

Which Bike?

APRIL
60p

45

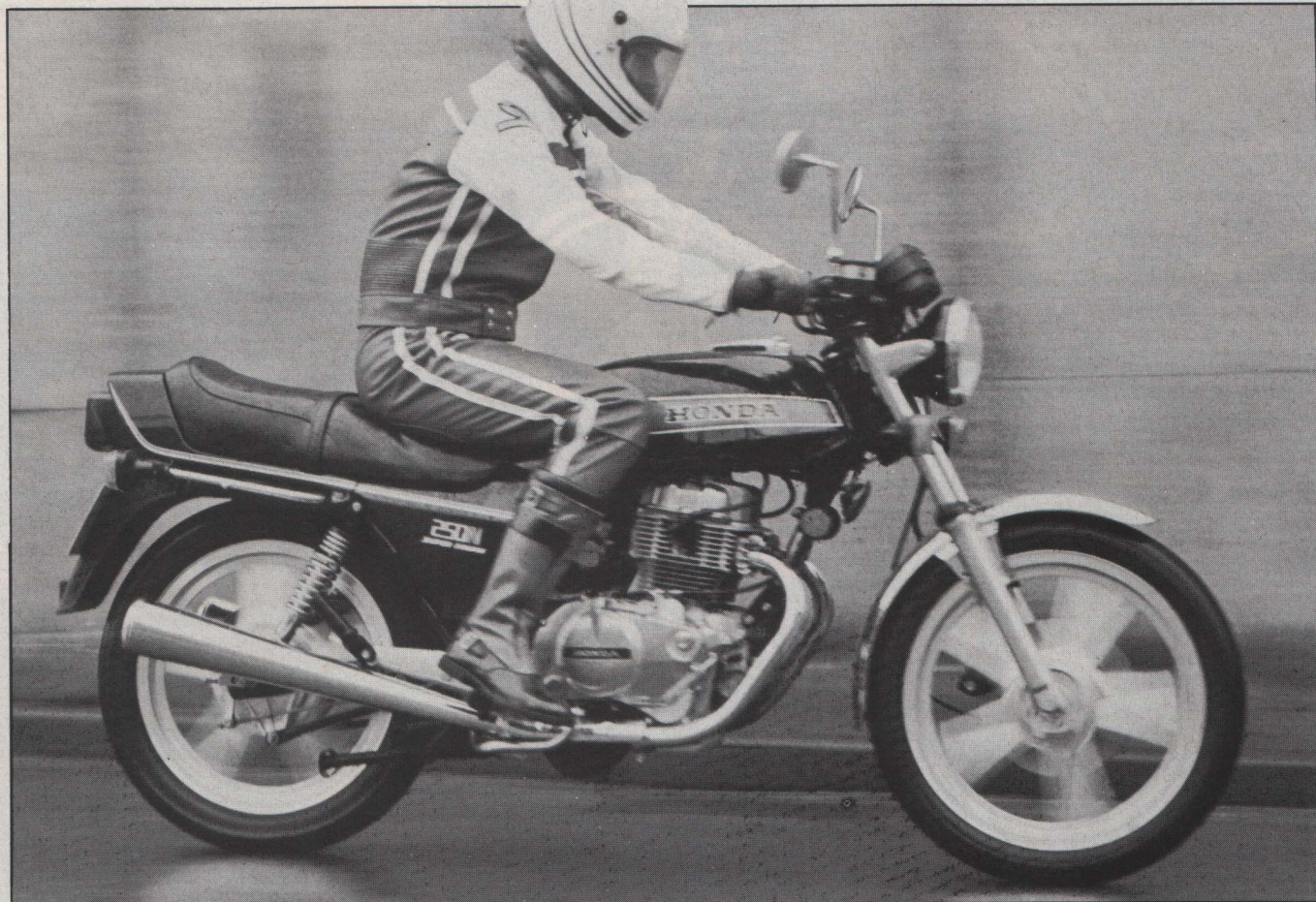
EVERY MONTH ALL NEW AND USED BIKE PRICES

**EVERYBODY'S DREAM?
TESTS OF BRITAIN'S
TOP SELLER
PLUS HONDA'S NEW
250 SPORT SINGLE**

**ON THE ROUGH
WITH YAMAHA'S IT425**



CHARTBUSTER!



One way and another motorcyclists are, in this country at least, a bit of a hotch-potch. You get people from all walks of life riding bikes and even within those areas you'll find all manner of variety and inclination.

