

Post the mid 60's few 250s other than some race replica strokers sought a higher station in life. 250s generally lead hard and short lives, thrashed mercilessly by inexperienced and unsympathetic riders, dropped more often than ridden and normally starved of basic maintenance. Finding a good condition vintage 250 is a challenge, finding one you'd actually enjoy riding.... Well that's close to mission impossible.

However in the decade spanning 1985-1995 Japanese makers used cutting edge technology to produce 250s and 400s that punched well beyond their capacity. This was largely a result of Japanese registration and licensing regulations, and was also boosted by learner regs in countries like Australia which limited new riders to 250cc. Australia was one of the few countries outside Japan that had access to machines such as the Honda CBR250RR and similar highly strung race inspired machines.

For new Aussie riders the 250 was the preferred weapon of choice, a 125 or smaller machine just didn't make sense the way it did in European countries where learner capacity limits were lower. Back then Australian regs didn't restrict riders on max power or power to weight, so lucky young guns got to ride the same peak 250 models on offer in bike crazy Japan, which all goes a long way to explaining why so many of the worlds remaining high performance 250s still reside in Australia.

Many hi spec 250s were sold here in the first place but additionally a large pool of machines was brought in by grey importers and individuals throughout the 90s to meet the learner market demands and more recently for established riders wanting to relive their more youthful times. Many of the imports were low k fugitives of the Japanese domestic market rego laws, in some cases almost in new condition. My Spada was one of these imports, landing on our shores in 1999.

Most of the more powerful 250s were fragile, overstressed machines, that shone brightly for a time then flamed out expensively, or ended up being crashed or scrapped. With the contemporary 250 technology rapidly developing many otherwise great bikes quickly fell from favour, which probably lead to more neglect than you'd otherwise expect.

One maker...Honda made two advanced 250s that have definitely stood the test of time, 250s that now 30 plus years later are being sought by serious riders and Here we analyse the Spada....the 250 that can. Someday hopefully we can sample the delights of the wonderful manic baby blade CBR250rr.

Most riders I hang with accept we are going to spend our “mental health” rides at between 80-115/120 kph and frankly most of us are ok with that considering our more, shall we say advanced yrs, slower reflexes and ancient undercarriages.

Realistically any bike that can traverse the countryside reliably at between 80-115kph, handle well, and brake competently, is probably good enough for most riding. Better still if said bike works well in urban situations, you know, it's easy to park, has enough power to be gone when a half-awake maniac in a cage is gunning for you, and is “nippy n nimble” in heavy traffic. Nail those parameters and you're probably on a winner.



Enter the Spada, no it won't suit everyone, if you're over 5'10 or very heavy, or you can't cope with a slightly lower bar height, this may not be your ride. For everyone else listen up, cause the Spada is one amazing 250 that will not leave you embarrassed on club rides, even spirited ones, should you feel so inclined. If you're into tiddler rallies this is probably the ultimate vintage 250, certainly many club riders think so.

The Spada has 4 keys tricks up its' sleeve and one other on open display.

A cracker of a 90 degree V2 power plant

Sublime handling for its period and age
Nice brakes
Excellent reliability

And in good condition it's a very nice looking machine.

The icing on the cake, even today, despite the Spadas popularity among club riders looking for the good units, is you can still actually find one for sensible money.

In many ways it's a better bike than the CBR250RR, it's not as quick, but far more rideable in most circumstances. Oh, and far less likely to have been "thrashed n trashed" by newbie riders with more confidence than competence. Try finding an original unmolested CBR250RR, you'll soon realise that's mission impossible, and the few really good ones you will uncover will be pulling massive premiums.

The Motor

First up, it's a V twin, and not just any V Twin, but the best type, a 90 degree type. Why is that good? Well you get better hi rev capability and smoother operation and also more potential for power. V Twins in small capacity machines are fairly rare, it's basically a cost thing. Two heads, two valve trains, more complex exhaust arrangements and carburettor setups, it's not exactly a pathway to making a cheap 250, hence most 250s, even today are singles or parallel twins, in truth the Spada engine probably cost Honda more to make than the in line 4 in the CB250RR.

