

A two-and-a-half hour journey from London to the MIRA test track at Nuneaton on a freezing cold day, with only the prospect of a cup of hot coffee to keep me going, gave me plenty of time to reflect on the pleasures of riding my first test bike, the MBX80. When told I was to be privileged with temporary ownership of Honda's new 80cc two-stroke I was delighted: at last a chance to run up limitless expenses, be the envy of my friends and give my a bike a holiday in the office garage. What had I done to deserve this? Could it be my impressive riding skills and brilliant writing ability — or was it that Brecon saw an ideal opportunity to put the new editorial policy into operation? *If we must test these small bikes we can't take seriously, we'll give them to lone 'cos she's so small.*

Eventually I reached Nuneaton and collapsed in the Little Chef near MIRA. Roland Brown, who'd left half an hour after me on a GSX750, was just finishing a huge breakfast and calmly told me they'd run out of coffee. I was lost for words but to save any further thought a large dog ambled over to the bikes, sniffed the GSX then relieved himself on the front wheel of the MBX, totally summing up my feelings.

To be fair it wasn't all the bike's fault. On motorways, long stretches of dual carriageway and straight roads its behaviour was only as expected — it wouldn't do much over 60mph, blew all over the road with every strong gust of wind and usually failed, after a fierce battle, to overtake the never ending stream of lorries which insisted on travelling slightly slower than I wanted to go but just too fast for me to get past.

Ridden where it can be appreciated best — either in town or, as a contrast, on twisting country roads it is fairly exciting, great fun and a pleasure to ride. The MBX is ideal in traffic, it's very small, light and an unusual bonus for me was that I could put both feet flat on the ground. It's also very narrow so it's easy to manoeuvre past stationary vehicles — I derived great satisfaction from squeezing through gaps, leaving despatch riders on fat CX500s behind me.

The only disadvantage is the



bike's revvy nature. I was caught out at the first set of traffic lights I came to after leaving Honda's when I pulled away gently in first gear to find the bike dying on me until it reached about 6000rpm, when it charged forward. I soon got the idea though; as long as I made sure the revs were up before letting out the clutch and then kept them at a minimum of 7000 in all gears it would fly along. Obviously masses of gear changes are required in town but the clutch is very light so it's no problem.

Once you get out on to country roads the bike shows its true colours. Faced with its sporty

looks and revvy engine I felt obliged to go everywhere as fast as possible. The MBX handled really well. The Pro-Link monoshock unit is good and the Bridgestone tyres, although narrow, held the road well and felt safe in the wet.

The brakes, however, are incredibly over the top. When I first saw the bike I couldn't believe it — twin discs on an 80cc bike? I had visions of locking up the front wheel every time I attempted to slow down but when I came to use it the front brake was pretty feeble, although the rear drum was OK. Putting twin discs on a bike this light seems ridiculous, especial-

ly when they don't work much better than a drum.

The rest of the MBX is well designed. It certainly looks excellent, from its bikini fairing with tinted screen through black engine to rear cowl which contains the flush fitting back light. The rack on the back is pretty useless since it's only big enough to carry a sandwich box, anything larger and you'd spend the whole time looking round to see if it was still there. There's no centrestand which makes chain tightening a bit awkward. I was surprised by the power of the 12V/36W headlamp since I was expecting the weedy glow thrown out by the 6V lamps

CAN HONDA BUILD AN LC?

The littlest learner from the biggest of the Big Four comes with nearly everything you'd expect from a 750 — including its fuel consumption. Test by Ione Holmes

usually found on small bikes.

The MBX will cruise happily at 70mph with a following wind (the speedo is relatively accurate) but as soon as there's an opposing breeze it drops to 60mph. On the journey to MIRA I could only hold 60 by spending most of the time in fifth of the six gears. That trip resulted in an almost unbelievably low fuel consumption of 48mpg, although it was usually slightly better. Even so, an average of 59mpg is poor for an engine producing less than 10bhp.

Those horses are pushed out by a buzzy watercooled two-stroke mill very similar in most respects to Yamaha's RD80LC motor. The Honda has a slightly larger bore and shorter stroke and an actual capacity of 79.7cc. Both 80s use electronic ignition — well it'd be a shock if they didn't these days — but the MBX doesn't feature a Honda version of Yamaha's Energy Induction System (essentially just a small storage chamber linked to the inlet to smooth out induction pulses).

