

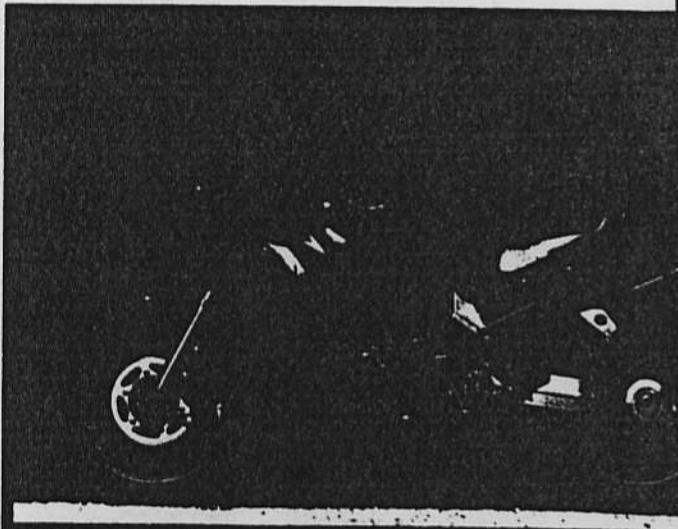
JUNE - 44K 6294

HONDA COULD HAVE NAMED IT JUST ABOUT ANYTHING. It could have been called the Anti-Replica, as it was dubbed on an early, hastily translated technical report that came from the factory in Japan. Or it could have been called the UC650, because other documents referred to it as an "unclassified motorcycle." And it just barely escaped the misfortune of being called the Bros, its official moniker in other countries around the world.

But the name that finally emerged from American Honda's what-do-we-call-it think-tank was "Hawk GT," borrowing heavily from a designation the company had used twice before. The Hawk name appeared on a reasonably successful line of 400cc Twins in the mid-Seventies, but more important, it was first bestowed on another unclassified, anti-replica motorcycle the company introduced more than two decades ago: the 250cc Hawk. That original Hawk and its 305cc derivative, the Super Hawk, are credited with catapulting Honda from a maker of

Bird of a Different Feather

PHOTOS BY RON HUSSEY



pleasant little motorized toys to the largest motorcycle manufacturer in history; and the company would love nothing more than for this latest Hawk to be just as significant as the first.

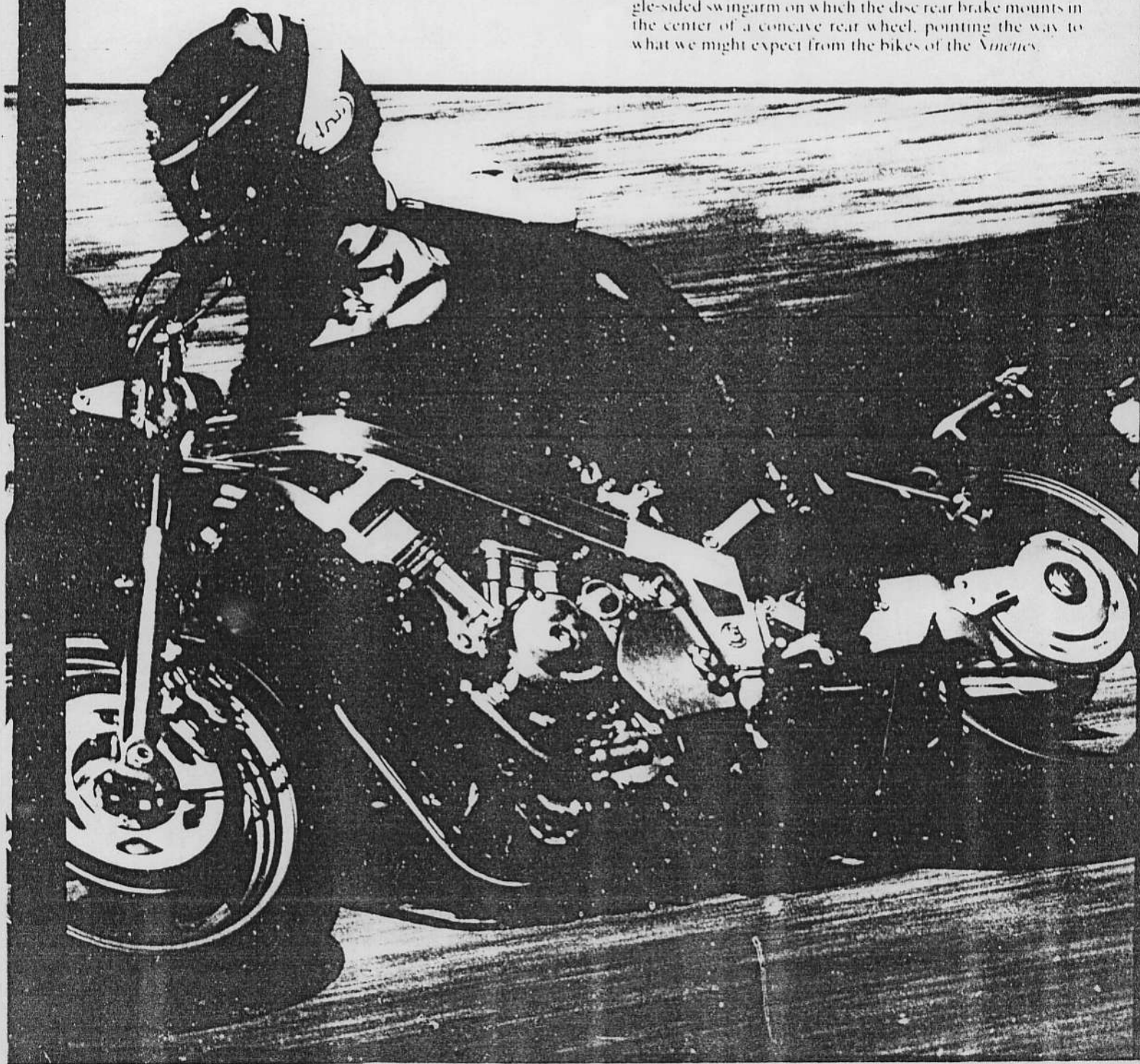
For good reason. To say that 1987 wasn't a good year for Honda is like saying 1968 wasn't a good time to vacation in Da Nang. Financially, last year was the worst in the company's history. And falling sales and rising yen demanded that something different be done.

