

cycle guide

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Special 46 Page Section

SUPER BIKE SHOWDOWN

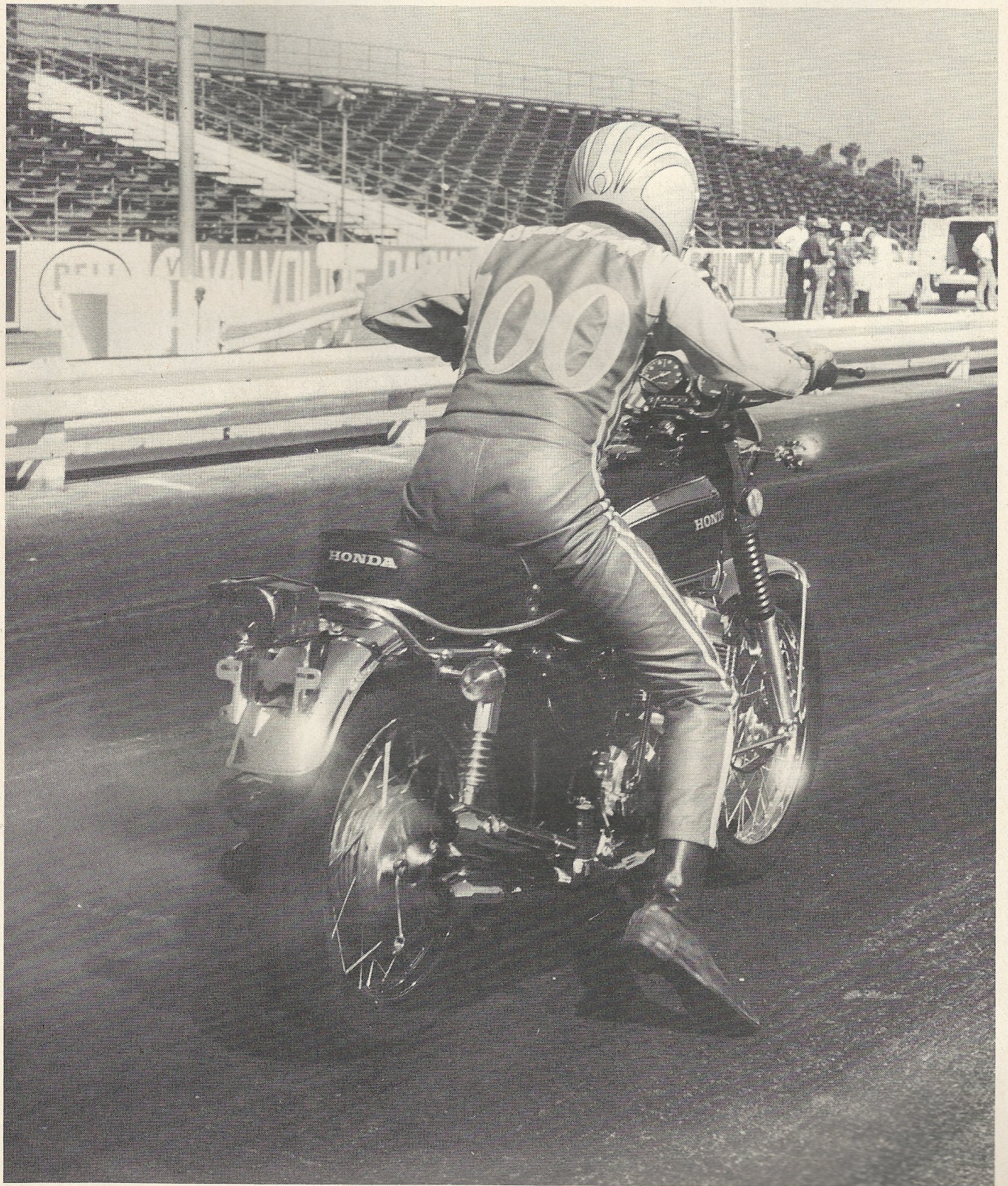
*Test Reports And Comparative Summary
Of The Seven Top Muscle Machines*

**Exclusive -- All New 750 Yamaha • 1973 Triumph Trident •
Plus: H-D Sportster • Honda 750 • Kawasaki Mach IV •
Norton Commando • Suzuki GT 750 •**



