



HONDA

250RS

SINGULAR FUN

Is a Japanese two-fifty four-stroke twin too expensive for you? Then take a look at the first of a crop of less price singles about to hit the roads, Honda's CB250RS.

It's economic and, would you believe, very quick. Rick Kemp gives it a Quickspin.

Photography by John Perkins.

HONDA CB250RS

It would appear that after spending the last few years improving the performance of bikes with more and more power, the Japanese industry has at last got the message and started to concentrate on lightening its offerings. Not because of design elegance or even moral reasons but more to appease the market research departments in these ever more economy-conscious times. With most of the 250cc twins costing around £900 now and weighing as much as 400 lbs, the appeal of a quarter-litre bike costing £150 less with only a marginal loss in performance but distinct advantages in running economy and handling isn't difficult to understand.

Kawasaki, Yamaha and Honda are all offering single-cylinder roadsters on this theme this year, all based on power units derived from their trail bikes. The Honda, first of the three to come into our hands, takes on a distinct character however because unlike the other two isn't what the factory men call an entry-level bike intended for the novice or uncommitted two-wheel rider replete with such luxuries as electric starter, cast wheels, carriers and the like.

The Honda CB250RS is a sporting bike in the purest sense, both in performance and appearance. Styling is both familiar but different. It still has the look of the Euro-style twins but the seat tail is more emphasised and the tank and side panels waisted with more than a little of the CBX looks in them.

And like the CBX, effort has been made to lighten the bike. Plastic is used where possible: side panels, seat base, front and rear mudguards and the chain guard. The machine we rode was a pre-production prototype and had some blemishes on the plastic ware and some of the

parts looked almost hand made. But the finish was still very good.

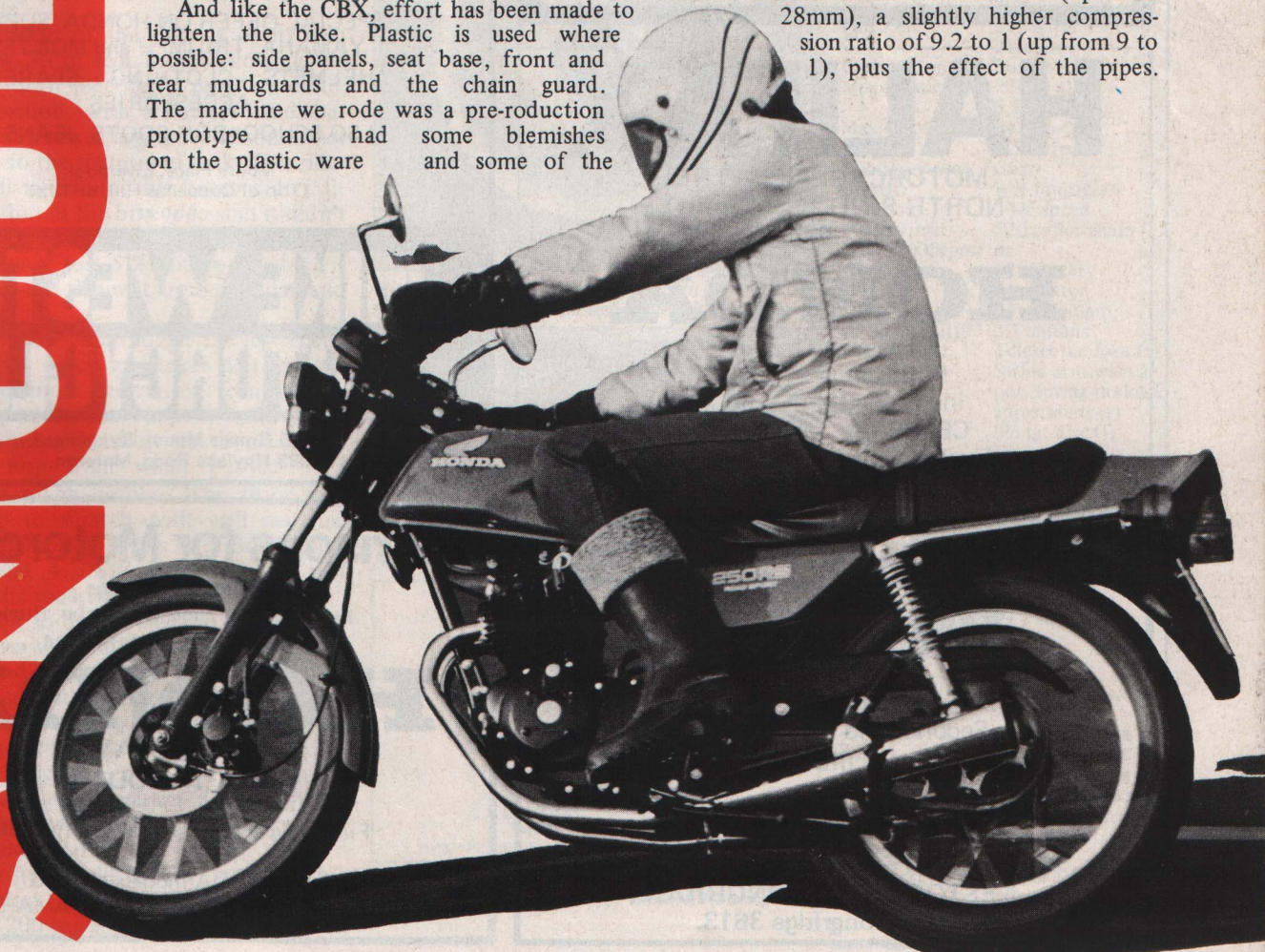
Black is used extensively on the engine, fork sliders and handlebar and along with the use of wire-laced wheels with light-alloy rims, the RS manages to look even more 'European' than the CB250N.