That something, Honda felt, was to answer a groundswell of cries for simpler motorcycles—for the return of the Twin, for the return of non-roadrace-replica sportbikes, even a few lonesome cries for the return of the 305 Hawk. But as a Honda spokesman pointed out, "We couldn't just start building the 305 again. It would cost just

as much to make as a modern motorcycle... and it would be awful."

The Hawk GT is Honda's initial response to those passionate pleas for more-rational motorcycles. It's a do-everything, 647cc Twin built through the simple execution of modern technology. It is a mix of old and new, a bike with one wheel firmly planted in the traditions of yesterday and the other rolling boldly into the technology of tomorrow.

For example, the Hawk is powered by a V-Twin motor, among the most old-fashioned of all configurations, yet it has three-valve-per-cylinder combustion chambers and is liquid-cooled. The bike is unfaired, just like those fondly remembered standards of the Sixties and Seventies, yet it has an aluminum-beam frame like those on the sportbikes and roadracers of the Eighties. And it uses a massive, single-sided swingarm on which the disc rear brake mounts in the center of a concave rear wheel, pointing the way to what we might expect from the bikes of the Nineties.

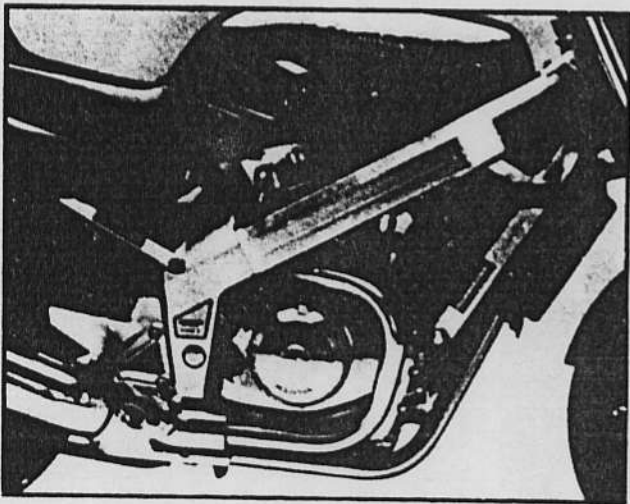




HAWK GT

So, despite its namesake, the Hawk can't truly be called a back-to-basics motorcycle. In simplest terms, it is a modern, twin-cylinder sportbike, sans fairing. That's *sportbike*, however, not *racebike* or *racer-replica*.

Rest assured, though, that the Hawk has just as much agility as most modern sportbikes, and is even *more* agile than some. With quick geometry and fat tires on wide, 17-inch wheels at both ends, it responds immediately and positively to the rider's every input. That it legitimately is an under-400-pound motorcycle with a comparatively low



That the single-wall pipes of the GT turn color slightly is no accident; Honda meant them to be a throwback to the days of Triumph Twins, which invariably had blued pipes.

center of gravity doesn't hurt one bit, either. It flicks over into corners with almost no effort whatsoever, and has enough cornering clearance to make the rider's eyes *real* big before anything touches down. Overall, it gives the rider the feeling that he or she can do practically anything.

With those kinds of capabilities, the Hawk begs to be pushed to its handling limits—limits that are extreme on the street. Only when a very good rider is attempting his best Wayne Gardner imitation do the Hawk's handling shortfalls make themselves known. The first thing the rider might notice is that the non-adjustable fork is a little soft, diving under hard braking. The rear end, too, isn't up to ten-tenths riding levels and tends to feel mushy at speed. It's spring-preload adjustable, but offers no damping options.

