

**B**LOOD-CURDLING STUFF. Adrenalin, excitement and laughs-a-plenty. And the M6 was (mostly) a doddle too. There's something about bikes like these that is absolutely bonkers, yet makes absolute sense. Performance-packed yet upright and easy. And always tempting you into silliness whether it be slides, stunts or wheelies.

Outwardly they're very different: a four, a triple and a V-twin, one from Japan, one from Britain and one from Italy. But spiritually they're the same. Big-engined beasts with more than their fair share of character and performance.

All have had a lot of time, money and effort lavished on them. They are all a quantum leap ahead of mere Zephyrs and their 'basic' styling merely belies the top notch chassis and engine specifications they all boast. The Monster was one of the most eagerly-awaited bikes of last year. This year the same was true of Triumph's evocative Speed Triple, and the often overlooked Honda CB1000 by no means suffers in their company.

What really draws this comparison together is that the Monster, Speed Triple and CB1000 are all trying to be refreshing, fun alternatives in the £7500 price bracket to the usual staid fare of racer-replicas and fairing-smothered tourers. Their various concoctions of big, lusty engines combined with flat bars, decent chassis and radical looks certainly gets the hair standing up on the back of my neck. Loony, bonkers fun the lot of 'em. But at the end of the day one certainly stands out from the crowd.

## HONDA CB1000



THEY DON'T CALL it the Big One any more. Phooey. Too many phnarr-phnarr jokes, too much embarrassment. But they should.

If there was ever a true 'big' bike this is it. Huge CBR motor, fat tank and unfashionably large 18in wheels, all echoing the days of Freddie Spencer CB900 superbikes and CBXs. Masses of heavy metal to stretch out and pose about on, and enough butch bulk to impress people

who don't really know any better. The CB thou is the two-wheeled version of the truck-engined Dodge Viper. There is no better way to give someone an inferiority complex than to park the CB alongside and watch its neighbours wither away in shame.

A bike as ballsy (and pricey) as the CB1000 simply *has* to be capable of burning off sports 750s in a straight line, keep them within the beam of its massive headlight through the twisties *and* has to provide upright, roomy, two-up comfort for it to have more than a snowball's chance in hell.

What's immediately obvious is that the CB1000 is no basic, old-fashioned roadster in the way, say, a Zephyr is. An all-new double cradle frame; the biggest, beefiest swing-arm you've ever seen; top-notch Showa forks and piggy-back rear shocks plus huge discs and FireBlade calipers only hint at the big jollies to come.

With the emphasis switched to bottom-end grunt, the CB version of Honda's 1000cc transverse four has been given smaller carbs (down from the CBR1000's 38mm CVs to 34s), different valve timing, remapped ignition and a restrictive four-into-one pipe. Peak torque is pushed down the rev range from 8500rpm to 6000 with power also boosted in the midrange at the expense of outright top end. The CB's peak power is 97bhp at 8500rpm against the CBR's 100bhp at 9500rpm. A new, wider-spaced five speed box replaces the CBR's six-speeder.

From the saddle it doesn't disappoint. Meaty, easy and turbine-smooth urge that winds you forward without fuss or bother. The power builds in a totally linear way; pulling from less than 2000rpm happily before smoothing out, on and up towards the 9000rpm redline. Day to day pottering or cruising has never been easier, but if you want to explore its ultimate potency the CB needs its neck wringing and demands more gearchanges (always neat and clean) than its meatball specifications may lead you to expect.

Though fine in isolation, back-to-back with the Ducati and Triumph the CB was another story. The two and three-cylinder Euros suddenly redefined rich, thick power and left the big and heavy Honda seeming breathless and bland.

When I might reasonably have expected the CB to flash up to 120 it was, instead, merely wheezing up to 100. When I was flying on a jetstream of thunderous noise on both the Duke and the Speed Triple, on the Honda I was in an almost silent, sterile cocoon.

On the brakes, where I'd started to

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