

Japanese Motorcycles

Didier Ganneau
François-Marie Dumas



1969 Honda CB750



In June of 1968, Honda dropped the gauntlet that would forever change the world of motorcycling. The CB750/4 offered a combination of hardware never before seen on a single machine.

At the heart of the CB750 was an inline four-cylinder engine with single overhead cam, four carburetors, prominent four-into-four exhaust, and 67 horsepower at 8000 rpm. For those keeping track, it put out a good 15-percent more power than BSA's new 750-cc Rocket 3 and at just under 500 pounds, weighed about the same. It's not hard to guess which was quicker.

But it wasn't just the four-cylinder engine that caused such a stir; though most contemporary competitors were twins, fours had been offered by several manufacturers in the past. No, it was the fact that

four-cylinder power and smoothness was joined by a five-speed gearbox, electric starter, and a front disc brake—the first ever on a street machine—all at a reasonable price.

The first CB750s were produced with sand-cast cases that had a rough finish; later models had smoother castings. Those early sand-cast models, such as the bike pictured, have become the most valuable to collectors.

By 1970, Dick Mann had piloted a race-prepped CB750 into the winner's circle at Daytona, and the world of aftermarket hop-up equipment came alive. The CB750 is also credited with casting the mold for what would later be called the "Universal Japanese Motorcycle," a breed of machines that would bring the bikes of England to their collective knees.



1983 Honda CB750



With 67 horsepower at 8000 rpm, the CB750's four-cylinder engine was both powerful and smooth. Redline was 8500 rpm. For the first time on a production bike, a front disc brake was standard equipment; fitting, given the whopping speed potential, which was claimed to be 130 mph.