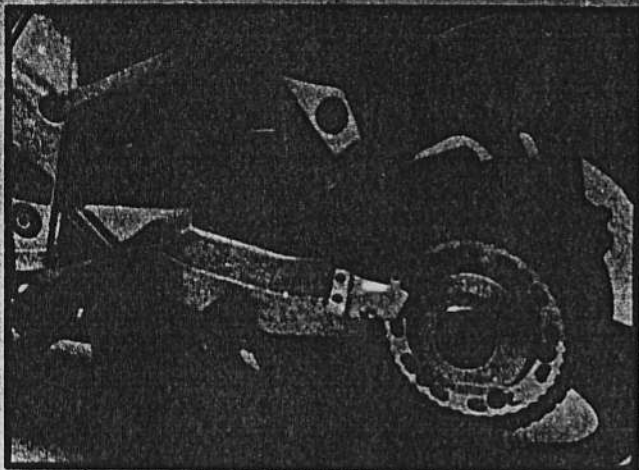
But for virtually any other kind of riding, the suspension at both ends is more than adequate. The ride is smooth and comfortable in a wide variety of environments, anywhere from the freeway to the bumpiest backroad.

It's interesting to note that the Hawk's rear suspension works quite well without any sort of linkage system: the bottom of the Showa shock bolts directly to the massive swingarm to produce only a mild amount of springing and damping progression at the rear wheel. The only apparent disadvantage is that the shock must sit higher in the chassis than on, say, a 600 Hurricane; but on the Hawk, that simply makes room for the 2-into-1 exhaust system's large "boom box" tucked away under the front part of the swingarm. That, in turn, allows the Hawk to have a respectable amount of power, yet make little exhaust noise despite having a very short muffler.

Both the power and the sounds that emanate from the Hawk are very satisfying. Satisfying, at least, if you like riding a bike with immediate throttle response. And satisfying if you want a 650 that pulls from low rpm like a 750 and *sounds* like it's pulling from low rpm like a 750. Instead of making an anemic drone at 3000 rpm, the Hawk beats out a rhythmic tune that no one could possibly find offensive.

In terms of outright performance, the GT is comparable

The massive, single-sided swingarm is technology borrowed from Honda's 750cc production-line racer-replica.



to Honda's most recent lightweight sportbike, the Interceptor 500. If you've never sampled a VF500, then imagine a bike that has a smooth, progressive powerband and a respectable, if less than awesome, peak power output. The biggest differences are that the Hawk makes much better power off the bottom, and has a lower redline.

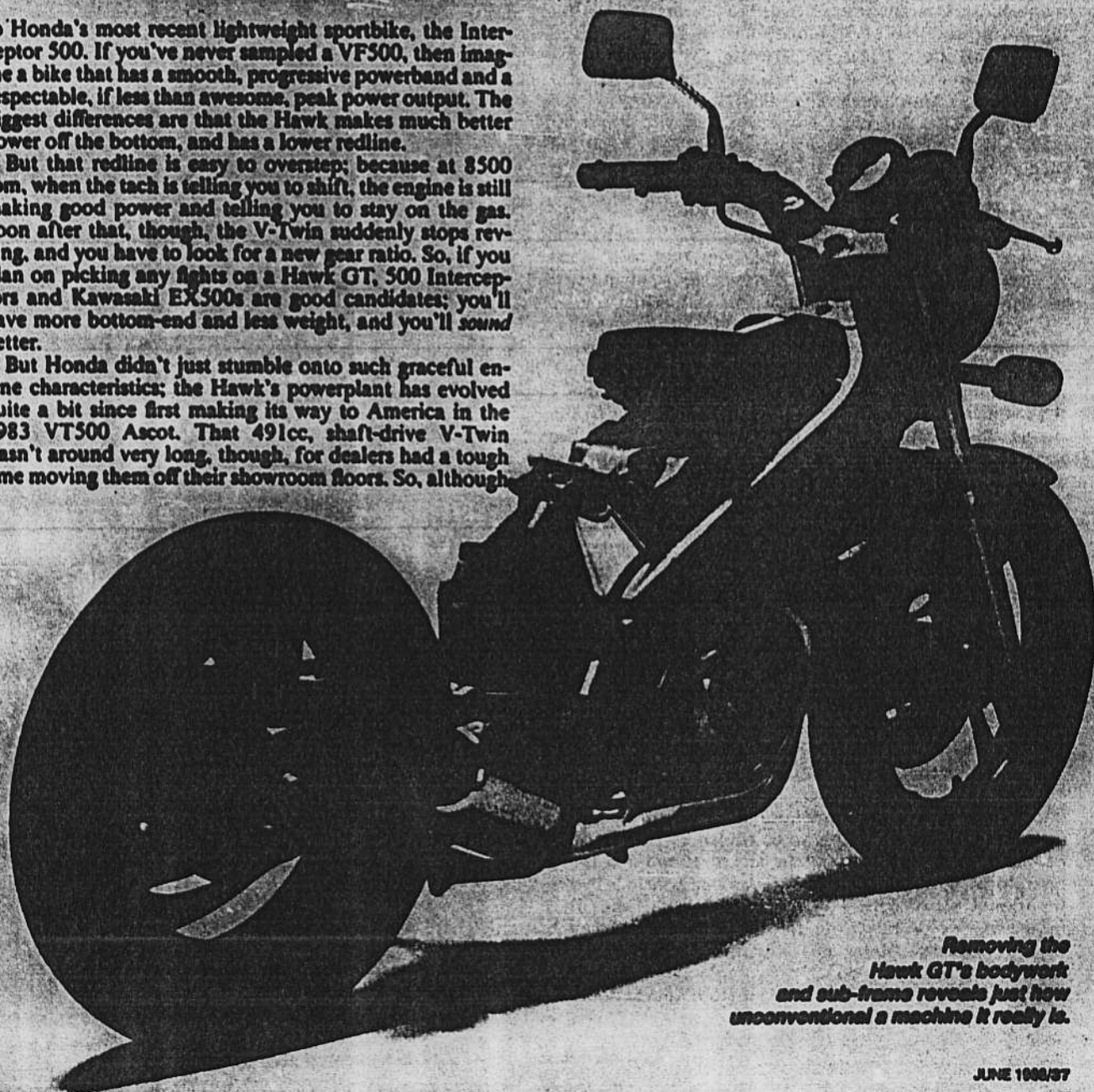
But that redline is easy to overstep; because at 8500 rpm, when the tach is telling you to shift, the engine is still making good power and telling you to stay on the gas. Soon after that, though, the V-Twin suddenly stops revving, and you have to look for a new gear ratio. So, if you plan on picking any fights on a Hawk GT, 500 Interceptors and Kawasaki EX500s are good candidates; you'll have more bottom-end and less weight, and you'll *sound* better.

