

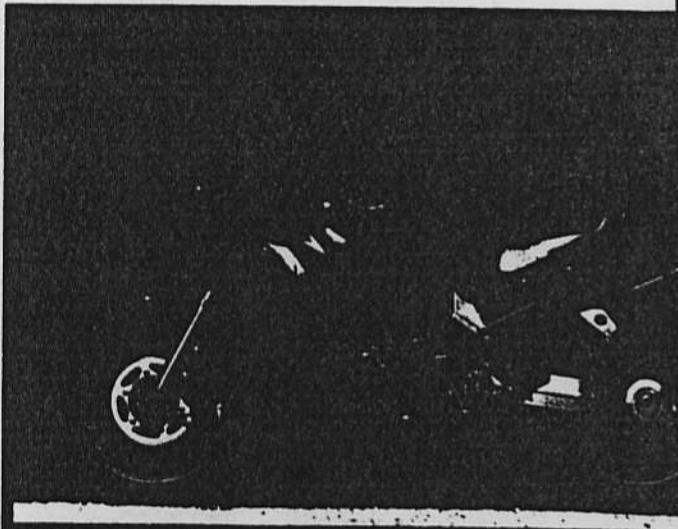
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HONDA COULD HAVE NAMED IT JUST ABOUT ANYTHING. It could have been called the Anti-Replica, as it was dubbed on an early, hastily translated technical report that came from the factory in Japan. Or it could have been called the UC650, because other documents referred to it as an "unclassified motorcycle." And it just barely escaped the misfortune of being called the Bros, its official moniker in other countries around the world.

But the name that finally emerged from American Honda's what-do-we-call-it think-tank was "Hawk GT," borrowing heavily from a designation the company had used twice before. The Hawk name appeared on a reasonably successful line of 400cc Twins in the mid-Seventies, but more important, it was first bestowed on another unclassified, anti-replica motorcycle the company introduced more than two decades ago: the 250cc Hawk. That original Hawk and its 305cc derivative, the Super Hawk, are credited with catapulting Honda from a maker of

Bird of a Different Feather

PHOTOS BY RON HUSSEY



pleasant little motorized toys to the largest motorcycle manufacturer in history; and the company would love nothing more than for this latest Hawk to be just as significant as the first.

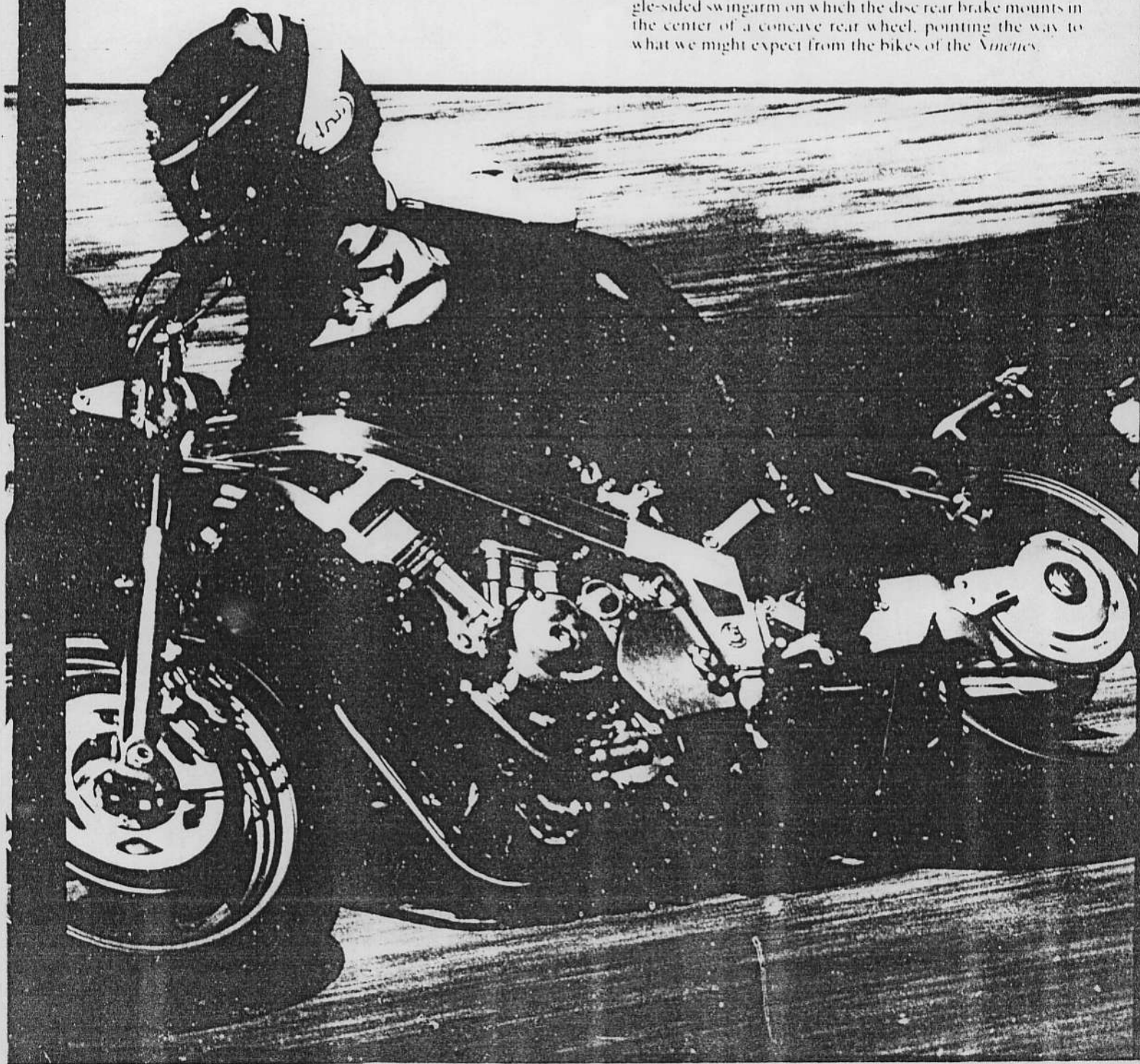
For good reason. To say that 1987 wasn't a good year for Honda is like saying 1968 wasn't a good time to vacation in Da Nang. Financially, last year was the worst in the company's history. And falling sales and rising yen demanded that something different be done.

