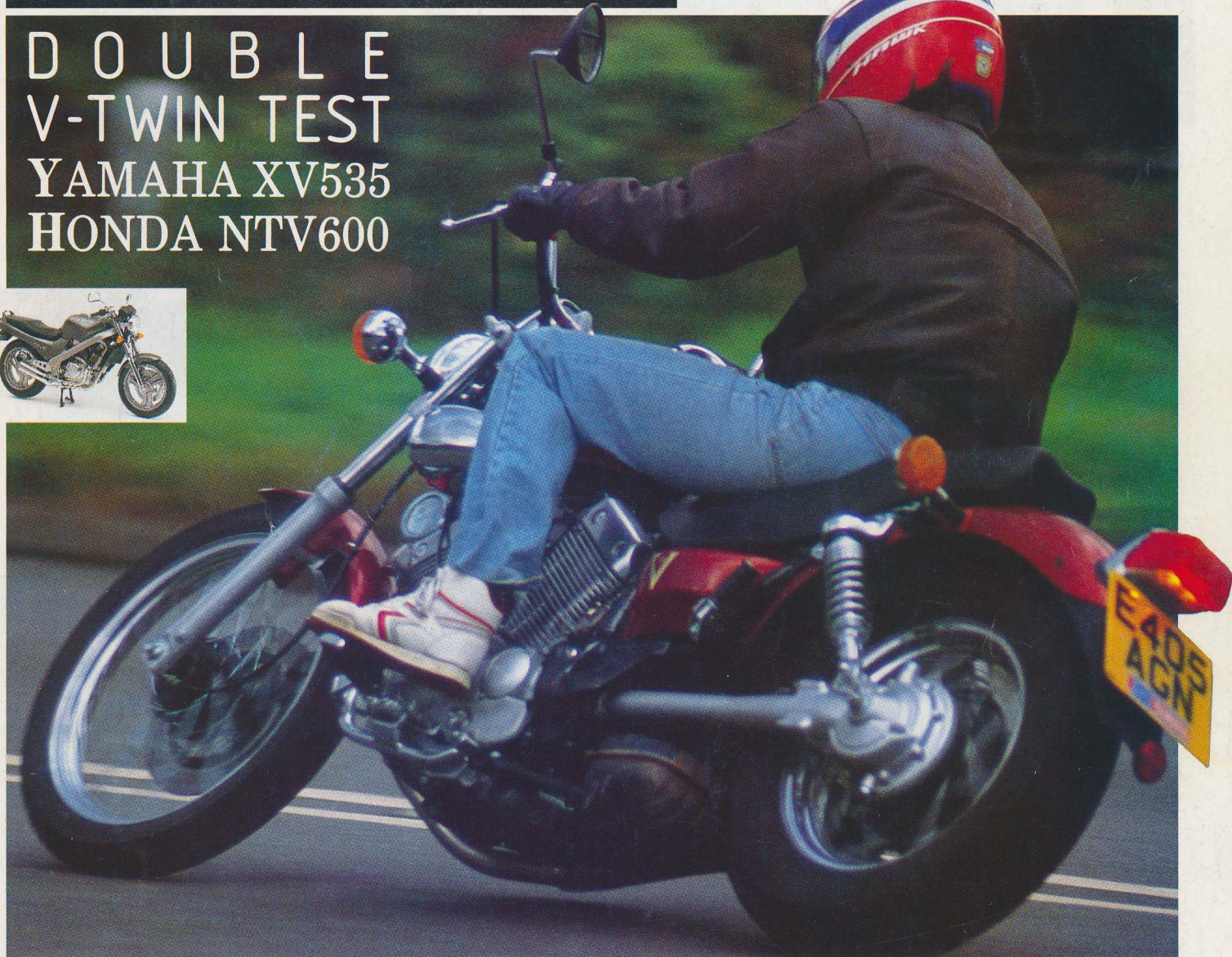


what BIKE?

MARCH • APRIL 1989

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DOUBLE
V-TWIN TEST
YAMAHA XV535
HONDA NTV600



C O N S U M E R G U I D E
new suzuki and kawasaki prices

- ON TEST - KAWASAKI KMX200
- USED BIKES - YAMAHA RD 500LC
- HONDA CB125 TWINS
- AWARDS - OUR BEST BIKES OF 1988

CONTENTS

ON TEST

9

Major Fun ...

