

# HONDA'S VF1000's

## HONDA VF1000R

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- ☐ 4 x 36 mm CV type carburettors. ☐ Maximum Horsepower output 122 ps at 10,500 rpm (DIN).
- ☐ Maximum Torque 9.4 kg-m @ 8,000 rpm (DIN). ☐ Transistorised pointless ignition with electronic advance. ☐ NS type aluminium spoke wheels. Radial rear tyre on 17" wheel.
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## Michael Cole tests Honda's VF1000F

Honda's V-fours have captured the imagination of those whose interests lie with road racing. The 750 has shown enough cornering clearance, mid-range grunt, top-end whack and quick steering to make it almost unbeatable in the hands of top proddy jockeys. The VF1000F is the newest and biggest so far — so is bigger better? Mick Cole, one of Australia's most respected road racers, retired from competition at the end of last year and has now joined AMCN's road test staff. He opens his score with an analysis of Honda's 1984 big-bore...

Before getting into exactly how the bike behaves on the road (which is, after all, what road tests are all about), it is worth taking a look at the changes which moved the VF750 into the one litre class. Similar as the two bikes look (VF750 and VF1000), the litre bike is much more than a bored 750.

The family resemblance is immediate and goes fairly deep; in riding the bike through Melbourne streets some weeks before it's availability to the public, the bike hardly drew a glance — victim of its subdued black, grey and silver paint and the only subtle differences in appearance. But the cosmetics are different. The fairing runs further back into the tank and hangs lower at the front of the frame. Standing there, the bike looks bigger all around, though it is difficult to pin down just where the increases in size have been made.

In the end however, it is the motor which sets the VF1000 apart — a 998cc, liquid cooled V-four pumping out some 118bhp at the crankshaft. That's one hell of a lot.

From the 750's 70mm bore and 48.6mm stroke, Honda has extended the capacity by stretching the dimensions out to 77mm by 53.6mm. In spite of the larger pistons and longer stroke, redline has been left at 10,500rpm — enough for a theoretical top speed around 260kmh.

Compression too is unaltered, running at 10.5:1. Most of the other engine changes are minor ones associated with the increase in engine size. Gear ratios for instance, have been raised to fully accommodate the increased power.

**Left: Mick Cole and Honda VF1000F — more grunt than you can poke several sticks at. Turn the throttle and things happen, fast!**



**Above: what does Graeme Crosby have in common with AMCN? We both chose Mick Cole as a rider.**

Radiator coolant is now routed through the removable frame member, running from the left foot up to a junction hose beside the radiator. This move also helps keep weight down to a commendable 233kg — the 750 weighed in at 218kg.

It would be a mistake however, to assume that Honda has gone for pure top end horsepower. As with the 750, it is probably the hefty mid-range grunt which impresses the most. Bob Maron rode the 1000 briefly and, in spite of having just crawled off BMW's K100RS which itself is noted for low down power, was hugely impressed by the broad spread of stump-pulling, slogging power inside the VF's cases.

As might be expected, the general layout of the bike is much the same as that of the VF750 but the view from the rider's seat is a little different. The tank capacity has been boosted to 23 litres — only one litre larger than the 750's, but that, and having the fairing run into the sides of the tank, make it look bulkier.



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## Road Test

## Honda VF1000F

Although the appearance seems virtually unchanged, the engine also sits lower in the frame and has a stronger upper case half. The larger radiator is an aluminium job which also helps keep weight to a minimum. Incidentally, the second radiator is now housed inside the fairing nose below and behind the headlight instead of inside the little belly fairing. This should help protect it from stone damage.

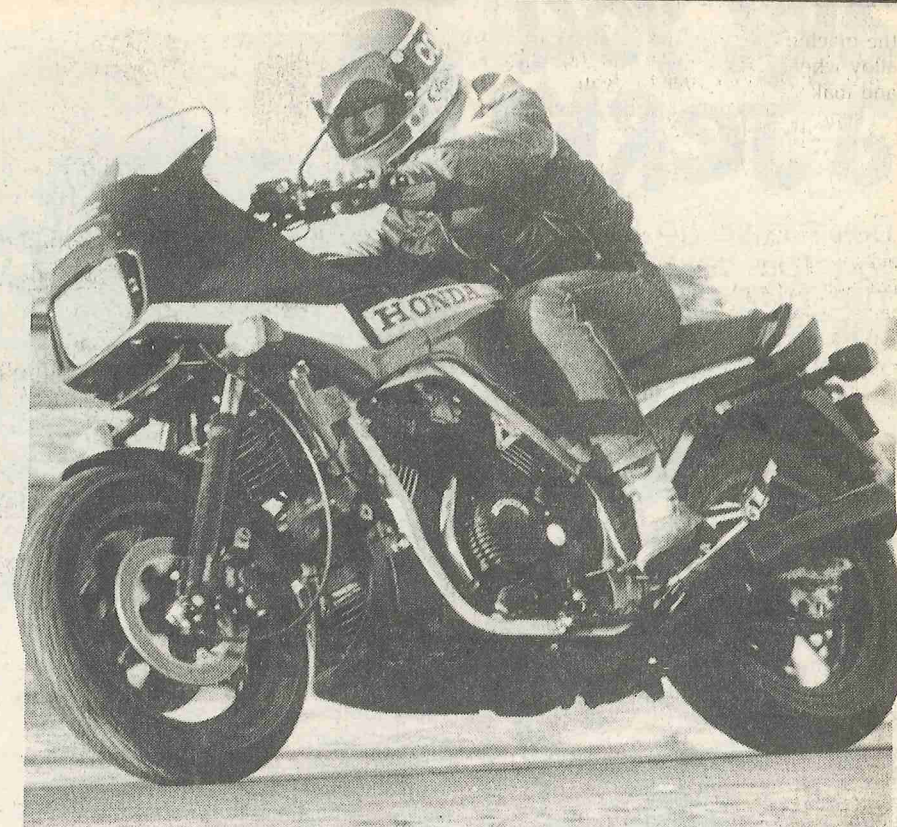
Part of the reason for the almost unchanged external appearance of the engine in spite of a 7mm larger bore, can be traced to a change in cylinder cooling — the VF750 had dry liners but, presumably rather than increasing the bulk of the casting for the 1000 too much, Honda has employed wet liners (which should also theoretically improve heat transfer).

