

RUBBER FOR CLASSICS

Tyre test and fitting guide



TRIBSA TAKES OFF

...after 48-hour shed-a-thon



BIRMINGHAM TO BOGOTA

Old Nortons across South America



Classic Bike

592

BIKES FOR SALE INSIDE

Lots more than any other classic magazine

OTHER BIKES IN THIS ISSUE

- Yamaha 250
- AJS 650 twin
- Morini Camel
- Royal Enfield 500
- Kawasaki 500
- Moto Guzzi V8
- Norton & Ducati race bikes

Why I had to buy a Honda

400 FOUR

by James May

Plus

Fixing rattles and finding parts for Britain's favourite Japanese classic



HONDA
SUPER SPORT



Sold, to the man who blinked

Buying at auction without paying over the odds

PAUL SMART'S 1972 TOUR

Winning for Kawasaki, Ducati & Triumph on three continents

UK £3.90 USA \$9.99

APRIL 2012



9 770142 890197

J A M E S M A

Why I had

You meet the nicest people on an old Honda
Four – the bike that, arguably, turned Brit

Words: James May Photography: Rory Game



to have one

Honda, especially if you're riding a 400
British motorcyclists onto Japanese thinking



He won't be aware of this, but I happen to know, through a mutual friend, that editor Wilson once dismissed Honda's 400 Four as, "feeble".

He rockets past at some speed, hunched slightly over the narrow bars, eyes glinting maniacally behind comedy goggles. When he stops, he pronounces it "great", and I don't think he was just being polite. There's no room for niceties in the gruelling arena of old motorcycle appreciation. Good. I like to have my innate Honda prejudice confirmed. I wonder why it took me over 30 years to get around to buying a CB400F.

Actually, it's because I only wanted a really good one, and every example I've managed to look at over the years has been a bit skanky. So when I read of David Silver's 400 Four project (*CB*, February 2012) one morning, a spoonful of cornflakes was arrested mid-way between the bowl and mouth. I was that excited.

Silver's idea to restore 50 CB400Fs as a batch was a great one; a chance for someone to occupy that uncharted territory between the economies of mass production that made the sophisticated Japanese motorcycle possible and the cottage industry approach most of us turn to when reviving them. Silver could achieve a sort of series restoration. The

"The combination of low weight, quality and handling was unstoppable"

jobs would be the same, but he could re-spoke dozens of wheels in one hit, while in the mood. I reached for the phone.

I was surprised to get through to David Silver himself, because I'd always assumed he was some departed pioneer of parts supply who endured in name alone, like Mr Kipling. I wanted an early bike, ideally in blue. Could he do that? Well of course he could, because he had over 50 to choose from and any component you cared to name. He already had a good early blue bike, and with a bit of work it could be made really good.

A couple of months later I was in that bit of Suffolk that should have remained attached to the Netherlands when Britain broke free, being walked towards a hanger door by Mr Silver. He slid it open, and there, parked in a Honda clearing, was my bike. "What do you think?" he asked. I thought it looked tremendous.

Honda 400 Four lust first stirred for me sometime in the mid 1970s, in a forgotten dealership in South Yorkshire. I was 14, and those I knew with motorcycles were on sports mopeds or at best an L-plated 250 stroker. The Honda looked like a musclebike, with its frame-filling four-pot of inconceivable capacity.

Modern, too. The tank and panels were slightly squared off, at a time when square forms were in the fashion ascendant. The

“I know the Kawasakis and Suzukis were quicker, but look deeper and there’s a cerebral quality to the 400 Four”



James wanted an early bike in blue, Dave Silver obliged with this pristine 1975 CB400F

four-into-one exhaust arrangement was what most owners of four-pipe CBs were doing anyway, so Honda saved money as well as being on trend. The badging was two-dimensional and the key went in below the instruments instead of somewhere near a red-hot downpipe.

But it is of course a mere slip of a motorbike. I’m reminded of this as I sling a leg over and discover virtually no bike in front of me. The last bike I rode prior to collecting this one was a modern BMW R1200GS, and on that there’s a lot going on in your field of vision. On the Honda, there’s just a view of two neat instruments and a bit of headlight shell. Beyond that is the endless road and unimagined four-cylinder adventure.

Half choke and a two-second prod of the button is all that’s required to bring the CB400F Super Sport 400 Four (as I believe it’s correctly called) to life. You can kickstart it, but such is its compactness the right-hand footrest must be folded away first, otherwise the two come together and you can kick the bike over.

The sound at idle is a rich and complex one; exhaust burble, a bit of induction, and a quality mechanical tinkle like a hundred elfin blacksmiths at work. The throttle is crisp, the gearchange light.

It’s said in some pubs that it was the 400 Four, not the 750 and 500 models, that finally turned British motorcyclists onto Japanese bikes and Hondas in particular. The combination of low weight, neat

handling, quality bits and reliability confirmed the invasion was unstoppable.

I’m not old enough to remember the glory days of the British bike business and the chauvinism of its champions, but they must have been around in huge numbers when this was new. How must it have seemed to the old guard? Enough cylinders (and carburettors) for at least four proper bikes, and they were capable of dispensing in one minute as many revs as a traditional thumper could manage between rebuilds. Once it’s up to temperature, the little Honda will howl its way through its novel six-speed box. The old boys must have been constantly losing count.

What makes this bike so pleasing is that it feels like it looks: sophisticated and rich in its details. I know the contemporary Kawasakis and Suzukis were quicker but look deeper and there’s a faintly cerebral quality to the 400 Four. It exhibits the appeal of a quality artefact and elicits pleasure in its contemplation. It has a sort of pet motorcycle character to it, and I want to pick it up and carry it around in my pocket when I’m not riding it.

I’m glad Hugo liked it. It means we’re all agreed, then. The 400 Four is great. And you really do meet the right sort of motorcyclist on an old Honda.



James arrives at Dave Silver’s time warp showroom by Tardis to enjoy the full 1970s experience

SPECIALISTS IN PARTS FOR HONDAS

ALL AT DISCOUNTED PRICES



DAVID SILVER SPARES

we stock
Parts for older Honda Motorcycles,
- from 60's to 2001.

Many large components
Parts for engine rebuilds and restoration
projects

A vast amount of old and obsolete parts

ORDER ONLINE, OR CALL:

01728 833020

www.davidsilverspares.co.uk

sales@davidsilverspares.co.uk

BELOW IS A LIST OF PARTS FOR THE CB400F. PRICES SUBJECT TO VAT AND POSTAGE.