Bob Berry discovers that custom styling doesn't mean cumbersome riding where Yamaha's superb XV535 is concerned.



14

... Captain Sensible



The Honda Revere has replaced the popular VT500 filling the 'middle ground'. Brian Tarbox hopes it succeeds.

35

Treasure trailer

Kawasaki's KMX200 is just perfect, reckons Rosie Marston. At last, an alternative to the Paris-Dakar dinosaurs.

FEATURED

25

1988 choice

Brian Tarbox singles out his two wheeled choices of 1988.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Yamaha kick-off in our monthly switch for summer!



● Yes, we are going monthly for this summer starting with the May issue and the first of four superb supplements where we test the very latest models. Yamaha are first and heading their line-up will be their new 600cc Genesis (right) and the awesome 1000cc version. Their unique TDR250 (top) and their commuter and learner bikes will be included in the first quarter of a long, hot summer for What Bike? Full details, page four.



NEWS

4

Hot summer!

What Bike? goes monthly for the summer! Norton launch their new race team. Bike sales are up. Neil Murray's news round-up.

TECHNICAL

42

Bore and stroke

What difference can these measurements make to an engine? What is 'over-square'? John Nutting reveals all.

SECOND TIME AROUND

22

Race-bred

It was the closest thing you could get to Kenny Roberts' GP bike. The four-cylinder Yamaha RD500 is eminently collectable today and a pretty good bike to boot.

ON SALE APRIL 17TH

of our survey into one piece riding suits and the overall table.



26

Gentleman Jim

Young Jim Whitham is 22 but has been on two wheels for 16 years already. The law was not impressed with his first ride on the road, though.

47

Mighty Intruder

John Sutton leapt straight from his Honda 100 to a massive Suzuki Intruder and has clocked 13,000 miles since. He's made a couple of mods and just loves his luxurious steed.

28

Measuring up

Something to suit you? Second part

40

Eternal twin

Honda have been making 125cc twins throughout their history. Buy the right model if you are looking for speed, though.

CONSUMER GUIDE

49

More price rises

Suzuki catch up the others with increases across their range; price rises too from Kawasaki; our new-look 'getting on the road' section for new riders; insurance rates; second hand guide.

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Aiming for Captain

Looking distinctly more handsome without its optional panniers, the Revere can fairly be described as cosmetically appealing.



Brian Tarbox (not much of a common sense merchant himself) argues the case for a bike that aims for the 'middle ground' of motor cycling



Rear disc inboard of the shaft drive on the single 'Pro Am'. Wide radial tyres on 17 inch wheels enhance handling.

Sensible

IT HAS been a lean time for Dayglo Derek and Captain Sensible. Falling new bike sales over the last eight years have led to a dramatic polarisation of what is left of the market.

On one extreme there are the race styled replicas stretching from 50cc to 1000cc plus. Racing them across the great divide are the frill-free economy bikes for which mpg and cost are everything. Throw in a few trail bikes, factory customs and tourers and that's your lot mate.

The middle ground has become a no-man's land in which none of the Big Four Japanese manufacturers seem that keen to venture. So is it a vast untapped arena or a barren wasteland? Honda aim to find out with the NTV 600 Revere.

An article in the *Guardian* (of all places) saluted the machine's arrival. It hailed the newcomer as a victory for 'common sense' following a period of madness. It was a well argued piece, but how many carrot crunching *Guardian* readers are straining at the leash to swap their 2CVs for a stylish but 'common sense' two wheeler?

Early sales figures suggest not that many. The trouble is that the Revere is not a cheap motor cycle. Captain Sensible may love the rather conservative V-twin motor but he also has to pay for the sporty type frame and fashion accessories.

This is not a new idea. BMW tried something similar with the R65 and one could argue that the 600TL Ducati/Cagiva and V50 Moto Guzzi were products of the same school. The Revere is in fact a very European motor cycle and its price becomes more acceptable if viewed in that context.

Of course, if the Revere was made in Italy it would be lower, sharper and more aggressive. And you could bet your bottom dollar it would be fitted with clip-ons and rear sets.

So how will the Revere fare? Ironically its success depends to a large extent on the outcome of family rivalry. One of the few bikes holding its own in the middle ground is the VT500. The Revere has been developed from it and has now replaced it in Honda's range.

The two models have much in common and there is little to choose between them in terms of top end performance and fuel economy. Buy one of the last 500s and you will save yourself £500. What you will miss out on is the bigger bike's extra dose of razzamatazz.

