

● Put bluntly, the most important thing about the new Honda CB-400F is this: it's really fun. Like all Honda factory products, the 408cc six-speeder has been sanitized and polished to a glossy civility. The new four-into-one exhaust system, to cite a single example, removes almost all the exhaust noise at normal speeds in city and highway traffic.

In this case Honda's lustrous detailing does not brighten up a pale, lifeless motorcycle. The Honda CB-400F is a marvel: it handles remarkably well, has sufficient cornering clearance, stops with authority, snaps through gears precisely—and motors along smartly. The bike feels all of a piece, as if a hundred separate design systems fell into perfect synchronization. Yet the attraction of the 408 transcends its obvious competence. Even a card-carrying Anglophile would agree that the CB-400F has real *character*.

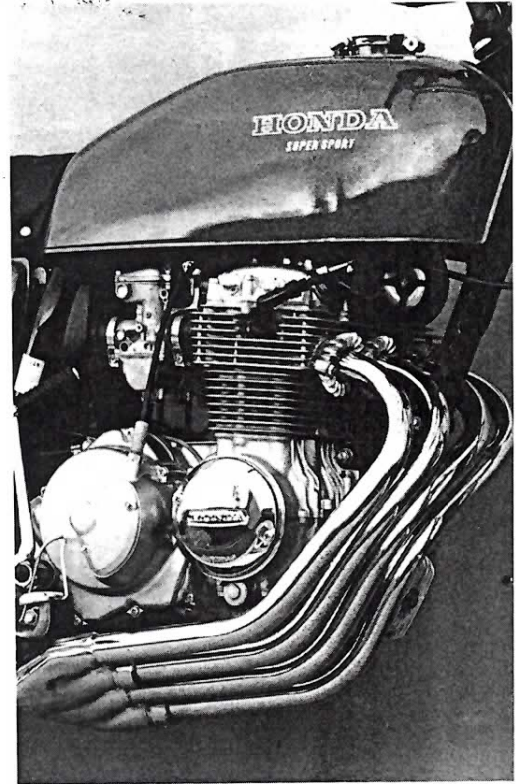
The motorcycle is genuinely exciting. At 10,500 rpm, a siren-song comes shrieking out the engine and muffler, and this music is the most captivating sound west of an MV Agusta 750. If you can't respond to the CB-400F's electrifying mechanical presence, you should immediately switch your sport to checkers.

Forget the CB-350F. That machine was a technical exercise, an artful triumph of engineering craft. It was also a reply to a query never raised—unless someone wanted to know how few cubic centimeters Honda could split by four. Admittedly, the CB-350 exuded niceness. Nice and heavy at 400 pounds. Nice and slow, with 15.6-second quarter-miles. Nice and “safe” with a ground clearance problem at the centerstand. Fascinating and charming the CB-350F may have been; exciting it wasn't.

Though it shares much mechanically with its forerunner, the 408 should not be tagged as an updated CB-350F. The new bike is dramatically better. The CB-400F will absolutely wallop an old 350 four-cylinder. The 408 runs through the quarter-mile more than eight-tenths of a second quicker than the 350. The 14.8-second figure still leaves the CB-400 far short of the jet-quick Yamaha RD-350 (14.1 seconds) and trailing Kawasaki's rapid 400 triple (14.3 seconds). But the Honda will edge out the Suzuki 380 (14.9 seconds). At 408ccs, Honda's midget-multi now gets inside the same second as its competition.

The Honda picked up speed in two

PHOTOGRAPHY: BILL DELANEY



HONDA CB-400F SUPER SPORT

**Four cylinders, six speeds and a ten-thousand-rpm redline.
Could it be a prescription for an exciting motorcycle?
You bet it is.**

junctions in the remote-shift linkage, the 408 has Heim-joint connectors. The touch (first seen on earlier Moto Guzzi Sports) is absolutely first-class since it eliminates the slop in the linkage.

Having settled into the riding position, sub-six-footers will find the combination ignition/fork lock switch in a panel between the instruments. Honda has finally placed the key in the right spot, and has in a way made up for the delay by incorporating the fork lock into the same switch. Opening the petcock—which has idiot-proof on/off/reserve positions—must be followed by flipping the choke lever on for cold starting.

Cold-blooded by nature, the 408 needs a short warm-up before plunging into traffic. Once warm, the Honda eases into a normal idle; just a mum-hum trickles out the megaphone-shaped muffler. Crack the throttle and the tachometer leaps toward the redline, accompanied by a velvety mechanical thrash from the engine and a whining *whooff* that spits out the muffler tip. Never has there been a better invitation to go for a ride.