Accessory wheel valve caps A pair of chrome valve caps featuring the honda wing.....	£2.50
Air filter.....	£9
Air filter retaining spring Fits between the rear of the filter and the case holding it in position.....	£5.25
Battery CB12AA Comes complete with sealed acid pack to activate the battery prior to charging and use.....	£29
Battery strap.....	£5.50
Brake caliper adjuster bolt.....	£3.25
Brake caliper assembly A Very high quality Japanese re-production of the original caliper.....	£149
Brake caliper bleed screw.....	£6.50
Brake caliper body We have worked closely with a factory which has a proven record in this field, to offer you a high quality replacement caliper body.....	£39
Brake caliper bolt.....	Each £4.95
Brake caliper bolt washer.....	Each 50p
Brake caliper piston.....	£39
Brake caliper piston in Stainless steel Stainless steel reproduction of the original part. Made to the exact same spec as original, but from better quality material.....	£25
Brake caliper piston oil seal.....	£3.95
Brake caliper piston oil seal.....	£2.75
Brake disc bolt.....	Each £8.50
Brake disc retaining nut.....	Each £3.25
Brake hose oil bolt.....	Each £3.95
Brake hose oil bolt sealing washer.....	Each £1.95
Brake hose, Lower.....	£43
Brake hose, Upper.....	£47
Brake lever rubber, Front.....	£2.60
Brake lever, Front.....	£5
Brake lever, Front with out end rubber.....	£15
Brake light switch, Front.....	£27
Brake master cylinder assembly This master cylinder and lever assembly is designed to look similar to that used by Honda on many of their 50HC fours and twin cylinder models from the 1970s. The piston is 14mm so is suitable for single caliper operation.....	£29
Brake master cylinder diaphragm.....	£3.95
Brake master cylinder repair kit.....	£29
Brake master cylinder repair kit A high quality Japanese replacement kit.....	£23
Brake pad set.....	£8
Brake pipe - Metal pipe from Lower hose to caliper.....	£7.95
Brake rod.....	£9.50
Brake shoe set.....	£15
Brakelight switch, Rear.....	£11.95
Breather cover gasket.....	£4.25
Breather cover retaining bolt.....	65p
Cam chain.....	£23.95
Cam chain guide blade.....	£15.95
Cam chain soft link, Required only if splitting Cam chain.....	£1.95
Cam chain tensioner blade.....	£49
Carburettor float valve A high quality Japanese replacement part.....	£12
Carburettor gasket set for one carb.....	Each £14.50
Carburettor needle jet set.....	Each £21
Carburettor repair kit for one carb. Kit contains Float Valve, Jets, Needle, Gaskets, O-rings and air mixture screws. One kit services one of the four carbs.....	£16
Carburettor standard main jet, Size No 75.....	Each £4.95
Carburettor standard slow jet, Size 40 A high quality Japanese replacement jet at a fraction of the cost of the original.....	£2.75
Carburettor standard slow jet, Size No 40Each £4.25	£4.25
Clutch cable A High quality Japanese replacement cable from the Original equipment manufacturer.....	£10
Clutch cover gasket.....	£6.50
Clutch cover screw set Contains all 10 screws.....	£5.95
Clutch Kit Contains Replica type A friction plates x6. Replica type B friction plate x1. Genuine clutch springs x4. Genuine clutch cover gasket.....	£45
Clutch lever.....	£5
Clutch lever end rubber.....	Each £2.60
Clutch lever Without end rubber.....	£8.50
Clutch lifter cam.....	£15
Clutch switch.....	£9.95
Clutch switch A high quality Japanese replacement switch.....	£7.50
Conrod bolt.....	Each £6.50
Contact breaker / Points for cylinders No.1 and 4.....	£19
Contact breaker / Points for cylinders No.1 and 4.....	£5
Contact breaker / Points for cylinders No.2 and 3.....	£19
Contact breaker / Points for cylinders No.2 and 3.....	£5
Crankshaft big end bearing half shell, Black.....	Each £6.25
Crankshaft big end bearing half shell, Brown.....	Each £6.25
Crankshaft big end bearing half shell, Green.....	Each £6.25
Crankshaft big end bearing half shell, Yellow.....	Each £6.25
Crankshaft main bearing half shell, Brown.....	Each £8.95
Crankshaft main bearing half shell, Colour code Yellow.....	Each £7
Crankshaft main bearing half shell, Green.....	Each £6.50
Crankshaft main bearing half shell, Red.....	Each £7

Crankshaft oil seal, Left hand A high quality Japanese replacement seal.....	£4.95
Crankshaft oil seal, Right hand.....	£3.95
Crankshaft oil seal, Right hand Japanese replacement oil seal from the original equipment manufacturer, assuring you of the highest possible quality but at a fraction of the cost of the original.....	£2.95
Crankshaft oil seal, Right hand A high quality Japanese replacement seal.....	£2.95
Cush drive rubber.....	Each £9.25
Cylinder barrel oil control valve gasket.....	Each £2.50
Cylinder base gasket.....	£4.25
Cylinder bolt, Front, 8x122mm Screws into the Front of the crankcase and fits up through the cylinder and cylinder head.....	Each £3.95
Drive chain adjuster.....	Each £7.50
Drive chain adjuster, bolt and lock nut.....	Per side £10.95
Drive chain, Heavy duty type with split link.....	£96
Link heavy duty drive chain with split link.....	£19
Drive sprocket, Front.....	£8.50
Drive sprocket, Rear.....	£16
Engine crash bar set.....	£55
Engine gasket set, Complete.....	£39
Engine oil seal kit.....	£19.95
Engine Service Kit Contains: Aftermarket air filter, Genuine oil filter, NGK DRBES1 spark plugs x 4, Genuine oil drain bolt sealing washer, Aftermarket ignition points and condenser assy.....	£49
Exhaust downpipe to collector gasket A high quality graphite gasket, easily comparable in quality to the original equipment gasket.....	Each £4.95
Exhaust downpipes and collector assembly UK made downpipe and collector set. Pipe profile perfectly replicates the original system which is now no longer available. Due to chroming issues in production, this consists of 4 separate pipes, slotting into the collector box as opposed to the 2 welded.....	£199
Exhaust finned clamp onto cylinder head.....	Each £22.95
Exhaust mounting stud into cylinder head.....	Each £3.95
Exhaust port gasket.....	Each £2.25
Exhaust silencer.....	£75
Exhaust silencer bracket An exact replica of the original bracket produced in the UK. We have had this re-produced as the original from Honda is no longer available.....	£20
Exhaust silencer to collector box gasket A high quality graphite gasket, easily comparable in quality to the original equipment gasket.....	£4.95
Exhaust split collar.....	Each £4.50
Exhaust system by Motad A high quality 4 into 1 chrome steel exhaust system.....	£245
Exhaust to cylinder head clamp set Contains all 4 finned clamps, includes 8 FREE replacement securing nuts!	£95
Final drive sprocket oil seal A high quality Japanese replacement seal. Situated on the gearbox countershaft behind the front drive sprocket.....	£8.50
Footrest bar, Rear.....	Each £12.95
Footrest pivot pin, Front.....	Each £1.75
Footrest rubber, Front.....	Each £6.95
Footrest rubber, Rear.....	Each £7.50
Fork dust seal.....	Each £9.50
Fork dust seal Japanese replacement dust seals sourced from the original equipment manufacturer, assuring you of the highest possible quality but at a fraction of the price.....	£4.95
Fork oil seal.....	Each £4.95
Fork oil seal retaining clip.....	Each £2.25
Fork tube.....	Each £75
Fork tube top bolt.....	Each £5.75
Fork tender.....	£210
"Fuel tank "Super Sport" emblem set (F1)" A Pair of replica decals.....	£4.95
"Fuel tank "Super Sport" emblem set (F2 Red)" A Pair of replica decals for the RED F2 model.....	£4.95
Fuel tank cap.....	£47.50
Fuel tank cap gasket.....	£4.50
Fuel tank finished in Primer Grey An exact replica of the original, primed ready to finish in any colour.....	£159
Fuel tank front mounting rubber.....	Each £4.25
Fuel tank lock, modified key operated type This is a replacement for the push button type and is now key operated.....	£36
Fuel tank rear mounting rubber.....	£14.95
Fuel tank rider caution label (F2).....	£1.95
Fuel tank stripe kit for Red tank (F2).....	£29.95
Fuel tank stripe kit for Yellow tank (F2).....	£29.95
Fuel tap assembly.....	£75
Fuel tap assembly (Canadian F1F1 models).....	£75
Fuel tap assembly (Canadian F2 models).....	£37
Fuel tap strainer kit.....	£16.50
Fuse box assembly.....	£39
Gear change shaft oil seal A high quality Japanese replacement seal.....	£1.80
Gear selector fork, Centre.....	£45
Gear selector shaft return spring.....	£4.95
Generator cover badge.....	£25
Generator cover badge retaining screw.....	Each 60p
Generator cover gasket.....	£5.50
Generator cover screw set Contains all 4 screw.....	£2.50
Generator field coil retaining screw.....	Each 50p
Handlebar.....	£59