The workman like VT500 that owes its position as the top selling 500 to its popularity with despatch riders.

The Revere is basically the same motor cycle with seven years more development and a handsome new face. The additional glamour is hardly likely to cut much ice with couriers but will it hit the right note with Captain Sensible?

We had all better hope so for it is the kind of bike that must make its mark if motor cycling is not going to be reduced to a straight choice between the MZ Luxus and ZX-10 Kawasaki.

● Engine and transmission

★★★★

HONDA first bumped up the capacity of the seven-year-old VT500 motor to provide locomotion for their weird and wonderful Transalp green-lane tourer. A new bore and stroke of 75 x 66mm stretched the water cooled engine from 490cc to 583cc but the factory also dropped the compression ratio from 10.5:1 to 9.2:1 and made low and mid range grunt the new priority.

It is this trail bike engine with new heads, barrels and side covers that has been called up to do service in the Revere which also gets a new two-into-one exhaust system and bigger carbs.

Maximum power of the two 583cc engines is the same at 55bhp at 8,000rpm — a mere 3bhp more than the higher revving VT500 can deliver.

On the road the difference in top end performance between the Revere and VT500 is easily lost in a light breeze. Flat out you can expect 112mph from the 500 and 115mph from the NTV600. However, the bigger engine is less frenetic. The red-line has been brought down from 9,500rpm to 8,500rpm and peak power is produced 1,000rpm earlier. Torque has also been increased and shifted downward with the Revere kicking out 5.5kg-m at 6,000rpm against the 500's 4.6kg-m at 7,000rpm.

This re-tuning exercise means the motor is less stressed. It will burble along at lower rpm and more readily respond in the mid-

range, but the 500 will accelerate just as quickly if run to the red-line.

The extra torque has allowed the switch from a six to five speed gearbox. The 500 does not feel comfortable pulling top gear at less than 40mph. On the Revere you can select the tallest ratio at just over 30mph providing you are not expecting an instant surge when you open up the throttle.

Unfortunately the new transmission is no smoothie. The drive shafts used on both bikes are excellent but the Revere is let down by a clutch that is clumsy in its take-up and a gearbox that clonks from ratio to ratio until the engine is spinning.

Just under 5,000rpm will be rewarded with an indicated 70mph and the bike will cruise at 90mph with wind pressure rather than engine stress being the limiting factor.

The six-valve, 52 degree V-twin employs offset crankpins designed to combat vibration by fooling the engine into behaving like a 90 degree motor in which primary balance is perfect. The slight tingle that beats the system at the top end of the rev-band is far too insignificant to intrude on rider comfort. Even when charging up through the gears you hardly notice its presence in the footpegs. What you do get is a feeling of real character enhanced by a distinctive if rather flat exhaust note.

One of the big complaints about the VT500 engine is that it is tucked away so neatly in the frame it's difficult to carry out routine top end service work which means higher labour bills at the garage.

Much of the sting has been taken out of this by the fact that the lower revving Revere engine does not have to be serviced so often and is a little easier to get at. However, although removal of the fuel tank exposes the top end of the motor both the airbox and radiator have to be shifted to gain access to the tappets on the front cylinder.

Another bug-bear with the 500 motor is that the long slender radiator is vulnerable to becoming clogged with muck thrown up by the front mudguard. The new radiator used on the Revere is tucked-up well out of the spray.

One could argue that another service friendly feature is the use of the single-sided Pro-Arm rear end with the back wheel being held by a single unit. In reality the Pro-Arm is perhaps more of a fashion accessory and one of the reasons why the Revere costs £500 more than the old 500.

● Chassis

★★★★

WHEN I tested the VT500 I argued that although the handling left a lot to be desired it was acceptable in view of the machine's modest performance and absence of sporting pretensions. I suggested that a hi-tech frame and multi-adjustable suspension would be like fitting air-brakes to a bicycle and would not justify the extra cost involved.

Well, the Revere is no faster than the VT500 but it has grown an all new chassis that easily out performs the engine. In fact anyone tempted into a little back-lane scratching is probably going to end up cursing the lack of horses.

But maybe the exercise does make sense, especially if you include fashion as part of the equation. There is no denying that the sturdy and highly visible twin-spar frame has great pose value and born again bikers returning to the fold are going to have their confidence boosted by the machine's safe, easy handling.