Naturally, valve sizes are up and the camshafts deliver slightly more lift and duration — a large contributor to the immense mid-range punch.

The final engine change we could trace was that the clutch, though similar to the 'limited slip' type used for the 750, has been substantially beefed up with the addition of four extra plates. You might remember AMCN blew the 750's clutch under the admittedly extreme conditions of drag testing, but fear not — the hook-up on the 1000 feels almost bullet-proof and we don't foresee any problems.

Even a casual look at the bike will tell you the two frames are similar. Both use rectangular section steel tubing in roughly the same layout and painted silver for the 'alloy look'. In fact, the overall dimensions are pretty much the same too, and wheelbase has only been extended 10mm from 1495mm to 1505mm. Steering angle has been decreased by a tiny 0.16 degrees but trail has been increased 2mm. No wonder the same basic handling characteristics are apparent.

While the front wheel carries a tyre of the same dimensions as the 750, the 750's 18" rear wheel has been replaced by a 17" with a wider 140/80 tyre. The



Above: high speed sweepers can induce wallowing, especially if the ground is undulating — further suspension fiddling (different oils) might help cure this.

Pro-Link set-up has been attended to with a few minor changes to the linkages (as well as the use of a remote damping adjuster) and fork diameter has been boosted from the 750's 39mm to 41mm. TRAC anti-dive adjustment has also been made easier because now, instead of needing a screwdriver for a dial set into the side of the fork leg, you can switch from any of four settings with a knurled knob on the left fork leg. A knob on top of the right leg controls rebound damping and the two legs are linked via a fork brace.

The brakes are also different — as with the CBX750 Bob Maron tested last issue, the Nissin twin-spot calipers are now

rough cast and operate a polished alloy activator for the anti-dive. In use, these seem to be about on a par with those of the VF750 — in other words, good. The anti-dive itself though, is in reality quite a mild one and doesn't exert excessive control over the bike.

Understandably, I was greatly looking forward to riding the VF1000 after having raced the 750 in the '83 Six Hour, so as soon as I took delivery I grabbed helmet and gloves and went for a blast. The bike hadn't been set up at all as far as handling and suspension are concerned so I was keen to get a feel for the bike and begin adjusting it to suit myself.

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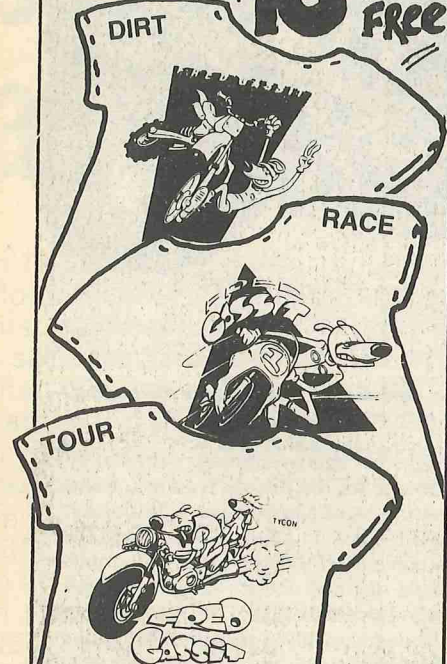
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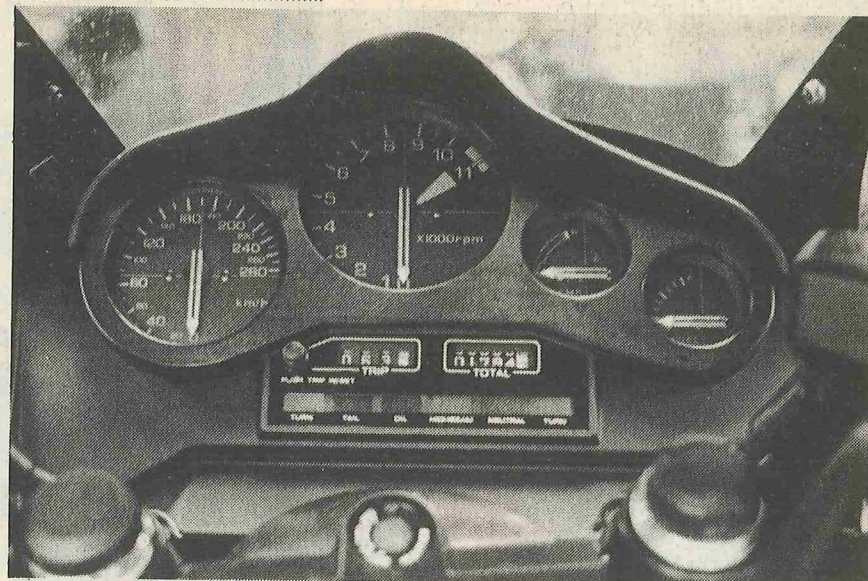
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## Road Test



