

RACING CAR NEWS

**"I'M NOT REALLY BAD"
SAYS ALLAN MOFFAT**

**INSIDE STORY ON
THE "DULUX" RALLY**

**TITLE WINS FOR
BEECHEY, GEOGHEGAN**

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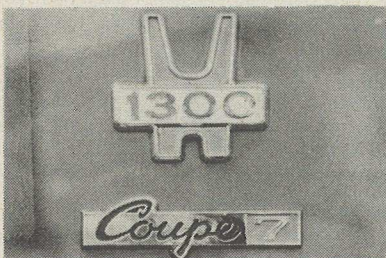
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FEATURES/CALDER BASKERVILLE ORAN PARK SANDOWN BATHURST WANNEROO HUME WEIR SINGAPORE





Story by MAX STAHL



HAPPENING

IT'S FUNNY how a car can be around for some little time and you don't take the slightest bit of notice of it until someone with a spark of initiative takes it out on a sporting contest of some kind — and does well first time out. That's how we were about the Honda 1300 coupe: a pretty little car, nicely appointed, with a quite interesting mechanical set-up, but that's all — until Allan Lawson suddenly popped up with a "9" in the Victorian "Classic" Rally last month and took third outright. This we had to inspect more closely.

Unfortunately, there wasn't a "9" available when we called suddenly on Bennett-Honda's Ken Bryan for a test car, so we opted for the "7" (only difference: one carburettor instead of four). But if first impressions are any guide the sleek little coupe was to provide extremely satisfying transport for the next few days.

Externally, the high quality of finish and the overall styling (though perhaps a little old-fashioned in the grille design) was immediately apparent and stimulating, but it was the interior that first set the pulse rate up a few ratios. A superbly styled and fitted dashboard, containing speedo and tacho, fuel, ammeter and oil pressure gauges, pushbutton radio and (in this car) a stereo tape deck, presented itself — with the extra feature of the central console being slightly angled toward the driver.

Following the trend of Japanese car makers to offer the best of European developed safety characteristics, the makers

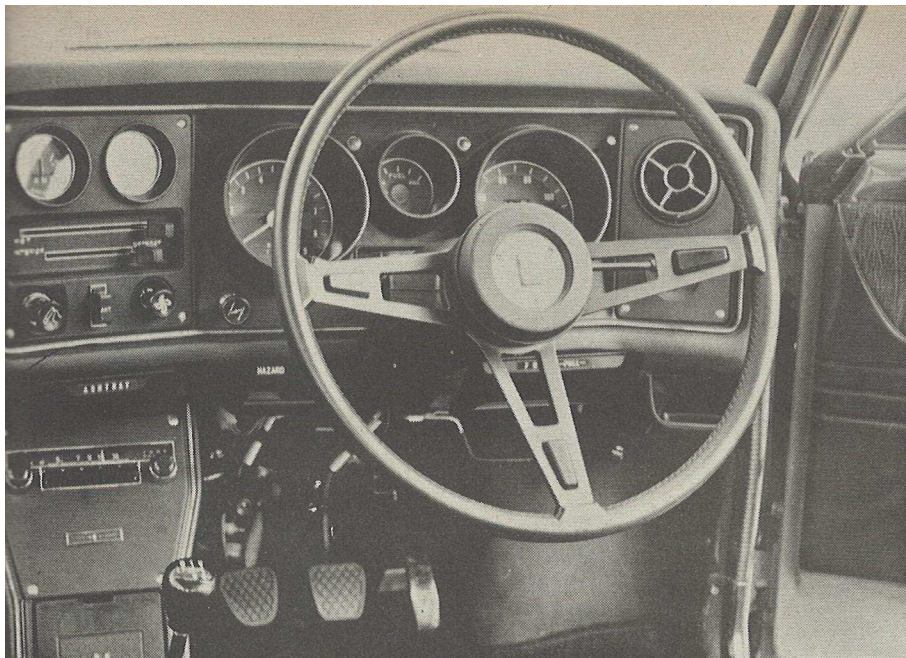
have grouped the much used controls — wiper/washer, dipper switch/flashers, on stalks projecting from the steering column. At the end of the light stalk a button operates flashing headlights for overtaking — and just when will this much needed safety technique be accepted and promoted in Australia?

Before leaving the dashboard area it is worth noting three other unique and useful features. One is the cassette-type fuse-box which can be removed in toto for easy checking (or even an anti-theft measure); the "hazard" switch, which flashes all four trafficator lights in an emergency, and the pneumatic switch that releases the aerial,

this unit cunningly mounted in the roof with its length retracted into the wind-screen pillar.