The exhaust system is untypical though. The engine has four valves with two exhaust ports and Honda have taken advantage of it to recall the looks of the old 125cc racing twins with the parallel pipes running under the sump and cranking out just under the footrests, ending in short megaphones that look as if they should make more noise than they do.

The only part of the bike that seems odd is the rectangular headlamp, though it matches the turn signals and instruments.

The RS uses the five-speed overhead camshaft engine found in the XL250S trail bike and in its roadster role seems happier. Like the twins it has a pair of balance shafts to smooth out the imbalance of the single 74mm piston, a feature shared by neither of the other Japanese single-cylinder roadsters.

Maximum power has been upped to 25bhp at 8,500rpm from the trail bike's 21bhp at 7,500rpm at the expense of the torque, which now peaks 1,500 higher up the scale at 7,500 rpm. The extra power comes from a longer duration cam with 10/40-40/10 timing at 1mm lift compared to the XL's 5/30-35/5, a larger choke 30mm Keihin carburettor (up from 28mm), a slightly higher compression ratio of 9.2 to 1 (up from 9 to 1), plus the effect of the pipes.



Honda have been offering tuning kits for the XR250 enduro machines in the USA that also includes a lightened crankshaft for improved response, and this appears to have been incorporated in the RS. The engine is very smooth and quiet, and is not as lumpy at the bottom end as the XL. Pulling away is easy once you realise that the RS lacks the XL's bottom end grunt. The five-speed gearbox is more necessary on the roadster even though the power spread is wide and the engine revs freely. But there just isn't the torque below 5,000 rpm, so if you're trying to get a move on you have to rev it hard. The red band on the counter is from 9,200 rpm to 10,500 rpm, so there's plenty in hand.

As to flat out performance we'll have to speculate. But as the RS makes only slightly less maximum power than the CB250N's claimed 27bhp and is 85lb lighter we'd think that it will be quicker through the quarter mile. Using the dry weight and 175 lb of rider and fuel as a yardstick, the RS has a weight/power ratio of 18lb/bhp compared to the CB250N's 20lb/bhp, a five per cent advantage. Since the RS is slimmer the top speed should be better too, somewhere around 90 mph. There's no doubt that the bike was felt quicker so long as you revved it.

Don't get the impression that the engine is completely gutless though. It'll chug along in second gear at a walking pace without stalling and pull away with no trouble.

Like the trail mate the RS is fitted with an exhaust valve lifter linked to the kick start lever to ease firing up. I have mixed feelings about this device and wonder if it's really necessary on a two-fifty because the bike is very easy to start with the aid of the pull button choke mounted beneath the instruments.

First impression of the bike is of its slim width and low 30 in seat height allowing the rider to place both feet firmly on the ground. The riding position, with a flattish handlebar and rear set footrests is aggressive if somewhat inflexible due to the sculptured tank. This rider is six foot tall and found his knees didn't fit into the space but as the bike is so slim it didn't matter too much. With a dry weight of 282 lb and a wheelbase of just 52½ inches, the bike is rideable so you can throw it around all day and not feel the strain.

Handling is excellent though the low speed handling is a bit quick and takes getting used to and becomes more neutral over 20mph. The rear FVQ suspension units kept the swing arm in check and during the short test didn't let the back wheel hop even when pushed hard through some rough corners. The front fork also came up to scratch with well matched springs and damping. Tyres are Bridgestone in 3.00S18 and 4.10S18 sizes and the soft rubber holds the road well.

Braking with so little weight to stop doesn't need to be overwhelming. So the single 9½ in front disc and rear drum are more than powerful enough with plenty of feel.

