



# Mini Riders

Return with us now, to those thrilling days of Kandy paint, Von Dutch pinstriping and affordable cars—Honda cars/By Wally Wyss

They're coming. Hordes of humming Hondas. Not the bikes—they've been here since the all-knowing Limey traders and American hawg merchants said: "Advertise motorcycles in a general interest magazine like *Life*? You must be joking!" Honda broke all the rules and conquered the U.S. motorcycle market, and accounts for more than a third of all motorcycles manufactured in the world today. We're talking now, though, about Honda cars, the tiny 1,500-lb. matchboxes seen everywhere on the West Coast, zipping in and out of traffic between Detroit's land-bound 747's as deftly as if the mid-America iron were paralyzed.

Honda delivered the N600 to the West Coast one crisp December morning in 1969. As of October, 1971, they had sold 24,385.

"You have to look upon the Honda as more than just a set of wheels that get you from point A to point B," said a salesman at Inglewood's Bill Krause (that's right—the ex-Maserati birdcage pilot) Honda. "If you look upon it as a toy, too, well, it's a lot more fun to drive."

As difficult as it is for former Camaro SS 396 and Morgan +4 owners to conceive, the Honda is fast gaining the reputation of being an enthusiast's car. Right, it has little chance of equaling the feats of the famed Mini-Cooper S (which has an engine twice as big), but, its low basic price permits even the poorest of students to splurge on a few "personalized" items like mag wheels, fat tires, and fender flares.

So what are they doing to the Honda? Well, first there's paint. We thought flames have been out since about '59 but somehow they've reemerged, thankfully without the usual louvers. Then, there's pinstriping, another '50's Kustom cliché, which is really *in* if you have it done by Von Dutch. Next come the pearlescents, candy-apples and other translucent hues, entering the world of the surreal with the addition of rainbow effects, "spider webs" or droplets. Larry Watson, of Hollywood, who painted the dark sedan shown here for Bill Robertson's Honda of Hollywood, charged \$500 for "going the whole route," or roughly one third the Honda's total price. But you don't have to spend that much. The yellow car shown had its "insert" painted on by Jerry Dame of Reseda for only \$100. The point is that the Honda costs so little, most buyers have money left over they don't know what to do with.

But the dealers are ready. Kolbe Honda in Reseda, Calif., has a whole raft of visual hop-up items, which do much to transform the Honda sedan's nature from econo-car to mini-super car. Among them: A full set of fender flares plus spoiler (\$30); a wooden steering wheel (\$32); a leather-covered steering wheel (\$31); Pos-A-Traction 5.00 x 8.00 mag wheels (\$139 per set of four); an 8000 rpm tach (\$30) and more. Kolbe's parts man says a lot of guys are working on cams and headers but nothing works well enough yet for them to really want to promote them.

And so it goes. The Kustom Kar, which we all thought had died and gone away because nobody wanted to depreciate his investment (and the factory could really do it better anyway), has reemerged with the availability of prosaic, but decently proportioned \$1,500 automobiles. The last time that happened was about 1948 . . .

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