It was late evening and quite dark, so the first thing I noticed was that the instrument lighting was rather severe. The glare from the high beam warning was particularly bad and anyone considering long trips at night will be tempted to tone down even the background lighting in the dials. I know it's another gizmo (and we've got enough of those already!), but in order to offer good visibility of the idiot lights in sunlight while not blinding you at night, it might be an idea to include some kind of dimmer switch. The dial lighting is just too bright and should be more subdued straight out.

Instrument location and layout is rather strange too. The tach is the largest and is placed right in the centre — great for the race track, but shouldn't the speedo take pride of place on the road? Closer examination shows up another questionable aspect; speedo calibration is such that numbers are given only every 20kmh, alternating between large figures and small ones as speed increases. The small ones unfortunately include both 60kmh and 100kmh which, because they are so low on the scale anyway (100kmh is at 9.30 on the dial) would be difficult to see even in larger numbering. Incidentally, the speedo reads to 280kmh — any bike calibrated that high is either a joke or worthy of a great deal of respect. The VF1000 is no joke.

One other thing I noticed was that (again as on the CBX750 which has the same system) the indicator switch can be difficult to use properly with heavy gloves. Indicating a left turn often had me inadvertently cancelling at the same time because it takes very little pressure to push the button inwards.

Other than that, the controls are excellent and all come to hand (or foot) easily. The seating position is good,

Above: VF1000F instrumentation lacks some clarity because the speedo has both 60 and 100kmh in smaller numbering. Fuel gauge was excellent but general lighting was perhaps too harsh for night work.

Right: the machine looks bulkier than the 750, but still steers lightly for a 1000 class muscle bike.

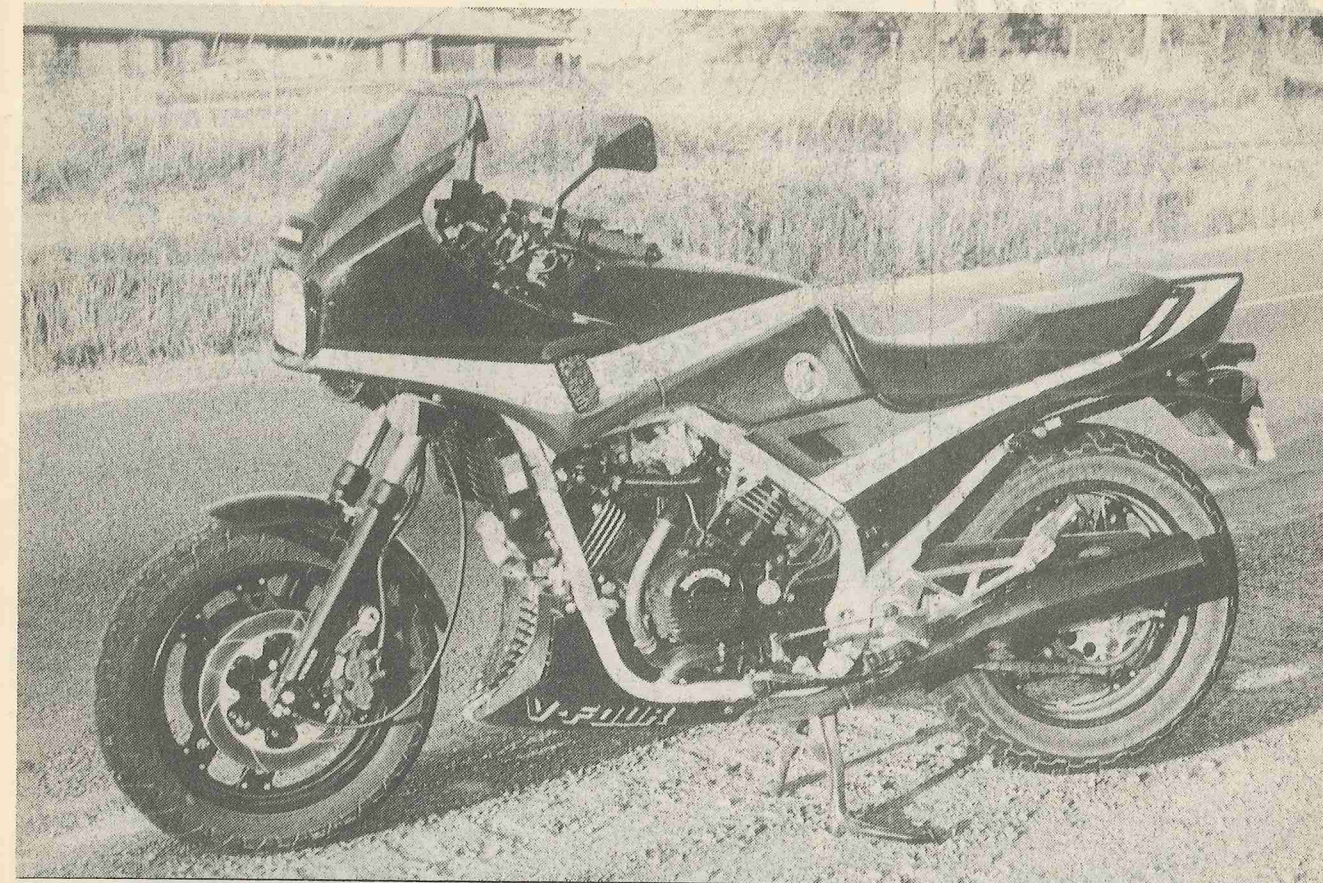
...any bike calibrated that high is either a joke or worthy of a great deal of respect. The VF1000 is no joke...

