ALL-STREET! HELMETS: The Vital Facts

MOTORCYCLIST

CRUISE MISSILE!
Honda's Mighty V65 Magna

NOVEMBER 1983

1000cc Triumph Four
When it was introduced last year, the Honda V45 Sabre appeared to be designed for the full range of duties on the sporting side of the 750 class. With those expectations in mind, we were a little disappointed when we tested the bike. Handling was shy of the mark we had set for the first V-4, and performance was only average for the 750 class.

The advent of the Interceptor redefined the Sabre's mission. It became clear Honda never intended the Sabre to be a full-fledged sporting bike. It was meant to span the gap between the full-attack Interceptor, the most sporting of the 750 sport bikes, and the laid-back V45 Magna cruiser. It was intended to be a sport/tourer, with the emphasis on tourer.

With the Interceptor on hand to establish its true identity, the Sabre seemed sufficiently strong to survive another year or two without any significant changes. However, Honda was apparently intent on making the Sabre as competitive as possible. So, even though it is just in its second model year, the Sabre has already been the object of numerous changes to improve power, handling, and ride.

To extract more power from the Sabre, Honda engineers applied some tricks from the V45 Magna and the Interceptor. Even though the '82 V45—Sabre and Magna—had identical engines, testing revealed the Magna was slightly faster. The reason turned out to be the difference in location and design of the airboxes; the Magna's delivered a less turbulent air flow to the carbs. So the frame of the 1983 Sabre was redesigned to position the airbox behind the steering head, where it flows air more efficiently.

To make room for the airbox, the ignition coils were repositioned behind the side panels.

Other breathing improvements provide additional power increases. The carburetors' venturis have been opened up from 29.2 mm to 30.0 mm and shaped like the CB750F's. The intake ports are 1.0 mm wider for their entire lengths. The cam timing has been altered to match the Interceptor's. These cams open the intake valves three degrees earlier than those in last year's Sabre, open the exhaust valves three degrees later, and close the exhaust valves two degrees later. They also provide a quarter of a milli-
**HONDA V45 SABRE**

Suggested retail price..............................$3398
Warranty ...........................................12 months, unlimited miles
Number of U.S. dealers .........................Approx. 1800
Recommended maintenance intervals ..........8000 miles

**ENGINE**
Type ..................................................Liquid-cooled, transverse
4-stroke 90° V-4
Valve arrangement .................................DOHC, 4 valves operated by
forked cam followers, threaded adjusters
Displacement........................................748cc
Bore x stroke.....................................70 x 48.6mm
Compression ratio .................................10.5:1
Carburetion ........................................4, 32mm Keihin constant-velocity
Ignition .............................................Battery-powered, transistorized,
2 magnetic triggers
Lubrication ..........................................Wet sump, 3.1 qt
Charging output ...................................300 watts
Battery .............................................12V, 14AH

**DRIVETRAIN**
Primary transmission ...............................Straight-cut gears, 1.736:1
Clutch ..................................................6 plates
Final drive ..........................................Shaft, 3.40:1

**CHASSIS**
Front suspension .................................37mm Showa, 5.5 in. travel;
TRAC anti-dive, adjustment for air pressure
Rear suspension .................................Honda Pro-Link, single Showa damper,
4.2 in. wheel travel; adjustments
for air pressure and rebound damping
Front brake .........................................2, single-action calipers
with dual live pistons, 276mm discs
Rear brake ..........................................Single-leading-shoe drum, rod operated
Front tire .............................................110/90H18 Dunlop F11
Rear tire .............................................130/90H17 Dunlop K127C
Rake/trail ...........................................29.5°/4.6 in. (117mm)
Wheelbase ..........................................61.4 in. (1560mm)
Seat height, unladen ...............................30.4 in. (772mm)
Fuel capacity .......................................4.75 gal (17.81)
Weight ..................................................539 lb (245kg) wet;
510 lb (231kg) tank empty
Colors ..................................................Black or red
Instruments .................................Electronic speedometer, tachometer,
odometer, LCD tripmeter, clock/stopwatch,
fuel gauge, water temperature gauge, gear indicator/
6-function warning system; lights for turn signals,
normal, high beam

