



# A WOLF A IN WOLF'S CLOTHING

The Honda CX500 Turbo is a  
civilised giant killer.

BY PETER NEUMAN

aagh! My body wins the unequal contest it's been having with my mind for the last three seconds, I roll off the throttle and my Honda CX500 Turbo fires itself into the prodigiously banked corner of the Tochigi test track at something less than its full speed of 205 radar-timed kilometres per hour. I lost my nerve. For the previous five laps, I'd been steeling myself for one full speed run around this futuristic track, but my body simply wasn't prepared to go along. Go into a corner at 205km/h? Are you kidding?

Not that it wouldn't be possible — Takazumi Katayama, the Grand Prix rider, holds the lap record for this circuit — 300km/h. The corners are banked so steeply, 42 degrees, that steering is neutral at cornering speeds approaching 200km/h.

I tried telling my body all this, of course. But would it listen? Not on your nelly. So we, the Turbo and I, took the corner at a relatively sedate 180km/h, and rolled back into the pits.

Riding this bike is quite an experience. Based on the plodding CX500 vee-twin that Honda has been selling to commuters and tourers the world over for three years now, this is a wolf in wolf's clothing. The only interchangeable part between the two bikes is the oil filter — everything else is either larger or





heavier or made of a stronger material. Because this bike moves, with 78 horsepower on tap at 8000rpm.

The heart of the bike is still the 500cm<sup>3</sup> vee-twin of the CX500, changed and strengthened though it is. But the lungs and the brain are new, and it's this that gives the turbo its legs... and the new fairing adds sex appeal.

Lungs are provided by the IHI turbocharger developed especially for this bike. As with all turbo systems, exhaust gases drive a turbine that in turn drives a compressor, which acts on incoming air. This pressurised air is guided to the cylinders via a resonance chamber.

But the Honda turbo is particularly effective in two ways. For one, it's located close to the exhaust ports, which contributes to quick throttle response. "Turbo lag" would not be acceptable on a bike, where the engine must respond as quickly as possible to the rider. The turbo is also small — and light. This means extra power without a weight penalty, something else that's vital on a bike.

The brain is the Computerised Fuel Injection System (CFI). A digital computer sits under the rear of the seat, programmed with three-dimensional maps of the fuel requirements under

different circumstances. All this gives even more rapid throttle response, as well as very economical and clean running. Adjustments to ambient temperature and altitude are also automatic.

This machine practically thinks, and should anything go wrong it has backup programming. Alternative circuits take over if anything untoward happens to the electronics, the computer switches the turbo off if the boost pressure sensor fails.

Running gear is a combination of the best that other Honda models have to offer. The forks come from the redoubtable CB900 Bol d' Or, the shaft drive is from the Goldwing. Frame is more or less standard CX500, and the bike shares its highly sophisticated Pro Link monoshock rear suspension with the CBX six-cylinder superbike.

The fairing is totally new. Designed to be effective, highly visible and practical, it also manages to look very, very good. You could easily imagine Luke Skywalker spending his free weekends aboard this machine.

To top it all off, the whole bike is a practical package. It offers 15 percent better fuel economy than the normally-aspirated CX500 (23.3km/litre, according to Honda). Its 20-litre tank will



take it 400 kilometres, with enough left over for peace of mind. The fairing insulates the rider from the airstream so effectively that it's difficult to tell how fast you're moving, and holds the bike steady as well.

Let's go back to Tochigi, to half an hour before I lost my nerve going into that corner . . . Our little group of five bike journalists rolled out on to the track behind the "shepherd", a Honda test rider on a CB900F2-B. The Honda rider accelerated down towards the first corner, and as we followed suit I glanced down at the rev counter. Lights were flashing, and the needle was well into the red. I was in third, and overrevving the bike badly.

A change up, then another, then the corner. I wasn't about to look down at the instruments while we were buzzing around that 42 degree banking, but once back on the straight, I checked again. Revs safely down, and speed — gulp — 160km/h. The old magic imperial ton, and it felt like about half that!

On the second lap, I took it up to 200km/h, with the rev counter still comfortably in the black. Back to the pits, where others were waiting for their turn, and where I sorted out my impressions.

First, the bike is almost supernaturally smooth and willing to rev. It had reached the red line in third so easily that I really hadn't noticed. Without any turbo lag.

Second, it had held the road effortlessly, due partly to the fairing and partly to the superb suspension.

Third, the bike had gone very fast — without my really being aware of it.

A giant killer, and an effortless one at that. The most truly civilised bike I have ever ridden. Doubts and qualifications didn't arise until I had another chance to ride the Turbo, and to experiment with it a little. They're not terribly major doubts, but here they are — for what they're worth.

The bike is perhaps a little too civilised. After all, one of the main reasons people buy a projectile like this is for the excitement. The turbo makes it all a bit too easy, and the fairing insulates the rider a little too much from the world of the road. The bike is perhaps too sophisticated. All that electronic hardware makes me wonder how it will stand up to real conditions, especially on Australia's notoriously bad roads in Australia's climatic extremes.

Perhaps this, perhaps that. Niggling doubts only a real road can lay to rest.

Am I looking forward to laying them to rest? Are you kidding? Just let me at the Bruxner Highway with this bike . . .

Until the first one arrives in Australia, I'll be satisfied with taking my hat off to Kazuo Inoue, the father of the CX500 Turbo; to stylist Morioka; and to Honda for having the vision to build this bike.

All doubts aside, it's the first glow of a very exciting dawn in motorcycling. We'll be hearing a lot more of its — unfortunately also very civilised — turbo howl in the coming years. 