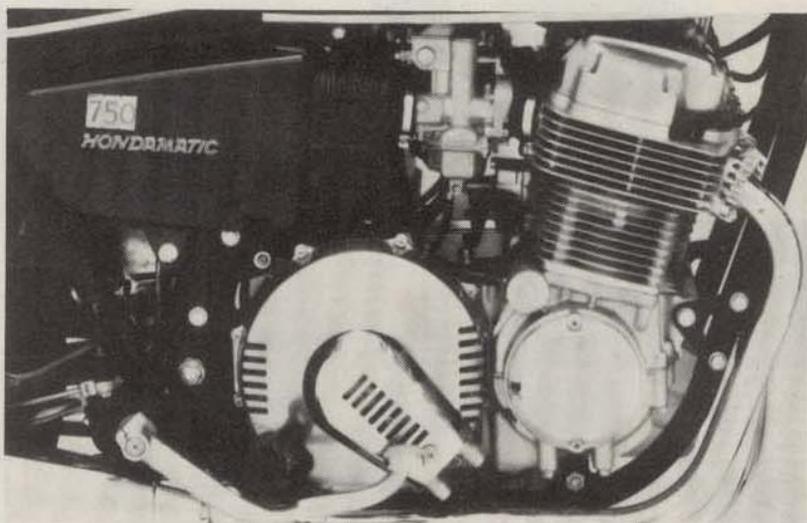


—Getting Off

by Steve Thompson



The Automatic arrives: Putting America on two wheels?

You probably know someone like my friend Chuck. See, Chuck is a nice, well-rounded American family man with a steady nine-to-five job, a great future in his business and a normal American fondness for refrigerators, stereos, cameras and electric knives. But unlike most of his friends, my friend Chuck also wants to ride motorcycles.

Now, to you—almost certainly a motorcyclist because you're reading this—Chuck's desire to ride bikes is no big deal. But to Chuck and his bowling buddies it's not so simple. They don't exactly think everyone on a motorcycle is Marlon Brando or Sonny Barger, but in their quiet Eastern township, such things take time to accept.

There's another problem. Chuck is about as mechanical as a left-handed spider monkey, which means that in addition to the already large problem of social acceptance, he is intimidated by all kinds of niggling fears—to you groundless, but to him very real—about the very act of operating a motorcycle. For years, things have stood at an impasse with Chuck; his cultural conditioning and fears of making a fool of himself in the saddle have just barely kept his hands off the grips. But now, for Chuck—and other men and women like him—there's a chance to break his deadlock.

That chance is in the form of the new Honda CB750A, in most respects just another four-cylinder 750 from Honda but different in one vital, overriding way: it has an automatic transmission. And because of that simple difference, it is the harbinger of a whole new era in motorcy-

cling, which might, just *might*, be the really big boom people have been predicting for years. To see why, you need to know some things about what's been going on in the industry in the last decade or so, particularly in the most important marketplace in the world, America.

Everyone who was not asleep under a tree knows that the step-through 50 ushered in the bike boom in the sixties, and that the subsequent invasion of Japanese motorcycles changed the nature of the market (as any disgruntled BSA man will tell you). But maybe everyone doesn't realize how that happened. Many people give Honda the whole credit, and the little 50 and the 750-Four were certainly groundbreakers, but it is the Japanese industry's need to grow constantly which produced such insights. Without depriving Mr. Honda of his due, you could safely say that if *he* hadn't done it, some other energetic soul would have. But it is always Honda which seems to be in the forefront of innovation, struggling to open up new places to sell motorcycles, to gain public acceptance, even to sell bikes to guys like Chuck. Thus when Honda announces a motorcycle with an automatic transmission, there is a real reason . . . in this case, knocking down most of Chuck's (and maybe his wife's) fears about riding, not only by the two-speed torque converter, but also by the parking brake, neutral-seeking sidestand and gas gauge. In effect, Honda has made the transition from Oldsmobile to four-cylinder motorcycle as smooth as possible.