The clutch feeds the power in pretty evenly, although, like most Hondas, the clutch hooks up the driveline components only as the hand lever nears the end of its arc. Driveline slop mars the unitary tightness that characterizes the 400F.

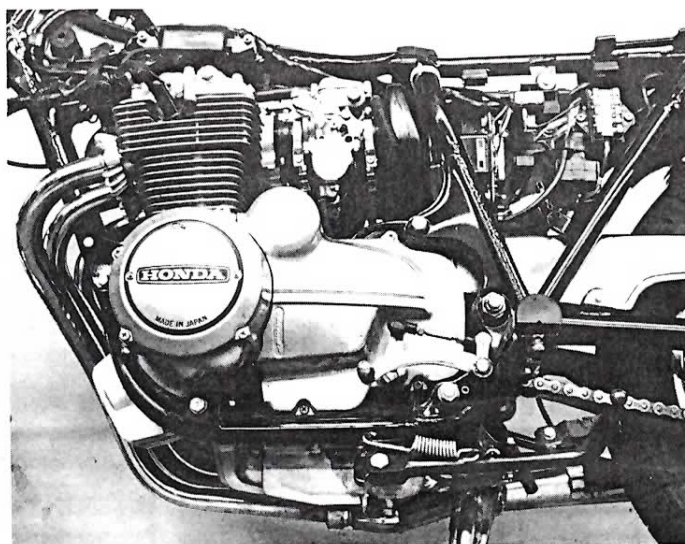
Adding a passenger in town makes the slop far more apparent. The passenger may be unaware of the wind-up/reel-out business in the driveline, but the rider feels it at every start. The pillion person will notice that his or her legs get pumped up and down a lot, thanks to the passenger pegs mounted on the swing arm. Since the Honda midget-multi has been designed as a monoposto machine, good form demands that the passenger be jettisoned at the earliest convenient stop.

In traffic, the Honda CB-400F's bright red paint job remains the loudest thing on the motorcycle. Auto-jockeys just *can't* hear the motorcycle; it's that quiet. Indeed, the 408-pilot may not be heard at all, because the horn bleats out a frail note. That leaves the eternal headlamp (on all the time) as the rider's attention-grabber. Since headlight filaments make poor alarm beacons, the CB-400F's color may be its most trustworthy guardian.

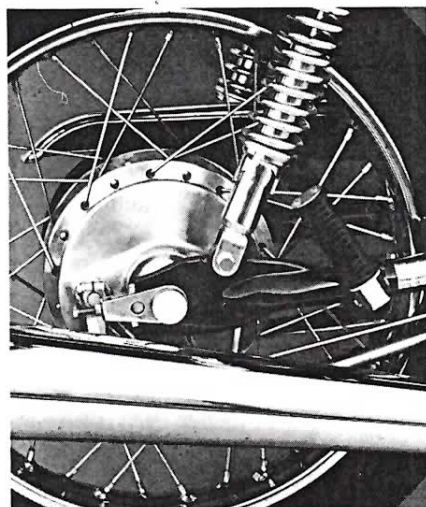
Around town, the bike soon proves itself as an agile, maneuverable motorcycle which never feels like a 400-pound multi. Many pounds remain in hiding despite the fact that low bars usually heighten any rider's weight-awareness. Though the bar has only a one-inch rise, the riding position will not tire out the stoplight commuter.

As the city limits signs recede and the countryside opens up, the bike gets better and better. Tooting straight-up along a two-lane blacktop, the engine spins with an eager hum. Some vibration reaches the rider at certain engine speeds (4800-5200 rpm); yet at its worst, the vibration in the handgrips and pegs provokes no discom-

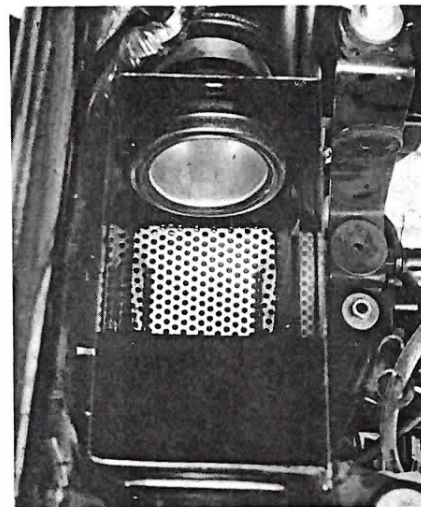
MARCH 1975



Cradle frame built from pressed steel and tubes provides a rigid structure; it's heavy but frame rigidity is the first element in good handling.



The axle carrier on the swing arm isn't a separate piece; it's stamped from the arm itself.



Cylinderhead breather tube terminates under the perforated floor for the air cleaner element.