Handlebar A high quality exact replica of the original handlebar, offering value for money without compromise.....	£35
Handlebar clamp.....	Each £8.95
Handlebar grip, Left hand.....	£4
Handlebar grip, Right hand.....	£5.50
Handlebar switch, Left hand.....	£56
Handlebar switch, Right hand.....	£55
Handlebar switch, Right hand (Canadian models).....	£53
Head light bracket A perfect replica manufactured in the UK.....	£49
Head light bracket (Canadian Models) A perfect replica manufactured in the UK.....	£49
Head light rim.....	£47.50
Head light shell.....	£19
Ignition coil A universal 12 volt. H.T. Leads are supplied overlength and are to be cut to size, this enables the coil to fit both Left and Right hand side.....	£29
Ignition points, condensers and back plate assembly A high quality Japanese replacement assembly.....	£29.95
Ignition switch.....	£20
Indicator (UK model) After market replacement 252 type indicator/winker. Chromed plastic.....	Each £5.75
Indicator chrome body.....	Each £14.50
Indicator chrome body (UK models) Each. This is the chrome body only, therefore excludes the lens, bulb and bulb holder.....	£14.50
Indicator lens (UK models).....	Each £1.50
Indicator stem, Rear.....	Each £27
Inlet manifold rubber for Cylinders No. 1 or No. 4.....	Each £15.50
Inlet manifold rubber for Cylinders No. 2 or No. 3.....	Each £15.50
Inlet manifold rubber O ring Seals the manifold onto the cylinder head.....	£3.10
Inlet manifold rubber set for all 4 cylinders These are the rubbers that connect the carburettors to the cylinder head.....	£32
Inlet manifold rubber to carburettor securing clip key blank, type 1 A Genuine key blank to have your original replicated. Please note there are 2 types, this type 1 is for key numbers starting with either the letter 'A' or 'B'.....	£6.95
Key blank, type 2 A Genuine key blank to have your original replicated. Please note there are 2 types, this type 2 is for key numbers starting with either the letter 'C' or 'D'.....	£6.95
Kickstart arm rubber.....	£3.95
Kickstart shaft.....	£59
Kickstart shaft oil seal A high quality Japanese replacement seal.....	£1.60
Main stand pivot bolt.....	£11.50
Main stand return spring.....	£3.50
Mirror set in Chrome A Pair of chrome mirrors. 10mm thread.....	£16
Mirror, Left hand.....	£17
Mirror, Right hand.....	£17
Oil drain bolt and washer.....	£2
Oil filler cap / dipstick O ring.....	£1.95
Oil filter.....	£4.25
Oil filter A high quality Japanese replacement filter including 'O' rings.....	£3.50
Oil filter A high quality replacement oil filter. Does not include O-rings.....	£3
Oil filter 5 pack A set of 3 High quality replacement oil filters. These do not include O-rings.....	£14
Oil filter bolt.....	£26.50
Oil filter bolt with 17mm head.....	£9.95
Oil filter case O ring.....	£3.25
Oil filter setting spring Fits between the oil filter case and the filter.....	£2.75
Oil pan gasket.....	£9.50
Oil pressure switch.....	£31.95
Pilot light bulb.....	Each £1.10
Pilot light case A high quality replica of the top and lower covers. This does not include any of the internal parts, these should be used from your existing assembly.....	£39
Pilot light top cover retaining screw These are the self tapping screws that retain the top to the lower cover.....	Each 50p
Piston gudgeon pin.....	Each £3.50
Piston gudgeon pin circlip.....	Each 50p
Piston kit for One cylinder, 1.00mm oversize Contains 1 piston, 1 ring set, 1 piston pin and 2 circlips.....	£35
Piston ring set for one piston, 0.25mm over size.....	Each £16
Piston ring set for one piston, 0.25mm over size High quality Japanese replacement ring set from the original equipment manufacturer.....	£12
Piston ring set for one piston, 0.25mm oversize.....	£19
Piston ring set for one piston, Standard size.....	Each £12.95
Piston, 0.25mm oversize.....	Each £24
Piston, 0.75mm oversize.....	Each £24
Points cover and gasket.....	£35
Primary chain A high quality Japanese replacement chain.....	£65
Rear fender/Mudguard and tail light bracket "Replica of the US model CB400 Four rear fender and tail light bracket. This is suitable for UK and European models, however it will require the American taillight assembly.....	£59