And Honda have kept it all simple and straight-forward. The only decision left to

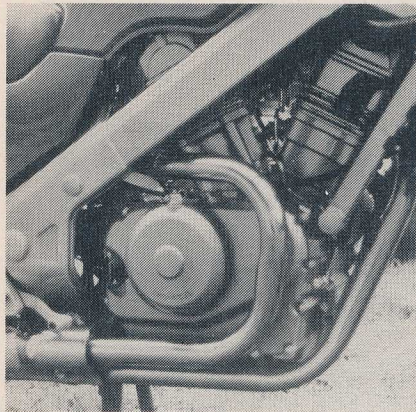
the rider is how much pre-load to use on the single rear-shock. Up front, air-assisted, 37mm forks fitted to the VT500 are dropped in favour of sturdy 41mm suspension legs, their extra girth doing away with the need for a brace.

The ride is soft and comfortable which means it can also get a little bouncy on

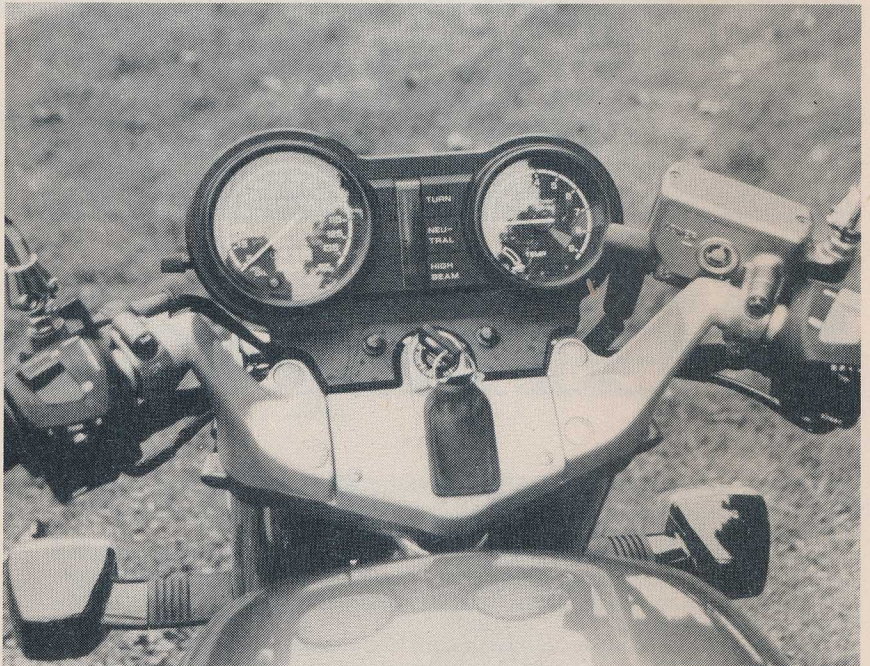
uneven roads. Your bum may leave the saddle occasionally but the bike always remains under complete control. It is a nice compromise. A more sophisticated suspension set-up would simply have been wasted.

Wheels have been dropped in size from 18 to 17 inch and come wearing fat, low profile tyres which give the bike a feeling of rock-steady stability. Changes to the chassis make the bike a few pounds lighter than the VT500 and both the seat height and wheelbase are slightly reduced.

At low speeds the bike steers more quickly than the VT500 which makes it even better for threading through jammed up city roads. And best of all, it is equipped with much better brakes — a 316mm disc with dual piston calipers up front partnered by a 276mm disc with single piston caliper at the rear. The VT500 has an enclosed front disc and rear drum, and



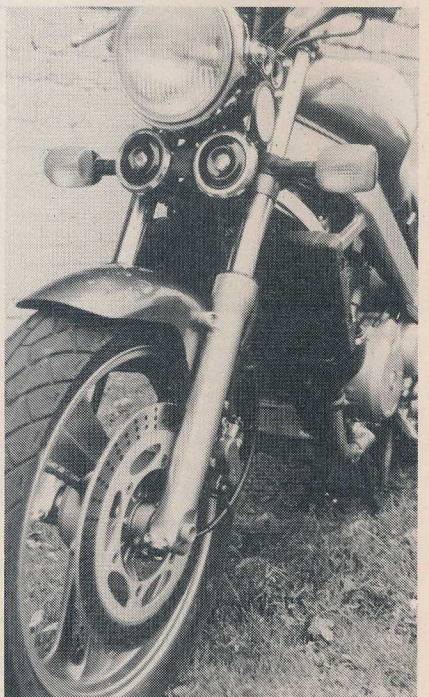
The watercooled V-twin engine enclosed in the sturdy box section frame. Basically the unit used in Honda's Transalp trail bike with new heads, barrels and side covers.