It's a good strategy. The numbers bear out Honda's approach: over 89 percent of

the cars sold in this country every year are equipped with automatic transmissions, which must mean that a similar number of the 120 million drivers in the U.S.A. either want or need them. You'd have to be a pretty dumb manufacturer to ignore figures like those, and Honda is emphatically *not* a dumb manufacturer.

The point of Honda's CB750A is therefore to lead the way into a whole new market for bikes, one which is as untouched as the step-through scene of the early sixties, and which could have even greater possibilities. Because whereas the little step-through was "cute" to the first-time buyer, the CB750A will be something entirely different. We had a chance to ride the bike briefly, and despite the puzzlement it obviously caused to those who think nothing without six speeds could possibly be a real motorcycle, we were left with a feeling that automatic transmissioned-bikes have a great future, no matter who builds them—Honda, Kawasaki, Bultaco or Harley.

And how could this help you, the guy who *likes* to shift? Well, you can believe—as the Six-Speeders at the intro did—that the automatic is a threat in that it might attract people to motorcycling who aren't really "enthusiasts" (whatever they are), and who might somehow infect our society. Of course, that's a view which disregards the fact that no matter what the method of transmission of power, motorcycles still require skill and enthusiasm to ride, a requirement which should effectively screen out those without the right attitude. And it is a viewpoint which presupposes our society to be small, which it ain't, friends.

The more logical (and hopefully more common) viewpoint should be that anything to swell the ranks of street riders should be welcomed, not only for the abstract we-all-gain-by-more-money-in-the-industry reasons, but because of one more basic: If all those new riders who are attracted by the automatic come from cars, life on the roads will get a lot nicer. Just think of your average traffic jam cut by a third; after all, there really aren't a lot of people on the roads, just a lot of cars.

Still, the automatic will not be for everyone, maybe not for you and maybe not for your biker friends. But if you know a person like Chuck, let him know about it; chances are it's just what he's been waiting for to get out there with you on Sunday. And if he likes it, he may even start riding to work on Monday too, which means that his Olds Delta 88 stays in the garage. And *that's* something worth all the Six-Speeder put-downs in the world. 

Cycle 05/76

HONDA 750 HONDAMATIC

I have read your magazine for a number of years now and I always look forward to looking over the new bikes in your winter issues. (It gets my spring motorcycle fever started.)

I ride a 1977 750 Hondamatic and I've been puzzled by the non-appearance of said breed for the 1979 model year. And more puzzling still is that I haven't read one line anywhere as to the reason.

What gives?

Douglas Parish Sr.
Kalamazoo, Mich.

The Honda 750A was a fine piece of engineering and was not a sales success. Honda withdrew the model when they came out with the new 750 Four. The 400A is still in production and we wonder if perhaps the CX500 may be enlarged and fitted with Hondamatic, but for now, no more 750A ☐

CW 5/79

BLOWN FUSES

My Honda CB750A Hondamatic has an electrical system failure problem. I have talked to numerous owners of '76 to '78 750A Hondamatics and almost without exception they too are experiencing blown 15-amp main fuses. When this fuse blows everything including the engine quits dead. >

I have written to Honda in Gardena, California, to find a remedy to this problem. They simply suggest we go back to the dealer. Yet numerous poor dealers here in San Antonio and in Houston have told us they don't know what's causing the problem although they are aware that it exists.

Jack Ramsey,
Helotes, Texas

The problems you describe were caused by wire of too small a gauge supplying the fuse. This caused the wire to overheat which lead to the fuses not blowing but melting the end connections. Honda has been aware of the trouble and introduced a modification late last year. This was communicated to all dealers. It includes a metric fuse and fuse box (part number: 38200-393-772).

We talked to Honda about your trouble and their Customer Relations Department should have contacted both you and your local dealer with respect to correcting the fault.

