

Testing Honda 750 Automatic

With only two gear ranges, the CB-750A nevertheless is a quick performer and is especially comfortable in traffic

Dick Blom



down is neutral, next up is first or low gear and one more upshift is second gear or drive range. The transmission can be left in drive all the time if the rider doesn't mind rather leisurely acceleration at lower speeds, and in that sense it is fully automatic. Simply by dropping down into low range, usable at speeds below 60 mph, low-speed acceleration improves immensely.

One pleasant aspect is the total lack of any drive train snatch when the throttle is rolled on or off. Very nice!

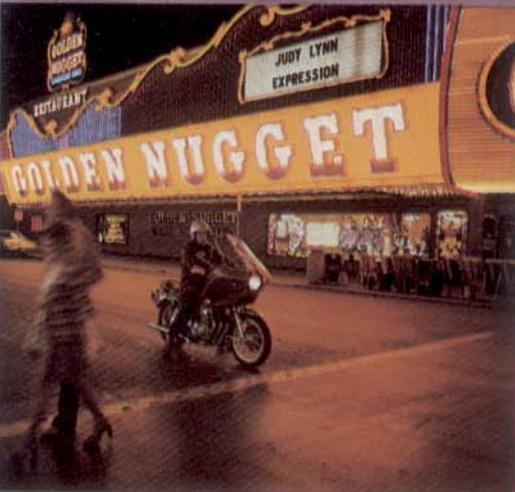
A well-thought-out feature is the simple parking brake, necessary because of the transmission's lack of a solid gear lockup. Simply pull out the button on the left side, under the tank, step down on the brake lever and the brake is set. Reverse the procedure to release it. Putting the side stand down slips the transmission into neutral. Sounds like a gimmick, but in use it turns out to be very handy.

A tachometer has been omitted. I missed having one but it's not really required since the single shift point is at 60 mph and that's marked on the speedometer. In the second instrument unit are the indicator lights for high beam, low oil pressure and the indicator light for the parking brake. Also, there is a big set of gear indicator lights, along with the turn-signal indicator and a gas gauge.

The gear indicator lights are fine for daytime riding but much too bright for night riding. If much night riding is done on this bike, the rider will have to devise something to partially obscure these lights. The problem was compounded on the test bike because it was equipped with the new Ancra fairing that had a fairly tall windshield, one that had to be looked through rather than over. The bright instrument lights were picked up on this windshield and I was partially blinded from both the primary light and the secondary reflection of it in the windshield.

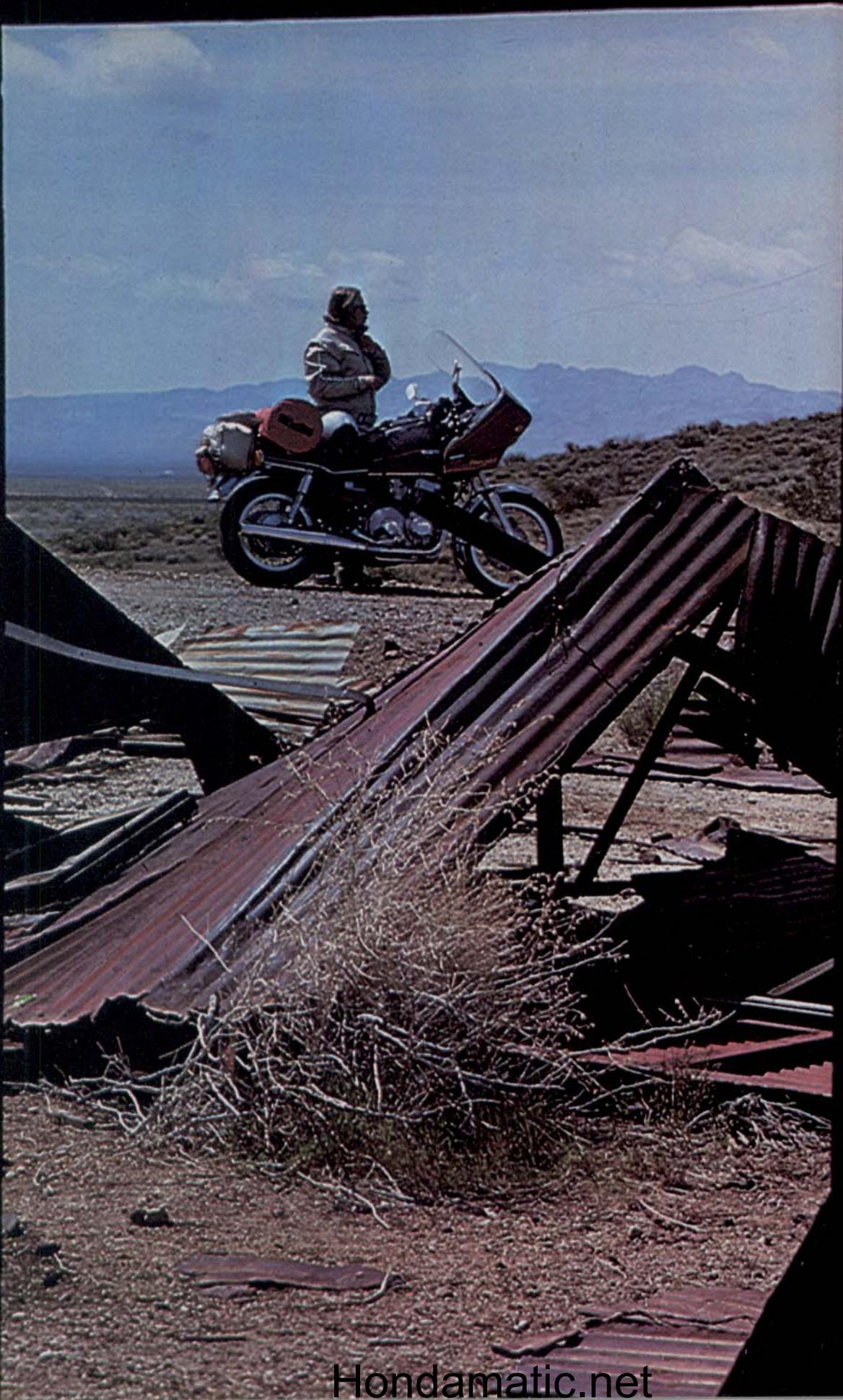
Both instrument pods had clear glass covers which, when the sun is at the right angle, cause a bright reflection in the rider's eyes and render the instruments momentarily unreadable.

