

SON OF MAGGOT

The VT inherited CX-style reliability but lost some of the maggot's charm. There are still loads of VT500E Hondas on the road — no wonder — owners give the V-twin a glowing testimonial

● A 1983 VT500E, back in the days when roads were made of rubber and gravel rash hadn't been invented



Sceptics will always find something to point the finger at. When the VT500E replaced the CX500 as Honda's middleweight workhorse it was that inboard front disc that came in for stick — and the compact motor, and the spindly forks. It wasn't, at first, considered a worthy successor to Honda's highly successful CX500.

But worthy it was. It gained a reputation for reliability and became the next generation's favourite despatch mount. It wasn't a blitzing tarmac burner. Top speed was around 112mph, but the ability to cruise easily and smoothly at 80mph-plus appealed to long distance riders. By 1988 it was the best selling 500cc bike in the country.

The VT500E sold for six years. There were two versions, the ED, from 1983 to 1985 and EF (1986-88). The differences were minor. The ED models were white or black and the graphics ran under the Honda logo on the tank. EF models were red or blue with graphics running over the top of the Honda logo.

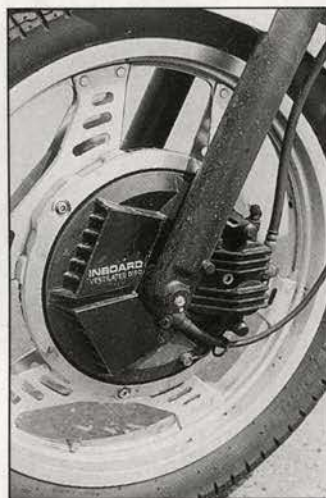
The 490cc V-twin motor had three valves and two spark plugs per cylinder. It had a clever offset crankpin arrangement to cut vibration from the 52 degree narrow-angle V-twin motor. The compact engine was shoe-horned into a slender chassis which made engine access difficult. The inboard ventilated front disc only added to the complication.

The engine was new, but the chassis was old hat even by eighties standards. The tubular steel frame carried spindly 37mm teles up front, and twin (FVQ) shocks at the rear.

It was light at only 177kg (390lb) and the narrow waisted 31 inch seat made it easy for shorter riders to get their feet down. The VT model continued until 1988 when it was replaced by the NTV600 Revere.

THE OWNERS

Brendan Berry (32) wanted a V-twin, but doesn't like Harleys. Donald Melrose (38) was attracted by the VT's looks and shaft drive. Chris Jeggo (47) says, 'I wanted a middleweight, shaft drive V-twin'. He found a



● The inboard disc brake, a phase Honda grew out of (thank God)

low mileage example in good nick and snapped it up — 'It made my day'.

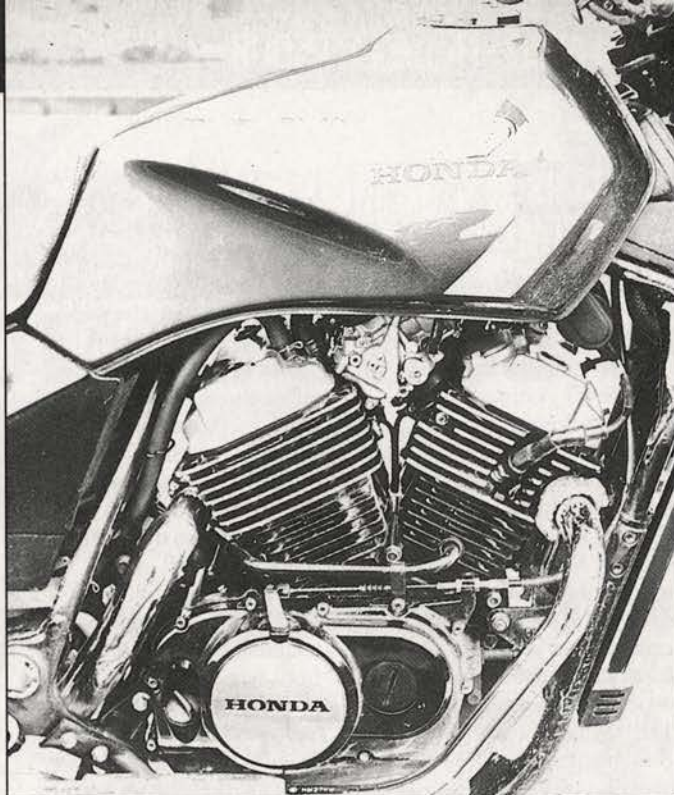
Good road test reports, under 600cc insurance, good reliability record, the fact it's a Honda are other popular reasons for choosing the VT500E. Denny Cornell (35) says, 'I wanted one as soon as I read the launch report in MCN.' She didn't have to wait long. It came out in February 1983, she bought hers in April that year.

