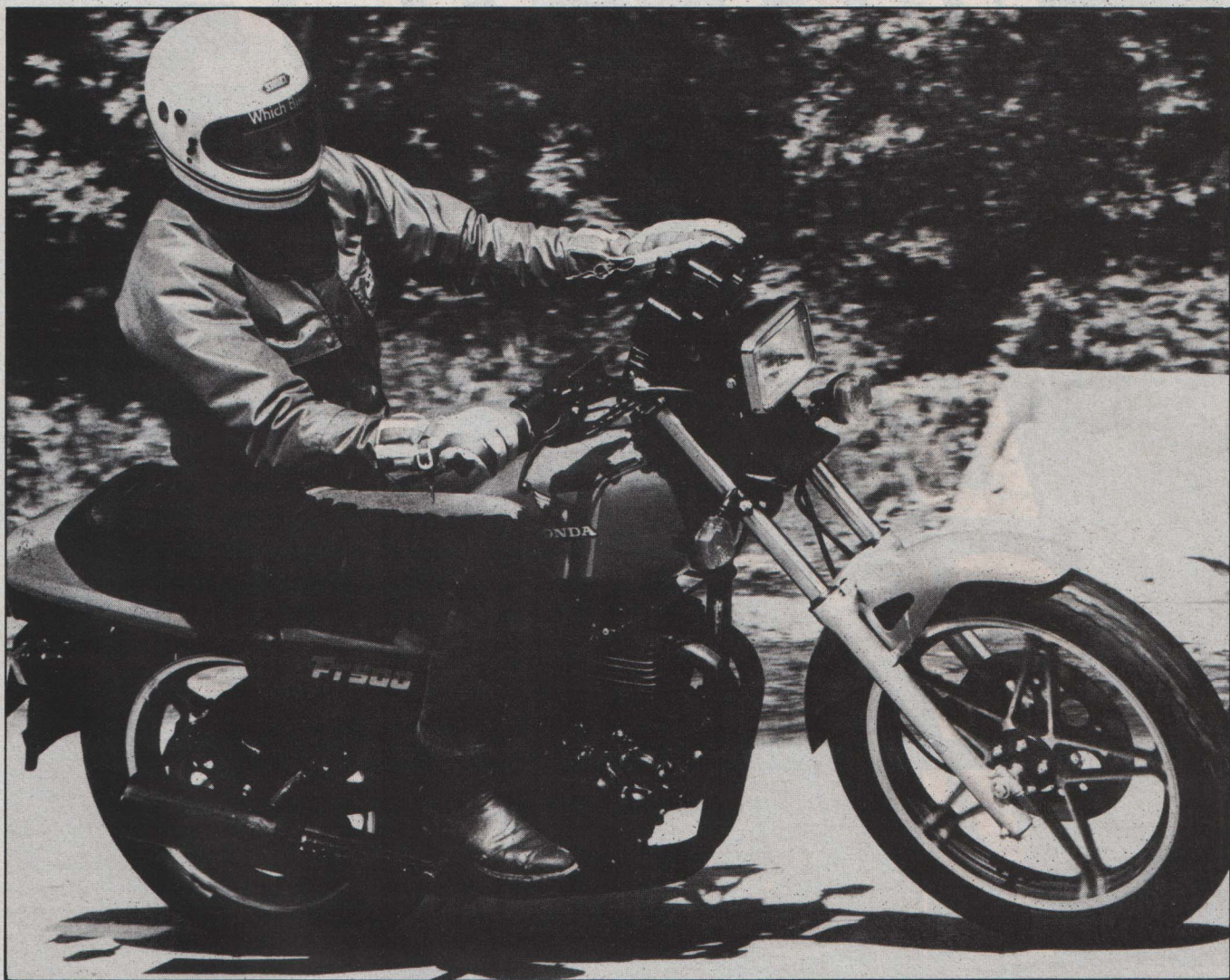


REBEL

without a Cause

Roger Atyeo rides Honda's big single and finds
that things still ain't what they used to be



Photography by Malcolm Bryant

It came as no great surprise when Honda announced its single-pot 500cc roadster, using as a power unit the trail bike motor. The transition from trail to road had been done to great effect with the neat and nimble CB250RS: housed in a new frame, the slightly modified motor produces respectable performance figures and enough torque so as not to tax the gearchange foot — and it doesn't guzzle gas like Australians drink beer. Last year was the year of the 250, this year it's the 500, an eagerly-awaited opponent to Yamaha's long-in-the-tooth SR500.