**PERFORMANCE**
Fuel consumption ..................................34 to 40 mpg, 37.9 mpg avg.
Average touring range ..........................180 miles
Best ¼-mile acceleration ........................12.03 sec., 110.7 mph
200-yd top-gear acceleration from 50 mph......74.6 mph terminal speed
RPM at 60 mph, top gear ..........................4050
Calculated speed in gears at (redline) ......(10,000) 1st, 47 mph;
2nd, 68 mph; 3rd, 88 mph;
4th, 105 mph; 5th, 127 mph;
6th, 149 mph
Speedometer error ..................................30 mph, actual 29.2;
60 mph, actual 56.9

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**HIGH-SPEED PASS, TERMINAL SPEED**

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**RPM AT 60 MPH**

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**AVERAGE FUEL CONSUMPTION**

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meter more lift, for a total of 8.25mm. The camshafts now have more support at their ends, thanks to beefier bosses in the cylinder heads.

The 90-degree V-4 engine is so smooth that it is easy to wind right past redline without knowing it. To make the Sabre safe for overrevvers, the pistons’ valve pockets have been deepened slightly and the piston domes raised 0.7mm to retain the same 10.5:1 compression ratio as last year’s. Incidentally, all of these internal changes have also been made to the Magna engine.

A new airbox and changes in the cams and valves of a few degrees or a fraction of a millimeter don’t sound like much, but they add up to a quite significant performance increase. On a hot, muggy day at the dragstrip, the new Sabre, in spite of the lousy surface traction, carved three-tenths of a second off the best time of last year’s bike, turning 12.03 seconds at 110.7 mph in the quarter—4.4 mph faster than last year’s bike. (Correcting for horsepower loss in the unusually hot weather, the ’83 Sabre should have run about 11.85 seconds at 112.5 mph.) At 75 mph, the new bike was also running 3.2 mph faster through the speed traps in our 200-yard top-gear acceleration test.

By increasing fork-tube overlap and changing the steering-head angle and rigidity, Honda has improved the Sabre’s handling. However, suspension is still a problem.

A dial now controls the rear suspension’s damping setting, but you still have to remove the saddle to do it. Suspension compliance and road holding are problems at both ends.

Always smooth and responsive, the 750 V-4 now has more power due to better breathing on the intake side. Airbox, carbs, ports, and cams have all been altered for more power.

The electronic instruments include a useful selection of functions. On the left is a clock/stopwatch. Buttons on the left bar select and control the stopwatch.

Tail section storage compartments are vanishing on street bikes, but the Sabre has a fairly roomy one. The turn signal mounts are flexible, an increasingly common feature.

PHOTOS: PAUL MARTINEZ
The Honda V45 Magna runs very close to the mainstream of American motorcycling. The appeal of the Magna's custom-type styling is well documented; its 750 V-4 engine is regarded by many as a piece of motorcycling's future. These elements seem to produce a very marketable combination.

But the Magna is a lot more than a clever package. Overall, it just be the most enjoyable ride in its class. The Honda's competition comes from two directions: Kawasaki has two shaft-drive four-cylinder cruisers, the LTD and the Spectre. Yamaha offers a regular Maxim, as well as a Midnight Maxim. Call it the 750 shaft-drive, four-cylinder cruiser class. Within this rather narrow range, the $3298 Honda V45 Magna is one of the cheapest bikes available. The Midnight Maxim is the most expensive at $3599.

Essentially identical with the motor in the V45 Sabre, the Magna mill possesses all of the same attributes. The V-4's good points are numerous. It's smooth, quiet, powerful, and predictable. Its manners are impeccable at all times. Warm-up requires only a few seconds of choke. Throttle response is crisp and immediate. The rider has an 8500-rpm powerband at his disposal; the motor pulls smoothly from 1500 rpm all the way to the 10,000-rpm redline. In a sprint, the Magna is the fastest in the class. Its 12.25-second, 107.9-mph best run in the quarter-mile is a solid three-tenths quicker than the Spectre's best and four-tenths quicker than the Maxim's. The Honda's midrange power is excellent too. At matching engine rpm, the Honda will motor away from the Yamaha and Kawasaki. The V45 is hampered in our roll-on test since we use a starting speed of 50 mph in top gear. The Honda has a tall overdrive sixth gear, so it is spinning considerably slower than the other bikes when the throttle is whacked open. This results in a predictably slow top-gear roll-on speed for the Honda. It averages 73.8 mph; the Yamaha turns in a 75.6-mph figure, and the Kawasaki Spectre is good for 77.7 mph. If downshifted to fifth gear, the Magna should perform almost as well as the 80.1-mph Interceptor.