But Honda didn't just stumble onto such graceful engine characteristics; the Hawk's powerplant has evolved quite a bit since first making its way to America in the 1983 VT500 Ascot. That 491cc, shaft-drive V-Twin wasn't around very long, though, for dealers had a tough time moving them off their showroom floors. So, although

the engine continued to evolve, it did so not in America but in other models sold in other countries.

For the engine's return to the U.S., Honda played displacement games in an attempt to find the best power characteristics. The engine was built in prototype form as a 583, a 639 and a 655 before Honda finally settled on 647cc. The bike's amiable powerband indicates that Honda's engineers weren't suffering from a case of indecision, but knew what they wanted and achieved it.

Interestingly enough, however, they didn't do so by breaking any new technological ground. Even though the Hawk looks like nothing else that has ever graced two wheels, little about it is absolutely new. The single-sided swingarm and inboard rear disc are directly off the VFR750R Wayne Gardner Replica that is unavailable in this country; although no other Honda currently sold in the U.S. uses an aluminum frame, the VFR750 and 700 both had beam-type aluminum frames much like the Hawk's; and a number of similar chassis have been available on some European and Japanese Honda models.



Removing the Hawk GT's bodywork and sub-frame reveals just how unconventional a machine it really is.

HAWK GT

The Hawk was never intended to be an outright sportbike, so there's no fairing to cover the clean lines and excellent workmanship. Still, the V-Twin can hold its own on any backroad.

What is new is that all these high-tech tricks are available at once on a bike that doesn't fancy itself either a roadracer or a drag-strip demon, a motorcycle that is as much at home on city streets as it is on backroads. Really, the only environment in which the Hawk can't quite hold its own is on that long, lonesome highway, when you've got 500 miles to go before sunset. Its motor is smooth and vibration-free, but the seat is rather thin and begins to pain the posterior after an hour or two. Moving around to find new positions doesn't help much; the seat's step locks the rider into position. The only consolation is that your passenger has an even worse seat, and probably won't let you go very far without a break.