Yet, the 90 degree V arrangement is particularly sweet at this capacity, that short stroke keeps it compact so the wheelbase can be much the same as any 250 and the great primary balance means it can rev high without impediment. It might be an expensive way to build a 250 but obviously when Honda went down this path they had a higher purpose in mind.

An interesting point of in-house comparison is the Honda Bros 400 engine. It's also a V twin which is very closely tied to the Transalp 600/650/700 units but with a 52 degree layout and vastly different crankshaft arrangement. The Spada unit is not as wide, produces a little more power than the 400, despite the 150cc deficit, redlines at 4000 rpm higher and exhibits much less vibration, in fact almost virtually zero vibration, whereas the Bros unit exhibits a pleasant but obvious vibratory experience throughout the rev range.

This reliable long lived engine was born in 1982, propelled the original Honda VT250F, and eventually lived out it's days in the fuel injected VTR250, leaving the road for pasture in 2018, a 36yr life span! Along the way various small changes were made and outputs varied from around 26 through to 40hp depending on

model and market. The 40hp Spada remained the high point in power, performance and rev-ability.

Note also that this V2 wasn't plagued by the early Honda V4 cam issues despite being birthed in parallel with them.

It's quite difficult to determine what changed internally over the years through various iterations, but one obvious change aside from power outputs was the redline, this ranged from 11,000 rpm on earlier variants to peaking at 13,500 on the Spada and falling back towards earth with the VTR.

Torque curves and gearing also vary with models, even the number of gears, early VT250s and the Spada are 6 speeds, later VTRs 5 speeds and from what I can gather are set up with taller final drive ratios.

Regardless of the variances the Spada motor is remains peak VT250, yet is no less reliable than any of the other variants. Compared to it's siblings the Spada is only 5 ponies down on the CBR250R and RR and the same as the unfaired version of the CBR often referred to as the hornet 250. But it should be noted the low range torque on the Spada is much better than the CBR250RR.

Mechanically the only weakness is the cam chain and tensioner, but even then it's probably no where near as weak as contemporary competitors. Replace the chain and tensioner when it reaches the service limit, keep up the oil changes and everything will be rock solid reliable.

I've come across several Spadas for sale with in excess of 100,000k and most of the other owners I know in clubs have bikes which range from 50-90,000k, this is not a fragile small bore engine that will have you riding along wondering if it's about to pull the pin then grenade into a thousand pieces.

Fundamentally there's no reason any well designed 250 can't be long lived, it's really a matter of construction and quality. Consider, a four cylinder 600 can pump out a 100 ponies with a similar redline to the Spada, do the math and a 40hp 250 is almost the same specific output per litre as said 600 Supersport. Ah you say but the 250 works harder, maybe a little, but given two bikes with similar all up weights and frontal areas, cruising at 100kph is going to require a pretty similar power output. The scales here also swing somewhat towards the Spada as it will be around 45kg lighter than contemporary 600s such as the CBR.

The Spada loves to rev, but in practice it never feels stressed it just spins like a perfectly balanced centrifuge, without a tach you'd hardly know how fast those pistons are punching, in fact I've accidentally hit the rev limit rather too many times when wearing ear plugs because I wasn't paying attention and couldn't hear any issue. Given the true nature of the Spada there's no reason you couldn't go on long

multi day rides confidently, in fact I have, especially if the machine is well maintained, though of course luggage capacity might be an issue.

Personally I consider burdening the Spada with a dirty great rack and panniers is just plain wrong, a complete travesty, even worse than pineapple on a pizza. Touring on the Spada should mean tank bag, backpack and seat pack, which would be fine for a long weekend.



Gearbox

In a word, lovely, no false neutrals, positive and slick. Clutch-less changes are a breeze up the scale and pretty easy going down so long as you possess some mechanical sympathy.

Generally 250s having less reciprocating mass and flywheel effect can be easily rev matched and the Spada is a great example. Frankly out of all the bikes I've owned the Spada has the 2nd best gear change, my Versys X300 just pips it. The light and smooth mechanically actuated clutch helps a lot too. Really the only trap for first time Spada jockeys is that if you've come off a larger bike or a trail, first gear will probably seem taller than you might expect. Dial in few more revs and

little clutch slipping for a smooth and quick getaway, you'll get used to it quickly enough.