In day-to-day riding, the Magna's engine is by and large an enjoyable companion. It's easy to manage and amazingly flexible. There's a fair amount of driveline lash, (though not as much as the Maxim has) as well as shaft-induced suspension rise and fall, but both conditions are livable. The shifting is occasionally indefinite; sometimes the transmission pops out of gear immediately after a casual upshift. The hydraulic clutch requires no adjustment and engages predictably. The clutch won't take much abuse, however. After five runs at the dragstrip, ours was slipping badly under full-power upshifts, although it continued to work well during normal riding.

The Magna's chassis is standard fare. It's got two shocks on the back, just like in the old days. The Showas adjust for spring preload only, but they do a fair job under most conditions just the same. There's a paucity of rebound damping if you go blasting over big bumps or swoop through fast corners, but the highway ride is better than average. In fact, the dual Showas are more responsive to smaller bumps and ripples than is the Pro-Link rear suspension on the V45 Sabre. This, combined with the Magna's cushier seat, actually makes it a more comfortable long-range tourer than its sporting sibling. With its moderately chopper-style riding position, the Magna still isn't ideal, but the control layout is less extreme than the Kawasaki Spectre's. The Maxim is the most comfortable of this herd, since it is more spacious than the others.

The Magna's main comfort weakness is its long leading-axle front fork. It is reluctant to

**Suggested retail price** $3295

**Engine type** Liquid-cooled, transverse 4-stroke 90° V-4

**Front suspension** 37mm Showa, 5.5 in. travel; TRAC anti-dive, adjustment for air pressure

**Rear suspension** 2 Showa dampers, 3.9 in. wheel travel, adjustment for spring preload

**Front tire** 110/90-H18 Bridgestone

**Rear tire** 130/90-H16 Bridgestone

**Wheelbase** 60.6 in. (1539mm)

**Seat height, unladen** 29.7 in. (754mm)

**Wet weight** 528 lb (239kg)

**Fuel capacity** 3.7 gal (14L)

**Instruments** Speedometer, tachometer, odometer, tripmeter, water temperature gauge; lights for turn signals, high beam, neutral, overdrive; warning light for oil pressure, fuel level, tailight failure; taillight, brake light, turn signals, high beam, neutral; overdrive.

**Fuel consumption** 38 to 42 mpg, 39.3 mpg avg.

**Average touring range** 145 miles

**Best ¼-mile acceleration** 12.25 sec., 107.9 mph

**200-yd top gear acceleration from 50 mph** 73.9 mph terminal speed

The Magna's instrumentation is classically styled and lacks a lot of gimmicks. A fuel gauge would be a worthwhile addition.
from 50 mph. In short, without sacrificing any low-range power, Honda has substantially increased the Sabre’s midrange and high-rpm power to the point where it approaches the performance of some all-out sporting bikes.

Another bit of trickery borrowed from the Interceptor is a one-way clutch, which can be retrofitted to last year’s bike. This disengages slightly during hard deceleration to help prevent rear-wheel lockup on sloppy downshifts. It is connected to the same six-speed transmission used in last year’s Sabre, not a five-speed as in the Interceptor. The hydraulic operation of the clutch is about the same—light and smooth—with the drivetrain’s small amount of lash noticeable only as the clutch begins to engage. Gear shifting remains a weak spot, and we experienced some of the same popping out of gear and missed gears that we did on last year’s Sabre.

Braking continues to be one of the Sabre’s strengths. Excellent power and control, combined with the bike’s wide (but slightly hard) tires, provide terrific stopping capability. Only on rough surfaces, where the TRAC anti-dive system reduces the suspension’s ability to cope with bumps, is the VF750F’s braking anything less than excellent. The only change made in the braking was the substitution of spiral slots in the discs for last year’s straight ones, which was done to reduce cost.