In other words, you'll rarely find two bikers who are alike, even less who'll agree on matters pertaining to the two-wheeled world. You've only got to go into a bike pub and strike up a conversation to find out what I mean.

It's got to the point where I wonder if it's really of any value testing motorcycles in the time-honoured manner of subjective critiques. Everybody's viewpoint is different, so how can we possibly relate useful information apart from absolute performance?

So it's not surprising that there are no finite trends in motorcycling. Everybody goes their own way, subtly guided by the offerings from the Japanese factories.

Or so I thought until the middle of last year. Phenomena are few and far between in the trade so it doesn't take

HONDA CB250N

Honda's 250cc Super Dream was the most popular motorcycle in Britain last year, outselling the next best two-fifty by a factor of four. *John Nutting* finds what Dreams are made of for this year.

And we review the sort of accessories that can be fitted to the bike. Photography by

John Perkins.

long before obvious shifts in the buying habits of motorcyclists filter through to the *Which Bike?* office.

What was happening was something on the scale of an epidemic. Riders, both new and experienced, were buying 250cc Hondas at a hitherto unprecedented rate. Those with more than a little memory will recall when Suzuki used to carp about their GT250 twins being the top-seller but the other manufacturers would take over on occasional months. There was no chance of this re-occurring. The Hondas were outselling equivalent 250cc bikes in droves. In fact to the point

where they were the major proportion of the market.

And for all we know the position is still the same now. Latest figures show that Honda sold 17,215 250cc Super Dreams last year, making it the biggest selling motorcycle (if you discount mopeds and step-thrus) by miles.

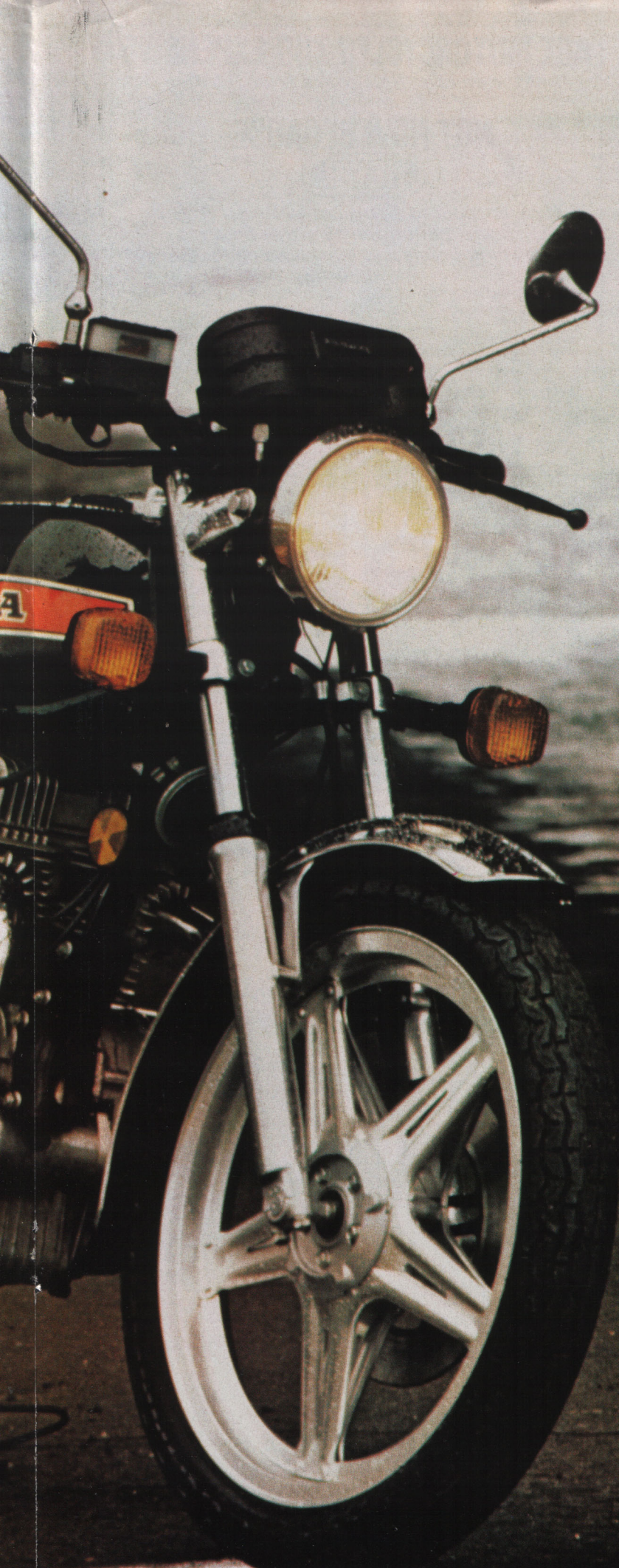
Yet last year, when *Which Bike?* compared a well-used but healthy Super Dream with Yamaha's XS250 and the then new Kawasaki Z250 twin, both bikes with the same specification, we couldn't separate the Kawasaki from the Honda in terms of overall function.

