

## 2011 Honda CBR250R

Fun, Light & Priced Right

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by Scott Rousseau

**H**ONDA'S ALL-NEW CBR250R was designed from the ground up to address what Honda says is an increasing global demand for high-performance single-cylinder streetbikes. Built in Honda's Thailand factory for worldwide distribution, it incorporates no less than 27 patented design technologies—nine in the motor alone, many of them to reduce friction and drag.

Honda officials wouldn't quote power and torque figures, but they did say the CBR250R's liquid-cooled, four-valve, DOHC single produces peak torque at 7000 rpm and peak hp at 8500 rpm. Also, its oversquare 76.0mm bore and 55.0mm stroke dimensions are virtually identical to those of Honda's flagship CBR1000RR superbike, as are its 30.0mm intake and 24.0mm exhaust valve sizes, and design work inside the engine sounds as if it was gleaned from Honda's worldwide racing efforts: For instance, its light-weight slipper piston carries a molybdenum coating, striations on the skirt aid oil retention, and it uses low-tension piston rings and a shot-peened wrist pin. Drag is reduced even further by offsetting the cylinder centerline 4mm toward the exhaust side to reduce the friction generated between the piston and cylinder during the power stroke. To give you an idea of just how technologically current the CBR250R is, this trick is also used in Yamaha's YZ450F motocrosser, and Kawasaki just incorporated it in its all-new 2011 ZX-10R.

A gear-driven counterbalancer—located so close to the crank that it rotates in-between the flywheels—reduces vibration—furthering Honda's goal of compactness and mass centralization.

As expected, the CBR's performance was more than adequate around town between stoplights. The lower four gears in its 6-speed transmission are well-spaced for crisp, authoritative acceleration. But would the demands of mountainous curves and the frantic pace of Southern California freeway traffic prove to be too much for the little 250 to handle? Not at all. Honda really did its homework with this engine, which revs hard yet remains silky-smooth on the freeway. An indicated 66 mph has the tachometer needle showing exactly 7000 rpm in sixth gear. There were instances on the freeway when 75-80 mph was warranted, and the CBR was able to keep pace easily, although at that speed there was very little lunge left in the engine, and a downshift was required if any passing was necessary.

More surprising, however, was how flexible the CBR was in the canyons, where we could take full advantage of the decent torque spread between 4000 and 7000 rpm, which lessened the need for

shifting in order to keep the pace humming along. We wouldn't call it a torque monster by any means, but there's more oomph than you might anticipate from such a high-revving, small-displacement single. Combined with smooth clutch and shifting action, the engine was more than exciting enough to entertain even the most hard-core sportbikers on our ride. Our only complaint was that the CBR's huge 38mm PGM-FI fuel injection projected just a hint of off-on lurch when we tried to pick the throttle up while exiting corners. This stumble is faint, but it does detract from the CBR's otherwise seamless engine character.

The CBR's handling and suspension are equally well-sorted. Its steering is light and precise, and its all-steel twin-spar chassis, which uses the engine as a stressed member is stiff enough to offer supreme flickability in the twisties, just as its 25.0° rake and 3.74" of trail would suggest. And yet its short 53.9" wheelbase doesn't feel nervous on the freeway. Some credit should go to the CBR's suspension, which includes a non-adjustable, conventional 37mm telescopic fork and a five-position preload-adjustable Pro-Link shock, offering 4.65" and 4.07" of wheel travel respectively. Just as with the engine, Honda did its homework; suspension action is sportbike firm but not harsh, and our test group marveled at just how competent it was at soaking up large and small bumps alike while maintaining excellent road feedback through its narrow IRC RX-01 bias-ply tires (110/70-17 front, 140/70-17 rear). We recently tested an Italian motorcycle with a price tag that was more than double the CBR's and it had a fork that didn't feel nearly as dialed-in.

The CBR250R's single front brake is the only other component that reveals its bargain intent. A two-piston sliding caliper clamps the 296mm semi-floating rotor, but getting really strong slowing requires a stronger squeeze at the lever than it should. Also, while riding the bike hard in the canyons, we thought we detected a hint of front brake fade, but it was hard to tell because the CBR's levers aren't adjustable. The single 220mm rear disc, on the other hand, offers a nice feel and sufficient power. Together, the brakes are more than up to the task of comfortably hauling the CBR down from the speeds most beginners and intermediates will travel. But here's another surprise: Ponying up a mere \$500 more gets the buyer an ABS version of the CBR250R—something unheard of at this price point. The system features Honda's Combined Anti-lock Braking System (C-ABS), which links the brakes back to front only. It's a mechanical rather than electronic version of the system, similar to what is found on some of Honda's scooters, but we sampled a CBR250R with the C-ABS and came away extremely impressed with its ability to stop the bike smoothly without any pulsing through the brake controls.

Lastly, we appreciate how the CBR's slim mid-section, low seat height, flat handlebar and low footpegs make for a sporty riding position that isn't aggressive to the point of causing discomfort. Its fairing offers typical sportbike-style wind protection, and its cockpit is well-appointed, with a multi-function digital instrument cluster that includes a 12,500 rpm analog tach, digital speedometer, clock, odometer, tripmeter, fuel level gauge and temperature gauge—everything you need to monitor the CBR on long rides. How long? With its 3.4-gal. fuel capacity, the CBR can go over 200 miles between gas stops, says Honda.

### Final Thoughts

Overall, we are quite impressed with the CBR250R. It has the look, feel and performance of a more expensive sportbike but with a nurturing disposition. Considering its \$3999 MSRP (\$4499 w/ C-ABS), we expect to see a lot of CBR250Rs on the road, ridden by riders of all skill levels. Next, we'll see how it fares against the class-standard Kawasaki Ninja 250R and ATK's GT250R. We think it's going to be one heck of a lightweight scrap! 