That something, Honda felt, was to answer a groundswell of cries for simpler motorcycles—for the return of the Twin, for the return of non-roadrace-replica sportbikes, even a few lonesome cries for the return of the 305 Hawk. But as a Honda spokesman pointed out, "We couldn't just start building the 305 again. It would cost just

as much to make as a modern motorcycle... and it would be awful."

The Hawk GT is Honda's initial response to those passionate pleas for more-rational motorcycles. It's a do-everything, 647cc twin built through the simple execution of modern technology. It is a mix of old and new, a bike with one wheel firmly planted in the traditions of yesterday and the other rolling boldly into the technology of tomorrow.

For example, the Hawk is powered by a V-Twin motor, among the most old-fashioned of all configurations, yet it has three-valve-per-cylinder combustion chambers and is liquid-cooled. The bike is unfaired, just like those fondly remembered standards of the Sixties and Seventies, yet it has an aluminum-beam frame like those on the sportbikes and roadracers of the Eighties. And it uses a massive, single-sided swingarm on which the disc rear brake mounts in the center of a concave rear wheel, pointing the way to what we might expect from the bikes of the *Nineties*.

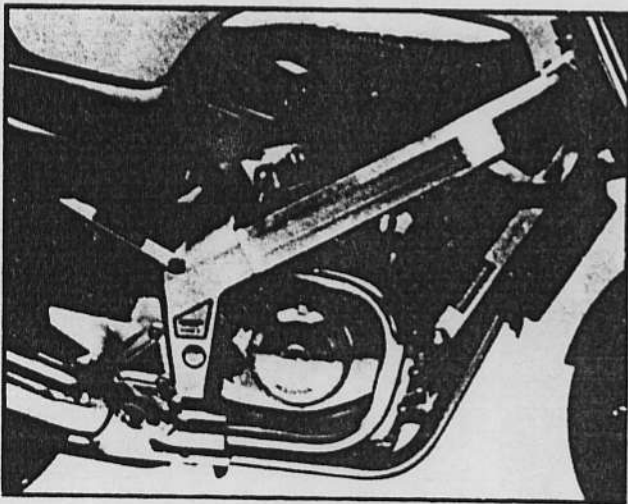




HAWK GT

So, despite its namesake, the Hawk can't truly be called a back-to-basics motorcycle. In simplest terms, it is a modern, twin-cylinder sportbike, sans fairing. That's *sportbike*, however, not *racebike* or *racer-replica*.

Rest assured, though, that the Hawk has just as much agility as most modern sportbikes, and is even *more* agile than some. With quick geometry and fat tires on wide, 17-inch wheels at both ends, it responds immediately and positively to the rider's every input. That it legitimately is an under-400-pound motorcycle with a comparatively low



That the single-wall pipes of the GT turn color slightly is no accident; Honda meant them to be a throwback to the days of Triumph Twins, which invariably had blued pipes.

center of gravity doesn't hurt one bit, either. It flicks over into corners with almost no effort whatsoever, and has enough cornering clearance to make the rider's eyes *real* big before anything touches down. Overall, it gives the rider the feeling that he or she can do practically anything.

With those kinds of capabilities, the Hawk begs to be pushed to its handling limits—limits that are extreme on the street. Only when a very good rider is attempting his best Wayne Gardner imitation do the Hawk's handling shortfalls make themselves known. The first thing the rider might notice is that the non-adjustable fork is a little soft, diving under hard braking. The rear end, too, isn't up to ten-tenths riding levels and tends to feel mushy at speed. It's spring-preload adjustable, but offers no damping options.

But for virtually any other kind of riding, the suspension at both ends is more than adequate. The ride is smooth and comfortable in a wide variety of environments, anywhere from the freeway to the bumpiest backroad.

It's interesting to note that the Hawk's rear suspension works quite well without any sort of linkage system: the bottom of the Showa shock bolts directly to the massive swingarm to produce only a mild amount of springing and damping progression at the rear wheel. The only apparent disadvantage is that the shock must sit higher in the chassis than on, say, a 600 Hurricane; but on the Hawk, that simply makes room for the 2-into-1 exhaust system's large "boom box" tucked away under the front part of the swingarm. That, in turn, allows the Hawk to have a respectable amount of power, yet make little exhaust noise despite having a very short muffler.

Both the power and the sounds that emanate from the Hawk are very satisfying. Satisfying, at least, if you like riding a bike with immediate throttle response. And satisfying if you want a 650 that pulls from low rpm like a 750 and *sounds* like it's pulling from low rpm like a 750. Instead of making an anemic drone at 3000 rpm, the Hawk beats out a rhythmic tune that no one could possibly find offensive.

In terms of outright performance, the GT is comparable