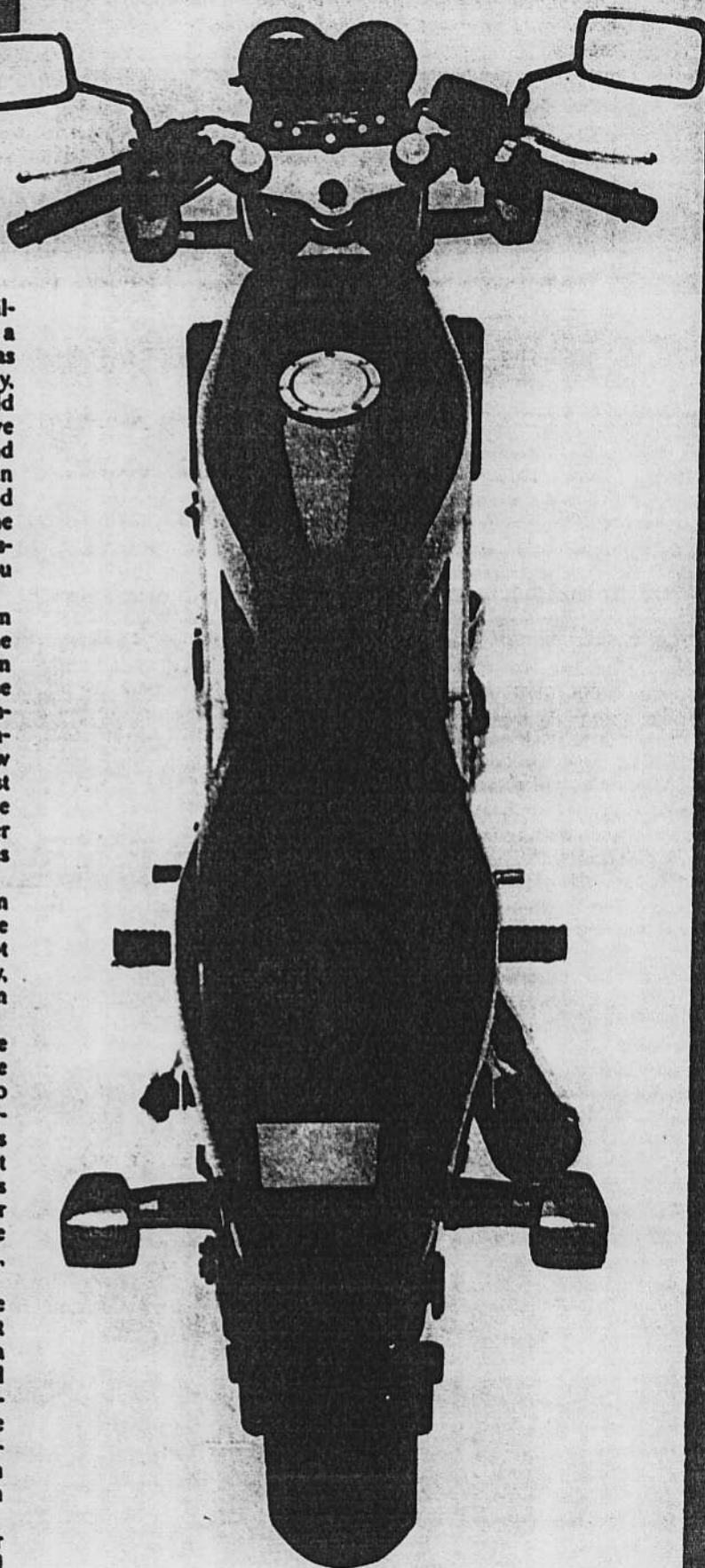
You can keep on riding for a while if you've got an exceptionally tough butt and no passenger to toss out the anchor, but the rest of your body will probably give in before long. The bike's footpegs are about as high as those on any current sportbike, and the handlebars have a distinct sporting flavor, as well. The bars are fairly high compared to those on the true repli-racers, but they're still low by most other standards; and because they're of the cast variety, they cannot be changed for something a little higher. So, as they are, they contribute to the bike's rather cramped riding position. In fact, the entire motorcycle is small and better-suited for smaller riders.

Surprisingly, though, there isn't much else to complain about on this mostly-new, first-year model. Okay, so the engine does tend to bake the rider's right leg in hot weather. And there's the smallish fuel-tank capacity, which will have you planning your trips around gas-station locations.

But there's plenty to praise, too. In fact, one simple feature is enough to nominate this bike for the Motorcycle Medal of Good Taste: It has a centerstand. You learn to appreciate a centerstand on hot days, when the motorcycles all around yours have fallen over with their sidestands burrowed into semi-melted asphalt. Still more proof that the designers of this machine actually rode motorcycles is in the set of little bungee-cord hooks behind the passenger seat. Perhaps this isn't an original idea, but the Hawk's are positioned much better than those of the Kawasaki Ninja, which has had them since 1984.

Things like that are evidence that, unlike many of the plastic-coated flash machines of the day, the Hawk isn't intended to be a status symbol or proof of manhood; it's a motorcycle designed simply to be ridden by people. Real people, not racers and wannabe racers. It still is a sportbike, to be sure; to call it a standard motorcycle in the traditional sense of the word—or in the spirit of the original Hawk—would be wrong. But the Hawk GT is a much more *rational* sportbike, one with the emphasis less on "sport" and more on "bike."

That qualifies it as a success no matter what it does for Honda's bank balance. ■



HONDA HAWK GT

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL

List price	\$3995
Importer	American Honda Motor Co., Inc. 100 W. Alondra Blvd. Gardena, CA 90247
Customer service phone	(213) 327-8280
Warranty	12 mo./unlimited mi.

CHASSIS

Weight:	
Tank empty	393 lb.
Tank full	412 lb.
Weight distribution, front/rear, percent:	
Tank empty	46.9/53.1
Tank full	47.1/52.9
Fuel capacity	2.9 gal.
Wheelbase	58.3 in.
Rake/trail	28.0°/4.7 in.
Handlebar width	26.6 in.
Seat height	30.4 in.
Ground clearance	6.1 in.
GVWR	745 lb.
Load capacity (tank full)	333 lb.

ELECTRICAL

Electrical power	300w @ 5000 rpm
Battery	12v, 8ah
Headlight	60/55 halogen

DRIVETRAIN

Engine	liquid-cooled, four-stroke V-Twin
Bore x stroke	79.0 x 66.0mm
Displacement	647cc
Compression ratio	9.4:1
Claimed power	58 bhp @ 8500 rpm
Claimed torque	43 lb.-ft. @ 8000 rpm
Valve train	ohc, three valves per cylinder, threaded adjusters
Valve adjustment intervals	8000 mi.
Carburetion	(2) 38.5mm Keihin CV
Air filter	pleated paper
Lubrication	wet sump
Oil capacity	2.9 qt.
Starter	electric
Primary drive	straight-cut gear
Clutch	multi-plate, wet
Final drive No.	530 O-ring chain
Sprocket sizes	15/44
Gear ratios, overall: 1	
1st	13.29
2nd	9.73
3rd	7.76
4th	6.41
5th	5.55

