

CYCLE GUIDE

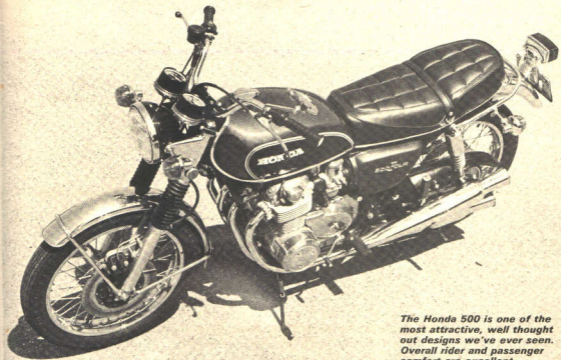
TEST
REPORT

HONDA CB
500 FOUR



THEY'VE DONE IT AGAIN

Honda has unleashed another new standard for the motorcycle industry to follow. It is without a doubt the most incredible touring package we have ever had the pleasure of testing.



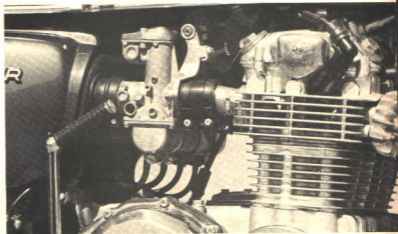
The Honda 500 is one of the most attractive, well thought out designs we've ever seen. Overall rider and passenger comfort are excellent.

It would be difficult to try to evaluate the new Honda 500 four-cylinder touring machine without at least mentioning something that has gone before. The 750 four-cylinder motorcycle has taken the country by storm. In most areas, the 750 is almost as common as the Volkswagen. Here in southern California, it seems as though every other machine we see is the four-cylinder Honda.

About a year ago, rumors began filtering through that soon we would be seeing a 500cc version of the 750. We really didn't think too much of this, since rumors are an everyday part of our business. Then too, the idea of a smaller displacement motorcycle based on a larger one met with mixed emotions around the office.

Then a short time ago, Honda held a press showing of their new models, one of which was the 500 four. Casting our eyes upon this new beauty, one thing became very apparent. The shortcomings of the 750 were no longer in evidence on the 500 model. The bike is considerably lower, narrower and lighter. But looks can be deceiving, so we reserved judgment until the opportunity presented itself to conduct a full-blown road test.

The day finally came when the bike

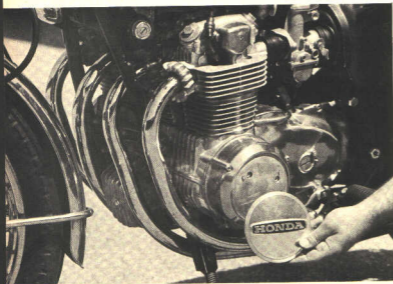


The four carburetors are connected by a mechanical linkage which is activated by a single throttle cable, so carbs remain synchronized.

was delivered to us. We weren't sure what we were getting, but it didn't take long to find out. Unlike the 750 four, the 500 exhibits unbelievable

handling qualities that you can only appreciate after you have ridden it. It's interesting to note that Honda has obviously become aware of the problem areas in the execution of the four-cylinder 750. Every one of the problems we've encountered in the big four are no longer apparent in the 500cc version.

After flailing the motorcycle around



The Honda nameplate is cast metal with three pins which are soldered to engine case. The pins sheared off, and the plate fell off.

the Orange County road racing course for many laps, the bike was brought in, and for the first time in quite a while the engine was allowed to drop to an idle. We were amazed to find the engine noise was no louder than when we started. Nor did the power plant exhibit any of the fussiness that one might expect from a highly tuned engine. Unlike the 750, we encountered no spark plug problems during our entire test. The plugs were changed, however, the first time we took it to Orange County, and on the dragstrip we found the fresh set produced one more mile per hour, but no better elapsed times.

There are so many good things to say about the 500, it's difficult to know where to begin. Aside from the size, the bike does not look that much different from its larger brother. Its top speed is not overwhelming, nor will it accelerate like a jackrabbit. But these are two qualities we do not feel are prime requisites for a touring motorcycle. Not that the Honda 500 is a slug; far from it.