Simplistic cockpit layout with red line at 8,500rpm.

Beefier forks than on the VT500 are air assisted. Single front disc is strong and sensitive.

Massive panniers are a £150 extra and endow the bike with Elephantine proportions.



slamming on that front anchor doesn't provide the kind of stopping power you want in an emergency.

The front brake on the Revere is both strong and sensitive. We understand that Honda decided against a double front disc to save money but they haven't short-changed the owner.

● Equipment

★★★★

THE Revere is a very classy looking number. Even the tank decals are superior to the cheap and nasty ones worn on the VT500. During the test several people came up to me and commented on the Revere's good looks and that's perhaps half the battle with the kind of buyer Honda are hoping to attract.

The new look wheels, chrome headlamp, highly visible frame and Pro-Arm ensure that the bike stands out from the crowd and does not look second best in any company.

Not impressed? Well on the purely practical side the bike's trump card over the VT500 is that it is a lot more comfortable to ride over long distances thanks to a spacious well-padded seat that extends its sofa-like luxury to your pillion passenger. The riding position on both machines is very similar but you sit *in* the Revere rather than *on* it which gives a secure feeling of control.

The headlamp "fairing" fitted to the VT500 shields only the instruments so you are not going to miss its absence on the Revere.

Panniers fitted to the test bike are £150 optional extras from the Honda catalogue and I would not be at all surprised if there was a big demand for an after-market touring fairing. So equipped the bike would make a good rival for the BMW R80T.

Fuel stops will not be a problem. The sculptured petrol tank holds 19 litres — a litre more than VT500 — giving the bike a range of about 250 miles when cruised at around 70mph. A superior headlight is another equipment advantage the Revere has over the VT500. In all other areas the two bikes come out about even, both bikes being equipped with handlebar mounted chokes, side and centre stands and passenger grab rail.

Changes to the instrumentation and switchgear appear to have been made for the sake of it. One of the few extras fitted to the Revere is a fold-away handle to help pull the machine onto its centre stand.