The rest of the instrumentation and controls are fine. I especially like the



The new Honda CB-750A has a number of things going for it, aside from the brand-new automatic transmission. It is a well-thought-out bike and riding it for any length of time points up the good qualities (along with a few bad points carried over from previous models and one or two new ones). In overall concept, this motorcycle is a winner and a model that should prove very popular with a great many riders.

The major innovation, of course, is the automatic transmission. Actually, it's not fully automatic. It's a two-speed, with torque converter. No clutch is required and shifting is still accomplished by the rider with a left-foot shift lever. All the way



choke lever right up between the two instrument pods next to the key, in plain sight and handy to use. Having the fork lock incorporated in the ignition switch is an excellent feature. The handlebar-mounted switches are well placed and easy to use. The only exception might be the headlight dimmer switch, and that was mostly a case of getting used to its location.

The front disc and rear drum brakes do a good job of stopping the bike and both have a good, progressive feel. The front brake requires only light pressure but is not touchy or grabby.

Out on the road, just lever the transmission into drive and enjoy riding. The only exception to leaving the transmission in drive is on very tight mountain roads where low range was required for both acceleration and deceleration. High-speed acceleration, say from about 50 mph on up, is quite good. In a high-gear roll-on with the new Kawasaki LTD, it stayed right with it up to about 90 mph. The indicated top speed was about 100 mph, but the last 5 mph, from 95 to 100, were very slow in coming. For all practical purposes, such as passing cars on a 2-lane road, high-speed acceleration was just fine. If you are in the habit of drop-

ping down a gear or two for real punch in passing, you might miss the ability to do that. But a little anticipation of just when to get it on will compensate nicely for the lack of lower gears.

The only disconcerting trait of the transmission, for me, was the feeling that it was running in too low a gear or maybe slipping a little at steady speeds between 50 and 60 mph in drive. Above 60 mph, the feeling disappeared completely.

Generally, I found it to be very pleasant to ride for touring, but where it really shines is in urban traffic, on city streets and freeways. Here the transmission truly does allow the rider to devote more of his attention to what's happening around him and less to the operation of the bike. For slower traffic, leaving the transmission in low range gives instant throttle response and good, brisk acceleration. At stop lights, in low range the bike moves off smartly. In everyday riding, I found it nearly always stepped right out ahead of all other traffic at stop lights. From idle to full-bore acceleration requires just a flip of the wrist, and it works correctly every time — no missed gears or false neutrals.