SUSPENSION/TIRES/BRAKES

Front suspension:	
Manufacturer	Showa
Tube diameter	41mm
Claimed wheel travel	5.5 in.
Adjustments	none
Rear suspension:	
Manufacturer	Showa
Type	single shock
Claimed wheel travel	4.7 in.
Adjustments	spring preload
Wheels:	
Front	MT2.50 x 17
Rear	MT4.50 x 17
Tires:	
Front	110/80-17
	Bridgestone Excedra G547
Rear	150/70-17
	Bridgestone Excedra G548
Rear tire revs. per mi.	806
Brakes:	
Front	12.4 in. disc
Rear	9.4 in. disc

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION

Time to distance:	
1/4 mi.	12.70 sec. @ 102.97 mph
Time to speed, sec.	
0-30 mph	1.3
0-40 mph	2.1
0-50 mph	2.9
0-60 mph	4.0
0-70 mph	5.3
0-80 mph	6.9
0-90 mph	9.1
0-100 mph	11.7
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.2
60-80 mph	5.3

SPEED IN GEARS

Measured top speed	115 mph
Calculated at 5500 rpm redline:	
1st gear	48 mph
2nd	65 mph
3rd	82 mph
4th	99 mph
5th	114 mph

Engine speed at 60 mph	4470 rpm
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FUEL CONSUMPTION

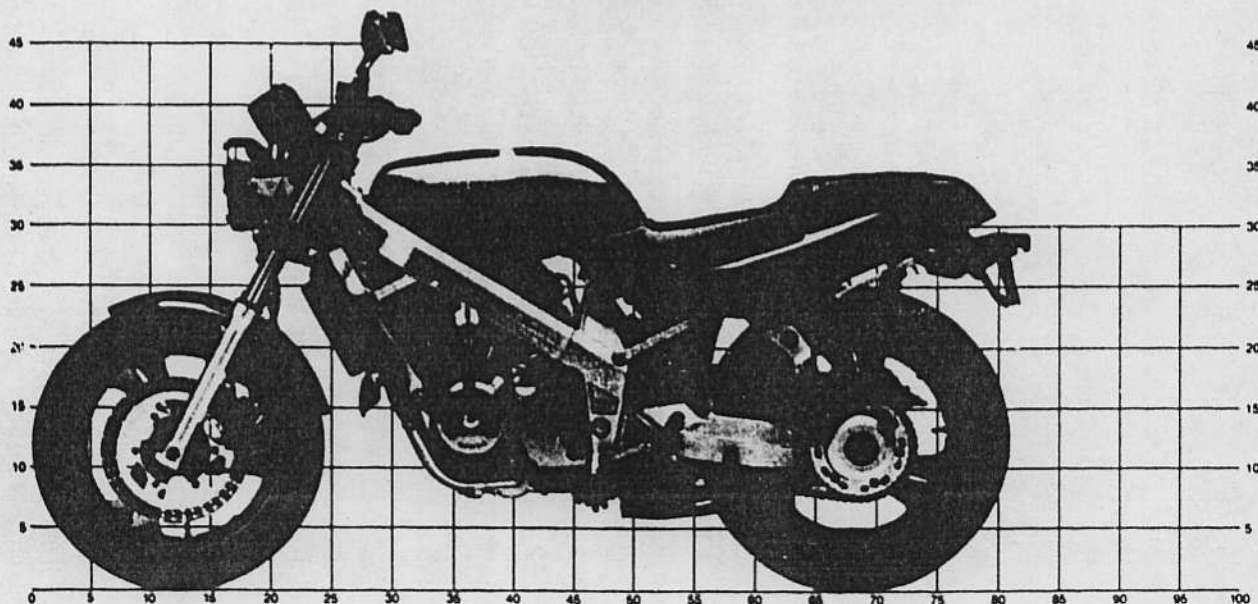
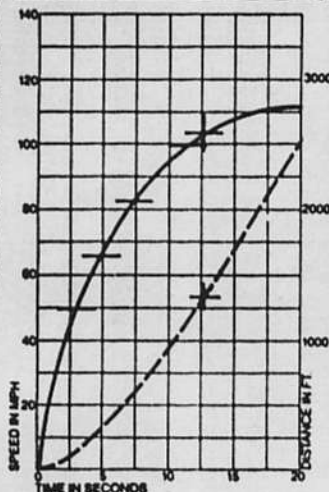
High/low/avg.	65/47/52
Avg. range inc. reserve	150 mi.

BRAKING DISTANCE

from 30 mph	26 ft.
from 60 mph	116 ft.

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph indicated	27 mph
60 mph indicated	53 mph



THE VIEW FROM THE REAL WORLD

Honda's Hawk GT is a neat machine,
but will it play in Peoria?

Three Cycle World readers take it for
a ride and answer the question.