Seating also followed the European trend, and although they at first looked flat and impersonal, they soon showed hip-hugging characteristics and provided long-lasting comfort during our extended test run to Melbourne and back. These seats, complete with headrests, were operated by a side mounted lever which both tilted the seat and ran it forward to clear room for the rear seat passengers. It also released the seat for full layback comfort. It was also encouraging to find that the Honda has obviously been made for export, in that





ING HONDA

there is plenty of adjustment to cater for the longest legged driver — and the steering wheel is still well within reach.

Close inspection under the bonnet revealed the highly sophisticated Duo Dyna air-cooled, dry-sumped 4-cylinder east-west engine of all alloy construction. The engine compartment at first look seemed very crowded, and so it was, with its 7-pint capacity alloy finned oil reservoir and the smoothly cast air cooling chambers running around the cylinder head and block. A large fan mounted on the crankshaft provides the air flow, while a powerful oil pump keeps 3.6 pints of oil flowing through the engine in the normal feed and recover dry-sump manner.

Mounted within the engine case is the all-synchromesh 4-speed transmission which drives the front wheels via a 3.5:1 differential unit also enclosed in the overall casing. The transmission system, however, has its own 3½ pints of oil, so as to avoid the gases and carbons from the engine oil supply. The drive shafts from the diff to the front wheels are solid and short, suffering very little power loss.

Suspension is independent on all four wheels, with the front by McPherson struts and coil springs, with leaf springs and Honda's unique cross beams, which compensate for any camber change, in the rear. Wheels are 13" x 4J, fitted with Japanese made Dunlop SP68 radials. Being conscious

of the habits of front wheel drive cars we checked the pressures in the Dunlops and found them 30 psi front and 29 rear, but doubted that this would be sufficient. We were right, but only just.

Out onto Parramatta Road, the little coupe accelerated briskly to merge with the traffic flow, and it immediately became apparent that the seating, steering position and visibility were just right, while the clutch and throttle pedal pressures provided smooth changes and the hand fell directly onto the short floor-mounted gearshift. With 1300cc pulling 17 cwt, one could be excused for not expecting over much in performance, but we'd reckoned without Honda's engineering genius, for this master of the small engine had packed 100 bhp (at 7200 rpm) and 79 lbs/ft of torque (at 4500 rpm) into his delightful creation and the "7" sang along with no fuss whatsoever, even in the low rev range.

Once on the open road we opened the throttle for high speed cruising and it took only a few corners to inform us that more pressure was needed in the front tyres, so in went another 2 lbs, and it was just right. In fact, it was easy to forget that it was fwd, so even was the handling. Taking tight corners quickly provoked some understeer, but a brief lift off the throttle soon transferred the weight and steering was immediately restored, while the lower rear tyre pressures allowed the tail to move out just the few degrees necessary to maintain the desired line.

Now we were able to try out the willingness of the power-plant, and on our isolated test road full speed runs (to the 7000 rpm red line) gave us 25 mph in first, 50 mph in second, 80 in third and an effortless 105 mph in top, though on several slight downhill sections the engine would run to 7300, giving an exhilarating 110 mph.

With performance in this region available it was worth knowing how good the brakes were. Though servo assisted, the brakes had plenty of "feel", and the front disc/rear drum set-up performed well, although when cold the first applications produced some vibration.

A brief excursion on some dirt roads provided the answer as to how Allan Lawson had managed to do so well at his first-up run in the "Classic" Rally. The Honda was surefooted in the extreme, and very positive in its reaction to bumps and dips. It was easy to feel just what it would do and where it would bounce on the particularly large corrugations, and the fwd carried it round all kinds of corners with little or no fuss at the wheel.

It seems that Honda, along with Mazda, Colt, Toyota and Datsun, is out to make an impression in motor sport in Australia, especially rallying — even rallycross — and if you think that \$2894 (or \$3100 for the "9") is not too much to outlay, then you may be assured that you will be highly competitive.

You will find also that your running costs in competition are not high, either, for on our test, over sections where 100 mph was the norm, the Honda gave 25 mpg. On long cruising sections, averaging just on 60 mph, the consumption was just over 30 mpg, the 9.9 gallon tank thus having a cruising range of around 300 miles.

At the present time only slightly more than 100 of the Honda models have been landed in Australia, but more are on the way. Motor sport enthusiasts will encourage them even more when the fuel injection system now being developed in Japan is available.

