

If the bewildering array of new equipment that seems to appear practically every month has pushed your weary mind to snapping point, consider the plight of the poor Japanese biker who is assailed from almost every quarter with factories launching avalanches of flashy new tackle onto the market every week.

If your reading diet is confined to the British weeklies then you'd consider the 250cc market to be the most vibrant in Japan. No so. It's still the fifties that pull the most punters, mainly because of the lack of formalities required in putting one on the road. And they're not the pathetic little pipsqueaks we have to put up with in the UK. Currently the hot set-up for any self-respecting Tokyo blade with about 190,000 Yen (about £500) to burn is a water-cooled six-speed fifty with a race-style frame and suspension pushing out 7.2 bhp and with a top speed of over 55mph. If you're stuck with a 50mph limit anyway, why bother with anything bigger?

The aforementioned partly explains the exotic nature of the latest Honda sports sixteen to reach these shores, the MBX50. It's a completely new machine that shares nothing with the old-spine-framed MB50S and hopefully should have none of that model's problems with main bearings. The main plank of its introduction is that it uses the latest in fashionable trickery like the water-cooled MBX50

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A sixteen with all the latest gadgetry—Honda's MBX 50.



(above) Razor-sharp looks, pro-link rear end, superb finish. And it's faster than a bicycle. (below).

made for Japan: single shock Pro-link rear suspension, 'boom-rang' Comstar wheels and high-shouldered tank styling like the bigger bikes. The only major difference is that the engine has an air-cooled cylinder barrel, pumps out around three ponies, and has just five (instead of six as for the J-model) cogs with the gearing set to give the requisite 35mph top speed on the flat.

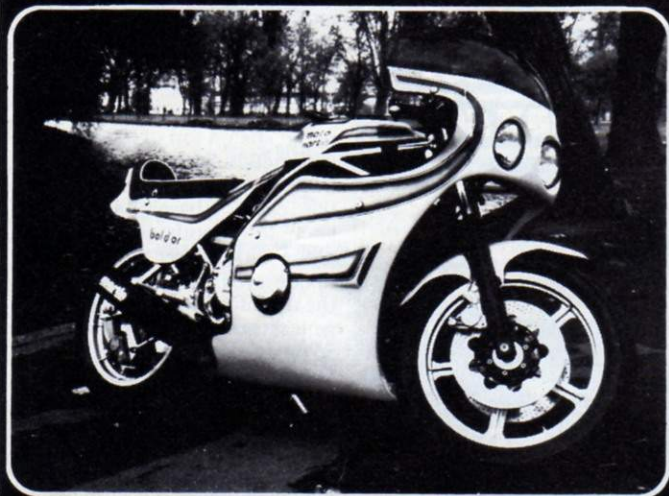
Although a new design, the motor that powers the MBX shares many of the features of the old MB50. It's got reed-valve induction with a tiny 13mm Keihin carb while the oil pump sits on top of the gearbox and meters the lube to the inlet tract. Behind the cylinder, inside the cases, there's a balance shaft to smooth out the vibes along with rubber mounts. One major area of improvement is the use of 12-volt electrics. The generator still supplies the 35-watt headlamp direct but the bulb doesn't dim quite so badly as have some in the past when the revs drop to a tickover. A separate circuit in the generator charges the 3-amp-hour battery which supplies the stop lamp, turn signals, instrument lights and the horn. For a change, we can't criticise the MBX's electrics.

As you might expect the MBX's chassis is more sophisticated than the old MB, but at the same time it's more conventional. The frame is a twin loop affair but the swing arm is long with a single shock under the



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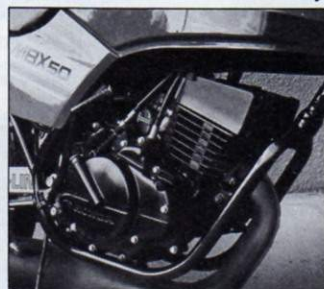


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seat. This is operated by a pair of links, one of which connects the shock to the box-section arm, while another connects the first link to a lug on the frame, the idea being to speed up the rate of movement of the shock as the suspension compresses. The action has a long and soft movement and more than ample for the bike's performance. Up front, a leading axle fork does its job impressively. The front disc brake, surprisingly, is a dual-piston caliper type as found on the CB125T: it's incredibly



With a blistering 2.7 bhp on tap from this mini power pack, who needs brakes?

potent while at the same time being easy to use.

Once up to the cruising speed, the MBX50 is remarkably nimble yet precise enough in its steering to allow most hazards to be tackled virtually flat out. This is a peculiar need of 50cc sixteeners because their acceleration is invariably so inferior to most other vehicles (short of milk floats) that once speed has been attained, the rider is disinclined to lose it. Fortunately, tuck and dive tactics are the MBX's speciality. You can fling the bike into urban corners confidently and it's only when the road surface is wet that the usual caution becomes necessary.