SUPER BIKE SHOWDOWN

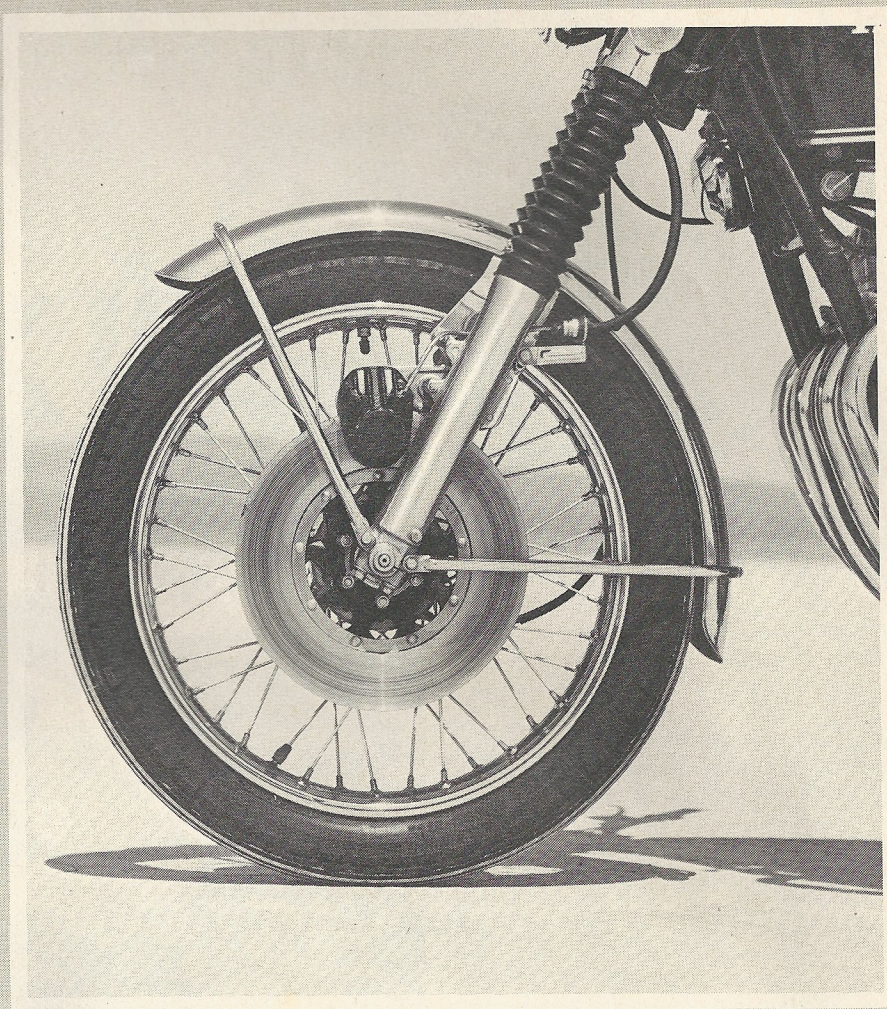
HONDA 750



It's been less than four years since Honda introduced their big Four. It seems like the four-piper has been with us a lot longer than that. Out here in Cycle City, Southern California, you just can't get very far before you catch sight of the big smoothie or your ears pick up on the distinctive, restrained exhaust note that makes identification of the source so instantly possible even when the machine is outside the visual spectrum. Disc brakes are becoming common now. Even some of the smaller around-town bikes are seen sporting them. Honda did it first, and the rest on the binder bandwagon haven't been able to match the performance yielded by these breakthrough units. The other feature conjured by the image of the Four is the smoothness. It's a cliché already.

You start thinking about Honda's market startling introduction back in '69 (remember who won the World Series or who took the Oscar for best actor?) and you admit now as then it was quite a package. The first four cylinder engine (in many years) for public consumption, the first disc brake equipped stock bike, the electric starter, that never before sound and the smoothness. The Mach III and the Honda Four really are responsible for this whole super-bike phenomenon upon us. Different strokes for different folks, you might say, but they were the instigators.

Much has been said about the Honda's braking capacity, and it is fully justified. The last time we tested the machine we stated that their front anchor was the best we had ever encountered. We have no reason to alter that statement at the present time. We weren't at all surprised that the second heaviest bike, the water-cooled, radiator-laden Suzuki was heaviest at 535 wet, tipping the scales at 518 pounds fully fueled, was still the faster stopper during panic stop testing from 65 mph. In 35 to 0 stopping the brand new 750 Yamaha edged the Honda by about eight feet, coming to a halt within 37 feet. The back brake is a good performer. It will hop a bit during hard braking but is fully controllable. Just getting stopped within a certain number of feet is not the only concern in evaluating braking performance. Stopping can be a bit hairy if the rider has difficulty maintaining control of his rapidly decelerating machine. The Norton is guiltiest on this count. Concentration is the key word in halting that performer. The Honda certainly boosts the operator's sense of well being with very predictable, controllable stoppage. Our tests from 35 produced no fade at all. Stopping from 65 yielded a slight amount of fade after the first anchor tossing but



This is the brake that stopped the best. Honda was the first Japanese manufacturer to utilize disc brakes and theirs is still the best.

repeated efforts did not increase this amount of fade. Binder performance as we zapped around the race course was comparable to that experienced during panic stop testing. We got smooth predictable fade free stopping at any speed.

