PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVE GOOLEY

By Jake Grubb

The Trans-Atlantic

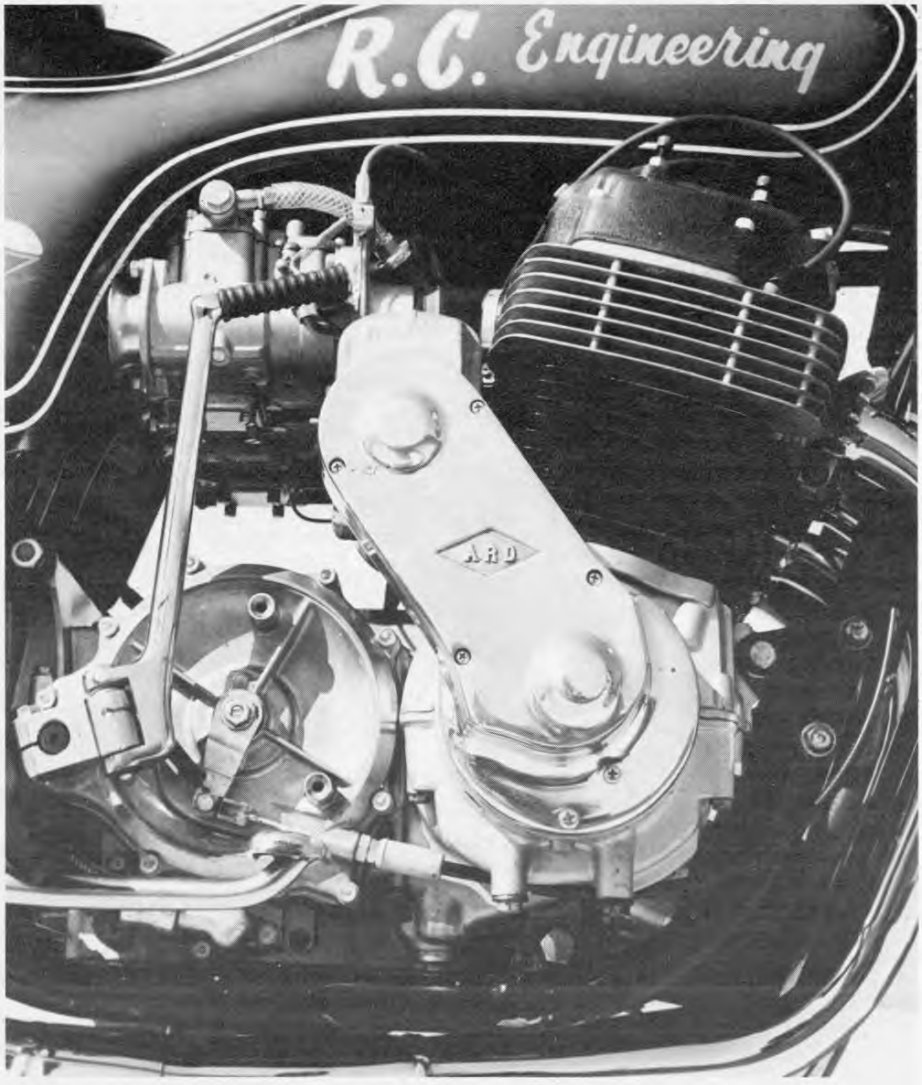
Cafe Connection

●"It is my *madness,*" he said, pivoting on the leather soles of his tan-colored St. Laurent shoes. Thomas Barber's obsession for extravagance is surpassed only by his unceasing appetite for potency. He is wealthy. Heir to a family of powerful European business and industrial influence he is multi-lingual, has been educated in five different countries and presently occupies a lucrative position in France as junior executive at a Parisian bank. At 22, he resides in Monaco, Turin, Geneva, La Croix, St. Michel and Paris. Mobility is his life style. Thomas travels to Boston and New York several times a year on business and he religiously attends the Daytona 200 each year in March. We ran across him in a most unlikely place: Gardena, California.