Regulator / Rectifier combined unit This One unit takes the place of the 2 separates.....	£59
Seat.....	£95
Seat cover.....	£19
Seat lock An quality aftermarket replacement lock at a fraction of the cost of the original.....	£19.95
Seat lock plunger This is the part fixed to the underside of the seat that secures into the lock.....	£15.50
Seat replacement chrome stud.....	Each £1
Seat strap.....	£10
Shock absorber lower mounting bolt.....	Each 95p
Shock absorber lower mounting bush.....	Each £2.50
Shock absorber set - Replica.....	£129
Shock absorber upper chrome nut.....	Each £2.25
Side grab handle.....	£25
Side panel emblem (F1).....	Each £16.95
Side panel emblem set (F1) A Pair of replica decals.....	£9.95
Side panel, Left hand - Matt black.....	£32
Side panel, Right hand - Matt black.....	£32
Side stand pivot bolt.....	£3.76
Side stand pivot bolt nut.....	50p
Sides and dust seal.....	£1.95
Side stand rubber (Canadian models).....	£4.25
Spark plug cap for cylinders 1 or 4.....	Each £4.50
Spark plug cap for cylinders 2 or 3.....	Each £4.50
Spark plug cap for cylinders no. 2 or 3.....	Each £11.50
Spark plug NGK DRBES1.....	Each £2.50
Special tool rotor puller 07733-002-0001.....	£33.50
Speedometer cable.....	Each £1.10
Speedometer cable Japanese replacement cable from the original equipment manufacturer, assuring you of the highest quality but at a fraction of the price.....	£6.50
Starter clutch springs, caps and rollers set A high quality Japanese replacement set.....	£9
Starter clutch springs, caps and rollers set.....	£15
Starter motor brush set.....	£11.50
Starter solenoid.....	£15
Steering bearing lower washer This sits at the very bottom of the steering stem below the dust seal.....	85p
Steering bearing set This is the original ball bearing set containing all steel ball bearings, top and bottom bearing races and dust seal.....	£37
Steering head taper roller bearing set.....	£28
Steering lock.....	£18
Steering stem top nut This is the chrome domed top nut which screws onto the top of the steering stem.....	£5.25
Steering stem top nut washer.....	£1.85
Swingarm bush.....	Each £21
Swingarm pivot bolt nut.....	£3.95
Tachometer bulb.....	Each £1.10
Tachometer cable.....	£17.95
Tachometer drive gear oil seal.....	£1.70
Tail light assembly (UK models).....	£12.95
Tail light bulb.....	£1.25
Tail light chrome base and reflector (UK models).....	£17.95
Tail light lens (UK Model).....	£5.95
Tail light lens retaining screw (UK models).....	Each 95p
Tail light lens rubber gasket (UK models).....	£1.20
Tappet adjuster screw.....	Each £5.95
Tappet cap.....	Each £5.95
Tappet cap O ring.....	Each £1.40
Throttle closing cable.....	£11
Throttle closing cable.....	£9.50
Throttle opening cable.....	£14.75
Throttle opening cable.....	£9.50
Throttle pipe.....	£8.75
Throttle pipe.....	£4.95
Tool tray An exact replica of the original tray.....	£29
Transmission / Starter motor cover retaining screw.....	Each 60p
Transmission cover screw set Contains all 4 screws.....	£2.40
Valve spring retaining split collet / cotter Please note that these are sold separately - not as pairs.....	£1.40
Valve spring, Inner.....	Each £5.25
Valve spring, Outer.....	Each £7.50
Valve stem oil seal.....	Each £2.50
Valve, Exhaust. Produced by a factory who supplies original equipment to other manufacturers within the Japanese motor industry, therefore assuring you of the highest quality replacement valves.....	Each £19.95
Valve, Inlet.....	Each £20
Valve, Inlet Produced by a factory who supplies original equipment to other manufacturers within the Japanese motor industry, therefore assuring you of the highest quality replacement valves.....	Each £15
Wheel bearing retainer, Front Left hand.....	£5.95
Wheel bearing retainer, Rear Left hand.....	£13.95
Wheel bearing, Front A high quality Japanese replacement bearing.....	Each £6.50
Wheel bearing, Rear Left hand A high quality Japanese replacement bearing.....	£7.95
Wheel bearing, Rear Right hand A high quality Japanese replacement bearing.....	£7.50
Wheel rim, Front - 1.60x18 36 hole The highest quality rim from the original equipment manufacturer: D.I.D.....	£65
Wheel rim, Rear - 1.85x18 36 hole The highest quality rim from the original equipment manufacturer: D.I.D.....	£75
Wheel spoke kit, Front.....	£24
Wheel spoke kit, Rear.....	£25
Wiring harness.....	£99
Workshop manual by Clymer.....	£27.50

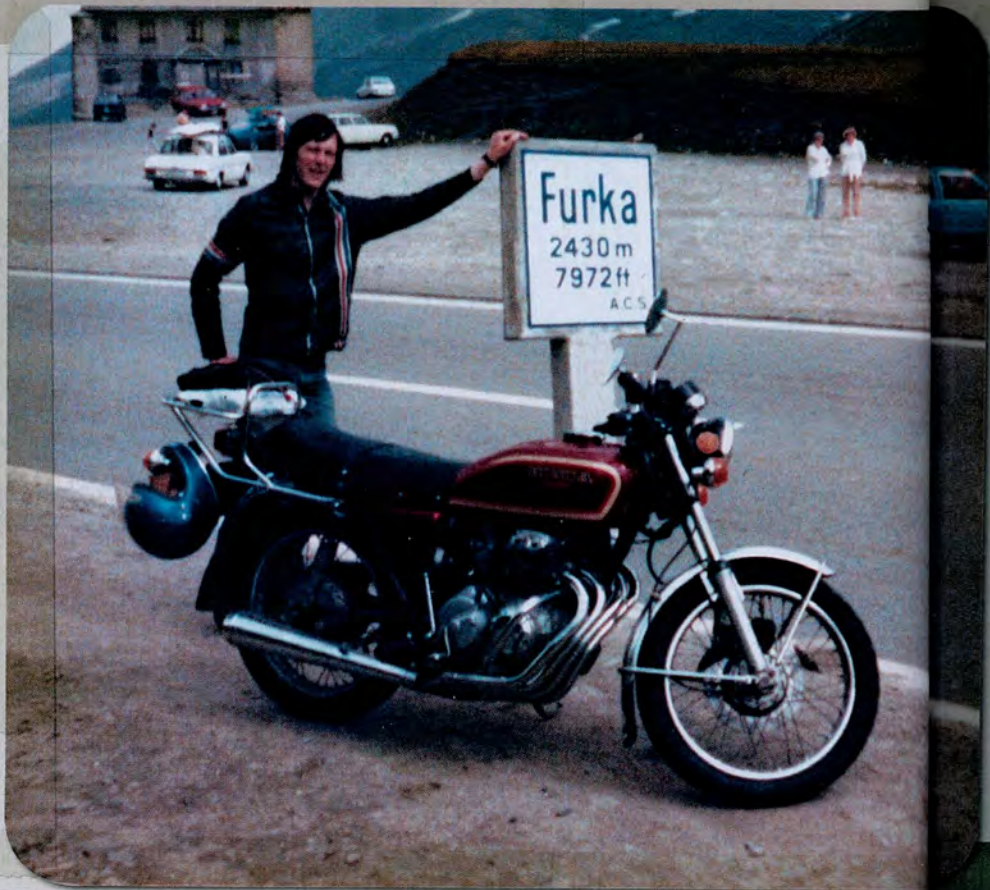
“It was the look that I fell in love with – the lines”

➔ Graham bought his first CB400F at the start of the long, hot summer of 1976 and kept it for six years. Now he’s restored another and has no plans to sell it.

“I traded in a Honda CB250G5 for my first CB400F. It was the look of it that I fell in love with – the simple lines, that elegant sweep of the exhaust. It was a late F model with the pillion footrests mounted on frame loops. I used it for riding to work, weekends, holidays, everything. Me and my mates travelled all over the UK, but some of my best memories come from the camping trips we took round Europe.

“We’d get the ferry to Zeebrugge and just go: Belgium; France; Germany and Switzerland. I can also remember taking the bike through a tunnel under the railway in my home town of York, just to hear the exhaust note bouncing off the walls. I sold that original bike to buy a VF400 in 1982. What a mistake. Now I’ve got another and it’s just as good as I remember it being.”

