trim little John Lloyd handlebar fairing is not quite so good, though it looks great and probably works well on the much heavier machines. The shape is good, but — like the earlier Z1-R Kawasaki machines — it is slab-sided right at the handlebars, with the result that gusty side winds tend to move the 'bars about, and of course this takes the bike with them. On windy days, top speed of the Hawk is about 100 km/h with the neat little fairing attached, only because the bike tends to wander about too much when buffeted by turbulent air.

No doubt the heavyweight machines would not suffer to the same degree, simply because of their advantage in this area, because I have ridden several bigger machines with this type of fairing fitted and never had to remark upon this.

During the test programme I shall whip the screen off and check the high wind handling of the naked Hawk; I expect it to be transformed. *

The Fairing Story

It isn't all a fair go...

ACTUALLY there's a bit more of a story to the CB400's fairing — and more than a few tears of frustration. When the item was supplied to us by J.L. Distributing it looked pretty flash — instant Z1-R and all colour co-ordinated to the bike.

We politely ignored Julia Cullen who broke into gales of laughter when we mentioned we'd fit it on the following weekend. Three weekends, a split thumbnail and one frustrated Bear later we passed the bike onto an unsuspecting staff rider who had suddenly run out of transport. He could have the bike for a while we said — provided he fitted the fairing.

At that stage the two top mounting rods had been bolted on and after hours of stuffing about we'd discovered the bottom bracket we'd been supplied with was not what was needed. Eventually we made our own two bottom mounting brackets. A short length of one-sixteenth mild steel bar and a hacksaw and drill are all that's needed. The brackets can be secured to the brake line bolts.

On our fairing the headlight hole was too large and incorrectly shaped. It looked best with the ungainly gap at the top. We had a lot of trouble securing the top stabilising rods so they missed the instruments and trip-reset meter but we finally got it set

up and (with our home-made bottom brackets) reasonably secure.

Then we noticed the perspex shield wasn't too good a fit with the fibreglass. Someone went to tighten up one of the (plastic) securing bolts and the thread stripped . . .

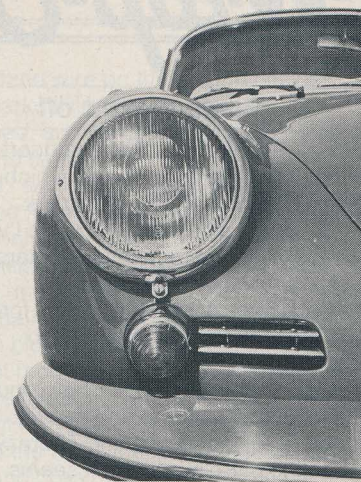
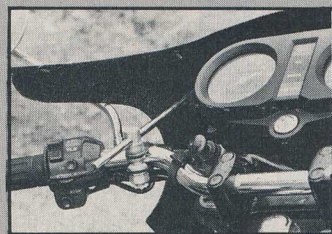
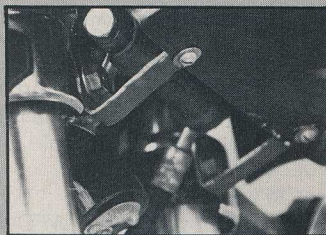
None of our hassles was news to smirking XJ650-owning Julia. She'd shelled out \$69 for a Yamaha colour-matched J.L. fairing a few months before. That was also a very poor fit around the headlight and the rubber trim was unsecured. She was supplied with only the two top stabilising bars and told that was all that was necessary to fit the unit.

Poor girl. She destroyed her delicate puce fingernail polish trying to set it up and eventually took to trying to snare hapless males to lend a hand. But we knew the problems by then, didn't we?

The fairing is now resting quietly in the back of her garage somewhere and Julia is still surprised at the response she got when she took the product back to the manufacturer for advice about how to set it up properly. Apparently it's all a question of price. The fairings are mass-produced and can't be expected to fit perfectly. And if the brackets supplied are inadequate then you've just got to figure out something better.

At least we all know that. Now.

Details of a tale of fairing woe. Clockwise from top left: gap around headlight rim; home made bottom mounting brackets might not look too good, but were the only option; final job shapes up quite well, although details hint at the strife of fitting; top stay demanded heaps of fiddling before it would clear instrument pod.



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