When seen in the flesh, the

FT500 lives up to the expectations created by its US launch. The bike is indeed a tasty tool, lots of eye-catching red paintwork, all-black motor with a black chrome silencer the size of the drain pipe. Wheels are of the cast variety, the rear shod with a monstrous 4.25 x 18 tubeless boot. Wire wheels may have looked nicer and would certainly have saved weight. The tank is almost slab-sided, the headlamp rectangular and the rather hard, unforgiving seat is square and flat. It all makes for a beefy package, or as the blurb sheet puts it 'functional simplicity'.

The 498cc motor is a modi-

fied XR500 unit; the major change being the addition of an electric starter which worked perfectly (no back-up kick start if it does decide to go on strike). The XR's red valve is dispensed with — the FT features a whopping great 43mm carburettor. The engine produces a modest 35bhp, giving the bike a top speed of 95.3mph on the strip. It's a respectable speed for a single though in '61 a Velocette 500 Clubman was electronically timed at 95.1 on the MIRA strip. Where the bike is truly a let-down is in its lack of low down grunt — something a half-litre single with a 7000 rpm red line should have in

abundance. The FT also suffers from a sloppy, noisy transmission which causes the bike to shudder and shake badly when the throttle is cracked open at low revs in anything above second gear. Lack of torque means over-time on the gearchanging and clutch-dipping game, which was never a problem thanks to smooth and precise five-speed gearbox and a light, responsive clutch. Fuel consumption was an unimpressive 53mpg average which gives a tank range of around 120 miles before reserve.

The twin balancers really come into their own on the big single. Unlike the SR500, the FT is comfortably

smooth cruising at the legal limit and allows you to buzz through the gears without fear of numbing your fingers.

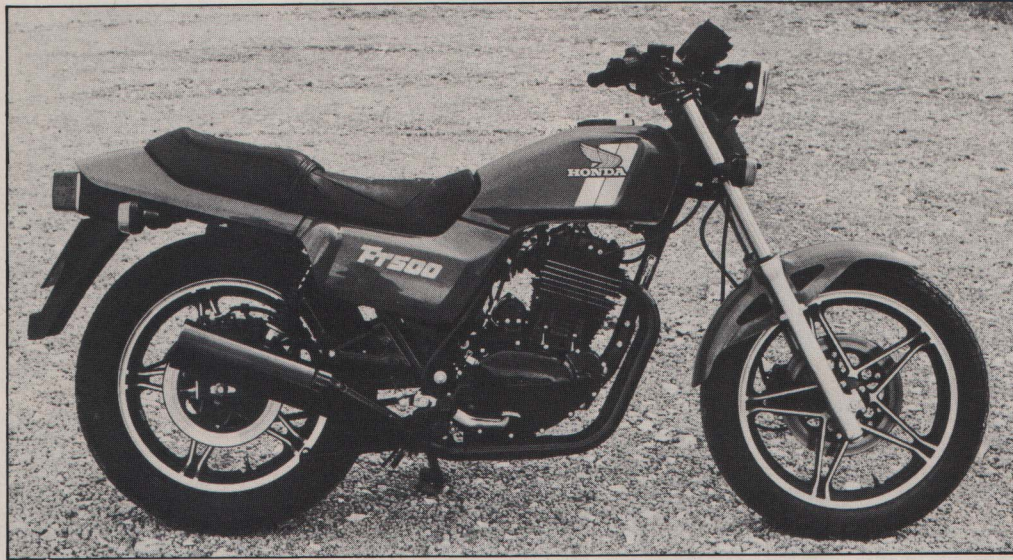
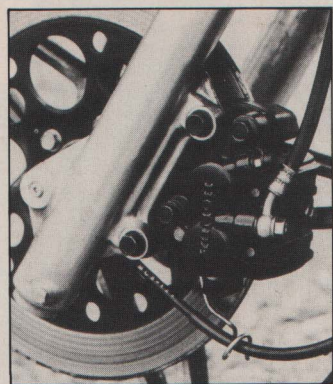
Handling could be improved. The bike suffers from understeer; take it by the throat and manhandle it around bends and you'll be okay, but unless a firm hand is taken the FT tends to go wide. We dropped the front end 30mm down the braced, air-assisted legs which

improved the balance and the steering. Once used to its shortcomings you can flick the FT about and crank it over with confidence. There's plenty of rubber to find the limit of the good ground clearance and the single discs back and front do the business in a progressive, competent manner. In traffic the bike does well, as it's quite narrow and has a good lock.