The MBX's riding position enhances the degree of control. The handlebar is flat and the footrests rear set on subframes well to the rear of the main frame loop so the rider is encouraged into a lean-to stance that maintains front end stability. This is not the most popular attitude for novice riders (witness the better

sales of the trail-style mopeds with their higher 'bars') but it does help control at speed.

Getting to speed on the MBX demands concentration. While there's five speeds to use, the ratios are low and though the motor revs to 8 grand smoothly it's best to short-shift at 6,500rpm over the max power revs. In top gear the bike'll reach 35mph on the speedo, but that's at 7,500rpm, so if you want more speed, you could (illegally) fit a bigger gearbox sprocket to raise the overall ratios and incidentally improve the absurdly low bottom gear.

In most other ways, the MBX works in the utterly appliance-like fashion we've come to expect. It kick starts easily while a long warm up period is necessary. The switchgear on the left console is easy to use, and the finish of both the plastic and steel bodywork is first class. Fuel consumption is only average at 96 mpg but the big 2.9 gallon tank compensates for this.

Within the confines of the sixteen-year law the MBX50 is a superb example of the breed, but then at £575 it should be.

J/N

SPECIFICATION

Model	Honda MBX50
Price inc taxes	£575
Warranty	12 mnths/unltd
Customer	Honda UK Ltd.
Contact	Power Rd, Chiswick, London W4. Tel: 01-995 9381

ENGINE	
Type	2-str single
Capacity	49cc
Bore/Stroke	39x41.4mm
Lubrication	Auto pump
Comp. ratio	7.3:1 corrected
Carburation	13mm Keihin
Ignition	Capacitor discharge
Power (bhp)	2.7bhp @ 5,500rpm
Torque (lb-ft)	na

TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive	Gear
Clutch	Wet multiplate
Gearbox	Five speed
Final drive	428 chain
Overall ratios	47.6, 29.1, 21.6, 17.4 & 14.8:1

ELECTRICS	
Power source	Alternator
Battery	12V 3Ah
Headlamp	35/35W tungsten

CHASSIS	
Frame	Duplex cradle
Front susp.	Leading-axle telescopic fork
Rear susp.	Swing arm c/w single shock linkage
Front brake	220mm disc
Rear brake	110mm drum
Front tyre	250-18 Dunlop
Rear tyre	275-18 Dunlop

CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank	2.9 gal (12 ltrs)
Oil	1.2 ltrs

DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase	49.2in (1250mm)
Seat height	29.9in (760mm)
H'bar width	25.6in (650mm)
Grnd clrcnc	7.1in (180mm)
Rake/trail	63½deg/72mm
Dry weight	196lb

EQUIPMENT	
Mirrors, side stand, steering lock, seat lock, turn signals.	

PERFORMANCE	
Top speed	35mph
Fuel cons.	96mpg
Range	75 miles

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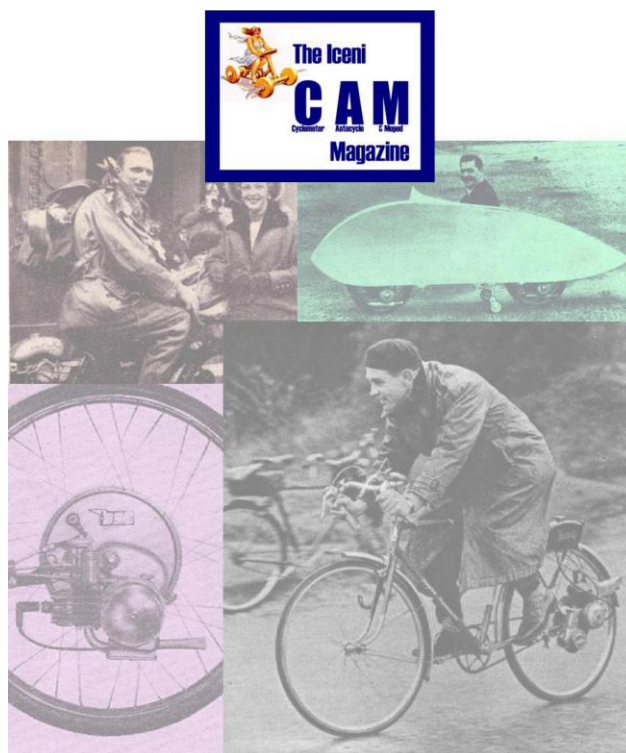
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