holding the rider fairly upright but putting some weight on the handlebars and keeping the feet tucked back a little for high speed work.

To start the bike, I simply employed usual Honda starting procedure: flip the choke full on, no throttle, press the button. First time every time. Although warm-up is always advisable, this bike, like the 750, is tractable immediately and exhibits none of the lean mixture characteristics of transverse fours these days.

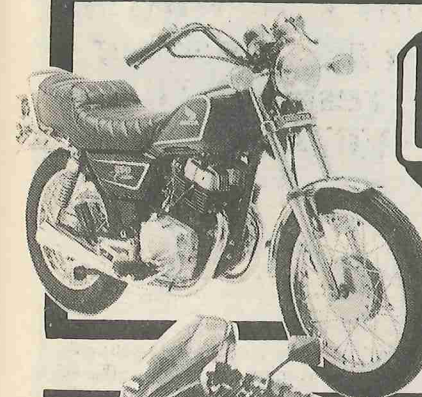
Riding off requires almost no throttle — the bike idles at about 1500rpm and begins to pull smoothly and strongly from 2000. Gas it in first and you run the risk of aviating the front tyre just like that!

## Honda VF1000F



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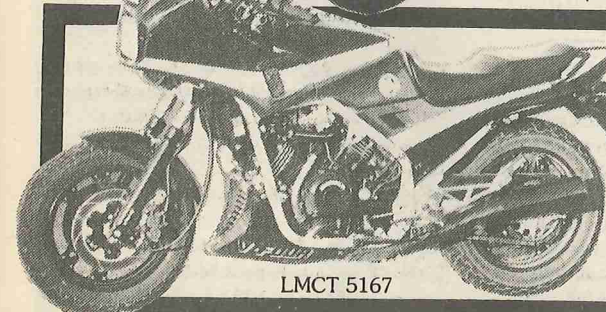