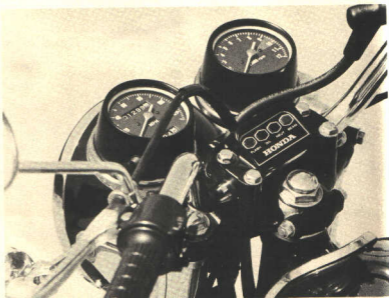
We might as well get some of the minuses out of the way first. We found out early that the 500 four is not a dragster. Actually, getting it off the line quickly proved to be quite tricky. In order to be consistent, it required a delicate touch on the clutch. The way we got our quickest ET's is as follows. The revs were brought up to almost 9,000. The

amount of horsepower. The r's would be at a low enough point to allow the engine to bog.

We found the secret was to drop the hammer, break the tire loose, and as the tire started getting hold of the ground, a couple fingers on the clutch, to let it slip a bit to keep the revs up, made all the difference in the world in bringing down the elapsed times. It took a little getting used to.

After about 8 or 10 passes, we discovered the clutch did not seem to mind this type of brutal treatment. This is not only unusual, but very refreshing. We did notice, however, we got no clutch engagement until the handle was 95 per cent out. It was certainly smooth enough, so no one should have any complaints on that score.

The top speeds were in the 91.13 to 91.52 mph range. This is pretty good for a bike that weighed 421 lbs., with a couple of gallons of gas in the tank. The first run produced an ET

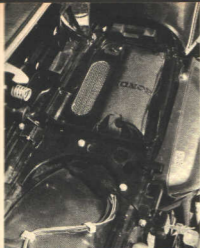


The handlebar mounted instrument panel is the best new idea this year. It tells the rider the status of turn signals, oil pressure, transmission neutral, headlight high beam.

clutch was popped, and the rear tire would break loose. The bike would move about six feet, at which point the tire would grab hold of the ground, and the revs would drop to 4,000. At this point on the tach, the engine does not have an appreciable

slip reading 14:68; not very inspiring. But the interesting thing was that every succeeding effort produced a lower elapsed time than the one before. We finally got it down to 14:17, and with a little effort, we feel that a high 13 second run is quite possible. It would take a slightly different tire, and perhaps a lighter rider. But it probably can be done with a standard motorcycle.

There were a few things we noticed during the day we spent trying to get low elapsed times: First, the clutch



The big, comfortable seat folds up to allow access to the tool kit. The wire mesh next to kit is the air cleaner intake.

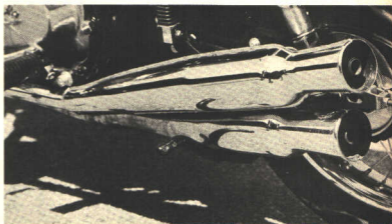
and gear box are flawless. The ratios are perfectly suited to the power plant. The engine does not seem to be delivering close to its maximum power until the engine is revving in excess of 7000 rpm, but this is no big deal because it will run quite happily all day at that speed. Also, we found we got our best elapsed times by shifting at 9500 rpm, which is just into the red zone on the tachometer. This produced no ill effects that we were able to detect. The engine pulls like the proverbial train clear up to 10,000, so you have to be rather quick to catch the revs at 9500.

The really fantastic part of the whole engine package is its quietness and smoothness. If it were not for the fact that the bike comes equipped with a tachometer, with a snug-fitting helmet to muffle his hearing, a rider would be at a loss to tell what the engine was doing. It is so smooth, you have no idea how many revs are being generated without checking the tach every so often. And the engine seems to thrive on lots of revs.

One of the things that is going to endear this motorcycle to the hearts of the American riders is the handling. It is so incredibly steady at any speed, that this whole handling business suddenly takes on a new perspective.

The first thing you notice is the low profile. The bike is considerably lower than a 750. Even the shorter riders can keep both feet flat on the ground, instead of just their tip-toes. This undoubtedly adds to the rock steadiness at high speeds.

Wailing through the corners in the back section at Orange County at close to 100 mph, makes a believer



The four separate exhaust pipes are attractive and very quiet, adding greatly to the pleasure of the ride. The center stand is the first thing to ground on hard cornering.

out of you. The only thing we would have liked to try, but didn't, was fitting slightly stronger shock springs. At really high cornering speed, the back end seemed to be slightly mushy. But since the average rider isn't going to be going around corners at 100 mph, we can hardly consider this a valid weak point.