BY DAVID EDWARDS

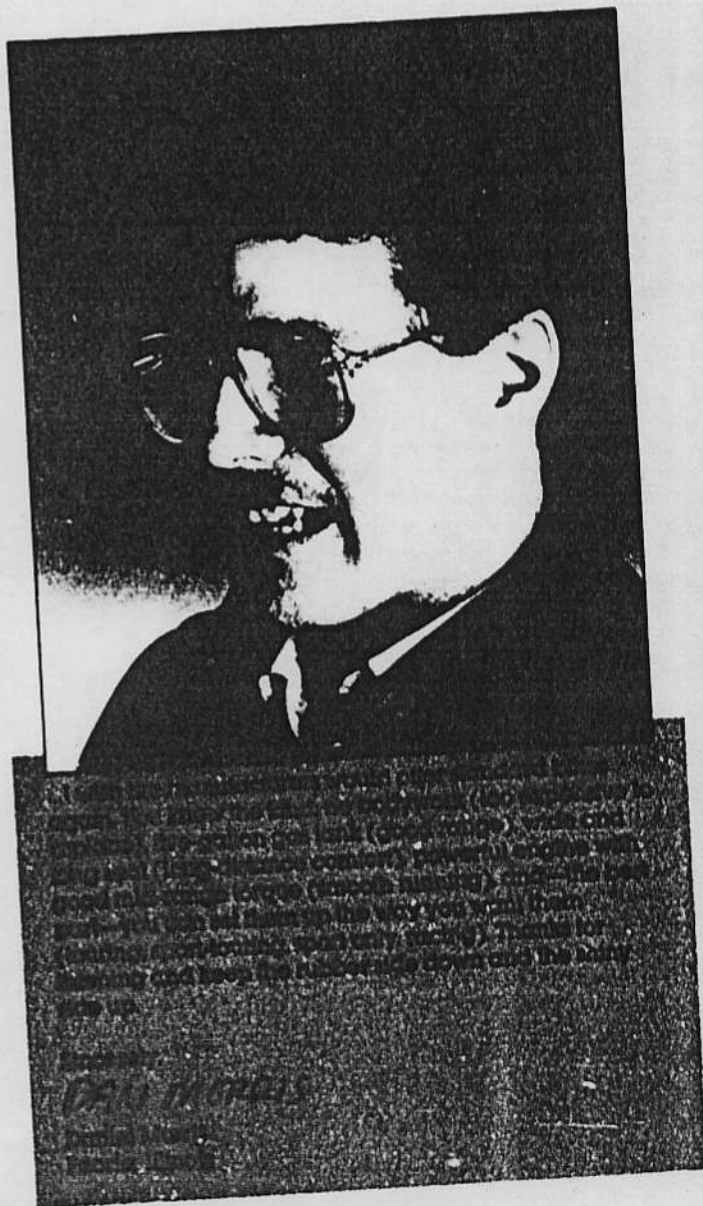
LETTERS. BOY, DO WE GET LETTERS. EVERYTHING from hand-scrawled one-liners asking if you can have our test bikes when we're through with them (no), to single-spaced, margin-to-margin epistles lamenting the state of the sport and asking us if we think motorcycling will still be here in the year 2001 (yes).

And each month, the U.S. Postal Service delivers to us three or four letters that carry the same plea: Where are the standard motorcycles? A fair number of you, it seems, are tired of race-replica sportbikes, Main-Street muscle-cruisers and dirigible-spec touring bikes, and would like a non-specialized motorcycle, an all-rounder that serves well no matter what the riding situation.

Well, Honda must have received some of those same letters, because when its 1988 lineup was unveiled, a different kind of motorcycle shared the spotlight with the Hurricanes, the Shadows and the Gold Wing 1500. Called the Hawk GT, it promised to be a new-age standard motorcycle.

Given these circumstances, we decided to bring the Hawk and some of the letter-writers together, to see if the two were compatible. So, we selected three *Cycle World* readers who had sent in letters bemoaning the fate of the old-style standard, arranged for them to meet at our offices and took the trio for a weekend ride on the Hawk.

Richard Brownley, from Salt Lake City, Utah, is a 39-year-old doctor, a kidney specialist at the University of Utah. A motorcyclist for only two years, he's making up for lost time and rides a 1981 Yamaha XV920, a 1985 Yamaha RZ350 and a 1986 Yamaha SRX600, averaging about 9000 miles per year.





Los Angeles, California, resident Barry Sommer, 34, has 16 years of riding experience, and by trade is a knife sharpener and restorer of samurai swords. He owns three bikes—a 1967 Ducati Sebring, a 1971 Triumph Bonneville and a 1982 Suzuki GS1100—and rides approximately 3000 miles each year.

Daniel Morris lives in Peoria, Illinois, where he's a development technician for the electronic ignition systems used on Caterpillar truck engines. He's 30 years old and rides a 1980 Suzuki GS850 that's been tailored for sport-touring. He's been riding for 10 years and logs about 10,000 miles a year.

After two days and 600 miles of riding, which included everything from lane-splitting through clogged beach traffic, to sedate interstate droning, to down-'n'-dirty mountain-road scratching, each of our guest riders had formed strong opinions about the Hawk GT.

The bike's appearance drew the first comments. Morris thought the Hawk looked "like a Hurricane without the bodywork," a styling move he thought wasn't all bad. "There's something about bodywork that says 'Don't look under here,' as if they're trying to hide something," he said.

