

# David Silver offers a bright future for Honda CB400/4



Nice line-up...



...or would you prefer red?

If there's one Japanese motorcycle that cuts across most of the perceived or alleged barriers, stereotypes and divisions within the classic world it has to be Honda's sublime CB400F. Based on Mr Honda's favourite machine (the CB350) the revised 400 pretty much epitomises the essence of the Big Aitch up to the mid 1970s; mechanical miniaturisation personifying the 400/4. This was motorcycling's equivalent of Campbell's Condensed Soup; everything you needed but in one small manageable package.

Beloved by journalists and riders alike, the bike was a firm UK favourite, yet it was only on sale for a few years. Poorer sales in the critical USA marketplace and an alleged high build cost saw the middleweight favourite pensioned off in favour of the CB400T twin. This disenfranchised many of Honda's fans who had hoped that the revised F2 was but a stop gap to a new and upgraded second generation iteration.

Until very recently anyone who wanted a good example of a 400/4 was left trawling small ads or losing countless hours in a chilly garage restoring one. The demand for parts has remained strong and many an apparently stalled project has been saved by the NOS parts dealers had to stock in order to retain their franchise.

However, as this supply route has gradually dried up more and more owners have turned to David Silver Spares of Leiston, Suffolk which for many years has been the place to find older Honda parts. Owner David Silver was previously involved in getting replica parts manufactured to address the shortfalls within the classic Honda scene but the

popularity of the 400/4 has convinced him to take on what's possibly one of the most audacious projects within the classic Japanese world.

## Best examples

Starting in 2011 Silvers began acquiring 400/4s with a view to using the best examples of the various components as master references for a remanufacturing programme that would cover the most requested items. With an increase in knowledge base about what parts were genuinely needed replicas were commissioned. This in turn, and almost inevitably, led to several restorations and ultimately a dedicated warehouse/workshop. The whole thing thus gained a momentum that has seen more than 40 bikes restored back to life from various states and sold to an eagerly receptive customer base. Almost all of the machines have been UK bikes that the former owners wanted to sell or had simply stopped using.

The Silver database had a long list of owner/customers (6500+) and when approached some of these were more than happy to sell their bikes to David. A plus was that the bikes would almost inevitably be back on the road and in fine fettle.

Although sales figures of UK CB400Fs seem to be fairly nebulous David Silver reckons that globally Honda sold over 100,000 F1 and F2 examples combined. This would strongly argue the decision to remanufacture parts for this one model was emphatically not an act of supreme folly. Given that there are another 40 or so 400/4s in various states of repair within the company's HQ and still huge amounts of

interest from people waiting to acquire one, the decision was unquestionably very shrewd. Exposure at the London Excel and involvement with BBC's Top Gear presenter James May and the blue F1 model he bought from Silvers have really flagged up to the classic motorcycle community what's possible in terms of remanufacture.

A trawl through the company's website for CB400F parts is little short of jaw dropping and reaffirms that the future of the classic Japan scene is exceptionally well starred. Although there is still a substantial amount of OEM parts available the project has delivered a diverse range of replacement parts. Valves, shock absorbers, seat straps, idiot light cases and piston/ring kits are all available ex-stock and the quality is OEM equivalent, it has to be or Silver's would lose repeat sales.



Enough spares here.



Remanufacturing begins.

When you look at the range of parts on offer you begin to appreciate that they've gone to extra ordinary lengths with this project and begin to comprehend the depth of commitment. It's now possible to buy a replica, right hand, handlebar switch exact in every discernible detail to all but the arch-pendant for less than £30. Compared to £65 for one of the few remaining OEM examples it's exactly these sorts of parts that keep the bikes out on the road and in general use.

## Brand new

Alternatively, how about the opportunity to purchase a brand new, ready to use painted tinware kit consisting of tank and side panels at £450? Most enthusiasts have paid more than this for a respray of a dented rescue tank and two cracked side panels that had missing mounting lugs. Knowing they fit straight on and look just as Honda intended is a huge bonus to anyone who simply just wants to get a project sorted. These and innumerable other replica parts are the result of Mr Silver's mission.

In addition to gathering more Honda models for a shop front that's now become a museum, David Silver is actively looking at what other parts from high sales volumes Hondas might also be worthy of



Ready and waiting.

investigation. Two likely suspects are the CB400s successor, the Superdream, and the ubiquitous CX500. Despite not necessarily being iconic classics, both models are hugely popular with riders who want accessible period iron, not show ponies. With high end reproduction 400/4 parts now being sold globally there's little argument that items such as authentically replicated Superdream or CX front mudguards won't simply fly off the shelf.

Ask the man himself what's the time scale on the current CB400F boom and he replies; "Possibly another year, perhaps two. We don't necessarily make a huge profit on the remanufactured parts but it's still business we wouldn't otherwise have. The exercise has raised the company profile significantly and that can only be a good thing." And it's not just so much sales spin either; in 2012 alone the business had an extra 400 plus new CB400F customers registered on its database.

Due to EU machinations, David Silver Spares is unable to import Honda parts from

the USA which has always been one of Honda's primary markets. Mad as it seems, it's not possible to source genuine classic Honda parts from what ought to be a land of plenty. Hugely frustrating but if nothing else it underlines the 'business' commitment to keeping older Hondas alive.

Interestingly, and in an ironic quirk of fate, David Silver Spares is within a stone's throw of another classic machine manufacturing premises. Garrett traction engines and steam wagons used to be made almost on the same spot until the early 1930s. One form of classic mechanisation may have long since disappeared but you get the distinct impression if David Silver and team have a say in the situation classic Hondas are going to be about for the foreseeable future.

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