After riding the bike for a short time, you come away with the distinct impression that it has been designed as a total package. Every part of the motorcycle seems perfectly mated to the rest of the machine; a trait rather uncommon on today's market.

It would be difficult to say what facet of the machine's character is the most outstanding. The whole bike is outstanding. One thing we especially liked was the choice of tires. The machine can be hustled through a corner at so low an angle that the stand on the right side grounds (the stand on the left side grounds quite easily).

There was one annoying thing we would like to see changed. The throttle used on the 500 requires the rider to reach forward, wrapping his hand around the throttle in a rather uncomfortable position in order to get full throttle operation. It would be better to provide a short throttle action to alleviate this.

As might be expected, Honda has done a fine job in the stopping department. Along with providing a chassis that will whisk you through corners effortlessly and fast, the rider has every assurance that in an emergency situation, the binders will haul the thing to a stop in the shortest time possible.

The front brake is a single disc unit that has tremendous stopping power; so tremendous, in fact, that without some judicious effort on the part of the pilot, you could lock up the front wheel without intending to. We found

that by using two or three fingers on the brake, instead of your whole hand, this problem is greatly minimized.

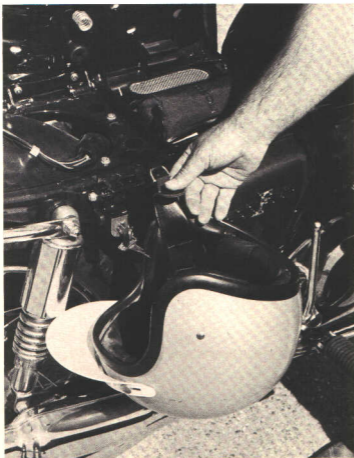
The back brake did not exhibit quite so much ferocious stopping power, which made high speed braking effortless. Another nice thing is that the brakes don't fade. We don't care how hard you use them. The chance of getting any fade is highly unlikely.

Anybody contemplating constructing a roadracer from scratch, would be well advised to strip the sheetmetal off the 500 chassis and duplicate what Honda has done exactly. By taking chassis measurements, as well as finding out where the cg is, and building a bike as low as possible, we would be willing to bet that with care and patience, a home constructor could come up with a real winner.

One interesting thing was the lack of vibration at any speed. Not once could we induce any shaking to cause the mirror to vibrate, or the handlebars or footpegs. This is part of the problem (if you can call it that) that the 500 rider has when whacking down the highway. Most bikes give you some indication of what they are doing, while the 500 doesn't. We found ourselves having to consult the tach everytime we moved out to pass, since we were never really sure how many revs we were turning.

Passing cars at high speed on the highway could possibly be a problem. Because the engine does not have the beans of its larger brother, it takes longer to get around something. This is especially true when riding double.

Speaking of riding double, the bike seems to have every bit of surefoot-



The ignition key unlocks the seat fold-up lock. Helmet can be attached to metal hook by the D rings, and then seat locks down so helmet cannot be removed.

edness, as when riding solo. The only difference seems to be that the underpinnings scrape the ground sooner when going around the corners. It would almost seem as though the Honda engineers designed the motorcycle with the idea of having two people on board all the time. It's that steady.

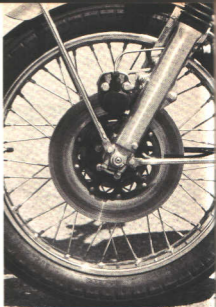
With the engine cold, we found it did not leap to life as quickly as we would like. It took a few seconds of grinding the starter before things happened. With the choke full on, the engine warmed up quickly; no more than two or three minutes at the outside. After 60 seconds or so, the choke can be put into the halfway position, and after a couple minutes, you can dismiss it completely. It seemed to warm up considerably faster than most of the 750's we have ridden.

The one thing we would definitely like to see changed is the position of the ignition key. It's probably in one

of the most awkward places we can imagine. Like most Honda's, it's located on the left side of the gas tank, well forward and just behind the steering head. We would much prefer to see it with the key mounted directly in front of the rider, between the two instruments. This is a far more practical arrangement.

One nice touch is the addition of a small panel, with the various indicator lights, instead of having these indicators on the speedometer and tachometer faces. At the outset we had mixed emotions about it, but after a day or two, we became convinced this was a well thought out idea.

