



# HAWK

GT

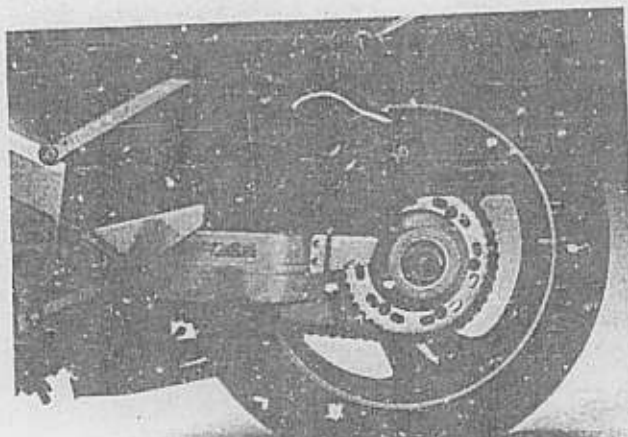
IF YOU BUY THE LINE OF THOUGHT that says bikes from Europe have character and soul, and bikes from Japan do not, Honda's 650 Hawk GT is poised to blow a small hole in your theory. As polished as any other Japanese motorcycle, the Hawk managed to maintain the edges of its personality even as it passed through the tumbling drum of Honda's development process.

Introduced in 1988 and left essentially unchanged through 1990, the Hawk

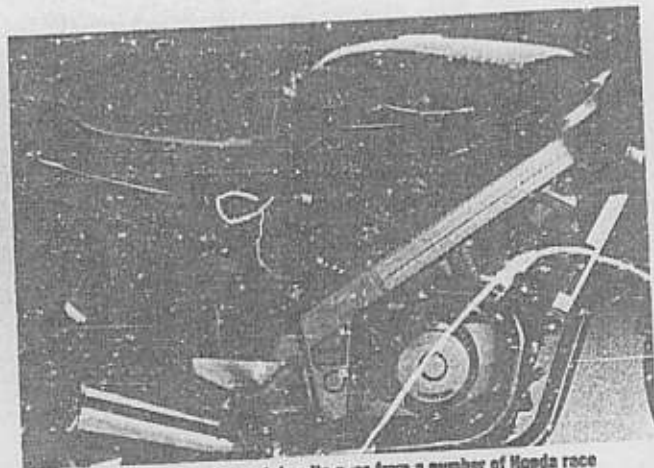
owes much to the small team of enthusiastic engineers who shepherded it through Honda R&D, intent on keeping it a motorcycle they could claim—a simple, mechanically honest V-twin in sporting standard guise. With its fairly upright seating position, and light, quick handling, the Hawk rewards its rider in town as well as on racer road.

But by reaching out to appeal to a broad range of riders, the all-purpose Hawk takes a different approach than

*Unchanged in its third year of production,  
Honda's Universal Backroad Sleeper still blends  
European character with Japanese polish.*



The Hawk's EM-derived, light and rigid single-sided swing arm carries all necessary rear hardware, making for positive rear wheel alignment and quick wheel removal. The rear axle rides in an eccentric chain adjuster.



This twin-spar aluminum frame takes its cues from a number of Honda race machines, and has more than enough strength to deal with the Hawk's smooth but underachieving 647cc twin.

that of most Euro-sports. Ducati's 750 Sport, for example, tested elsewhere in this issue, is a demandingly focused machine, one that requires a substantial investment in money, effort, and maintenance in return for speed. The Hawk simply asks for less of each.

It does, however, share a vital element: broad, accessible power. Like the Ducati, the Hawk is not a wheel-lifting, fire-breathing monster: Its 647cc V-twin brings its modest goods in early, emphasizing low-end snap and allowing the rider to make haste with broad-ranging torque and momentum. A smooth rider can glide the Hawk along a classic arcing line, making use of its outstanding cornering clearance. More aggressive riders can tap the Hawk's impressive agility, snapping hard into turns with an ease few Euro-twins—and not even many Japanese sport bikes—can match.

Hinging from an aluminum twin-beam frame, the Hawk's motive unit traces its heritage back to Honda's 52-degree, three-valve-per-cylinder twin introduced on the 1982 Shadow 500, and that also powered the VT500 Ascot. The small V-engine uses crankpins offset 76 degrees to eliminate primary imbalance, and while its displacement may have grown, the heart-shaped, three-valve (two intake, one exhaust) combustion chambers remain, as do the Ascot-spec pair of 34mm Keihin carbs. A digital ignition controls the fire in the dual-plug heads, while liquid-cooling keeps the engine running in the temperate zone and helps suppress noise.

This engine, completely exposed by the Hawk's lack of bodywork, runs as slickly

Blow a downshift  
and the bike shrugs it  
off, chugging out  
of turns anywhere  
from 4500 to  
7500 rpm with  
enough authority to  
maintain impressive  
momentum.

as its streamlined, finless appearance suggests. Up to 6000 rpm, the Hawk is so vibrationless and quiet that it almost disappears beneath you. Here, the Hawk differs greatly from the Ducati Sport: You feel and hear things mechanical taking place under the Sport's gas tank, but on the Hawk you just hear the air rushing by. While the Hawk suggests the small-caliber snap of a Colt M-16 fired by a draftee, the Ducati's engine is a crackling Kalashnikov in the hands of a Believer.

The Hawk's more polished approach has its advantages. The slick-shifting five-speed gearbox and light clutch make the Hawk easy to ride around town. On cold mornings, its engine wakes up quickly, and once warm it delivers crisp throttle

