

MINITEST:

Honda CB400T Hawk

New duds and suspenders for The Best.

• The best under-500cc sportbike comes in two colors—black or silver—and is available in Honda dealerships. It's the CB400T, better known as the Hawk.

Picking the best isn't easy, either. There are some bikes in this displacement category that are either faster or quicker, and some will argue that the Hawk isn't the absolute best-handling under-500cc sportbike, either. But best in individual talents doesn't necessarily translate to best overall, and there the Hawk is the best.

The reasons why the Hawk carries off the honors are several, and most haven't changed since last year's model. As ever, the Hawk's 395cc twin-cylinder engine runs smoothly from idle to its 10,000-rpm redline, thanks to a set of counterbalancers, and the three-valve combustion chambers contribute to sufficient horsepower for 14.3-second quarter-miles. And the engine is more than just a performer;

it's rugged as well. There are racers who have ridden their Hawks in as many as 32 box stock road races without once pulling the heads off their engines.

Neither is any real maintenance needed for the solid-state pointless ignition or the smooth-operating 32mm Keihin carbs with their accelerator pump. Even the six-speed close-ratio transmission whips through the gears faultlessly, so smoothly, in fact, that you sometimes question whether you've used your left toe at all. The only problem our silver 1981 test bike had was a little more of a cold-blooded nature than the '80 model. Honda has assured us that carburetion is unchanged from last year so perhaps the early-morning laziness was just an idiosyncrasy of this particular engine.

And while the motor is working almost faultlessly, so, too, is the chassis: The Hawk is among the best handlers on the street.

Whether speeds are high or low the Hawk can turn any corner into a straightaway if you have even the slightest inkling about apexes and cambers. The Hawk's agility is even improved over the '80 model with a new air-assisted fork and Variable Hydraulic Damping (VHD) shocks. Spring and damper rates inside the VHD shocks are about the same as last year's units, but Honda feels that better quality control in the new shock improves performance. The fork also provides a more progressive action and can be more precisely tuned for each rider. The Hawk still steers with the quickness and predictability it's always been known for, so when you touch the footpeg nubs to tarmac, you don't notice any wiggles or handling aberrations; just the same sure ride with no surprises.

But while the engine and handling are largely unchanged from last year, the Hawk's styling isn't. The new cosmetics emigrated from Europe, where they've been used for several years on the CB400N version of the Hawk. The Euro-facelift for U.S. consumption includes a larger tail section, matte-black fork legs, plastic color-matched front fender and reversed ComStar wheels. Another alteration appears at the instrument cluster, which now features Honda's back-illuminated face that makes the numbers easier to read at night.



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To become small-bore champ, this year's Hawk had to top the best

... last year's Hawk.

HONDA CB400 HAWK

Importer: American Honda Motor Company
100 West Alondra Boulevard
Gardena, California 90247

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|----------------------------------|---|
| Category | street |
| Suggested retail price | \$1898 |
| Engine type | four-stroke vertical twin |
| Valve arrangement | single overhead camshaft, three valves per cylinder |
| Bore and stroke | 70.5mm x 50.6mm |
| Displacement | 395.0cc |
| Carburetion | two 30mm Keihin constant-vacuum |
| Gearbox | 6-speed |
| Front fork / wheel travel | air-spring, 32mm stanchion tube diameter / 5.3 in. (133mm) |
| Rear shocks / wheel travel | 5-way adjustable spring preload / 4.3 in. (110mm) |
| Wheelbase | 54.5 to 55.5 in. (1384 to 1410mm) |
| Seat height | 31.0 in. (787mm) |
| Weight | 397 lbs. (172kg) |
| Fuel consumption | 52 to 61 mpg (22 to 26 km/l) |
| Warranty | 6 months / 6000 miles |
| Available colors | black and silver |

The new Hawk also has a 5mm-lower seat that is just as firm as all Hawk seats—which is to say that it's fine for sport riding but too hard for long-distance stints. But the Hawk never has been the best small-sized tourer or arguably the fastest or best-looking bike in town. It has always been close to the top of the list, but in 1981 the only area where the Hawk tops everything in its class is braking. The new twin-piston caliper stops the Hawk quicker and more predictably than any of its competition.

But when you add the winning score for brakes with consistently high marks for performance, handling and looks, the Hawk comes out as an overall sub-500cc sportbike winner. You can't buy a better all-around little sportbike, unless, of course, you don't like black or silver paint. —Dain Gingerelli