So once again we wonder: What makes the Honda CB250N such a popular motorcycle? There are arguably better bikes in the individual areas of performance, handling, comfort and economy. And some with better overall behaviour and value. Could there be some indefinable feature of the bike that gives it such universal appeal. After all, 17,215 people who vote with their money can't be wrong.

Is it the performance of the Super Dream that makes it so popular? We're not so sure on that because the CB250N is nothing like the fastest of even the four-stroke twins. Neither is it the quickest over a quarter mile.

Top speed is between 86 and 89mph depending on rider weight and stance. That's nothing to get excited about. But the bike can haul along at an indicated 70mph with not too much trouble. Given a strong headwind or a heavy load you'll have to start stirring the upper ratios of the six-speed gearbox to keep up speed, which can become a





chore because the gap between fifth and top is unusually wide.

Acceleration through the gears isn't all that great either. The engine's torque curve is essentially flat all the way through to the red line at just over 10,000 rpm and to get any quick response you have to rev over seven grand. The engine will pull reasonably from 3,000 rpm so it's tractable enough for use in town.

The flatness of the performance is strange despite the use of an engine of unusual complexity. Like the bigger Hondas it comes with twin inlet valves but with a single overhead camshaft. It's very oversquare with a bore and stroke of 62 x 41.4mm to allow all the valves plenty of breathing space but because the engine is air-cooled and to make access to the spark plugs easier only single exhaust valves are opted for.

Despite all this the motor only manages to churn out 27bhp at 10,000 rpm, a figure that's equalled by the less complex competition. And since it's dragging along a chassis virtually identical to the CB400N it should be no surprise that the performance of the CB250N is sluggish.

The weight does have its advantages in that additional features like the engine's twin counterbalances for extra smoothness and the tough chassis for stability can be added. Idea of the balancers is to modify the out-of-balance forces created by the pistons rising and falling in unison so that it's less annoying to the rider. As designed by Honda's engineers, it's not however as successful as it might be. Only at low revs does the motor feel smooth — above 60mph there's a fuzzy vibration that comes through the handlebar and further up the scale buzzes and mirrors.

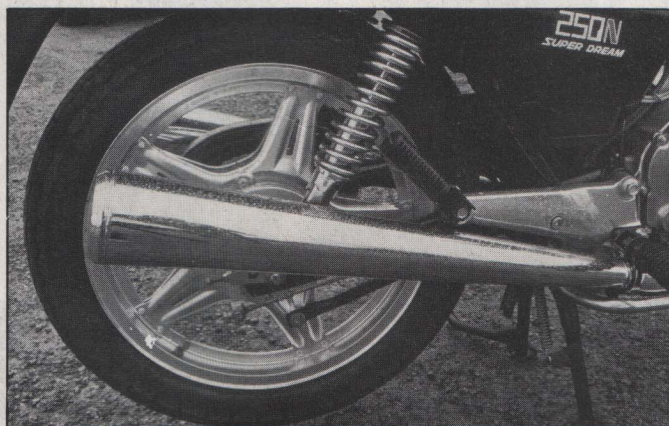
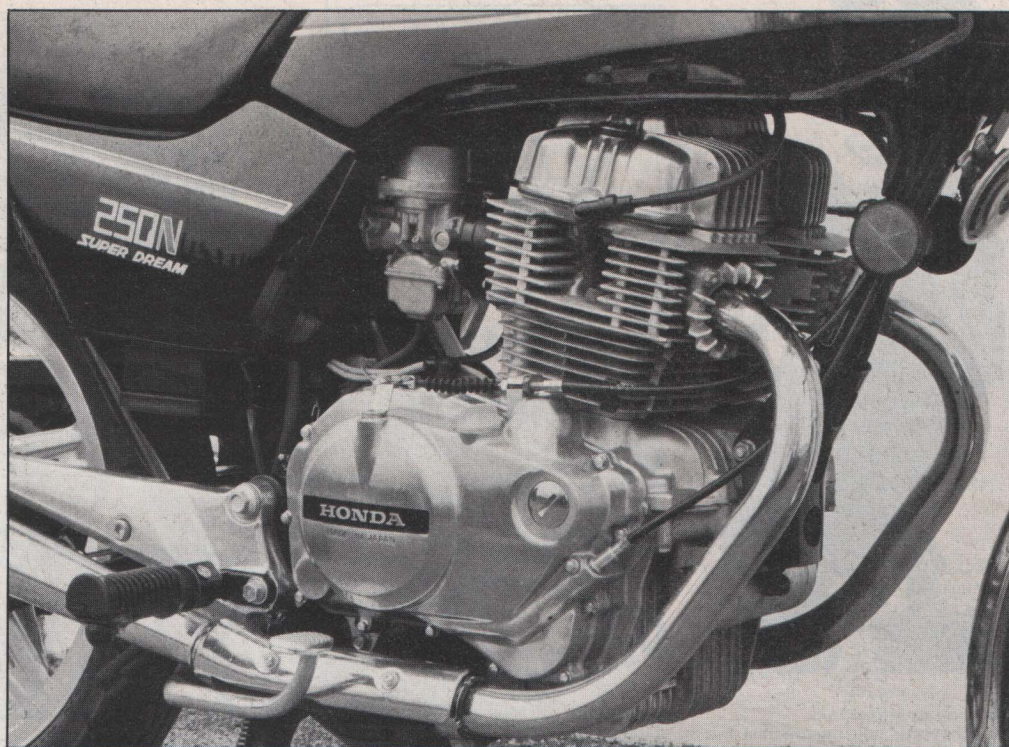
Despite the weight and the need to rev the engine, the Super Dream is still economic to run. Given a careful throttle hand you'll be able to get over 65mpg, while pushing it