And although engine access is criticised, Roy Hadjigeorge chose the VT for 'easy maintenance'.

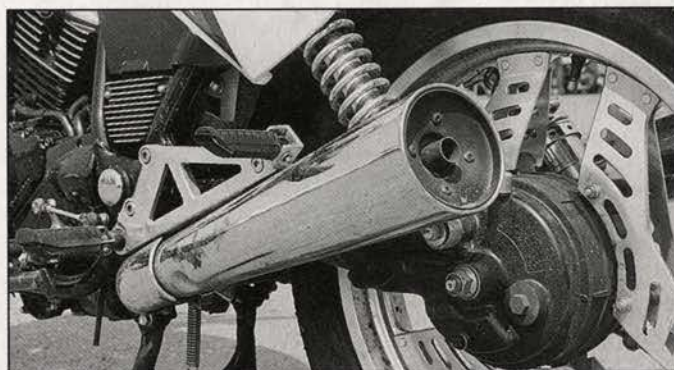
THE BIKES

All model years are represented here although most are 1986 versions and three quarters were bought secondhand. Stephen Holmes got a bargain, he only paid £530 for his 1983 model two years ago. 'A friend was selling, it seemed to suit my needs and the price was right,' he said. Average price for a used VT is nearer £1300.

It may be a despatcher's hack, but few of these bikes work for a living now. They've still collected an impressive mileage between them. The average VT's covered 27,000 miles, though Stephen Holmes and Brendan Berry's bikes have more than 40,000 miles on the clock. 'It's all touring, general use and nipping to the shops,' says Stephen, backed up by Brendan who says, 'I use it for commuting, going to rallies and covered 3000 miles on a touring holiday.'



● 1987 model, same V-twin engine, different graphics



● Shaft final drive is a definite plus, FVQ shocks aren't

CHANGED ANYTHING?

A front mudflap comes top of the accessory list. It helps keep muck off the radiator. Next comes hard luggage, popular makes are Givi and Krauser top box and/or panniers.

Braided steel hose is another common mod to cure a spongy front brake. Fitting gaiters to preserve fork and seal life is a popular option.

Nick Bryant hasn't added anything, but replaced the thermostatically controlled fan switch to a manual item operated from the handlebar because the Honda shop wanted \$40 for a thermo-switch.

Koni Dial-a-Ride or R&R rear shocks replace the FVQ original equipment items. 'The Konis are better and have more adjustment,' says Roy Hadjigeorge. They cost £109 for the pair last year. And if you

want to uprate the front suspension, Roy says M&P Accessories sell Progressive fork springs for 31 quid a pair.

When the exhaust rots, Motad do a replacement system for just over a hundred notes.

HONDA SHOULD ...

... have changed a number of small points, but nothing comes through as a major headache.

The sidestand's too short — the bike leans over too far. Donald Melrose wants a bigger pillion seat, Roy Hadjigeorge a lower saddle. Chris Jeggo a longer front mudguard.

Alan Perryman complains the horn is too quiet. Stephen Holmes and Malcolm Bowe don't like the bikini fairing — it's ugly and ineffective.

WHAT GOES WRONG?

Nick Bryant's had the most problems with blown fork

READERS SURVEY

seals, failed radiator thermo-switch and a blown head gasket.

A few mention indicator problems — either broken wiring or flasher unit failure.

Brendan Berry and his mate had an identical silencer problem. 'The right hand silencer fouled the rear wheel spindle. As the suspension moved, the spindle rubbed against the silencer. We both claimed new silencers and had them slightly offset to cure the problem, under warranty.' They've had no problems since.

Stephen Holmes' bargain VT needed major work against corrosion and previous owner neglect. The front brake caliper seized, wiring was frayed and cables corroded. He's now sorted the problems out himself.

Alan Perryman's bugbear is petrol tap diaphragms — he's on this third in 25,000 miles.

A third of you haven't suffered any problems at all.

SERVICING

Most bikes are home maintained. It's not that difficult to work on, but Nick Bryant says the tappets are awkward

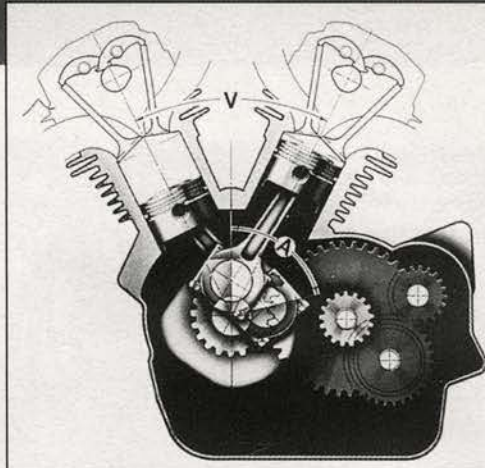
to check and adjust and the inner spark plugs are virtually impossible to get at. Others agree, and say the enclosed front disc is a pain when it comes to change the pads.