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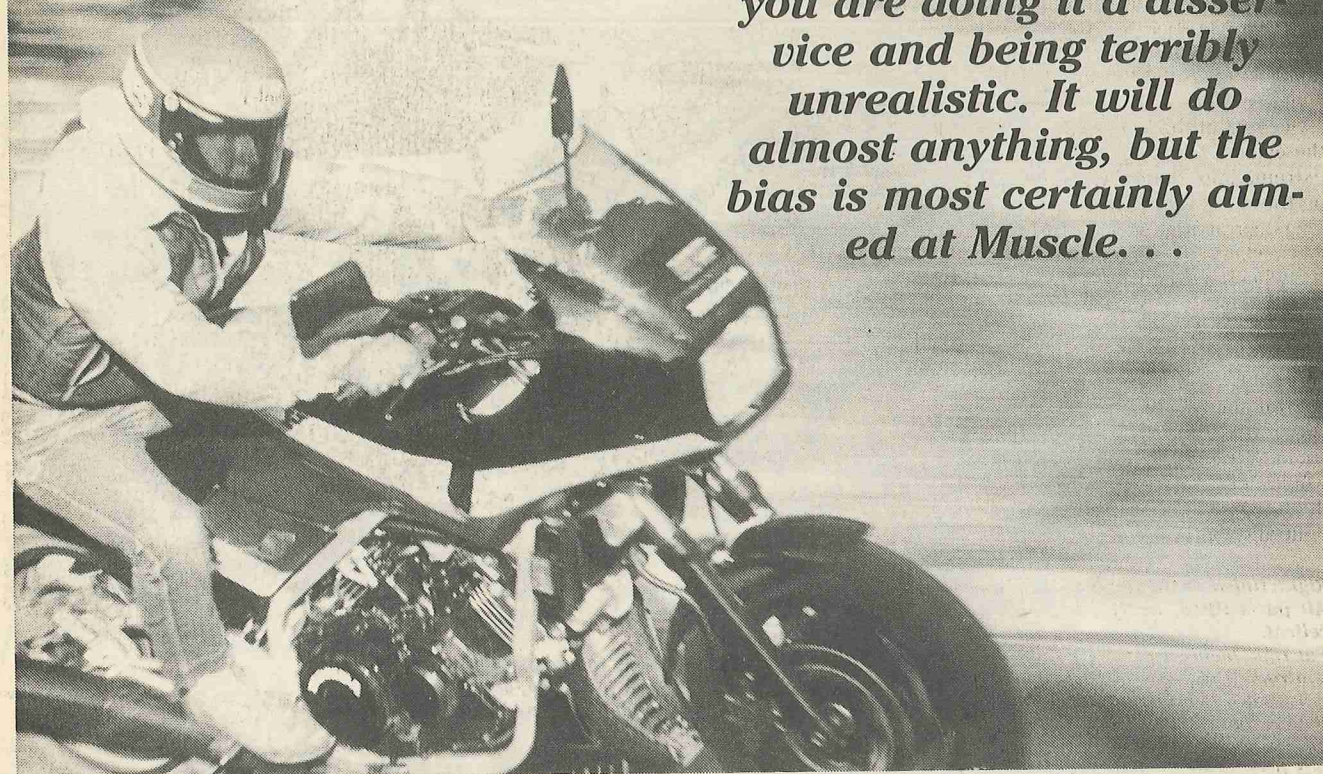


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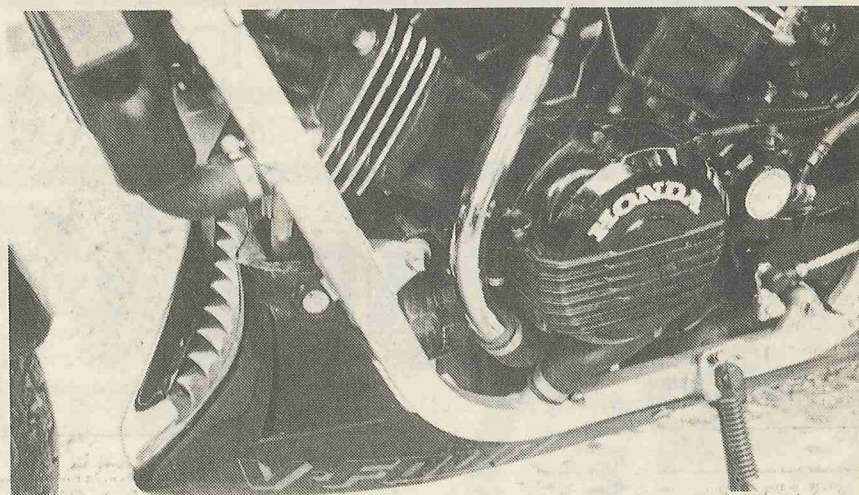




*...if you view it as a general purpose machine you are doing it a disservice and being terribly unrealistic. It will do almost anything, but the bias is most certainly aimed at Muscle...*

As delivered, wheel alignment was poor, there was no air in the suspension and the damping was on minimum — as expected the handling was shocking. Before checking any of these things I thought, 'here's a 1984 version of Kawasaki's Mach IV,' but fiddle with the knobs a bit and the picture changes dramatically. The bike has heaps of potential. With the wheels string-lined (difficult because the main stand gets in the way), the front damping set to 3 (hardest), 7psi in the forks (recommended is 6psi), rear damping on full (3 again) and shock pressure up to 40psi (maximum is 43psi) the handling improved substantially.

Any softer than these settings and the bike shakes its head and wallows quite badly through undulating turns, but on those settings a rider of my weight (about 73kg) will find it feels far more secure and he can actually feel what the tyres are doing. It still wallows a little at high speed, particularly in corners and over undulating ground but much of the 'sponginess' disappears. I would like to have been able to change the fork oil for say, 10wt and perhaps look at doing something similar at the rear but, even as it was, the bike was beginning to feel too hard for comfort on the street. In the end, you have to choose between setting everything soft for comfort's sake, and having it set rather hard so you can feel



*Above: the second radiator has been relocated from the belly fairing and placed below the headlight while the left frame down-tube now doubles as a coolant hose.*

what the bike's doing. As the bike was finally set up, it's handling was much better and you could concentrate on other aspects. Like the tyres — the front seems quite good, although after less than 2000km it was showing signs of feathering at the edges. The rear tyre was surprisingly soft, even for the street, and one blast through your favourite piece of road will have it cooked and beginning to slide dramatically. I can't see many riders

getting more than 2500km from a tyre because the bike positively begs to be ridden hard and has so much torque that what feels like gentle riding will rip shreds from rubber like this.