HONDAMATIC LUBE

As the owner of a 1977 CB750 Hondamatic I am considering using Microlon, a teflon-based oil and gasoline additive in the bike. Microlon is supposed to impregnate bearing surfaces with Teflon particles and reduce wear and friction. They advise that this additive should not be used with metal-to-metal friction surfaces in the clutch, but is safe for fiber-to-metal clutches. I know there are clutch plates in the Honda, but I haven't been able to find out what material is used on the plates, since none of the dealers I've talked to have ever had to take one apart. Microlon recommends adding 8 oz. of their product to the crankcase and 4 oz. to a full tank of gas, then running the oil through the normal oil-change cycle. The additive is then supposed to leave residual lubrication on bearing surfaces. So I would like to know what kind of clutch material is in the Hondamatic before I add anything to the oil, so I can avoid clutch slippage problems.

Wayne Martin
Ravena, N.Y.

The Hondamatic uses all steel clutch plates, so you do have metal-to-metal friction surfaces. Honda says the Hondamatic clutch operates under very high pressure (600 psi) so that slippage is not normally a problem, but they designed the unit to provide a long trouble-free life on normal motor oil and have not tested additives on the engine or transmission. But if Microlon advises against using the product in all-metal clutches, their recommendation is probably well followed.

CW 10/80

SLOW SIGNALS

Q: I have a 1978 Honda CB750A. The turn signals have always been slow when the engine is at idle. The left signal is slower than the right. About two years ago I added additional turn signals to my hard saddlebags and an additional tail lamp to the sissy bar. Now the signals are slower than ever. In fact, the left signal does not flash at all. At speed, the signals work all right, but the left is still slower. What is causing this?

Everett Stedman
Indianapolis, Indiana

A: Usually, when you add additional signal lights (I am assuming you have them wired in parallel), the turn signals flash faster. This is because the bimetal flasher unit is current flow-sensitive. The additional load increases the current, which heats the bimetal strip faster, which makes and breaks the internal connection faster, and the lights flash faster.

If your bike's signals are slow, there is insufficient current available to heat the bimetal strip. Check the connections between the flasher unit, the handlebar switch and the harness for corrosion. A little rust will act as a resistor, which will reduce the current flow and slow down the flasher. Also, since the problem occurs only at idle, the charging system may not be able to keep up with the demand on the

battery at idle. There may not be enough power leftover to run the flasher! Have the charging system checked out. Since one side flashes slower than the other, I also suspect that the turn signal bulbs do not match. Signal lights of the wrong wattage will cause trouble, as will corrosion at the bulb sockets. Clean the bulb sockets and compare the bulb wattages with the factory specs.

R 10/92

Stuck Motor

I own a 1977 Honda 750A. It has 5700 miles on it. The problem is that I stored it for one year inside my shed and now the engine literally won't crank over.

Before I tried to crank it over, I removed the spark plugs and squirted a little oil in each cylinder. I tried the starter and a fresh

battery at first and the engine would not crank over. I used the kick starter that's located under the seat and the engine still would not spin. I'm 200 lbs. and the kick starter wouldn't budge.

I then took the sidecover off and placed a breaker bar with a 19mm socket on the flywheel and it still won't crank over.

Next, I took the valve cover off and attempted to take the cam chain sprocket off, so I could slip the chain and cam out and ultimately take the cylinder heads off. The problem I'm facing is that the two cam sprocket bolts are in the 12 and 6 o'clock positions. I can't take the bolt out that's in the 6 o'clock position, because it backs into the engine casing.

If I'm barking up the wrong tree by suspecting a hung-up piston ring, or if I should be checking something else, please tell me.

Michael Sammartano,
fullthrottle63@hotmail.com

There are many things that can be bound up inside the engine and cause it to be unable to spin over. The only way to tell which one(s) is the problem is by complete tear down of the engine. It may be that you are experiencing a stuck ring, but we have also seen bearing failures in that unit. The best way to access the cam chain sprocket bolts in your case is to simply cut the cam chain. There are replacement links available so that you don't have to buy a new chain if the old one is still within specification. The engine should be completely disassembled, cleaned and inspected, since in an engine that old, other items may be near the end of their life.

MCN 9/00