I put in about 800 touring miles on the standard Sabre one weekend and did another 500 on the dressed version a couple of weekends later. I’m left a little puzzled by the bike now. It’s no longer possible to dismiss its taut ride, since there is no need for it to excel in the super-sport mode. Yet, the ride intrudes into the Sabre’s comfort when you are touring. With different suspension, the Sabre could be an excellent tourer, which seems to be something the 750 class needs. As it is, I’m not sure what the bike is intended to do or be; it is neither Tourer nor sport bike, and somehow, it doesn’t quite seem to fit in the sport/tourer niche either.

On the other hand, and despite this lack of ability to place it, I still like the Sabre. It has been overshadowed by the Interceptor, which certainly has more personal appeal for me. I also find the V45 Magna almost as comfortable as the Sabre, and I certainly prefer its ride to the Sabre’s. Nonetheless, the Sabre is a competent motorcycle in almost any role. It would just be nice if it stood out in at least one area.

—Art Friedman

Those of us fortunate enough to sample the initial Sabre were highly impressed, not so much because of what the bike did, but because of what it represented—the first trickle of what soon became Honda’s rushing torrent of engineering trickery. The magnificent Interceptor was the crest of the wave, and numerous changes to the chassis have altered handling and ride. In conjunction with the redesign of the airbox, the steering head has been raked out an additional degree and given more support. The offset of the triple-clamps has been increased from 55 to 60mm. A side effect of these changes is a slightly longer wheelbase. Up front, the fork sliders have been changed to provide additional engagement and overlap, and the shock for the Pro-Link rear suspension now has four Instead of three rebound-damping positions. Rebound damping now adjusts with a small wheel in the top of the shock instead of the sliding handle used last year, but you still need to remove the saddle to adjust it. The sidestand has been relocated to provide more cornering clearance on the left.

Have these changes made the Sabre a handling fool? Hardly. It is noticeably more stable at high speeds when charging a corner, but the suspension still provides a rough ride over sharp bumps of all sizes. As a result, road holding and traction still suffer in bumpy corners. However, with the slower steering response created by the geometry changes, the bike isn’t bounced off course as easily as it was before. Even the version we tested with Honda’s fairing and bags is more manageable during hard cornering than last year’s, and either ’83 version is considerably more stable than the 1982 model in fast, smooth corners. The


**ALL DRESSED UP**

Hondaeline fairing and bags for the Sabre: expensive but effective

The Hondaline fairing installed on one of our Sabres should look familiar. It first turned up a few years ago as standard equipment on the CBX and has been fitted as optional equipment to most of Honda’s big road bikes. We tested a 1982 C8900F with the fairing installed. Although the fairing was around before the Sabre was ever introduced, it looks as though it were built just for the Sabre; the lines of bike and fairing mesh perfectly. The Hondaline saddlebags have a similar history, but they, too, seem to have been designed with the Sabre in mind. Since the bike and accessories look so good together and since the Sabre has been repositioned in Honda’s lineup as more of a touring machine this year, it seemed appropriate to sample the accessories and the V45 Sabre together.

This is not a cheap way to dress your Sabre. The Hondaline Sport fairing with lowers will devour $565, plus whatever you pay to have it installed. The bags are $421, and their mounts cost an additional $105. By the time you have paid tax, the total is over $1100. For that kind of money, you might expect something extraordinary, which the Hondaline accessories aren’t. The quality is certainly top-notch, with excellent fit, finish, and detailing, but the performance is nothing special.

The frame-mount Sport fairing comes with detachable lowers, mounts, and a cover for the old headlight. All wiring is included, and it uses a round headlight instead of the stock rectangular unit. There are two pockets in the fairing, and the right one locks. The tinted windscreen turns up at its top, creating the same annoying buffeting we noted on both previous bikes tested with the fairing. It rattles your face shield and shakes your helmet. It would be nice if a taller windshield were used, like other fairings, the Hondaline has pads which cushion the points where long-legged riders’ knees might touch the fairing.

Like the fairing, the bags are color-matched to the Sabre. They may be detached by unlocking the single lock for each bag. The same key operates the locks in the bags’ latches. Detaching and remounting the bags takes just a few seconds, and when removed, the bags are easy to carry with handles that fold flush into their tops. They are not as roomy as some of the popular aftermarket bags, and they won’t hold a helmet. Straps inside help you organize and separate the contents, and a retaining arm keeps each bag from opening more than about 60 degrees, a convenience if you want to open one while it’s mounted. If you wish to open a bag all the way, the retaining arms may be disengaged at one end.