Seen arriving in style at the 16200 block of Main Street Gardena each day, a local might suspiciously guess him to be an ousted Hollywood extra from an MGM back lot, thumbing his way to Laguna Beach in search of some action. Wrong, of course, but Thomas does look rather theatrical. In his exquisitely tailored wool knit pants, half inch alligator waist belt, body-hugging red checked shirt and $200.00 mohair sport coat he really stands out among Levi-mod Americanos. Nevertheless, he talks with honed annunciation, looks at you with an eagle eye and when it comes to his R.C. Honda, answers all of your "whys" and "hows" with authority and great enthusiasm.

He explains that the popularity of large Japanese 4-strokes in France and greater Europe parallels that in the United States. But high performance development of Honda and Kawasaki multis on the Continent is far behind progress here at home, "mostly because of your access to aerospace materials and processes. Our resources in Europe are very limited in this regard." Through extensive research into American businesses specializing in Honda engine development Thomas became particularly impressed with R.C. Engineering. Correspondence with headman Russ Collins of the Gardena firm led to serious discussions concerning a custom cafe Honda. Collins, a man known for his attitude of thoroughness in approaching custom projects, expressed conviction in his ability to meet Barber's demands for excellence, and the two men established a working rapport.

By the time Thomas touched down at L.A. International Airport in February,



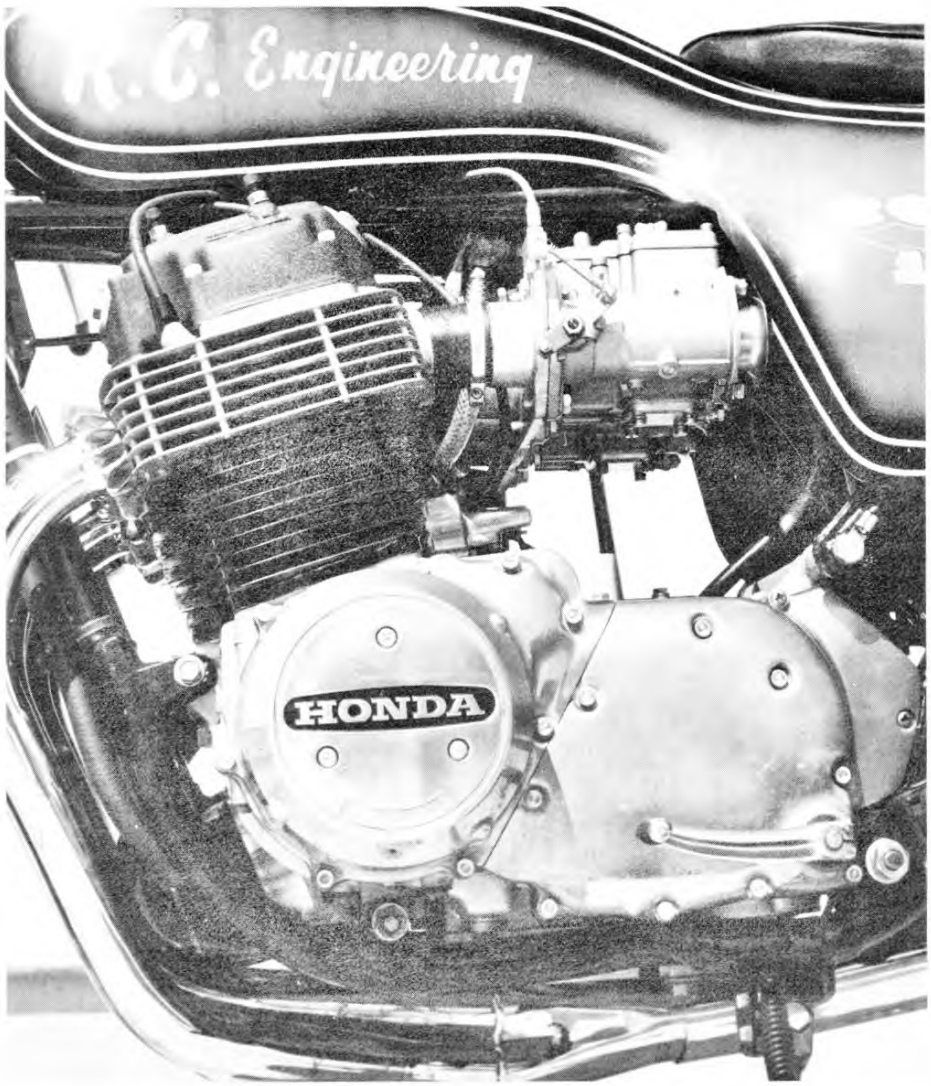
If it ain't trick it ain't a cafe racer; and Barber's Honda is trick. A pair of Webers attend to carburetion, an ARD mag to ignition and dual-row chain to movement.