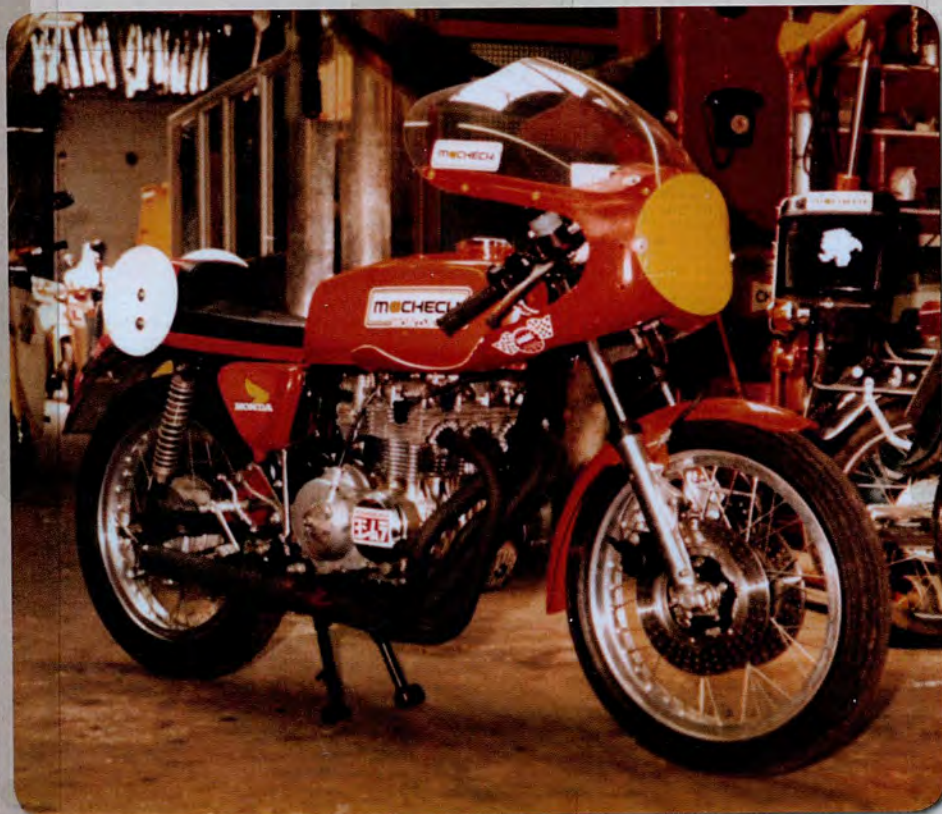
Graham Hugill, York



Four the people

Honda’s CB400F has provided many happy memories for countless UK riders, racers, dealers and mechanics. Here’s what some of them did on their days off...

Words: Gez Kane.



“The Harrier had a Yoshi 460cc kit and Piper cam”

➔ John Ryan was service manager at Mocheck in Clapham when the CB400F was launched. The new model proved so good Mocheck raced them and built their own hot-rod version – the Mocheck Harrier.

“I’d known Ian Tay (one of the founding partners of Mocheck) since he was a lad, so when he and Tony Ackner started Mocheck, I joined to run the workshop. That was in 1973 and two years later Honda brought out the CB400F.

“We got involved in racing the 400s in 1976, with riders such as Tony Rutter. Ian Tay had the idea of producing a road-going replica, which became the Harrier. It had a Yoshimura 460cc kit (the prototype used CD175 pistons, re-profiled by hand and with the stock con rod small end bored out to suit), a Piper cam and exhaust, nose fairing from Colin Seeley and CMA cast wheels. In race trim, with slimmed down gear-sets and other little tricks, the 460 would do 130mph. Road-going Harriers were tested at 112mph.”

John Ryan, London

“I’d always wanted one and used it for commuting”

↓ “I bought my yellow F2 in 1979, which was after the model had been discontinued. Mocheck in Clapham had somehow got hold of a batch of 30 or 40 leftover bikes and were selling them at a good price. I decided to trade in my Yamaha DT175 for one of them.

“I’d always wanted one and used it for commuting every day, as well as rides out to club meetings at Brands Hatch. It was superbly reliable and had done 86,000 miles by the time I sold it to David Silver last year. I always maintained it myself and in 32 years of ownership, the only things that ever went wrong were a fuse holder breaking up and a connector working loose just as I was approaching the Blackwall Tunnel. That was interesting, to say the least.”

Colin Dixon, Gravesend



“The CB400 was a great bike for the island”

↑ John Kidson was the first man to win a TT on a Honda CB400F. The TT in question was the 1977 Formula 3 race and, with it, Kidson also took the Formula 3 world title.

“The bike was built and supplied by my friend Gordon Wadley, who owned Nettleton Motorcycles. There was a limit to what you could do to the bike for Formula 3. Gordon fitted a crank from a Japanese market 398cc bike to comply with the capacity limit and used a Futura cam. We skimmed the head to raise compression and polished and flowed the heads, but that was about it.

“The race went pretty well after a scare in practice. The bike dropped a valve on Wednesday, wrecking the head and bending a rod. We had a spare rod, but no

head. In desperation I went to see Neil Kelly, who had a bike shop just outside Douglas, but he didn’t have one either. Then he remembered he had a CB400F with bent forks in for an insurance repair. We ‘borrowed’ the head off that and the bike didn’t miss a beat in the race. In the end I won by over five minutes.

“The CB400 was a great bike for the Island. It wasn’t particularly fast – it would probably do about 115mph flat out – but it was relatively stable, predictable and very reliable. After the TT the bike went back to Gordon, who sold it on to Bill Smith and I retired from racing at the end of the season. But I spotted it in the Bonhams auction at the Stafford show in the mid-1990s and bought it back. I still own it and I’ve paraded it odd times. In fact, I crashed it at Castle Combe last season when the catch tank split and sprayed oil over the rear tyre.”

John Kidson, Stroud

“The best thing about the bike was the engine”

➔ “I bought a red CB400F in September 1975 after being bowled over by the look of it. I didn’t even get a test ride. I’m not the biggest guy in the world and I just thought, ‘someone’s built a superbike just for me.’

“I can remember picking it up one Friday like it was yesterday. It was my only transport and I went all over the UK on it. My then girlfriend and I would load up the bike with our camping and walking gear and head off up to Scotland. I can’t believe how much gear we took.

“The best thing about the bike was the super-smooth engine and the total reliability. I don’t think I ever took it above the ton, but it never let me down. I bought it on HP and owned it for just over two years before I lost my job and it was repossessed. I bought a wrecked one last year and it should be back on the road this summer after a total rebuild. I can’t wait.”

Mick Dewsbury, Buxton



HONDA
400 FOUR

Everything you need to know

Reliability and hassle-free ownership are key to the CB400F's appeal, but there's still much to know. Let this lot sink in and become a Jedi on the subject

Words: Gez Kane. Photography: Rory Game

There is some confusion over model designation. Only the CB400F and the CB400F2 came to the UK. The F1 is a USA- and Canada-only model introduced in 1977. The F model is the original 1975 model year machine with pillion footrests mounted on the swingarm and an unlined fuel tank in either Light Ruby Red or Varnish Blue. For 1976, the pillion footrests were mounted on a loop coming off the rear subframe and the fuel filler gained a lock, but the model was still called the CB400F in the UK and Europe.

Many US F models were modified with higher 'bars, but the 1977 F1 has a single (rear) stay on the front mudguard, slightly higher handlebars, a locking cover to the fuel cap and footrests re-positioned a little further forward than on the UK and European models. Rare in the UK.

The F2 model arrived in 1978 and apart from the Candy Antares Red or Parakeet Yellow colour scheme and decal differences, remained the same as the F until longer cylinder head studs were fitted after engine number 1084315. American market F2 models have black side panels.

Japanese and French market bikes for 1976 have 398cc engines. This was achieved by a stroke of (48.8mm rather than 50mm). A few Japanese-market cranks were imported for racing in the UK's TT Formula Three class, notably the bike shared by Bill Henderson and John Kidson who finished fourth in the Production TT in '76 and the one on which Kidson won the world TT Formula Three crown the following year by winning the TT.