Brownley agreed. "On this motorcycle, everything is up-front. You can see the entire engine, you can see the weld joints on the frame. That's good. For certain people, a BMW or a Triumph is the archetypal motorcycle. The Hawk will appeal to them. But at the places where we stopped on the ride, the bike also got a lot of attention from sportbike riders."

"Yes, it is a high-tech bike," added Sommer, "as long as

you know what to look for," referring to the Hawk's aluminum frame and single-sided swingarm.

Brownley continued: "I think an important question here is, what does this motorcycle have that an SRX600 doesn't? What will allow it to make the boat where the Yamaha missed it? The SRX was kick-start only and had twin shocks; the Hawk has electric start and a single shock. It's classical and yet it's modern, and that may allow it catch both audiences."

"Or it may be its death knell and appeal to neither," observed Sommer.

Brownley summed up the Hawk's styling with a comment both Morris and Sommer concurred with. "The more I looked at it, the more I liked it," he said.

While the Hawk GT's looks drew unanimous favor, its seating position was given three emphatic thumbs-down. And each rider complained of heat along the right side of the motorcycle. Sommer and Morris, each 6 feet 2 inches tall, were the most vocal detractors of the GT's ergonomics.

"The seat just isn't right," said Sommer. "It's too cramped for riders over 6 feet, and I'd like the footpegs moved forward."

"For me, the seat isn't wide enough, and I couldn't scoot back," said Morris. "And because it's slanted downward, I kept sliding into the rear of the gas tank. I was a little worried about the family jewels."

At 5 feet 9 inches, Brownley was a better fit for the Hawk. "The tank wasn't a problem, but I, too, would have preferred that the seat didn't have the step-up at the rear."

All three agreed that the rear seat was next to useless. "I

wouldn't carry a passenger on this bike," Sommer said.

There were other complaints that reflected each rider's personal preferences. Brownley felt the radiator cluttered the bike's looks. "I would have preferred an air-cooled engine," he said. Sommer didn't like the clamp-on cast handlebars. "I'd like the option of easily changing the bars," he said. "I think it should have tubular handlebars." Morris would opt for a bit of aerodynamic aid. "It needs a fairing—nothing big, though—something like the old GPz-style handlebar fairing."

Both Morris and Brownley would have liked more motor, as well. "The engine is nice and smooth, but in fifth-gear roll-ons there's not much there. I'd want a larger engine," said Morris, who weighs over 200 pounds. Brownley echoed those feelings. "I was impressed by the engine's smoothness and the evenness of the powerband, but I'd like to see a 950 Hawk to go along with the 650," he said.

Sommer, admitting a sentimentality toward the Triumph-size engine displacement, disagreed. "I would be very satisfied to have it stay at 650cc," he said. "On the highway, it cruised with no problem, and I once had it up to an indicated 110. It was rock-solid; I was extremely impressed."

The most informative responses came when we asked for an overall opinion of the Hawk, and if Honda had indeed succeeded in re-inventing the standard motorcycle.

"A standard-style motorcycle should be able to carry a passenger and luggage. This one won't," Brownley stated simply. He did, however, give the Hawk points for originality. "I admire Honda for taking the gamble to be different and not make just another look-alike rocketbike. I hope the day is coming when you can walk into any brand of dealership and buy a bike like the Hawk."

"It sure isn't a standard," said Morris. "I think it's just too small to go anywhere, sales-wise, in the Midwest. Besides, back there, people want cruisers. The Hawk looks like a cult-bike to me." But while he doesn't feel that the Hawk is the second coming of the standard motorcycle, Morris has no doubts that it is a very good motorcycle. "It's a high-quality machine. It feels like one solid piece of metal, one unit. There's no slop. It's got class."

Sommer was even more enthusiastic. "Honda has done a fine job of getting back to basics. The Hawk does everything I want a bike to do: I like the way it handles, I like the power, I like the riding experience. It's a bike I would own and want to keep, a nice addition to my collection. It's a 1988 Bonneville; the closest thing to a Bonneville that I've ridden."

And while he agreed that the Hawk is not going to meet some riders' criteria for what a standard motorcycle should be, Sommer's closing statement shows just how close the bike is: "If it had a better seat and different handlebars, Mr. Honda could have my money tomorrow." □



...A Yamaha SRX600 is my British bike substitute. I appreciate the combination of classic yet clean, modern lines. My Yamaha XV920RH (Euro model) has an even longer-legged lope than a BMW, and its V-Twin has torque and something of a Harley sound. Whenever I feel the urge to buy something (primarily for its newness although there are always other rationalizations), I hop on whichever bike I haven't ridden in the longest time. It's like Christmas morning all over again. And I don't need to go buying anything else.

Happily yours,

Richard Brownley

Richard Brownley
Salt Lake City, Utah

...I have been a rider for 16 years and it's my humble opinion that the rampaging technological improvements which now envelope our industry suck wet armadillo fur. Why should I own a machine that has more body parts than Arnold Schwarzenegger, more computer circuits than my microwave oven and more horsepower than Gene Autry's ranch, not to mention costing more than a month's rent at the Waldorf-Astoria?

Cordially yours,

Barry Sommer

Barry Sommer
Los Angeles, California