At £1350 the FT500 won't

cost you an arm and a leg; it'll appeal to messengers and people making short daily trips with the occasional weekend country trundle. Honda, as is its way, will no doubt wait and watch the sales figures before deciding upon development. Let's hope they continue it and turn what is now a flawed bike into a great bike.

Roger Atyeo



MODEL:	Honda FT500
Price inc tax	£1350
Warranty	12mths unlt'd/mileage
Customer Contact	Honda UK Power Road, London W4 Tel: 747 3300

ENGINE	
Type	Ohc single
Capacity	498cc
Bore/stroke	89 x 80mm
Comp ratio	8.6:1
Lubrication	Wet sump
Carburation	43mm Keihin CV
Ignition	Capacitor discharge
Power (bhp)	35 @ 6,500
Torque (lb-ft)	30.8 @ 5,000

TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet multiplate
Gearbox	Five speed
Final drive	Sealed 530 chain
Overall ratios	15.6, 10.4, 7.9, 6.3 & 5.3:1

ELECTRICS	
Power source	Alternator
Battery	12V 14Ah
Headlamp	60/55W quartz

CHASSIS	
Frame	Tubular welded spine type
Front Susp	Telescopic leading axle fork
Rear susp	Swing arm with twin shocks & 5 pos spring preload adj
Front brake	11.7in (298mm) disc
Rear brake	10.7in (273mm) disc
Front tyre	Dunlop 3.50S19 F11 tubeless
Rear tyre	Dunlop 4.25S18 tubeless

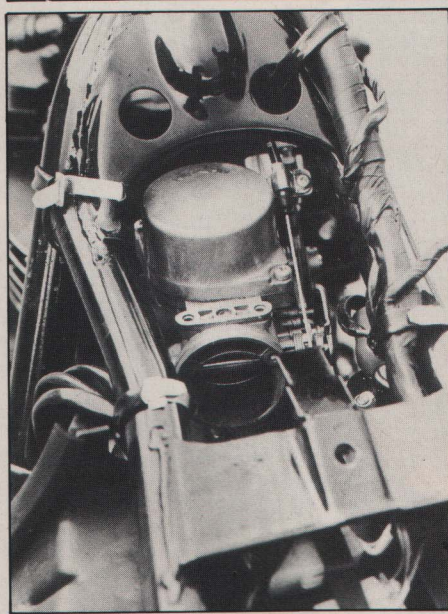
CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank	2.8gal (13 litre)
Oil	2.4 litre

DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase	56.3in (1435mm)
Seat height	31.5in (800 mm)
H'bar width	29.25in (742mm)
Grnd clrnce	6.5in (165mm)
Rake/trail	61deg/4.7in
Dry weight	350lb (158.7kg)

EQUIPMENT	
	Elec start, turn sigs, speedo, tacho, str lock, fuel cap lock, tools

PERFORMANCE	
Top speed (mean)	95.3mph prone 87.0mph upright
St 1/4-mile time	15.1s @ 83.6mph
Speedo	30 (29.2)mph Indicated/ (actual) 50 (48.3)mph 70 (68.9)mph
Speed in gears @ max power	32, 49, 64, 80, 96 mph
Test weight (full tank)	357lb
Fuel consump average	53.2mpg
worst	46.2mpg
best	57.8mpg
Tank range to reserve	150 miles

Mucho thanks to Mocheck, 40 Clapham High St, tel: 720 6072 for the kind loan of the test bike.



Top: Subtle adjustments to the fork of the FT500 make it handle more like a roadster than the dirt bike it was bred from. Top left: The four valve motor breathes through this monster CV carb. Middle right: Changes for road use include a deeper sump and electric starting. Above: The long fork legs benefit from the use of this fork brace and the steering's more precise for it. Right: Neat eh? Racer type rear spindle adjusters.