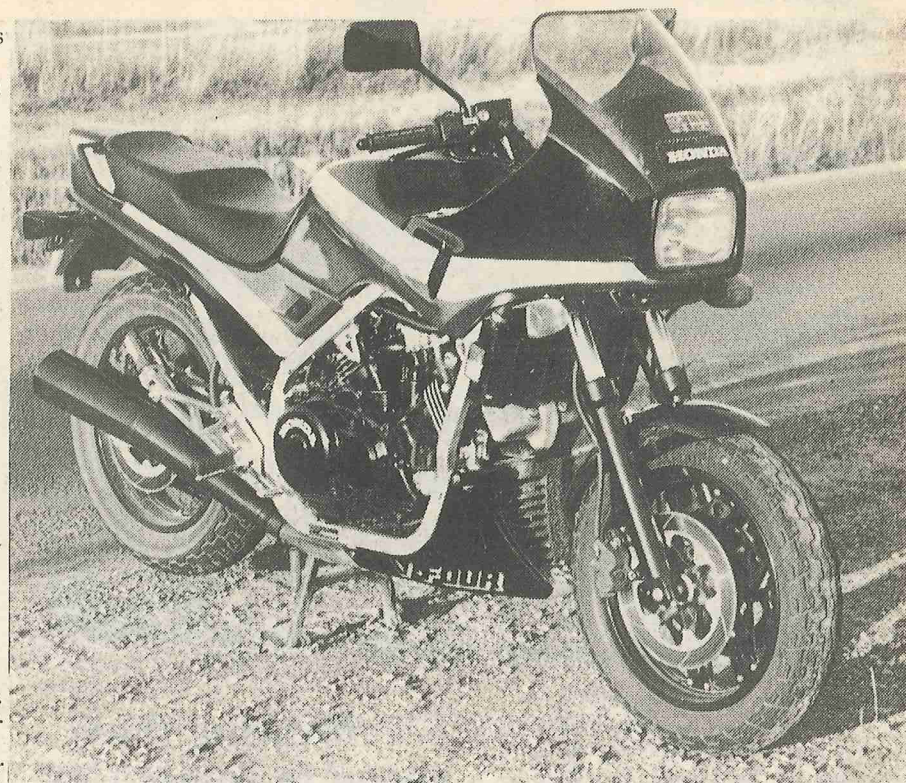
It's all very well to say the bike should be ridden with more self control, but if a bike such as this is to be ridden at moderate speeds, why the hell does it have unlimited horsepower? It's a speed freak bike for sure, one that will either kill you or turn you into a racer. You definitely need to increase your reflexes and whole awareness of the road by several orders of magnitude. Everything happens so fast.

Okay, it's possible to sit on legal speeds — the engine is smooth and strong enough down low that 100kmh and even 60kmh cruising is comfortable, but with that much horsepower one has continually to keep checking his speed and rolling off the throttle. 60kmh in top gear sees only 2500rpm on the tach.

Because of the 'superman' nature of the engine, handling and brakes take on extreme importance. With the bike set up the way I had it, it tended to oversteer at slow speeds with the front end tucking in. Some of this is just that the wheel takes far less pressure to turn than I'm used to, but I feel the comparatively triangular section of the front tyre is a contributing factor. At about 80kmh the steering becomes more neutral and, with your backside just cocked off one side of the seat, you could let go of the bars and the bike would hold its line beautifully. In fact, the faster you go the better the steering neutrality becomes.

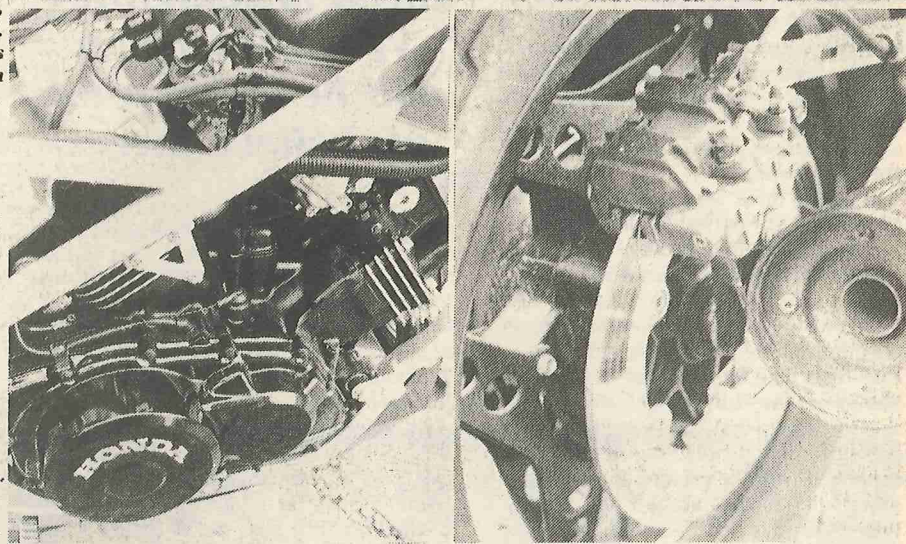
*Right: finish on the test bike was first class. All parts fitted neatly and paint was excellent.*