The camchain tensioner is a notorious weakness (see panel right). The tensioner bolt is at the front of the crankcases where it bears the brunt of road dirt. Make slackening the bolt off, cleaning it and smearing it with copper

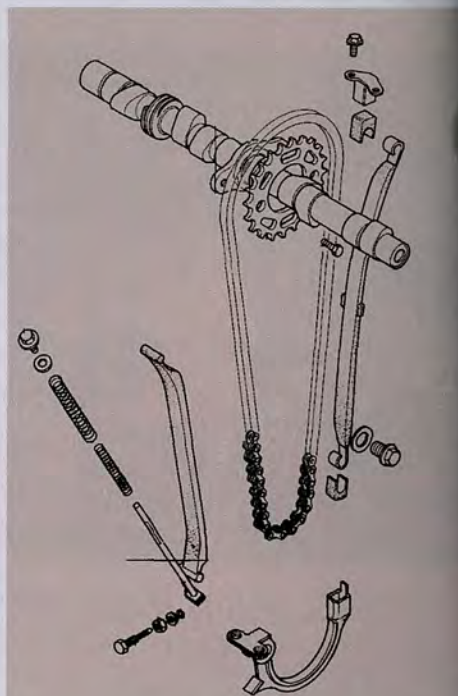
grease part of your cleaning schedule. It's easy to over-tighten it too, so beware of stripped threads. A thread insert is easier to install with the engine in bits.

The front brake master cylinder is no longer available from Honda. David Silver of David Silver Spares has the problem covered. "We sell a universal unit that looks very similar to the original and costs just £35 – that's cheaper than a repair kit," he says. "They're good – we sell around 600 of them a year and I've never had one back."

Tinware and fuel tanks are often the most difficult parts to source for restorers of Japanese classics, but not so for the CB400F owner, according to David Silver. "Original fuel tanks aren't particularly rot-prone," he confirms. "But many have been damaged over the years. We produce a steel pattern tank finished in grey primer for £192. You do need to buy the F2 fuel tap with the round screw in type mounting though, as the tanks were copied from new F2 tanks."

Amazingly, genuine front mudguards are still listed by Honda – though at a spicy £252. Replica rear mudguards – including the rear light bracket – are a much more modest £72 from David Silver. A good job, since water collects between the inner and outer pressings on the originals, causing rot to set in prematurely. Chainguards have been impossible to source for years, but David is well on the way to ending the drought. "We should have them on sale later this year," he confirms.

CB400F engines are remarkably durable. One of the bikes David Silver bought for his restoration production line has covered 86,000 miles with only routine servicing. But there are a few things to watch for. If you're stripping the engine anyway, it