Whatever problems Honda had with trying to keep the back end of



The hydraulic disc front brake is the best insurance available for stopping the high speed touring machine. The front forks work very well at all speeds.

the 750 clean, the 500 does not share the same fate. Except for the normal throwoff from the chain, there was no indication of spewing on the left rear portion of the motorcycle.

Although complex in design and manufacture, it would be difficult for us to fault the 500 from a reliability, noise level and performance standpoint. Although short on power, for a 500 it pumps out a pretty fair amount of performance. Perhaps not as much as the Mach III, but the Mach III is a different type of motorcycle.

Designed pretty much like the 750 four, the 500 appears to be a scaled down version of the larger power plant. Like the larger version, the 500 comes equipped with a normal slide type carburetor, not the demand vacuum type found on the 350 and 450 versions. You will find one of the slickest multi-carburetor hook-ups ever seen on a motorcycle. It's a super-husky unit that bolts to the carburetor assembly, and with one cable yanks all four slides open simultaneously. What's more, they all stay in adjustment.

Mechanically, there is not a great deal that can be said about the 500 design that has not been said already about the 750. It has obviously been well thought out, engineered and executed. From a technical standpoint, the mechanical package that the customer buys is not only one of the most sophisticated available, but also one

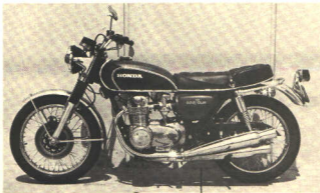
of the most bullet-proof. Any motorcycle that could withstand the hard usage we gave it in two days at Orange County, has got to be a good one. A lesser machine would never have stood the pace.

The harder you ride the bike, the more you become aware that anything short of savage treatment will not cause the engine to perspire even a little bit. The production racers will really love this one. With slightly over

1300 miles on the odometer now, the bike seems to get better with every passing mile. We have yet to have our first problem. We certainly wish we could say that about all our road test bikes.

The Honda 500 will undoubtedly prove to be a sales success, along with the rest of their wares. But as far as we are concerned, the introduction of the 500 four-cylinder motorcycle has ushered in a new era in motorcycle

chassis design. Other motorcycle manufacturers might be well advised to study what Honda has done, because whatever it is, it's right. It is so right, in fact, that we would be hard pressed to try to improve it. It's an unbelievably good motorcycle. It's easy and fun to ride. What's more, it's as reliable as anything can be. Regardless of what has come before, this is, we believe, Honda's finest product ever.—*Bob Braverman CG*



HONDA CB 500 FOUR

ENGINE

Type	four cylinder, SOHC 4-stroke
Bore and Stroke	56.0x50.6mm
Displacement	498cc
Compression Ratio	9.0:1
Rated Max. Horsepower	50 @ 9,000 rpm
Ignition	battery/coil
Carburetion	four Keihin 26mm concentrics
Lubrication	wet sump

DIMENSIONS

Length	83 in.
Seat Height	31.7 in.
Wheelbase	55.5 in.
Ground Clearance	6.5 in.

WHEELS AND BRAKES

Front Tire Size	3.25x19 in.
Front Brake Type	hydraulic disc
Rear Tire Size	3.50x18 in.
Rear Brake Type	internal

TRANSMISSION

Type	five speed constant mesh
Clutch	wet multi plate
Internal Gear Ratios ..	1st, 2.35:1; 2nd, 1.64:1;
	3rd, 1.27:1; 4th, 1.04:1; 5th, 0.90:1;
Countershaft Sprocket	17T
Rear Wheel Sprocket	34T

PERFORMANCE

Indicated Highest One-Way Speed ..	108 mph
Quarter-Mile Acceleration:	
Top Speed	91.83 mph
Elapsed Time	14.17

GENERAL

Air Filtration	dry paper
Battery Type	12V-12AH

CAPACITIES

Fuel Tank	3.7 gal.
Fuel Reserve	1.0 gal
Oil & Gear Box	3.2 qts.

FRAME AND SUSPENSION

Front Suspension	telescopic oil damping
Rear Suspension	adjustable, hydraulic spring over shock
Frame Type	tubular, double cradle

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Turn Signals

COLORS

Gold, Brown, & Green

DISTRIBUTOR

American Honda Motor Co.
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Gardena, CA. 90247

PRICE AS TESTED

\$1,400.00 FOB Los Angeles