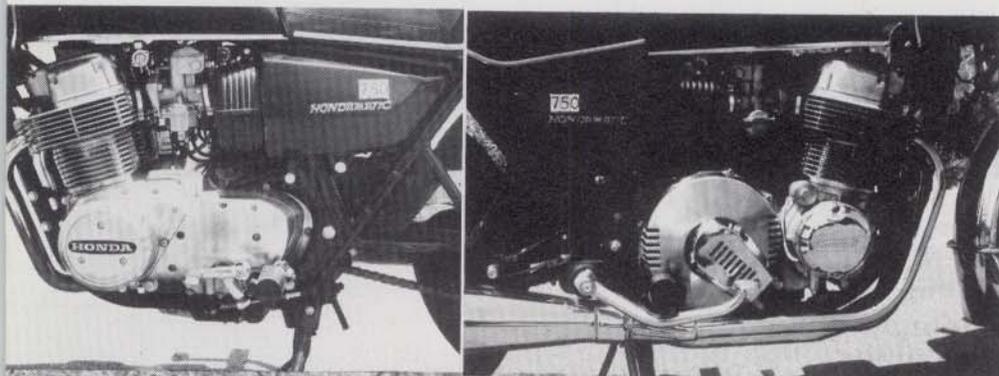
The riding position is quite comfortable, but for riders with long legs the pegs will be a little high. They have been moved up a little to give better cornering clearances, and in this respect the bike is great. Everything is well tucked up out of the way for really fast cornering. The extra clearance is usable because the bike handles very nicely. Smooth curves can be taken with great confidence on this bike. When the road gets a little rough or choppy, the bike becomes skitterish. The rear shocks leave something to be desired; by about 2500 miles, they felt as if they had lost much or most of their damping action. The front forks are fairly stiff on very small surface irregularities, and on freeway expansion joints the bike had sort of a hobby horse action, fore and aft. This was not exaggerated — just mildly unpleasant. The front springs performed well except for their inability to respond to small, sharp irregularities in the road.

The ride ranged from firm to hard, depending on the type of bumps. The rear springs are rather soft, and if they had good shocks the ride for one person, even with touring gear, would be very good. But with the poor shocks, a good amount of bottoming was experienced, riding one-up with about 60 pounds of gear. Two-up is fine for around town, with no other load, but if saddlebags and a luggage rack are to be added for touring two-up, plan to change the rear springs and shocks. They are inadequate for this kind of use.

The seat has been considerably improved over the 4-pipe model. The front is contoured and doesn't have those sharp edges to cut into the inner thigh. However, the cushion is far from perfect.

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Rider



automatic transmission, very pleasing to the senses.

A couple of small points might be worth mentioning: first, the bike is difficult to put on the center stand. I never did work out a satisfactory method, especially with touring gear loaded on the back. The gas would leak badly if the fuel tap was not shut off when I stopped. I mean anytime the engine was turned off, if even for a couple of minutes, the gas tap had to be closed; otherwise the gas would pour out . . . probably just a sticking float valve.

The folding foot pegs have no return spring, so if they get pushed back, it is a matter of finding them with your toe to get them back into riding position. Until I got used to it, when I was putting the side stand up I would fold the pegs up nearly every time. Small point, but something to get used to . . .

The fairing on the test bike is a new Free Spirit from Ancra Corp. It was color-matched to the deep wine-red of the bike and made a striking combination. The fairing has a quality look and some excellent features. A headlight adjustment can be used while riding. The fairing has a built-in panel for four instruments. It has good storage space — the only intrusion being the area where the front turn indicators are molded in.

The windshield was a little high for me on the test model; I had to look through it

instead of over it. On the positive side, it provided protection from both wind and rain. In fact, I even rode it in some snow and pretty heavy hail with no ill effects. The windshield is raked back sharply so rain didn't build up and obscure my vision. But morning dew caused a real vision problem. I couldn't keep a clear spot to see through and had to really stretch to see over it. However, the windshield could be tailored to just the right height, so this should be no problem.

The Free Spirit offered good protection from wind. Only a little was felt on the upper arms and, of course, the area below that which the fairing covered, say from about the knees down. I could feel sidewinds a little more than with some other frame-mounted fairings . . . nothing dangerous. The blast from big trucks could be felt distinctly.

I liked the kangaroo pouch in the left storage cover; it's a nice place for small items like sunglasses. The storage covers snap on, which is fine, but they come loose all around when opening. This made me reluctant to open them when moving for fear of losing one of them to the wind.

All in all, it's a good-looking, well-made fairing that offers fine rider protection. The bike/fairing combination was a good one . . . nice looking and pleasant riding.

My overall impression of the motorcy-

cle is one of smoothness and sophistication, offering the rider a fine bike with a very interesting twist: the automatic transmission. It would be an excellent first big bike for a new rider. And it's ideal for this situation: a rider wants his wife to learn to ride a big bike so they can tour together on separate motorcycles. The CB-750A would eliminate some of the fears that seem to intimidate a new rider. For the experienced rider who travels a lot of traffic, the bike would also fill a real need. In fact, it would be a very good selection for anyone who just wants the smoothness and convenience of the automatic transmission wrapped up in a good-looking, good-handling 750 package.

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