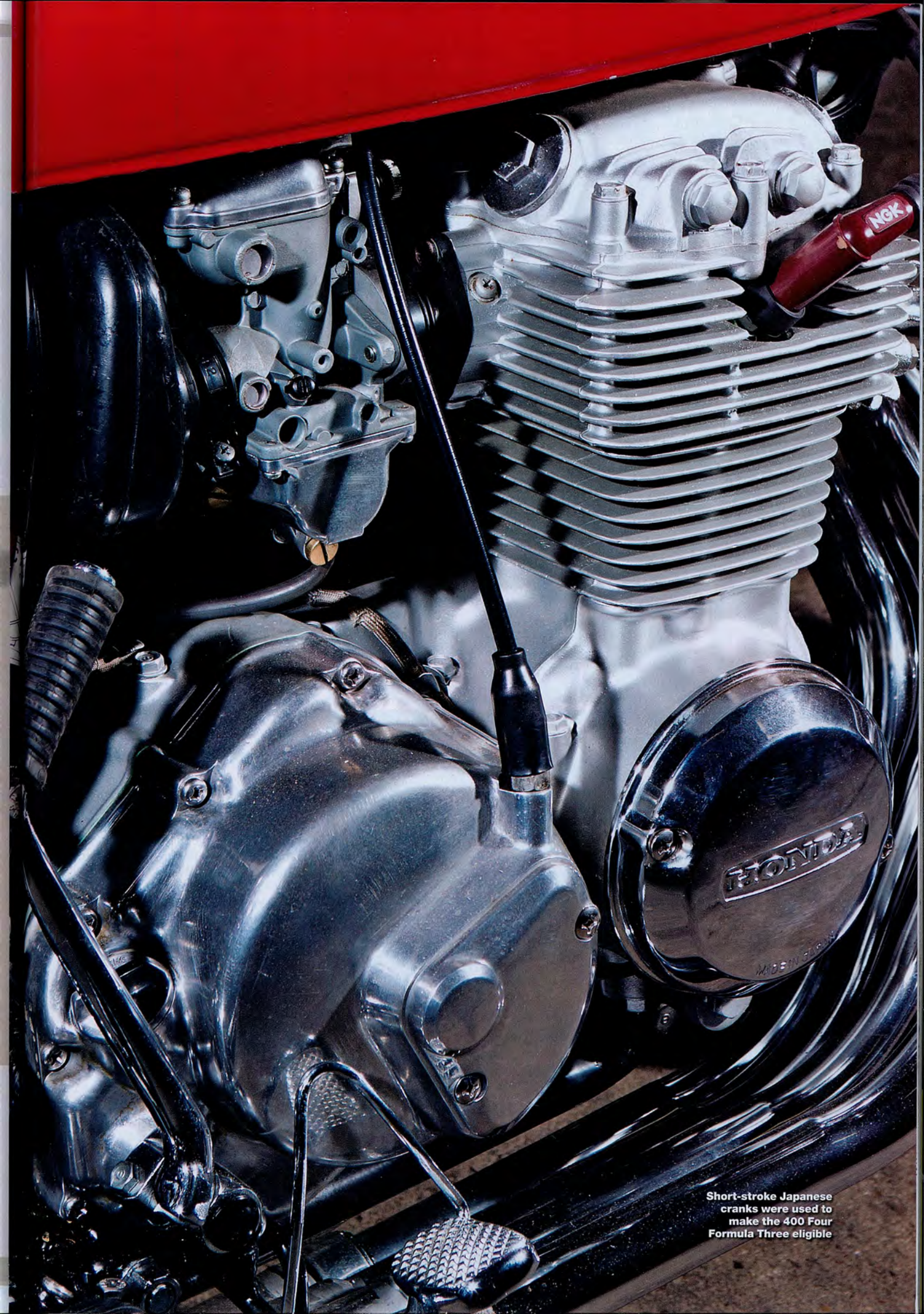


WEAK POINT: CAMCHAIN TENSIONER

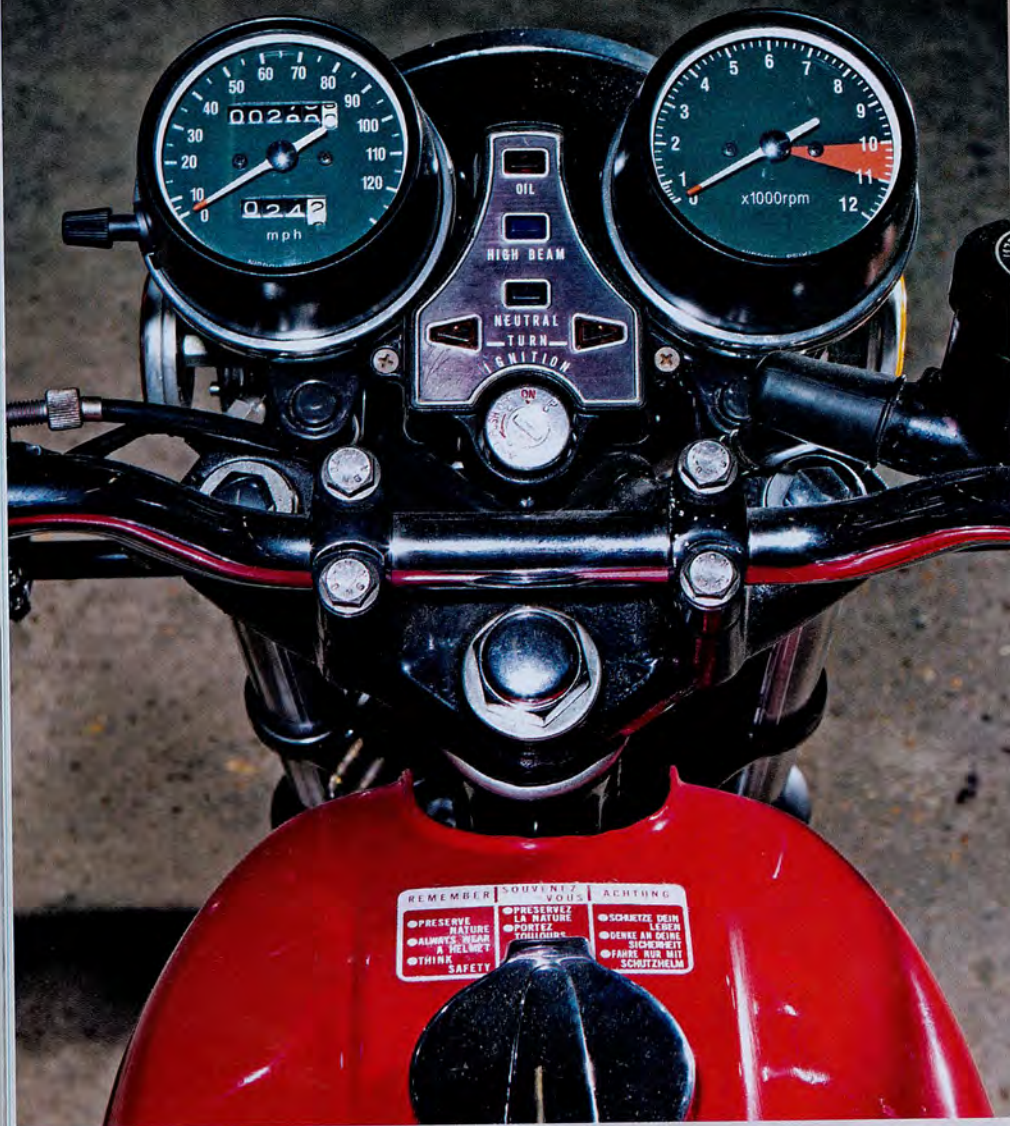
The horseshoe-shaped arm puts the tensioner blade under tension. This can seize on its pivot. The part is no longer available from Honda but Phil Denton Engineering make replacements in stainless steel for £85, and Dave Silver has commissioned a batch of pattern arms too. Phil Denton also produces corrosion-resistant stainless adjuster locknuts.

makes sense to replace the primary drive chain – though most owners report primary chains lasting at least 50,000 miles. They cost £78. It's also a good idea to replace the camchain, tensioner blade and guide blade and the tensioner arm. All the parts are still available.

The CB400F runs a plain bearing bottom end with colour-coded shells and

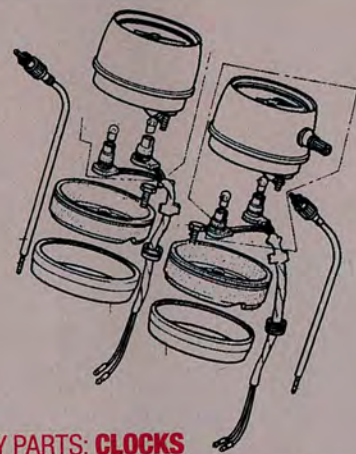


Short-stroke Japanese cranks were used to make the 400 Four Formula Three eligible



THE TOP-MONEY MINTER: £2500-3750

A good find. This a very nice example of a late F model, distinguishable by the unlined tank with 'Super sport' graphic under the Honda name. The 400 Four decal on the side panel uses a gold striped-effect font. The pillion footrests are mounted on a welded on frame loop and it has a lockable fuel cap. There's a genuine Honda exhaust on it and all the other hard-to-find parts.



KEY PARTS: CLOCKS

The speedo and rev counter are among the hardest parts to track down. "It would cost too much to produce replica clocks," David Silver admits. Faded faces can be replaced using overlays from Peter Horton (01634 305567), who tests them for colour-fastness by sticking them onto his wheelie bin for a few months. Peter Bond of Gauge Repairs (020 82 899031) restores clocks and changes around £140 for a speedo or rev counter.

markings on the crankcases to facilitate bearing shell selection. By now, as David Silver points out, the markings might be hard to decipher. "You might be lucky and be able to find the markings but on many bikes I've seen, the markings have worn off," he says. "The shells are mostly available, with big end shells costing £7.50 each and main bearing shells £8.40, but if you're in any doubt, you have to measure the crank journal to shell clearance using Plastigauge and refer to the parts book or workshop manual to select the right shells. If that sounds out of your league, specialist engineering firms such as SEP (01509 673295, www.sep-kegworth.co.uk) will be able to measure and advise."

The camshaft runs straight onto the alloy cylinder head on the 400 Four, so it's essential to change the oil and filter regularly and use good quality lubricant. With a genuine oil filter costing just £5 and a pack of five good quality after market filters from that man Silver costing £14, changing oil and filter at 1000 mile intervals is cheap insurance for your rebuilt engine. While you're at it, replace the original oil filter bolt (with its 12mm head) with a more durable pattern item with a 17mm head.

The six-speed gearbox is remarkably robust. "We very rarely get asked for gearbox parts," says David Silver. Decent used gearbox parts turn up on eBay (www.ebay.co.uk) regularly and CMS (www.cmsnl.com) in the Netherlands stock most gearbox parts, shafts excluded.

The same 20mm Keihin carburettors are used on all variants of the CB400F. "The problem with them is that modern fuels leave deposits," says David Silver. "Always drain your tank and carburettors if you're going to lay the bike up. The float valves get blocked very easily. A minute speck of dirt will cause the contents of the tank to empty through the affected carburettor."



THE TIDY RUNNER: £1400-2500

This F2 model, with its lined tank and filled-in side panel decals, has a Motad 4-into-1 exhaust that just doesn't look right. And what are those vast crash bars all about? The seat cover is a poor pattern item and there's a bit of corrosion creeping in here and there. The frame's finish needs attention too, but most of the must-have parts are still there and the chrome is in good order.

The quick fix is to turn off the tap and run the engine until the carburettor is dry, then turn the fuel back on. The fresh fuel rushing in to the carb will often dislodge the dirt. If that doesn't work, you have to clean the carbs and fit new float valves. An in-line fuel filter is a good idea too, as is getting the carburettors ultrasonically cleaned. We sell carburettor repair kits for £19.20 per carb."

Most of the engine components are specific to the CB400F/F2 (377 middle numbers) or its predecessor, the CB350F (333 middle numbers). But, with over 105,000 400 fours produced, most engine parts you'll need will be out there somewhere. This wide availability of bits is one of the main reasons the CB400F is such an attractive hassle-free classic bike.