Yamaha's claim of more power and better fuel economy thanks to a mere plastic box the size of a ciggy packet seemed rather far fetched last year but looking at the MBX80's thirst compared to the RD80LC's (62mpg even when being thrashed by 14-stone R Brown), there may be summat in it.

Instead of going for a trick engine mounting to reduce vibes — the RD80LC has a pivoting rear engine mount and a preset amount of flop allowed in the front mounts — Honda have opted for a balancer shaft on the MBX. Seeing as neither 80 vibrates at all badly it seems you pays your money and takes your choice. On the other hand, the Yamaha system can be a headache for RD250 and 350LC owners who have to cope with regular exhaust gasket replacements as the flopping around breaks 'em up, though we haven't heard of any such problems on the RD80.

It's when you start looking at the rest of the Honda that you begin to realise just how much impact the latest learner legislation has had on a class which used to inhabit a no-man's land between mopeds and sports 125s. Twin discs, 12V electrics

(Continues page 77)



Photography Kel Edge

MBX80



(only 6V on its main rival), rising rate rear suspension, trick wheels — apart from the electrics, it's not so long since you wouldn't have found any of those on 750s let alone something only 30cc up on a moped.

I suspect, however, that it'll be the MBX80's frame which'll tempt L-plate 80 freaks into Big H's welcoming arms. Not because the Honda's tubular cradle is discernibly any better than the Yam's — despite Honda's tongue-in-cheek assertion that the MBX80's trellis is 'full size' — but because it includes pillion pegs whereas the Yam doesn't.

After all, the trad way to celebrate passing part two (apart from burning your L-plates on the nearest police station steps) is to shove a trusting and unsuspecting pal on the back and go for a wobble... er, blast. Unfortunately I soon discovered that pillion pegs and a dualseat do not necessarily make 80s into reasonable two-up transport.

Due to unforeseen circumstances (ie the GSX objecting to standing quarters and self-destructing its clutch at MIRA), the return journey had to be made two-up on the Honda. MBX80 seats are small, narrow and extremely hard and, after 120 miles on the pillion with a rather large person in front, it'd be an understatement, to say parts of me were numb. But however uncomfortable the seat, it certainly didn't deserve the attentions of a vandal who thought it would be fun to slit a large hole in it. At a cost of £66 to replace it was no joke.

Yamaha's RD80LC is currently about £30 cheaper than the Honda but both 80s have similar performance figures. The MBX is let down by its poor fuel consumption so on paper the Yamaha may look the better bike but when it comes to signing the cheque I suppose a choice between them would be made on looks and brand preference.

Honda obviously want learners to see the MBX as more than simply a bike to pass their test on. With its high price of £699, plus fuel consumption you'd expect from something five times its size, their target must be 'enthusiasts' rather than commuters. It's a fun bike that takes a bit of practice to ride well, it's got the performance of most 125s but is much cheaper to insure. If Honda are trying to encourage learners to continue buying Hondas once they move on to bigger bikes, I guess they're going the right way about it with the MBX80.



CHECKOUT

HONDA MBX80

Price (inc taxes)....	£699
Guarantee.....	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine.....	single cyl 2-stroke, watercooled
Bore x stroke.....	49.5 x 41.5mm
Capacity.....	79.7cc
Comp ratio.....	7.3:1
Carburation.....	18mm Keihin
Ignition.....	CDI
Air filter.....	Foam element, re-usable
Oil capacity.....	1.2 litres (2 pints)
Max power	
@ rpm.....	7.16kW (9.6bhp) @ 5750
Max torque	
@ rpm.....	1.2kgm (8.68 ft lb) @ 5500
Clutch.....	Multiplate, wet
Primary drive.....	Gear
Gearbox.....	6-speed
Electrical system....	12V 3AH battery, flywheel magneto, 36/36W headlamp

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Bridgestone Mag Mopus
Front.....	2.75 x 18in
Rear.....	3.00 x 18in
Brakes.....	
Front.....	twin disc
Rear.....	110mm (4.3in) sls drum
Suspension.....	
Front.....	telescopic
Rear.....	Pro-Link

SPARE PARTS PRICES (INC VAT)