hard will drop that figure to the 62mpg of our last test bike and the 57mpg of the 1980 model. Metering is helped by the use of twin 28mm choke-constant velocity carbs which only allow the engine as much mixture as it needs at a given throttle-valve opening, since the flow is controlled by vacuum-operated slides.

Starting from cold was never troublesome; just pulling the instrument-console mounted choke plunger and dabbing the starter button was enough.

Only bother was that the engine would take an inordinate amount of time to warm up and always felt very unresponsive just off idle.

Honda are so confident in the bike's starting that they've dropped the kick start lever, the only mechanical change on the 1980 Super Dream.



The unsprung footrest on the right side that can be knocked up inadvertently, leading to a loss of footing, is still retained, unfortunately.

The Super Dream's popularity could more likely be in its superb handling. The bike feels exceptionally secure while cornering, with good stability in the steering. The tautness is partly at the expense of rider comfort because the suspension is very hard, a feature not attenuated by the seat. Damping, though, is well up to scratch on the FVQ units. These are supposed to supply a damping force proportional to damper speed, but with release valves to let the wheel skim over smaller road ripples.

The heavy spring rates on the latest model didn't really allow the bike to display the suspension's characteristics at their best, though the Yokohama tyres provide great road-holding.

Low speed control is somewhat compromised by the steering geometry which uses

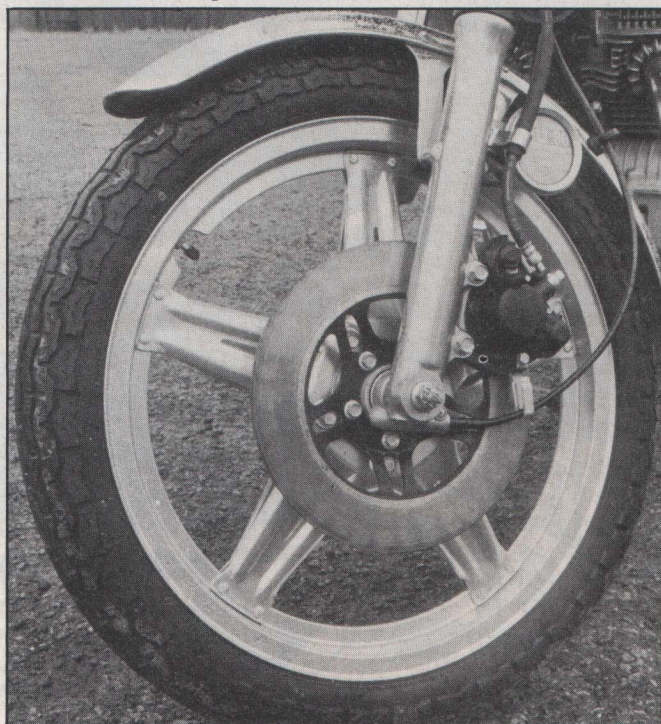
longer trail than any other 250s. And the test bike had tighter steering bearings than usual, which made flicking through dense traffic tricky.