We like to check at what speed the rider first notices vibration on the various mounts tested. We're still waiting for the first indication. We couldn't notice any vibration. This certainly is an important factor in the comfort evaluation of any machine, particularly those suitable for long distance touring. The Honda was edged by the Suzuki only as far as overall comfort is concerned. The seat is very accommodating for long periods of time and ample enough for a passenger to move about and pick his or her spot on the saddle. Shorter riders may have a problem getting both feet firmly upon the ground because of seat height and width. For anyone above 5'10" it is no problem. Every once in a while we will glimpse a smaller female type operator so ob-

viously the problem is not insurmountable. Foot pegs are spring loaded and folding. We liked the handlebar positioning but not the hand grips. They are fluted and feel like they are moving as the right hand operates the throttle. This requires maintaining considerable pressure to keep the throttle where you want it. A softer pressure on the grips allows the throttle to start shutting off beneath the fingers. We also noticed that at times it is necessary to move the right hand forward on the throttle to get a more comfortable grip during high speed cruising. Otherwise the hand feels like it is being bent back into the wrist to a point of noticeable discomfort. Throttle response itself is quite good and very smooth. The problems are only with the grip and the distance it travels before reaching the wide open throttle setting for fuel feeding. The throttle just isn't a quick turn unit and requires two twists to get it wide open.

The Honda is both a comfortable and accommodating machine for two up riding, and the power plant easily counteracts the added weight so that there is no noticeable affects in power available when the rider gives it the gas. There are noticeable handling

