

1976 Honda CB550K2

It was back in May of '23. I wasn't looking to buy any bikes; sometimes the bikes just find me somehow. A local woman contacted me about 3 bikes: her husband's '76 CB750, her own CB550, and an older TS185 Suzuki dirt bike that they shared. For health reasons, it was time for them to sell the bikes. Since it was a busy time of year, I asked my friend Fred, a decent wrench, to participate in the purchase and resurrection (and possibly profits) of the lot. We viewed the disused bikes, discussed what might be needed, and a deal was struck. We immediately sold the 185 to my young apprentice, Aiden. With his youthful enthusiasm, he had it up and running in no time. Fred went to work on the 750, and I pitched in to get it ready for re-sale. We used Bring-a-Trailer, and once it sold, we basically owned the CB550K for free.

But TANSTAAFL: There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch, and this applies here. Anytime I am asked to put a value on a relatively clean 40+ year old bike that hasn't run in decades, I am quick to point out that \$1,000 should be considered the *minimum* required for re-commissioning. This would just about cover tires & tubes, a battery, fork seals, hydraulic system overhaul, and a fuel system overhaul, which is generally the least amount of work required to get safely back on the road.

At some point in its past, someone thought it would be cool to drill 4 half inch holes in each of the four muffler's ends. Fred and I both felt that the result was not in sync with the bike's character. The shapely, original, *quiet*, un-rusted mufflers were saved with 16 special stainless riv-nuts and screws to close the holes. An AGM battery replaced the dead original. Fresh tires and tubes were installed, along with fork seals of course. The front hydraulics were treated to a new caliper piston and seals, and the master cylinder was rebuilt. Of course, the carburetors had to be refurbished and the fuel tank's considerable internal rust exorcised. The "free" CB550K, pretty as it was (and is), wound up costing a considerable amount. Was it worth it?

The result is, perhaps, best described in Honda's showroom brochure, now posted on the garage wall: "...one of those happy balances of power, weight, smoothness, and handling that seems able to do just about everything well." Yes, *balance* is what this bike is all about. It's not the fastest, but when the revs climb there is adequate horsepower on tap. The suspension may not measure up to 21st century standards but was considered quite good in its day, and still delivers a decent, controlled ride. At 425 pounds and with an upright seating position, riders quickly feel at one with the machine: there's a rightness about the CB550 that comes through best in a corner. It handles well, and the motor is above all smooth. The more I ride it, the more I appreciate its positive attributes. I believe it will make you smile.

The bike set out on its first tour with less than 6,000 miles on the clock. It covered over 1,000 miles in its first season with no major issues. But that is to be expected: It's a Honda!