Predominant reason why the handling of the CB250N is so good is that the engine can never overpower the chassis. The frame, which uses the engine as its bottom member, is a strong, pressed steel structure with tubular subframes which given the whole bike a compact feel and which even on the CB400N is more than tough enough.

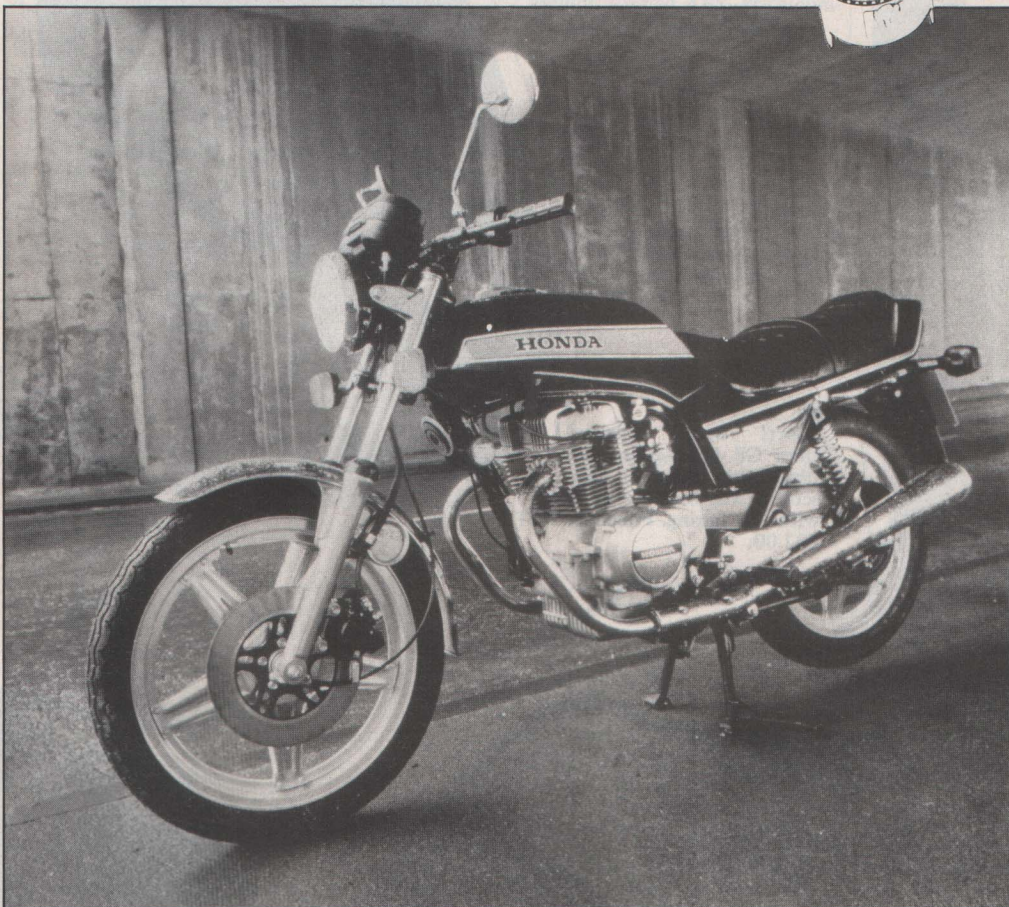
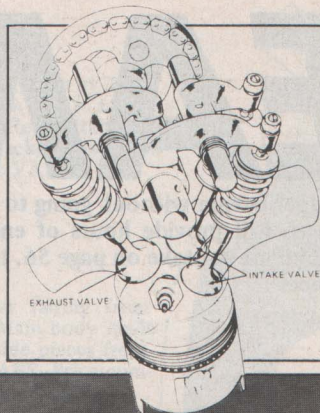
Wheels are the familiar Comstar units which first saw light on the 1,000cc endurance racers and, with stamped alloy spokes and rolled rims, are both strong and stylish.