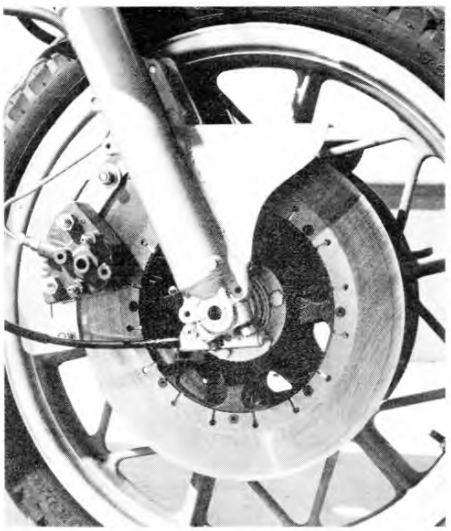
plans for his Honda were pretty well articulated. While his arrival was one of wide-eyed interest for engineers at R.C. *(is this dude for real or what?!),* Russ Collins was glad he could come in person. Work began almost immediately.

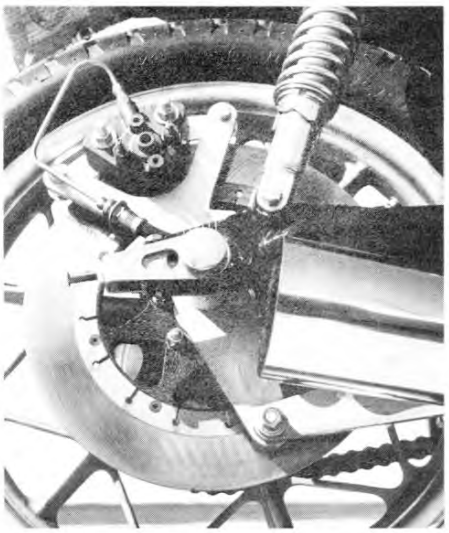
Imagine yourself traveling across an ocean just to get a motorcycle; dedicating yourself to three weeks of pure labor in putting it together with constant explanations for the logic behind your views; working twelve-hour days to complete your bike; staying up nights perspiring over meticulous details of assembly. This is the way in which Thomas directed his energies as the men at R.C. painstakingly built, sized, fitted and fabricated the Honda into what you see here.

It's an exciting bike. R.C. starts, when they go into a project this extensive, by simply removing the insides of the stock 750 Honda engine and effectively building a new powerplant. They capitalize not so much on what's in the engine, but on its basic design. The crankshaft is lightened, balanced, polished, radiused, fluted and is 3½ pounds lighter than stock. It assures quicker throttle response with a clear boost in overall acceleration and can withstand extreme stresses. R.C. "Goldenrod" connecting rods are of forged alloy billet, polished and artificially aged in a "very, very new" aeronautical process. Each single Goldenrod is 100 grams lighter than the stock Honda connecting rod and besides being stronger, transfers shock to the bearings more gently.

Cylinders are bored to produce 1000cc total displacement and house Venolia forged alloy pistons. These are fitted with R.C.'s top-of-the-line hard chrome wrist pins, guaranteed not to bend. Chrome moly cylinder studs replace the standard stainless steel units. The head is machined by hand; ports are reshaped and all valves, rockers, combustion chambers, exhaust and intake passages are polished to perfection. Valves are of stainless steel and are oversized to accommodate the enlarged ports. Special billet camshafts, ground for racing, are held firmly in place by extra cam tower bolts that supplement the stock studs. The four-into-one exhaust system, which in itself is capable of extracting six additional horsepower from a 750 Honda engine, is R.C. Engineering's newest answer to ground clearance.







Tracy's Fiberglass supplied the tank-seat-fender ensemble, R.C. Engineering the collector. Scoops cool the discs and calipers, while Kimtab wheels support the Dunlops.