*Far right below: rear brake drew praise for controllability. Front units were also good, but needed heavier pressure at high speed. Below right: the upper crankcase half is heavier than that of the 750 and the clutch has been beefed up with four more plates.*



The only problem here is that, at high speed, the bike begins to wallow and weave a little. It's not a real 'hinger', but it isn't perfect. As I said earlier, stiffening the suspension all round improves this but never eradicates it entirely.

Not that you'll feel the need to use the gearbox often, but in this case Honda has done an excellent job. Up-shifts are smooth and effortless, aided by a light clutch whose action is progressive and predictable. Shifting down is also good — the 'limited slip' device does its job well and no rear end hopping was apparent, partially because the back brake is subdued enough to be easily controllable.



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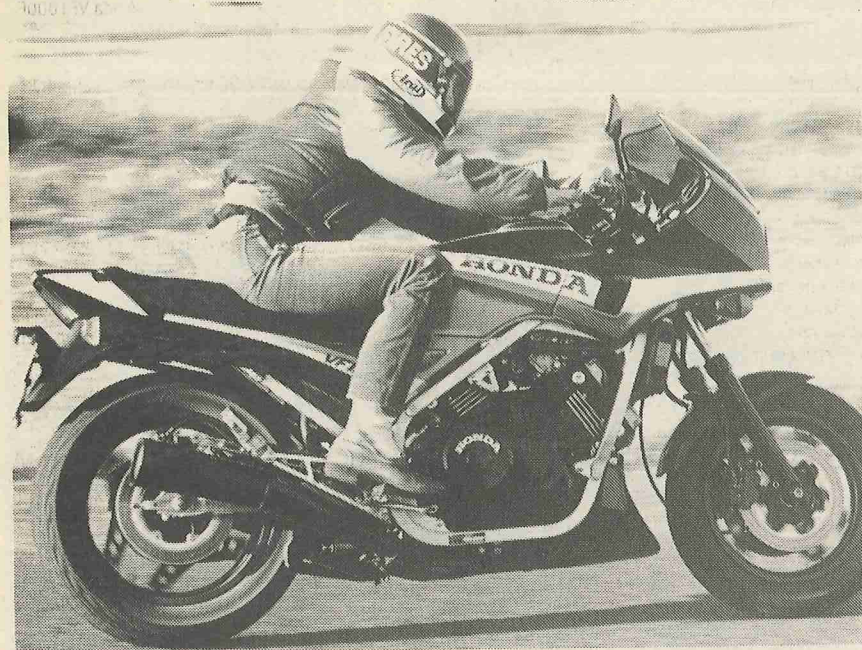
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Braking from speed is something VF1000 owners will be doing a lot of, believe me. In these conditions the hand lever needs a fair amount of pressure but power is adequate and at low speeds the brakes are great. There is no tendency to fade (at least on the street) and feedback to the rider is exceptional. Stability with the anchors out is also good, but there is a slight tendency to wander when on uneven ground.

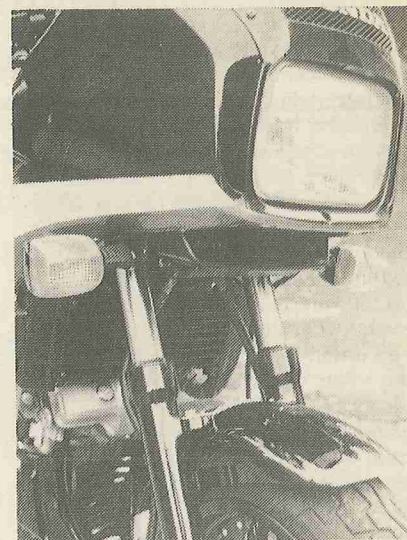
In tighter turns where the bike is over a long way, it's noticeable that clearance isn't as good as little brother 750. The collector pipes on both sides will grind when you're pressing along but you have to be moving. Swinging the bike through flip-flops and tight esses is surprisingly easy for a bike this size, but obviously, because of the extra weight, it's not quite as effortless as the 750. If anything, the extra bulk has steadied the steering and combined with the greater contact patch offset when turning (same front tyre, wider rear) this has made the bike more

**...braking from speed is something VF1000 owners will be doing a lot of, believe me...**

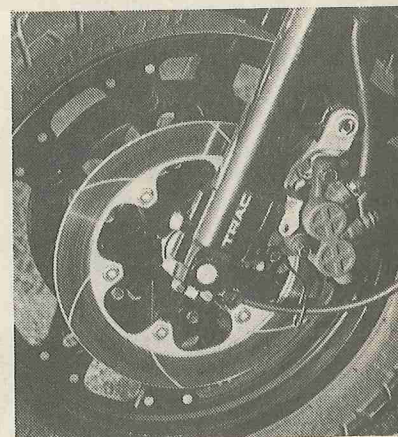
'deliberate' and taken out some of the ultra-sensitivity of the 750.