Style is where the CB250N really scores. The bike has really clean lines that catch the eye of the most unenthusiastic bystander. Colours have been changed this year to mark the 250 as being different from the similar-

Top: The CB250N engine looks chunky 'cos it's the same overall size as the 400. Only change for 1980 is the removal of the kick-start mechanism. Chrome cover on casing gives access to balancer chain adjuster. Above left: flash wheels are all alloy; silencers are very effective; rear suspension felt too stiff. Above: seat removes completely to expose toolkit and air cleaner cover. Below: front brake is powerful but hand lever has long reach.



Anyone can pretend to be an ace racer with the Super Dream's lavish instrumentation and controls. Right: The three-valve cylinder head layout doesn't really bring rewards in performance. Silly, eh?



looking 400 twin and 900 four, with options of metallic maroon or black with red highlights.

The fuel tank flows back into the side panels and a line cranks back parallel to the long silencers under the seat. The seat itself pulls off after releasing a loop from the helmet lock and undoing two catches, revealing the toolkit and airfilter. At the rear in front of the rear lamp is a small space enough to take a pair of gloves or over-trousers.

Despite the use of a fully electronic ignition system, the CB250N still needs its share of regular maintenance. The ignition is probably the most sophisticated you'll find on any bike in the world with two sets of magnetic triggers which conspire to give an advance curve tailored precisely to the engine's requirements, and of course needs no attention whatsoever. Earlier T models had their

share of gremlins in this department buy by now there's no doubt that the capacitor discharge system is virtually foolproof.

We're surprised it's not the same with the rest of the bike. Oil changes are still recommended at 1,800-mile intervals and full services, requiring oil filter replacement, attention to the balance chains, cam chain, drive chain, washable foam air filter, valve clearances (0.12mm inlet, 0.16mm exhaust), brake pads and shoes, battery plus all the little details. In other words, the usual.

If the CX500 we've got on long-term test is any guide however, the CB250 should be able to manage on longer intervals. Only the final drive chain needs constant attention by the owner.

We can only conclude that it's the size of the CB250N, compared with the equivalent Japanese opposi-

tion, that gives it such appeal. When you ride the bike you feel as if you're on a big high performance bike with a long reach to the handlebar and high footrests.

This of course helps when you're struggling into a headwind along the M4 at over 65mph or when you're carving through the back roads attempting to graze the tips of the footrests. On the whole though the Honda isn't as good a riding stance as some, unless that is, you're of some weird shape with long arms and short legs.

The front brake came in for some stick too. Not because the disc was lacking in power, far from it. More because the hand lever was too far from the grip when the pads bit, lessening the degree of control possible. The rear drum brake was very sharp in action but controllable.

But again we have to say

HONDA CB250N

Price inc. Vat:	£899
Warranty:	12 months, unlimited mileage
Engine:	Ohc 360-deg balanced twin
Capacity:	249cc (62x41.4mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Ignition:	Capacitor discharge
Comp. ratio:	9.4 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 28mm Keihin
Max. Power:	27bhp @ 10,000rpm
Max. Torque:	14.7lbs-ft @ 8,500rpm
Primary Drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six speed
Final Drive:	Chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	9.1 in top
Electrics:	12v 12ah battery 130w alternator 45/40w headlamp
Fuel Capacity:	3.1 gallons
Frame:	Spine type
Suspension:	Telescopic fork(f) Swing arm, 5-pos spring preload adjustment (r)
Brakes:	10.9in disc(f) 6in drum (r)
Tyres:	Yokohama 3.60S19(f) 4.10S18(r)

DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase:	55.5ins
Seat Height:	32ins
Grnd Clrnce:	6ins
Hndlbr Width:	28ins
Rake/trail:	63deg/3.9ins
Weight:	367lbs dry

EQUIPMENT	Turn signals, mirrors, self starter, rev counter, speedo, fuel tank lock, helmet lock, steering lock, tools, trip meter.
-----------	--

PERFORMANCE:	
Top Speed:	86-89mph
Speeds in gears calculated at max. power	
revs. Top:	93mph
5th:	80mph
4th:	68mph
3rd:	56mph
2nd:	45mph
1st:	32mph
St ¼-mile:	17.8secs
0-to-60mph:	11.5secs
Fuel consumption:	57mpg
Tank range:	180miles
Speedo correction at 60mph:	59.2mph

Importer:	Honda UK Ltd, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4
-----------	---

it, all those happy buyers can't go wrong. Maybe the other manufacturers aren't trying hard enough. That remains to be seen, for both Yamaha and Suzuki are bringing out bigger 250cc twins, even with chopper styling, something which Honda don't see as being the hot set-up for the UK this year. It's going to be an interesting 1980.