Stephen Holmes gets his dealer to do the fiddly bits — check the tappets, change the plugs and balance the carbs. 'He only charges £58 which I don't think is bad,' he says. Donald Melrose has a private mechanic who does a full service for £100.

Chris Jeggo's bills vary from £137-£276 — the highest included full service, MOT, front tyre and shocks. He reckons he gets good service and value for money. He has the bike dealer fettled every 7000 miles and does a minor check over and oil change himself every 3500.

Most are happy with the price of ordinary service items. It's the bodywork that costs — '100 quid for a small plastic tailpiece is out of order,' says Malcolm Bowe. And Alan Perryman says indicator units are pricey at 24 notes.

Tyre life is pretty good. Original equipment Bridgestones last an average 8000 miles a set. If you want better tyre life Brendan Berry recommends Avon Roadrunners. He managed



● Honda cracked the problem of primary vibration with offset crankpins — this is what it looks like

20,000 miles out of a front and 25,000 miles from a rear (can you believe it?). He also got 41,000 miles out of a set of front brake pads and 32,000 out of the rear shoes.

WHAT'LL IT DO?

The VT's good for around 105-110mph top whack and'll sit all day at about 80mph. Can't say fairer than that for a 500cc V-twin. The worst fuel consumption figure is 45mpg from Donald Melrose's 1986 model. It should do better — the average is 55mpg — though Stephen Holmes gets 65mpg from his 1983 VT.

You're happy with the front brake, if not ecstatic. It needs a good pull on the lever for sharp stopping. The rear drum's described as 'adequate to fine'.

'Handling's good now I've fixed the front tyre's slow puncture,' says Nick Bryant. But overall, so long as you don't expect a VT to handle like a Fireblade, you've no complaints. 'It's tuned more for long distance than scratching, but it's no couch potato if you want to play,' says Gary Wilson. Backed up by Stephen Holmes who reckons the VT handles well on smooth roads but isn't too good down the bumpy lanes. As Alan Perryman says, 'it's perfectly adequate for this type of bike.' Malcolm Bowe reckons the worst part about the handling is pushing it about in a confined space — 'it's too top heavy.'

Suspension is compliant rather than soft. The front end can be a little twitchy, but Malcolm Bowe says it pays to spend some time adjusting the settings, it can make a world of difference.

It's a good long distance tool, comfortable for hundreds of miles — but only for the rider. The pillion gets a bum deal, it's

too cramped on the back. Six footers complain the screen's too low.

YOUR VERDICT

You like the VT for the reliable V-twin motor, good looks and shaft final drive. It's good for town work with a wide spread of power and slim profile. You're happy with the fuel consumption and all-round ability.

There's not much you don't like. A few complain about the inaccessible engine and front brake, but it comes over as more of a niggle than a problem. Front suspension could be firmer, centre of gravity could be lower.

CONCLUSIONS

It's a good all-rounder, doesn't do anything brilliantly, doesn't do anything badly. It gets you from A to B and doesn't let you down.

Many of you say if Honda still made it you'd buy a brand new one tomorrow. The VT's Revere and NTV650 successors are not popular replacements. Only Chris Jeggo and Stephen Holmes put one on their shopping list as a possible next bike.

If Honda made a VT750 then riders wanting to move up the capacity scale would be more interested. Some are happy to stay with a VT500. Those who want a change, or who have already moved on, would choose a Honda VFR750 or CB750, one of the Triumph 900s or a Yamaha XJ.

Honda got their sums right with the VT500E. It's as popular now as ever. And despite early criticisms about over-complexity, when the VT500E turned into the NTV600, VT and CX owners cried on each other's shoulders. ☹

Rosie Marston

VT500E-F SPECIFICATION

ENGINE	
Type	water cooled, four stroke, sohc, 6-valve, 52 degree V-twin
Capacity	490cc
Bore x stroke	71 x 62mm
Compression	10.5:1
Carburettors	2 x 32mm CV
Gearbox	speed
Final drive	chain
CHASSIS	
Frame type	steel double cradle
Front suspension	37mm telescopic fork, air-assisted
Rear suspension	twin oil damped shocks
Front brake	inboard ventilated disc with dual piston caliper
Rear brake	drum
Front tyre	100/90-18
Rear tyre	120/80-18
DIMENSIONS	
Dry weight	177kg (389lb)
Tank capacity	18L (4 gals)
Seat height	790mm (31ins)
PERFORMANCE	
Claimed horsepower	51bhp @ 9000rpm
Claimed torque	33lbs-ft @ 7000rpm
IMPORTER	
Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick, London, W4 5YT (081 747 1400)	