In the final analysis, the bike was built to go fast — much faster than is legal. One can't help feeling that the bike isn't at all at home unless it's doing 100 to 120kmh around town and double that on the open road.

Although the F model is supposedly the 'cooking' version of the 1000-four, it can't really be looked upon like that. The VF1000R may be the full sportster, but the F is no hack bike and in reality is



Above: the upper radiator is housed inside the fairing, below and behind the headlight and fed cool air through three scoops — one either side of the light and one below. Below: Nissin brake calipers do a good job and proved virtually unaffected by rain. Anti-dive activator has the 'works' look, as do the rough caliper castings.



almost as exotic as its more expensive stablemate. If you view it as a general purpose machine you are doing it a disservice and being terribly unrealistic. It will do almost anything, but the bias is most certainly aimed at Muscle. As far as I can figure, the F fits into the marketplace at about the level of the first CB1100R (though it will eat one of those) — the VF1000R must be another step higher again!

In the long term, one has to look at the serviceability of such a bike — here the VF doesn't come out looking so good. With service costs as high as they are, how much will it cost to have valve clearance checked when it takes almost ten minutes just to pull a rear sparkplug? Because of the difficulty in getting at the heads, most riders will automatically take the bike to a dealer. Maintenance and service may not be required terribly often, but when they are, it's going to cost.

In other words, when weighing up the pros and cons of owning a VF1000F, you must decide what you want. The heart may say 'buy', but the head and back pocket will voice strong objections. If you are an experienced rider you will love this bike, there's no doubt about it, and fortunately (if what Honda tells us is right) your new machine won't be outdated as soon as it rolls off the showroom floor. If this bike does have a model life of several years as we've been promised, that at least is one worry removed.

I don't yet know how Kawasaki's GPz900R, Yamaha's FJ1100 or Suzuki's GSX1100EF will perform, but on the VF's performance alone, any challenger to the position of Meanest Roadster will have to be mind-blowing in the extreme.

— Mick Cole

## Honda VF1000F

Make and model ..... Honda VF1000F

### ENGINE

Engine type	DOHC liquid cooled, 16-valve, 90 degree V-four, four-stroke
Bore x stroke	77mm x 53.6mm
Displacement	998cc
Compression ratio	10.5:1
Induction	4 x 36mm CV
Starting	electric only
Gears	five speed constant mesh
Clutch	wet, multi-plate ('one-way')
Lubrication	wet sump, forced
Primary Drive	gear
Final Drive	chain
Redline revs	10,500rpm
Fuel tank capacity	23lt

### CHASSIS AND RUNNING GEAR

Frame type	wide line conventional dual loop cradle of rectangular section steel tubing throughout
Front suspension	oil damped, coil sprung 41mm forks with air assistance, 3-way adjustable rebound damping (one leg only) and fork brace
Rear suspension	'Pro-Link' single spring/damper unit with remote 3-way rebound damping and air assist on rectangular section alloy swingarm
Front wheel	16" Comstar
Rear wheel	17" Comstar
Front tyre	120/80 V16
Rear tyre	140/80 V17
Front brakes	twin discs, 2 x 2-spot calipers
Rear brakes	single disc, 2-spot caliper

### DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase	1505mm
Fork rake	28 degrees
Trail	98mm
Seat height	820mm
Static ground clearance	145mm
Weight (claimed dry)	233kg
Engine oil capacity	3.5lt
Headlight type	1 x 55/60w

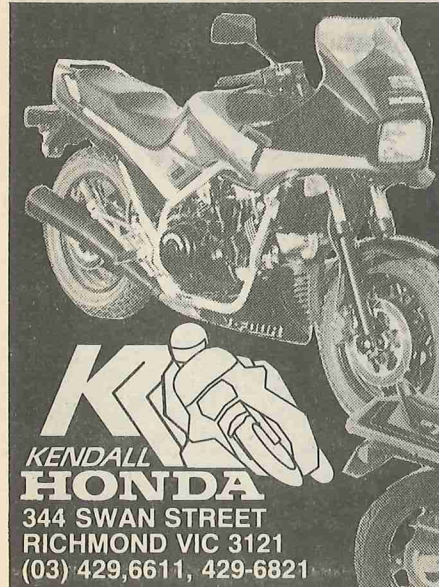
### PERFORMANCE

Engine oil consumption	negligible
RPM at 100 kmh in top gear	4200rpm (indic)
Maximum power (claimed)	116PS at 10,000rpm
Maximum torque (claimed)	9.3kg-m at 8,000rpm

Test bike supplied by	Honda Australia
Price as tested	\$4999
Tested by	Mick Cole

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