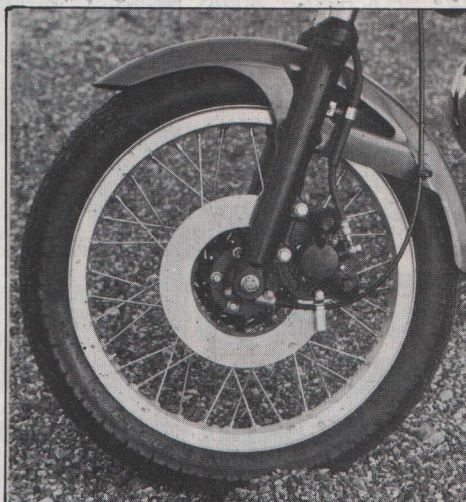
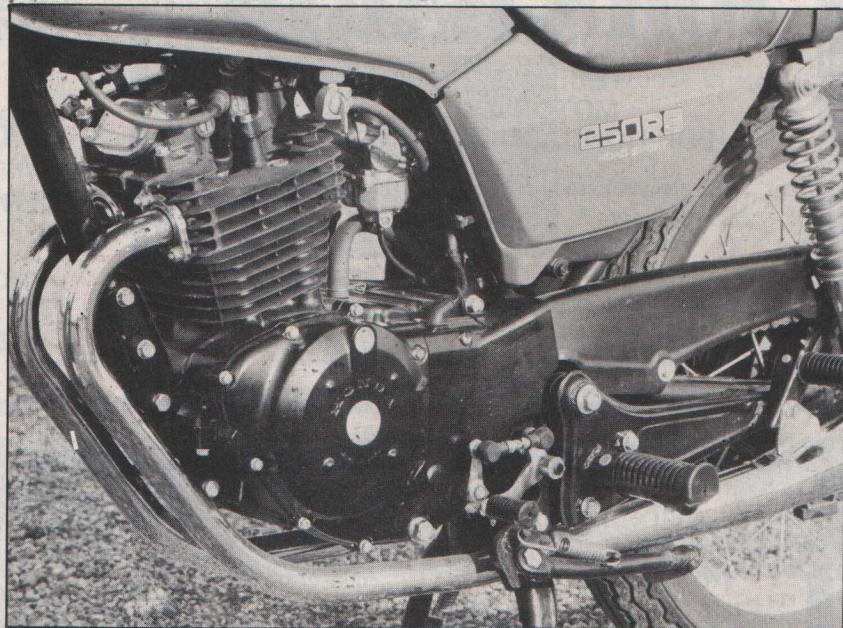
This appears to be one of Honda's best packages to date. The price of £759 is good though it is only £10 less than the electric start Kawasaki Z250C. It's a good looker but what will sell it is the way it feels, as the CB400F did.

Running costs should be low, with possible fuel consumption of 65 to 70 mpg giving a range of over 200 miles on the 3.1 gallon tank.

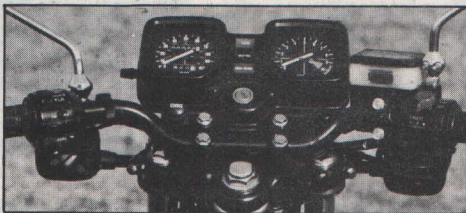
Maintenance should be easy too with capacitor discharge ignition and easy access to most of the motor.

It doesn't take too much imagination this bike in racing trim. All it needs is a fairing, a few tuning mods to the engine and chassis and we could have a low-cost racer. And who knows..... even a new Formula!

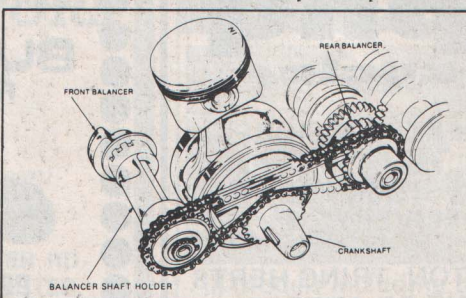
Only external changes to the four-valve Honda engine are the black finish and a rev-counter drive. Inside there's a higher compression ratio, longer cam timing and a larger choke carburettor.



With only 282lbs to stop the 9½ inch disc brake is more than powerful enough. Wheel has alloy rim.



CBX styling takes over in the instrumentation but the rest of the controls are pure Super Dream.



RS engine like the XL trail version has two chain-driven counter-balancers for smooth running.

HONDA CB250RS

Price inc VAT:	£759
Warranty:	12 mnths, unlimited mileage
Engine:	Ohc four-valve single
Capacity:	248cc (74x57.8mm)
Comp ratio:	9.2 to 1
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Ignition:	Capacitor-discharge
Carburetion:	30mm Keihin
Max power:	25bhp at 8,500rpm
Max torque:	14.4 lb-ft at 7,500 rpm
Primary drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five speed
Final Drive:	520 roller chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	na
Electrics:	12v battery Alternator 35w headlamp
Fuel Capacity:	3.1 gallons
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos. spring preload adjustment (r)
Brakes:	9½ in. disc (f) Drum (r)
Tyres:	Bridgestone 3.00S18 (f) Bridgestone 4.10S18 (r)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	52.5 in
Seat Height:	30 in
Handlebar width:	29.5 in
Grnd Clrnce:	5.7 in
Rake/trail:	na
Dry weight:	282 lb

EQUIPMENT: Mirrors, turn signals, 100mph speedo, 10,500 rpm rev counter, odometer, locking fuel cap, helmet lock, tools.

Manufacturer/Importer: Honda UK Ltd, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4.