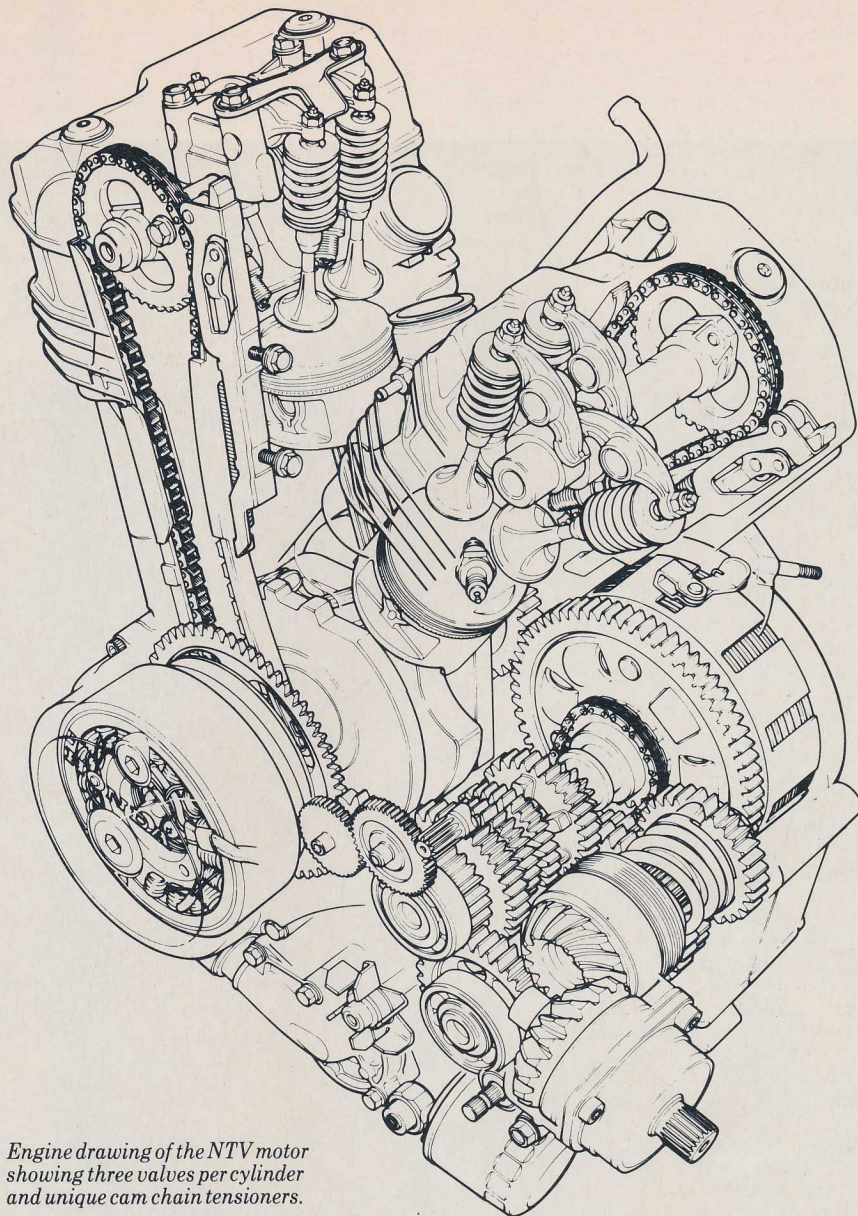
● The price you pay

★★★★

THE shaft drive, 600cc Revere is unique to Britain. All our European cousins have opted for the identical looking 650cc versions of the bike. And riders in Japan can choose between 400cc and 600cc models, both with chain drive.

The 'pick and mix special' created for UK consumption is aimed at the man worried about both money and maintenance. The enclosed drive shaft is a must if the Revere is to stand any hope of taking over from the VT500 as the number one choice with despatch riders. And the use of a 600 instead of 650 motor means big savings when it comes to insurance.

Unfortunately, unless you are a geriatric with a few centuries of no claims bonus, you are still going to have to pay through the nose for cover. A 19-year-old living in the big city can expect to pay about £860 for a comprehensive policy and upwards of



Engine drawing of the NTV motor showing three valves per cylinder and unique cam chain tensioners.

£300 for third party protection. A country cousin of the same age will have to cough up about £750 for comprehensive cover and a little over £260 for third party.

And the bad news is, those rates are likely to have been increased by the time you read this. Our advice is the same as always — shop around.

At £3,299 the Revere costs £600 more than the old VT500. What you get for that extra outlay is a better handling motor cycle with superior brakes and lots more razzmatazz. However, £600 is a lot of money and there is nothing to choose between these two machines if you are simply looking for practical every day transport. Hunt backstreets and you may still be able to find dealers with brand new VTs in stock despite its defetion from the range. In my view it is a better buy.

Fuel consumption of the two machines is near identical. The lower revving 600 motor takes up to 60 miles to gargle its way through a gallon of liquid gold and you don't have to ride like a saint to record a 50mpg average.

The achilles heel of the VT500, according to several despatch companies, is the high cost of servicing due to the difficulty of gaining access to the engine. Things are said to be better on its successor and its reduced appetite for revs should pay further dividends by reducing mechanical stress.

As for reliability, Honda UK put their money where their mouth is with a two year guarantee on the engine and power train — a policy of protection they offer on all their models over 400cc.

Spare part prices are neither better nor worse than we have come to expect. In other words, they are frightening. A complete exhaust system will set you back £304.58. A petrol tank is £159.90. You will pay £53.76 for a complete headlamp; £20.58 for each of the handlebar mirrors; £17.34 for a front indicator; £257.77 for a front wheel. The price list is typical and explains why insurance quotes are beginning to look like telephone numbers.

● Conclusion

★★★★

THE NTV 600 is practical transport dressed to thrill. It is expensive but not overpriced in as much as you are getting what you pay for including an up-market chassis that easily exceeds the modest demands of the motor.

For cheap day-to-day transport the VT500 made much more sense. The Revere is much more of a fashion accessory — a bike for the leisure rider to take out at the weekends and enjoy being seen upon.





Sparks fly as an intrepid tester from Performance Bikes magazine puts the NTV through its paces at their test session last year. A testament to the Honda's sure-footed handling.

The Revere in Welsh touring habitat. (Performance Bikes pic).