

A BUNCH OF SHIFTLESS

At a recent press introduction, Honda announced the long-awaited 750 automatic-transmissioned Four, along with a low-buck street 360, a tricked-out 125 motocrosser, and a couple of other Hondas that didn't seem to have any shift levers

Add a new name to the likes of Hydramatic, Fordomatic, Dynaflo, Powerglide, and Turbomatic—the Hondamatic motorcycle is here.

Actually, the term "Hondamatic" is not new; it has been used as a Honda parts ordering code since the middle sixties, and is also the given name of the automatic transmission in Honda's Civic automobile. But to motorcyclists, the new Honda CB750A, with its Hondamatic semi-automatic transmission, will be a milestone in the history of the sport. Although not the first motorcycle ever made with a transmission of this type, it will more than likely prove to be the first large-volume, easily-purchased torque-converter-automatic bike in history. Moto-Guzzi has a 1000cc automatic, but so far, it's been nearly unobtainable in this country.

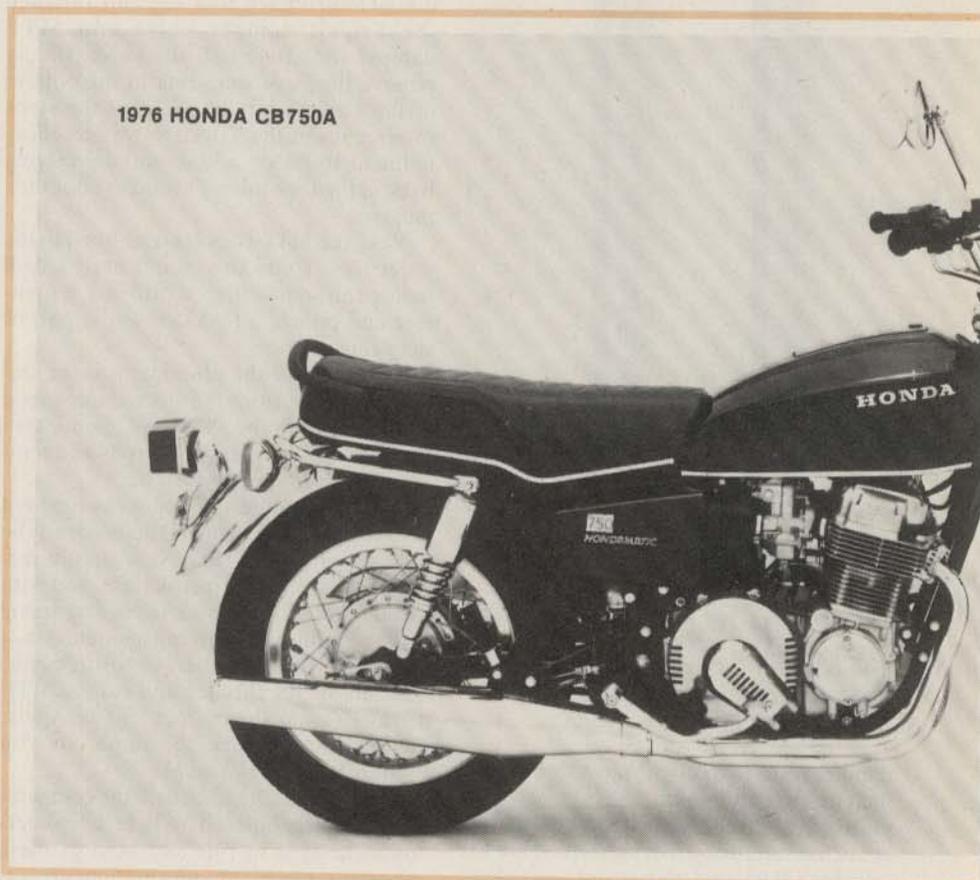
Honda announced the CB750A at a special press introduction at the Coto de Caza country club in the mountains southeast of Los Angeles. The introduction also served to unveil four other totally-unrelated models—an all-new 360 street twin, called CJ360T; a near-moped basic transportation device, called the NC50; an improved CR125M motocrosser; and a four-wheeled, single-seat, mini dune buggy called the FL250 Odyssey.

The recent trend in press introductions has been toward less talk and more information and riding, and this was Honda's first attempt at such a venture. After a brief sales pitch, the new models were described, with a technical description of the Hondamatic's workings using up most of the morning.

After lunch, the motorcycle press people were given a chance to try the new models. The Escape Country motorcycle park, just a few minutes away, was used for riding the CR125M and FL250, and the street machines were ridden on a special course laid out on the blacktop roads lacing the huge Coto de Caza complex.

Everyone seemed pleased by the

1976 HONDA CB750A



smoothness and apparent efficiency of the CB750A's two-speed automatic, but many people were surprised to learn that the transmission does not actually shift by itself. The rider must lift up on a short shift lever to shift from Low to Drive, but there is no clutch lever to fool with. You can easily start off in Drive, in which case the motorcycle gathers speed while the engine rpm remain fairly constant.

The heart of the transmission is a small, automotive-type fluid torque converter located on the right side, where the CB750's mechanical clutch is usually found. The unit works just like an automatic transmission in a car, right down to the fluid-operated clutch assemblies on each of the two gearbox gearsets. The biggest difference is that with a car, the transmission shifts for you, but with the Hondamatic, the rider does the shifting.

When asked why non-automatic shifting was used, Honda's technical representatives said that the designers were afraid of what might happen if the bike suddenly upshifted or downshifted in a fast corner. Since such an occurrence could conceivably be disastrous, they decided to

leave the shifting to the rider.

Well, it's not like there were six gears to contend with. There are only two, and Low isn't even needed unless you want a faster start.

A couple of devices on the bike are new to motorcycling. Since the torque converter more or less controls the engine rpm, there is no tachometer. Instead, the right-hand round gauge pod contains an electric gear indicator that lights up and displays either an "L" for low, a "D" for drive, or an "N" for neutral. There's also a fuel gauge, an oil pressure gauge, a high beam indicator, and a "Park" position light that indicates when the parking brake is on. Yes, there's a parking brake—a special ratchet device that allows the rear brake to be locked indefinitely by pulling a knob under the left side of the gas tank and mashing on the brake pedal. This is necessary because the bike can freewheel when the engine is off, even in gear.

There's also a transmission lock-out device that automatically shifts the lever into neutral when the sidestand is lowered, and prevents any gear from being engaged until the stand is retracted.

HONDAS

1976 HONDA CR125M



1976 HONDA ODYSSEY (FL250)



1976 HONDA EXPRESS (NC50)



planned extensive campaigns to plug the Automatic, with a sizable chunk of their budget set aside for female-oriented ads. And with its \$2194 price tag, the Honda automatic should appeal to a wide variety of people.

Basically a CB750 Four, the Automatic incorporates some refinements engineered especially for this model. The engine has a different cam lift and timing, and the crankcase was changed from dry-sump to wet-sump because the torque converter operates on engine oil. There's a central accelerator pump that feeds all four 24mm carburetors; a 17-inch rear wheel; wide, valenced Gold Wing-type chromed fenders; new seat styling with a padded passenger hand rail; and a four-into-one exhaust and concealed gas filler like on Honda's Super Sport models.

The CB750A isn't nearly as fast as the conventional 750, but to people attracted to an automatic-transmissioned motorcycle, brute performance is pretty low on their list of priorities. It *is* smooth and very easy to ride, once you quit clawing for a clutch lever and stop looking for some way to keep your left foot busy. The manual low-to-drive upshift requires very little lever pressure or movement, and it feels just like the upshift in an automatic-shift car.

Honda's advertising people have

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