A heavy-duty alloy clutch housing, which weighs less than the standard unit, features treated alloy plates that are copper-coated to dissipate heat more efficiently. The countershaft, which runs through the clutch and drives the primary sprocket, spins in a double babbit bearing. Internal gear ratios are stock. In fact the transmission is stock except for the clutch and primary drive assemblies. Barber considered going to a close-ratio CR gearbox but chose against it because of its limited benefit on the street.

There is no electric starter on this Honda. An ARD magneto replaces the standard battery ignition and the eight pound alternator that spins on the end of the crankshaft (creating a lot of drag), is lightened to 3¾ pounds. It takes a determined man to kick the big four-banger over. So that the starter shaft doesn't bend from the greater compression of the 1000cc engine it has been heat-treated and shot-peened. This is common R.C. procedure. Carburetion is through two 40 DCOE sidedraft Webers.

Speaking of comparisons between the U.S. and Europe in terms of cafe racer development, Barber re-emphasizes our superiority in terms of engine modification and preparation. "Nowhere," he says, "can you find in Europe a motor such as this one made by R.C." He stresses with emphasis, however, European expertise in areas of chassis, gas tanks, seats, fairings and suspension units: "we have a far better range to choose from in these categories." Competitive development among Europeans in areas of handling and aerodynamics has brought about great strides in frames and plastics accessories that seldom reach the American market.

Thomas explains that what is a cafe racer to an American is a *motorcycle* to a Frenchman or a Belgian. Speed limits on French, German, Italian, Belgian and Swiss expressways are for all practical purposes unlimited. People who own motorcycles often use them for traveling very rapidly from one destination to another. Development in the industry is and always has been suited to a trend of high-speed highway travel. Thomas says with assurance, "It is *impossible* to be on the highway at 130 miles per hour with high handlebars, much less with an extended front

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end or rigid rear suspension." Believe it—people travel at 120, 130, 140 mph over there. Citroens, Mercedes, and Lamborghinis have 100 mph-plus cruising speeds for good reason. Thus the low-slung, streamlined look in automobiles and motorcycles. Bikes, like cars, are built to perform. They have to handle and they have to be safely constructed.

The paradox here is that Thomas Barber's Honda is ninety-five percent American in its modification. And he believes it to be superior. He will use it in France for weekend pleasure but at first it will undergo widespread exhibition because Thomas intends to import and sell Collins' components in Europe and also export and sell European components in the U.S., distributing them through R.C. Engineering.

Layout of this "cafe" Honda is extravagant but completely functional in its every aspect. Front and rear disc brakes from Kimtab are fitted with Hurst/Airheart calipers. The master cylinders for the brakes are CR competition items, specially ordered from Honda of United Kingdom. Aluminum air scoops on the double front disc funnel air onto the pucks and calipers for cooling. Hidden goodies include a compact Lockhart oil cooler and an ignition switch that is similar to that of a Rolls Royce. When it is in the "on" position the engine will not start. When in the "off" position it will fire. This is meant to discourage thieves, plenty of whom will certainly lay eyes on the machine everywhere it is displayed.

The frame is stock. "Heavy but sturdy," Barber qualifies. A 4130 chrome moly R.C. swingarm may eventually be installed if the extra strength is found to be necessary. The attractive fiberglass body, which is becoming popular among California cyclists, is from Tracy Fiberglass Works. A pair of 4.10 x 18 Dunlop K-81 tires ride on Kimtab magnesium wheels which, in addition to being strong and light, make tire changing easier than traditional spoke wheels.

The double-row drive chain is Barber's answer to solving the vulnerabilities and unpleasantries common to chains in general. He detests them in principle because of their fundamental greasiness and constant tendency to stretch out of adjustment. The double row unit is no less messy except that it requires less maintenance in terms of adjustment, can take more abuse and will last longer.

Engineers at R.C. have recorded the Honda's rear wheel horsepower at a solid 105. Fitted with a fairing they expect the bike to top 145 mph with the gearing it now has. It will cruise comfortably in excess of 100. Because of its smooth power delivery and wide torque curve it is a nice motorcycle to ride. But there's no underestimating the engine's grunt; it is one hell of a handful. ◉