The carburettor inlet and carburettor-to-airbox rubbers will almost certainly be past their best on an unrestored machine. It's very hard to fit the rubbers when they get old and hard, but pattern replacements are available from David Silver at £18.50 for the inlets, while reproduction Japanese-made airbox rubbers will be coming on stream shortly.

Electronic ignition is a worthwhile upgrade – and not just because of ease of maintenance. With decent quality Nippon Denso points and condensers costing £40 per service, a fit and forget electronic

system like the proven Dyna S unit at £145 (www.dynatekuk.com) is cost effective too. The Dyna S system fits out of sight behind the stock ignition cover and uses the standard Honda advance unit. Boyer Bransden (01622 730930, www.boyerbransden.com) also market a system for the 400 Four at around £100.

Head gaskets are prone to leaking on earlier models. Longer head studs were fitted to F2 engines after engine number CB400FE-1084315, which go some way to preventing leaks. A slight weep is probably not worth bothering about, but a serious leak will need sorting. Fortunately, it's possible to remove the head without removing the engine from the frame.

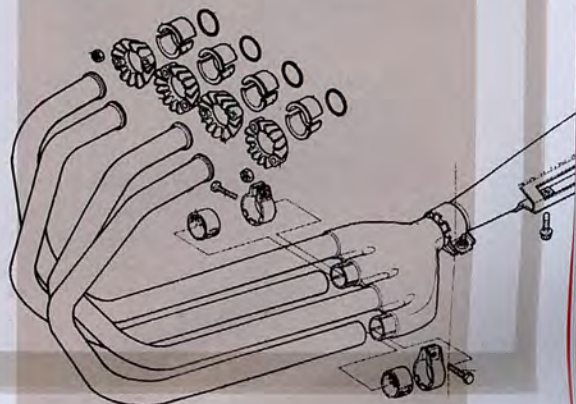
At the moment headlamp glass, fork sliders and chain guard are on the endangered list, so make sure any bike you buy has these items. "Beware of bikes with K&N-type open air filters fitted too," says David Silver. They can be made to work okay, but if you want to return a bike to original specification, you'll have to source a lot of tricky to find parts including the airbox, inlet duct and guide.

The genuine composite swingarm bushes are still available for £25.20 each from David Silver Spares. Don't be tempted to knock them into the swingarm – they'll probably break. Use a length of 12mm bar long enough to pass through the swingarm



KEY PART: 4-INTO-1 EXHAUST

The sensuous exhaust system is prone to rot. While aftermarket systems have been on the market for a while, David Silver has come up with a more authentic-looking solution. "The original exhaust has two downpipes welded to the collector box and two loose pipes," he explains. "That's difficult to manufacture, so we had some systems made with four loose downpipes. You can only tell the difference if you look underneath. But we're also looking at making an even more accurate copy, with the two pipes welded to the collector box."





THE PROJECT/PARTS DONOR: £200-1400

This early F, with pillion footrests mounted on the swingarm, was bought in Cornwall (off a beach at low tide by the look of it) for £200. The bad news list is long: homemade side panels, missing idiot light console, incorrect indicators, rear light and mudguards, knackered Marzocchi shocks, horribly bodged seat and exhaust and Super Dream forks, front brake caliper and wheels held together with gaffer tape. But the tank looks straight, the carbs and airbox are original and there may be some useful engine parts in there. Then again...

and a couple of large diameter washers and nuts to draw the bushes into place.

There's no need to put up with dodgy electrics on a 400 Four. "We can supply Japanese-made wiring looms for £120 and genuine switchgear at £67.20 a side," says David Silver. Many owners also swear by more reliable modern, electronic regulator/rectifier units.

The original finish for the engine is painted on the following parts: cambox cover, cylinder head, upper crankcase, lower crankcase, alternator cover, clutch cover, clutch adjuster cover and the left hand crankcase cover.

"The CB400F has to be the most popular Japanese classic in the UK," says David Silver. "It's the volume seller for us and we have over 6500 CB400F customers on our database. Restoring them like we are doing – almost on a production line basis and in numbers – is revealing the gaps in the parts supply chain. Doing it has meant we've commissioned a number of new parts that we might not otherwise have got round to. Will it be worth it? I don't know yet on a commercial footing, but it will certainly mean that more parts will become available to the home restorer."

SPECIFICATION 1974 HONDA CB400F

ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

Type..... air-cooled, in-line,
.....sohc four
Capacity..... 408cc
Bore x stroke..... 51mm x 50mm
Compression ratio..... 9.4:1
Carburettor..... 4 x 20mm Keihin
Clutch/primary drive... wet multi-plate/chain
Gearbox/final drive..... six-speed/chain

CHASSIS

Frame..... tubular single
.....downtube cradle
Front suspension..... 33mm telescopic forks
Rear suspension..... adjustable twin shocks
Brakes front/rear..... 8.425in (214mm) disc/
.....6.5in (160mm) sls drum
Wheels..... spoked steel
Tyres front/rear..... 3.00 x 18/3.50 x 18

DIMENSIONS

Dry weight..... 375lb (170kg)
Wheelbase..... 53.3in (1355mm)
Seat height..... 31in (790mm)
Fuel capacity..... 3.1 gallons (14 litres)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed..... 103mph
Peak power..... 37bhp @ 8500rpm
Fuel consumption..... 50mpg

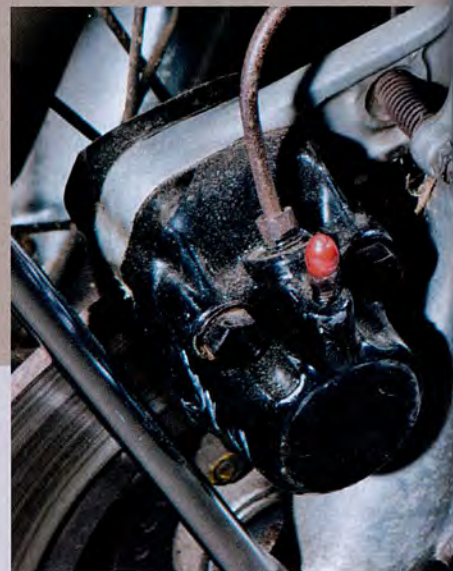
VALUE

Cost then..... £669 (1974 launch price)
Value now..... £200-3750



WEAK POINT: FRONT BRAKE

The steel pivot pin on the swinging front brake caliper seizes. Regularly strip clean and grease the pin. The bleed nipple often seizes in place too. "Once they've rusted in place, they are almost impossible to remove without breaking them," David Silver confirms. "On later Hondas the nipple is larger and stronger, so Honda knew it was a problem area. We can supply replica calipers for £46.80 including VAT. And we've got stainless steel brake pistons for £35. You can still get genuine Honda pistons, but they cost £48."



USEFUL CONTACTS:

David Silver Spares

New genuine and pattern spares.
01728 833020,
www.davidsilverspares.co.uk

CMS

Netherlands-based suppliers.
www.cmsnl.com

400 Four bits

Specialist breaker of 400 Fours.
www.400fourbits.co.uk

Phil Denton Engineering

Stainless and performance parts.
01492 641345,
www.phildentonengineering.com

D&M Engineering

CB400F performance parts and
engineering upgrades.
01623 870921,
www.d-mengineering.co.uk

Honda sohc forum, www.sohc.co.uk

Excellent web resource for owners of all
sohc Hondas. Dedicated 400/4 section.