

Honda PC800 Pacific Coast: 1989-90, 1994-98

RETROSPECTIVE



Year/Model: 1989 Honda PC800 Pacific Coast; Owner: Leland Sheppard, Placerville, California.

What happens when motorcycle designers share a drawing board with automobile types? The answer may be the Honda Pacific Coast.

Rumor had it that after Honda R&D Americas, Inc., was established in 1985 and began dealing with all Honda products, the word came down from above that the engineers and designers should get their heads and drawing pencils together and come up with a motorcycle that would appeal to the fellow who was driving a Honda Civic.

OK, said someone, perhaps the person in charge, the motorcycle guys will deal with the drivetrain and chassis, while the car fellows will look after the bodywork. An interesting notion. The moto-press was mildly impressed, more by Honda's effort to bring in new riders with a new design than by the bike itself.

Since this was not for the go-fast moto-heads, the engine did not need to be anything radical. So they borrowed the liquid-cooled, 45-degree V-twin engine from the '88 Shadow VT800. It had an almost square bore (79.5mm) and stroke (80.6mm), and three valves per cylinder, two intake, one exhaust. Intended to be a low-maintenance machine, the chain to each single overhead camshaft had an automatic tensioner, and the valve clearances were hydraulically adjusted. A pair of 36mm carbs fed fuel into the combustion chambers with a modest 9:1 compression ratio.

A V-twin with a 45-degree included angle has a tendency to vibrate, and while the VT version kept the vibes down to an acceptable level with offset crankpins, the R&D folk wanted the PC to be silky smooth. This was done by securing the engine with four rubber mounts, three on the cases, a fourth on the forward cylinder head.

An extra gear was added to the VT's 4-speed box, the clutch was beefed up a little, and a shaft turned the rear wheel. At 7,000 rpm, a rear-wheel dynamometer showed over 50 horses in the herd, and the PC could turn a quarter-mile in 14 seconds at 90 mph. Better than a Civic!

The drivetrain was put into a new chassis to make it more of a touring machine than a cruiser. The frame itself was a full-cradle design, with a pair of rectangular spars running up each side of the engine from the swingarm to the steering head, allowing the PC more cornering clearance than the VT enjoyed. The front end had a 41mm fork with 5.7 inches of travel, and TRAC, or Torque Reactive Anti-dive Control. The rear shock absorbers had 5.1 inches of travel with truly minimal adjustment, as only the left's spring preload could be changed; the right was supposedly sprung to be compatible with however the left side was set. Amazingly, it worked. There was a 17-inch wheel in front with a pair of brake discs, a 15 at the rear with a drum, and the wheelbase ran 61.2 inches.

While this was going on, what were the car guys thinking? Cover it all up. Make it look like a two-wheeled car. Plastic is cheap, molding is easy. And cover it up

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they did, from the cowling over the front wheel and the shrouded discs to the huge rear end, often referred to as The Trunk. Except it was completely unlike a car's trunk, which is one big spacious unit. On the PC, you lifted up the tail section and saw two middling-sized compartments separated by the rear fender. This had never been seen before—not by car guys, not by moto-heads.

This trunk could hold quite a bit of luggage, and a hydraulic damper kept the lid open. The waterproofing was excellent with the lid closing down and overlapping the lower part by an inch or two. Access required the passenger to get off, or at least slide forward onto the rider's saddle, as the pillion seat pivoted with the trunk lid. One oddity was that you couldn't come out of the store with two bags of groceries and open the trunk with a key, but needed to open the cover over the gas cap and pull a release latch.

The 4.2-gallon tank was under the seat, like on the Gold Wing, to keep the weight of the 630-pound motorcycle down low. There was no petcock with reserve, but a gas gauge did serve to make the rider aware of when it was time to fill up. That gas tank-looking affair between the seat and the handlebars was merely a cover over all the necessary ugliness that goes into an engine. Designers have to spend a lot of time, and OEMs a lot of money, making engines look pretty; it's cheaper to cover things up. However, the many plastic pieces made access to everything involved with the motor rather complicated. If you wanted to service the battery, you would have to

remove seven separate panels; to change the four spark plugs, four panels. The most common

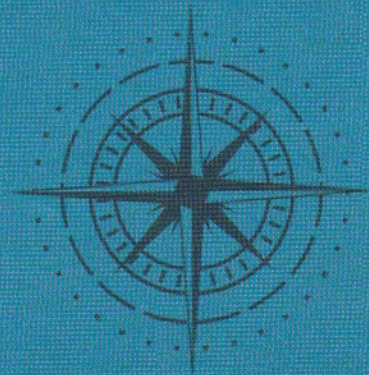
activity, oil and filter change, was sensibly set up to require the removal of only one panel.

The bodywork had a lot of good ideas, like pop-off mirrors and integrated fairing protectors to prevent damage in a tipover. The fairing design did have a tendency to let wind go up the pant legs of the rider, solved by tucking pants into boots. Seat height was an accommodating 30 inches, and the seat was comfortable. The main distraction suffered by the test riders of 1989 was the windshield's size, which buffeted both rider and passenger; for 1990 a taller shield was optional.

This was a pricey ride, \$7,700 in 1989 dollars compared to the Kawasaki 1000cc Concours that was a thousand dollars less. Initial sales were reasonably good, with over 7,000 units sold that first year—the great majority in the U.S. In 1990, we suffered a minor recession and sales were down by half.

American Honda took a hard look at the market and decided to pull the Pacific Coast off the 1991 list of new models, though “non-currents” continued to be for sale. It did stay on in Europe and Japan, though sales there were small. After three straight years of absence, it reappeared in U.S. dealers for the 1994 model year, as the recession receded. But sales were dismal, averaging less than a thousand units a year for the next five years. In '97, the price dropped and minor changes were made, with the front wheel cowling giving way to a conventional fender with a slightly sportier look. In 1998, the last year, the Concours came in at \$8,000, but the PC still cost \$8,700 and fewer than 600 were sold.

Sharp eyes will note the Made by Tupperware decals on the fairing of our sample machine. PC lovers do have a sense of humor. **99**



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