These accessories add 46 pounds and raise the center of gravity of the Sabre slightly. Some of the bike’s neutral feel is lost as a result; the Sabre wants to sit up slightly when you brake while cornering. However, the overall effect on handling is minimal, probably less than you would experience with any other fairing that gave equal protection. Unless you have something loose in one of the bags, there are no new rattles or squeaks with these pieces added, and even engine noise isn’t much increased with the fairing mounted. Gas mileage was barely changed—less than two mpg—so the fairing may be slippery enough to compensate for the additional weight.

Removing the saddlebags is quick and easy. The key unlocks the top mount, which pulls rearward, out of engagement with a bracket on the bag, which then lifts off.

steering retains most of its amazingly neutral feel, although a little has been lost in the steering geometry changes. For touring, commuting, and even the cornering done by the vast majority of street riders, the Sabre’s handling is more than adequate; that last, loony percentile of sport riders, though, would be better off with an Interceptor.

The changes to its geometry have made the Sabre slightly less nimble than before, and low-speed handling is slightly less light and responsive. The biggest problem at low speed is the Sabre’s shortage of steering lock. You simply can’t turn the front fork very far in either direction, so the Sabre will not make tight turns at low speeds. The bike still feels lighter than you might expect.

The Sabre’s saddle is flat and roomy, but it is also firmer than most comparable bikes’ seats. The firmness would probably be less noticeable without the slightly harsh ride, but the combination of the two will eventually make most riders sadle sore while touring. Those two criticisms aside, the Sabre is an excellent touring bike. The 90-degree V-4 is extremely smooth at all speeds, with nary a tingle reaching the rider. The handlebars may be pivoted where they clamp to the top of the fork tubes, and therefore they provide leeway for a variety of physiques and riding styles.

Both the standard and dressed versions of the Sabre go about 165 miles at touring speeds before you have to switch to reserve. A low-fuel warning light on the dash comes on a few miles after switching to reserve, which seems backward to us. In heavy expressway traffic, the switch to reserve can be an exciting moment, particularly if the driver behind you isn’t paying attention.

A dipstick has replaced the oil-level switch to reserve can be an exciting moment, particularly if the driver behind you isn’t paying attention.
window in response to customer requests, and the warranty (as on other Honda street bikes) has been extended to 12 months. Maintenance and service requirements remain the same. It is still necessary to rearrange the radiator a little to get to the valves on the front cylinder bank.

The engine and chassis changes have made the Sabre faster and more stable. Improvements riders of all ilk are likely to appreciate. However, even with its increased emphasis on touring, brought about by the introduction of the Interceptor, the Sabre would still benefit from an improvement in suspension compliance. There is a big hole out there for a 750-class super-tourer. The Sabre has most of the credentials to fill it. It is smooth, reliable, and powerful enough for the task, but it needs a bit more comfort to completely handle the role. As it is, the Sabre is a good, broad-spectrum 750 sport/touring bike with less competition in the class than ever. Yamaha’s Seca is available only as a full-dress machine, so the Sabre’s direct competition consists of the Kawasaki KZ750 and the Suzuki GS750T, both of which are slightly dated and have flaws of their own.

Of course, there are all sorts of flashier 750s. On the sporting end, there are the Kawasaki GPz750, the Suzuki GS750E and ES, and the Interceptor. Those favoring the chopper look will turn to the Yamaha Virago or Maxim, Honda’s Shadow or Magna, or the cruisers from Kawasaki and Suzuki. There are also 750s that exist in their own categories, like the full-dress Seca and Honda’s Nighthawk. Since styling and the image it conveys are much more important to most buyers than function, the other models will probably outsell the Sabre and the other less stylized 750s. However, the standard models have usually managed to outperform the other versions because of their wider range of uses. A major reason for their success in this broad range has generally been their superior comfort. But the Magna andInterceptor are about as comfortable as the Sabre. Therefore, riders who would traditionally forgo the image offered by the specialized versions in order to get the best all-around bike have less reason to buy the Sabre.

The Sabre remains a competent, attractive motorcycle, but pressure from its own increasingly competent siblings limits the number of potential buyers who will find maximum motorcycling happiness—even if function is a prime consideration—on a Sabre.