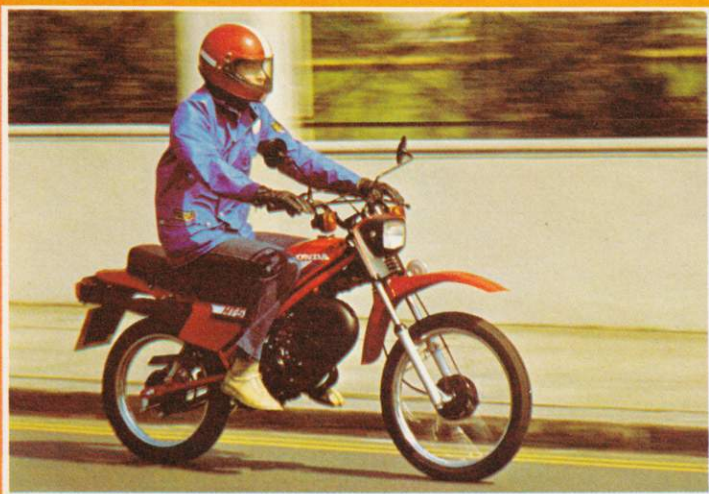


Small TALK



HONDA's new MT50 may well be the best value-for-money sports moped to be launched in Britain in 1980. With a totally new engine and an excellent styling job, the MT50 costs just £389 (including VAT). Other manufacturers will find it very difficult to compete and offer as much bike for so little cash.

When the Government's 30 miles-per-hour limit for mopeds was introduced, some cheap-skate moped makers simply modified existing engines to down-grade their performance. As one would expect of the world's largest motorcycle manufacturer, Honda set out to produce an engine which was designed to work best at this speed and also provide an impressive rate of acceleration.

The result is the motor in the MT50, which is also fitted to the very similar road sports moped from Honda, the MB50. A tiny carburettor with a manually-operated choke is matched to a specially-designed exhaust system. If either is modified from standard, performance suffers. The matt-black engine features a new bell-shaped combustion chamber in the well-finned cylinder head which is claimed to increase efficiency. Fuel consumption is about 100mpg and an oil pump controls the automatic supply of two-stroke oil at a 50:1 ratio.

Honda claims that the new lubrication system provides exactly the right amount of oil at any throttle opening. Certainly, the test machine we had ran very cleanly and hardly smoked at all

when warm. It also started first kick from cold or after a run.

Technically, the most interesting aspect of the new engine is the incorporation of a balance shaft behind, and turning in the opposite direction to, the crankshaft, making the motor very smooth at most speeds. In fairness to other manufacturers though, it is hard to say that the Honda is smoother than many conventional two-stroke rivals.

Despite the meagre 2½hp output, the 196lb (88.2kg) MT is no slowcoach if the five-speed gearbox is used to the full. With deft footwork the Honda quickly reaches its top speed, an indicated 35mph. Downhill the speed creeps up slightly but, more importantly, the engine willingly pulls up hills and into strong headwinds with hardly any loss of speed. It is remarkable that such a small engine is apparently completely unaf-

fected by hard work or weight.

Even with a passenger on board the engine would, incredibly, still respond as if there was no increased load. For a 16-year-old who is keen to pass the test as early as possible, this is an important advantage.

Without sacrificing the unusual trail styling of the MT50, Honda has provided a seat which is comfortable, even two up. Five-way adjustable rear shocks provide a smooth ride on good road surfaces. The drum brakes cope easily with stopping from all speeds, even with the additional weight of a passenger. Brake 'feel' is excellently responsive. This allows emergency stops to be made safely.

After such an impressive performance on-road it is disappointing to find that the trail styling is really just a cosmetic facade. The MT copes fairly well on easy off-road sections but the handling leaves something to be desired if rugged terrain is tackled. The laid-down rear suspension units should help but, in actual fact, they are too soft on the rough, even on the hardest setting. The front forks contribute to the feeling of uneasiness and give the impression that they are just not man enough for the job.

But for green lane riding where the going is not too hard the MT50 would probably be satisfactory and the fact that it is a very quiet runner would be an added benefit.

This point is almost irrelevant as more and more mopeds nowadays are sold for their looks rather than their suitability for a particular type of riding. Even

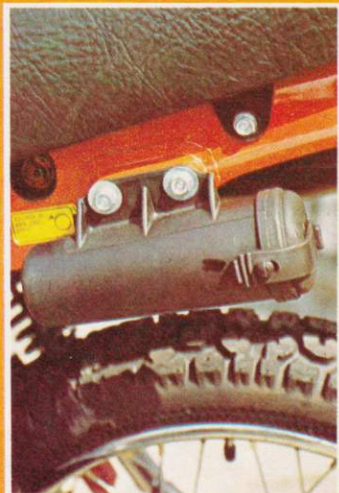
pukka competition machines often find their way onto the road. The MT50 is definitely a good looker, although it is arguable that not everyone will like its futuristic styling. Red or white paintwork is available.

Attention to detail on the Honda is superb. A good (for a moped) toolkit is provided in a neat holder mounted on the rear mudguard. A helmet lock is nearby as is the oil level sight glass, an easy indication of when it's time for a fill up. The oil tank filler cap is cunningly located just to the rear of the saddle, leaving the front space clear for the 1½ gallon petrol tank.

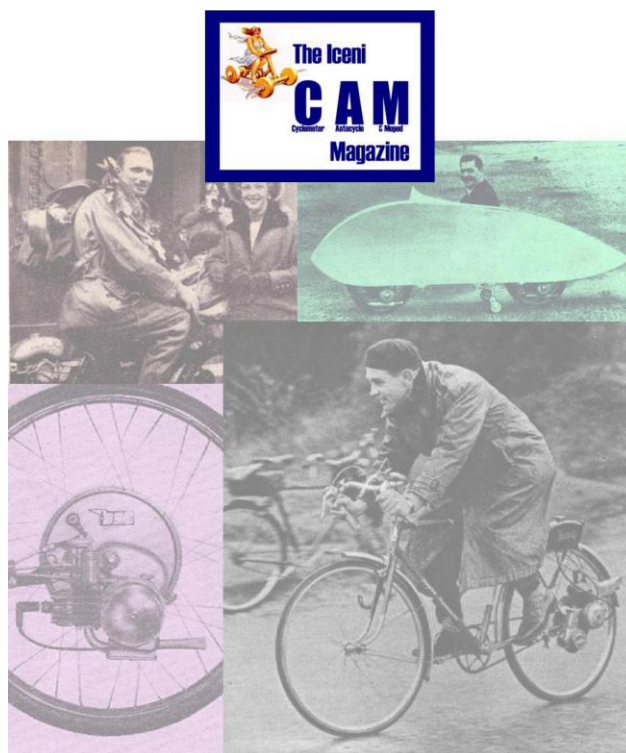
The handlebar layout is good with all the controls for lights, horn and indicators on the left hand side. The lighting is excellent and features a stop lamp operated by both the front and back brake. The horn is reasonably loud and a vast improvement over those normally fitted to mopeds. Criticism can be levelled at Honda for the indicator switch which is very difficult to centre in the 'off' position although the indicators are thankfully bright enough to be of value. A green neutral indicator light and a turn signal light are provided on the ignition switch console next to the speedo.

Everything considered, the Honda MT50 must rate as a good choice for a 16-year-old who wants big bike styling and good performance, albeit up to 35 miles-per-hour!

The MT50 certainly provides more than most of its current competitors. With some dealers offering it for as little as £350, it's a bargain at the price.



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