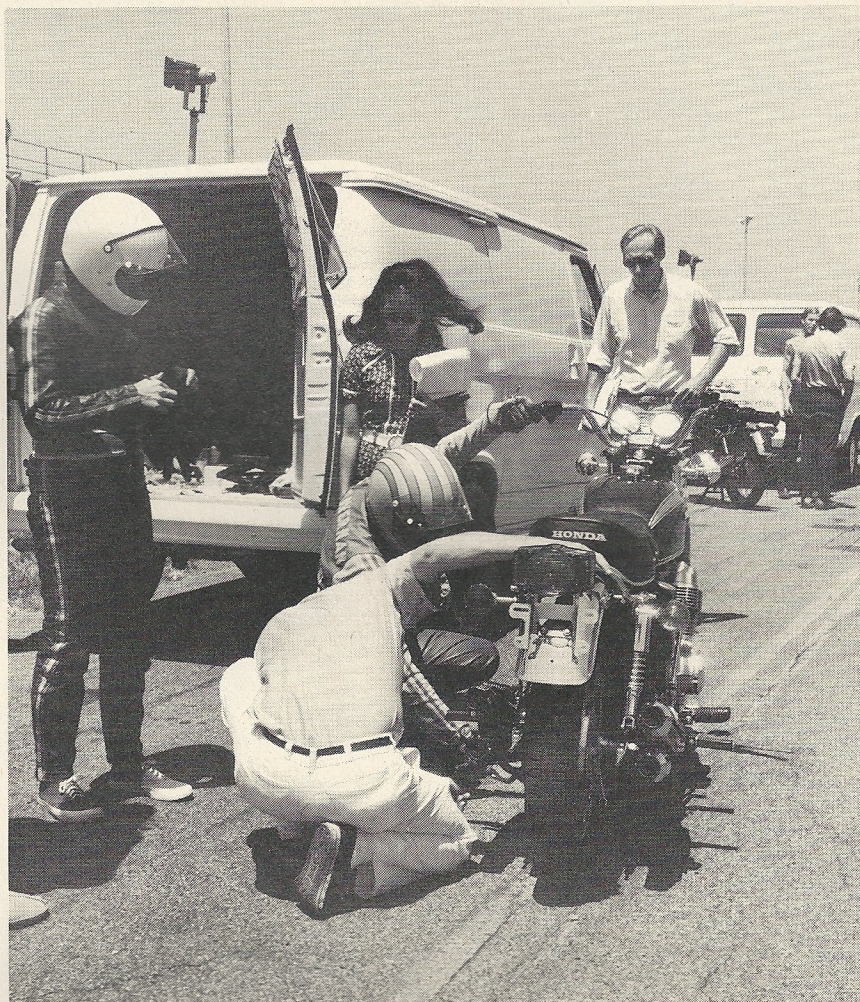
SUPER BIKE SHOWDOWN

changes, however. Ground clearance, which is no bother solo, is reduced. You can't really lean it over that much before something will start dragging, either the center stand or the passenger pegs. Other than having to take it easier and refrain from hard cornering the Four is quite suitable for two-up touring.

Another comfort to the Honda owner, other than physical considerations, is the price of this package at \$1,702 suggested retail, Los Angeles. While it is a bit more than pocket change, it is a bargain for a big bike buyer. *Only the Kawasaki (\$1,386) and Suzuki (\$1,575) are cheaper.* There are times on Los Angeles streets and freeways when the Fours seem as plentiful as VW's. To each his own when it comes to four cylinder transportation. Anyway a lot of people must find the price worth the pudding, so to speak.

Up until two months ago we have said that nothing else has a sound like the fascinating gurgling exiting from those four upswept mufflers. That was before our trip to Japan to preview the new Kawasaki 900. Then the brand new 750 Yamaha arrived just days before our showdown testing date, and once again we encountered a sound distinctive enough to be unable to compare it to any other we have heard. Regardless, listening to a Honda is still a great big turn on. Most motorcycles just sound like motorcycles—nothing wrong with that, mind you. Now we say the Honda is one of a select trio that sounds like more than just another motorcycle. Aside from the accoustical pleasure, sound has another function, which is not to rile the citizens. Our decibel meter testing pronounced the Honda the decided champion on this count. *The new Yamaha was second quietest.*

We were impressed with the durability and smoothness of the clutch and gear box performance. Very little pressure is required on the clutch. The feel is very silky, almost verging on being too light. Unlike most bikes, the clutch doesn't engage until the control lever is almost all the way out. Gear-box and clutch operation seem to improve with use, and initial performance was very smooth to begin with. Consistency is the byword. During quarter mile acceleration testing e.t.'s didn't vary by more than six one hundredths of a second in consecutive runs. The only fault we can mention regarding the gear box is that it is not particularly accommodating when trying to find neutral at stoplights. This is not a consistent occurrence but happens often enough to notice it.



While the men inspect the centerstand for scrape marks Mrs. B. suits up for passenger duty.

The electric starter eliminates the usual reluctance toward starting cold for which the Honda product is known. Warm up time is a full four or five minutes. *This is longer than any other bike tested.*

The single overhead cam engine emits very little engine noise and lives up to its reputation regarding smoothness. We feel a good part of this can be explained by the five main bearing crankshaft. Five carefully balanced main bearings for the four cylinder set-up really cut engine vibration. Reduced crankshaft flexure also noticeably prolongs bearing life. The Honda powerplant is a sophisticated piece of equipment requiring attentive servicing. It's no big deal provided the servicer is adequately experienced, but we wouldn't recommend "learning" on this engine to the buyer who likes getting his hands into his own machine. Properly tuned the powerplant is impressive indeed.

We were quite disappointed with performance at the Orange County drag strip. E.t.'s were the most consistent of any bike tested, but they were slow. *Only the water-cooler carrying Suzuki and the new 750 Yamaha were slower.* Best time was 13.75 seconds with a speed of 98.26 through the traps. During our last road test on the Honda we missed hitting the twelves by only one twentieth of a second and hit the ton, as they say across the Atlantic. Top speed, as indicated by the speedometer without correction for inaccuracy, was also down from 121 to 112. *If the Honda had accelerated the way we had expected from prior efforts, it should have finished very closely behind the Norton (12.92) and the Triumph (12.99).* Although quickness was disappointing, the execution of such acceleration was not. We just wound it up and dropped the hammer and off we went. It didn't want to rear up on us. There was minimal tendency exhibited toward breaking loose out of the gate, and it tracked off straight ahead.

During high speed roadability testing straight line tracking was excellent as was stability under acceleration. There was no problem getting the machine over in the corners, and clearance during cornering was no problem until a passenger was added. Cornering then had to be approached with much more restraint because there wasn't much travel left on the shocks with the added weight. The poor damping of the rear shocks is the culprit. Tire traction was excellent under acceleration and through hard corners. Suspension, front and rear, is very good for the solo rider. When we tested the 750 last year we noted that the sudden throttle response in low gear was not to our liking. There was a slight lag followed by a sudden surge. Whatever the reason, we experienced no such response this time around.