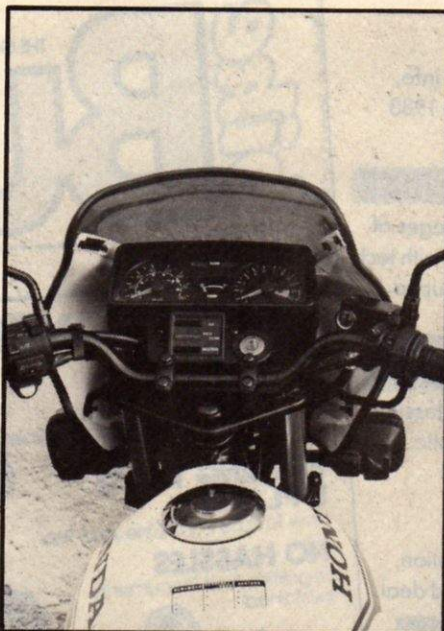
Air filter.....	£1.15
Head gasket.....	£3.32
Front mudguard....	£26.62
Front indicator	
and stem.....	£8.77
Brake cylinder and	
master cylinder	£76.36
One side panel....	£16.61

DIMENSIONS

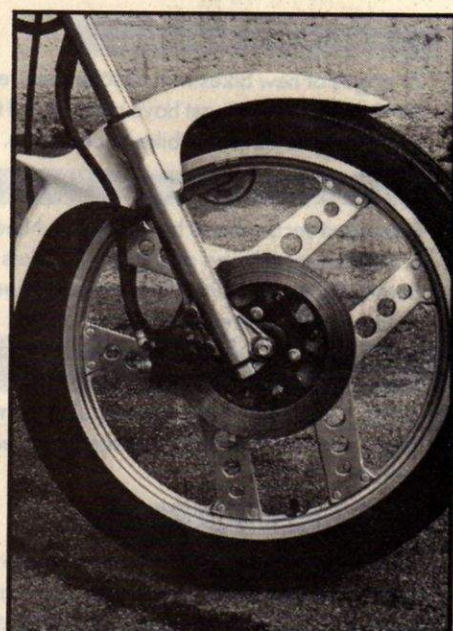
Wheelbase.....	1250mm (49.21in)
Overall width.....	675mm (26.6in)
Seat height.....	785mm (30.91in)
Weight	
(inc 1 gal fuel) ..	102kg (225lb)
Fuel capacity.....	13.2 litres (2.9 gal)

PERFORMANCE

Top Speed	
Prone.....	64.63mph
Sitting-up.....	62.08mph
Standing ¼-mile...	20.99sec/58.43mph
Speeds in gears	
@ redline.....	(1) 19.96, (2) 30.26, (3) 40.56, (4) 51.02, (5) 60.70, (6) 69.10
Fuel consumption	
Overall.....	4.8 litres/100km (59mpg)
Ridden hard....	5.8 litres/100km (49mpg)
Speedo accuracy	
At indicated	
30mph.....	26.81mph
At indicated	
50mph.....	47.44mph
Supplied by.....	Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4



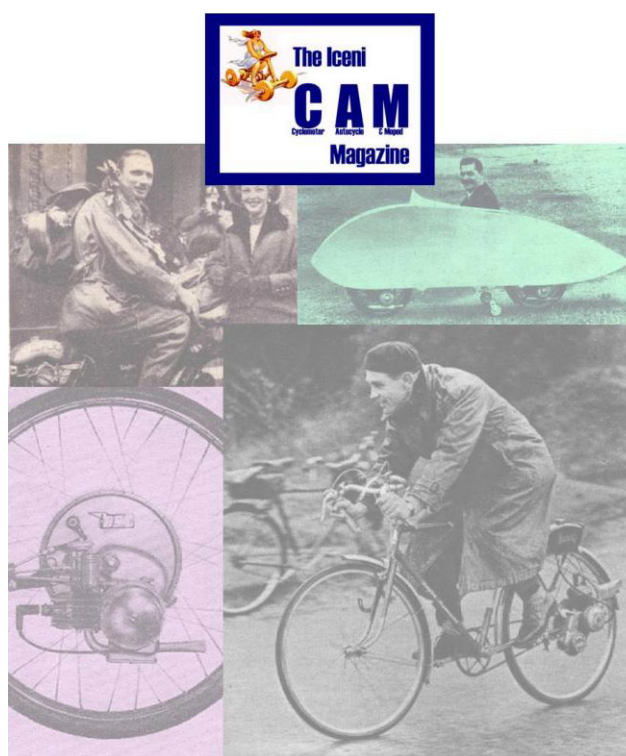
Just like a big bike — tachometer, master cylinder temperature gauge and all the fittings



No, we don't know why it's got twin discs either, or the aerofoil mudguard



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