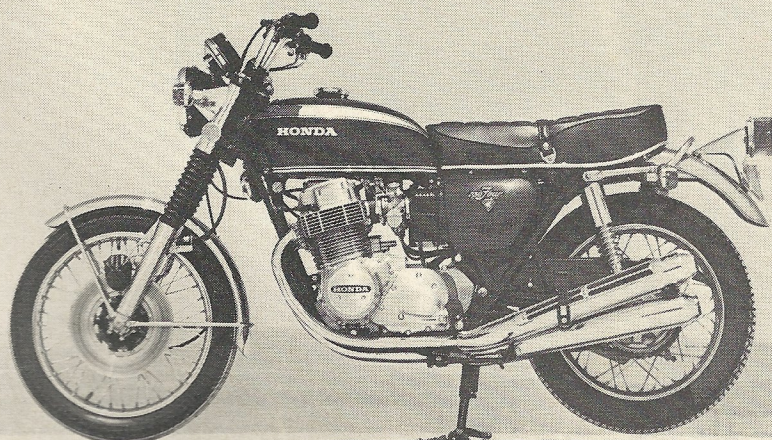
The Four is heavy, and its massiveness, which disappears into confidence-building roadability at speed, is noticeable at low speeds. Admittedly, bopping around town is not what the Honda was designed for. It wants to get out into open spaces and just lope along all day from 80 to 100 without breaking a sweat. Around town the massiveness has the reverse reaction. It doesn't inspire confidence. The weight on the front end is very noticeable. You are aware that you are operating over a quarter ton of metal which seems very much aware of Mr. Newton's law. Once away from metropolitan confines, however, it's a delight until or unless the old mountain road twisties are encountered. This is not its proper environment, and you once again are aware of the weight, particularly as some cafe racer goes tracking by in a hard left hander.

Power comes on at about 4000 rpm. The engine is so smooth that you can ride about town under 3000 without knowing it, although it isn't a recommended procedure. The absence of the usual noticeable lugging permits it to happen. Starting off in second gear is no big thing for the inattentive operator. Power runs up to about 8500. We shifted at about eight grand.

Speedometer readings were four to five percent optimistic. Readability of the speedometer and tachometer were excellent although we noticed some lag in the tach. We still don't like key placement on the Honda, but the kill switch position is excellent. We didn't have any problem going to the headlights, directionals or horn with the clutch hand.

The Honda is an exceptionally durable machine and is an excellent execution of preparing a machine for a designated purpose. One hundred thousand Americans can't be wrong.

Bob Braverman



HONDA 750

Engine Type	four cylinder OHC four stroke
Bore and stroke	61x63mm
Displacement	736cc
Compression Ratio	9.0:1
Max. Horsepower	67 @ 8,000 rpm
Max. Torque	44.12 ft./lbs.
Ignition	alternator/battery
Carburetion	four 28mm piston valve Kehin
Lubrication	wet sump
Length	85.0 in
Wheelbase	57.3 in
Ground Clearance	5.5 in
Weight-wet	518 lbs
Front tire size	3.25x19 in
Front brake type	hydraulic, disc
Rear tire size	4.00x18 in
Rear brake type	internal expanding
Transmission	constant mesh, five speed
Clutch	wet, multi-plate
Internal gear ratios	(1) 2.50;
	(2) 1.708; (3) 1.333; (4) 1.097; (5) 0.939
Final ratio	2.667
Countershaft sprocket	18
Rear wheel sprocket	48
Indicated highest one-way speed	112
Braking distance 35-0	45 ft. 0 in
Braking distance 65-0	133 ft 2 in
Quarter-mile acceleration:	
Top speed	98.36
Elapsed time	13.74
Air Filtration	dry paper
Battery type	12V-14AH
Fuel tank	4.5 gal
Fuel reserve	1.3 gal
Oil tank	2 qt
Engine/Gearbox Total	4 qt
Front suspension	telescopic, double damping
Rear suspension	spring over shock,
	pneumatic damping
Frame type	tubular, double cradle
COLORS	
Metallic brown, orange flake, candy gold	
PRICE AS TESTED	
\$1702.00 suggested retail, Los Angeles	
DISTRIBUTOR	
American Honda Motor Co.	
P.O. Box 50	
Gardena, Calif. 90247	