Acceleration

If you're seeking optimal 0-100 times at local traffic light showdowns, gear changes made between 12-12,500 are order of the day. I've seen a few 0-100 youtube clips where timid riders have called it a day at 9-10,000 rpm, leaving the real fun going begging. Spin it and you'll grin it, this one loves a good old flogging.

The zero to 100kph dashes are normally hard to quantify with 250s, much more so than larger capacity machines. Technique, rider weight, gear change points and state of tune have big impacts on 250s. I've seen for example later model VTR250 times ranging from 6.5 through to 10.8 secs, which you'd have to agree is an enormous margin of error.

As said, the Spada, at least mine is pretty tall in first for a 250, so ones launch ability has a bearing, but I'd judge a rider of around 80kg with practice should easily get a figure within the 6-8 sec range. Now that's not quick in motorcycle terms but consider that an awful lot of cruisers are lucky to break the 7.5 sec mark and the cult RE 350 meanders to 100k in about 15 sec so we are hardly talking snail on valium figures. By comparison I find my Spada accelerates harder than my Versys X 300. If you really know how to get the best out of such a bike, you know, with optimal launch revs, quick clutch less shifting, optimal change points, and dropped body position matter a lot. If you weigh say 70kgs or less you could probably pull a sub 6 sec time. And anyway, be honest how often do you really give your bike the beans as they say, most of us are happy to just roll on up to the limit in a relaxed manner.

I guess would-be crotch jockeys could lower the final drive gearing to give some extra tingle in the dingle, but then you'd trade off some top speed, fuel economy and the relaxed nature for those rare accelerative thrills. In any case with a lowered final drive the 0-100 would then require an extra time sapping gear-change to 3rd, so the point may be moot, though thrust out of corners would be sharper. As an aside on standard gearing a Spada can hit about 100kph in 2nd gear, which for a 250 is right up there!

On club rides where others are on much larger bikes I have no issues keeping up, very rarely does a hill require a change down from 6th and even when cruising through townships I can hold 5th or 6th, and smoothly accelerate to 100kph in 6th upon exiting town so the Spada is in no way finicky about gear choice or revs, unlike the CBR250RR.



Running Costs

It's a 250, you'd expect the fuel economy to be pretty good and it is, but be realistic, fuel economy is very closely tied to weight, power and the twist of the wrist. No, it's not going to compete with low power single cylinder motorcycles that have limited performance.

I'm happy with my results, here's a good example. On a 170km club ride with much larger bikes of 650cc and up and speeds of 100-125 kph my Spada averaged 3.71 litres per 100k. At no time was I left off the pace, in fact for much of the ride I was in 2nd position in a group of 8, so it's reasonable to assume that at an average pace in the 90-100 kph range you would see even better results. I'd also note that this was not a flat land ride, there was a mix of longer hills, tight winding roads and riding around horrendous potholes with attendant accelerations.

Stoppers

You'd have to be a dewey eyed nostalgia driven ludite to deny that brakes have not progressed quite a bit over the past 3 decades. No-one could expect the Spada to have state of the art stoppers, no 4 or 6 piston grabby bits, no ABS and that's before we get into the degradations of 35yr old components that have gummed up somewhat.

The front caliper grabs via 2 pistons and rear a single piston jobby, discs are 320 front, 220 rear.

On the other hand, mainly the right one, if the brakes are in top form they are actually plenty good enough, especially allowing for the lowish bike mass, limited terminal velocity and generally smaller riders who find a fit on such machines. Initially mine were frightening, real poop in the undies and down the legs frightening, but not now. New pistons and seals front and back, a braided front line, rebuilt master cylinders and nice soft grippy organic pads solved the issue, in fact it probably stops better than new. I hazard a guess that when many youtube bike reviewers are ragging out on the brakes of older machines their findings are coloured somewhat by component condition rather than outright design capability.

I could probably improve things further by replacing the front disc with a more performance orientated item but until the disc wears out I'm ok with the current one.

So a word to the wise if you own a classic 70s to 90s Jap bike spend the time and money to rebuild the braking system as a priority. Accelerating hard won't usually kill you, but an inability to stop hard just might!

Making a comparison with other bikes I own, the brakes are better than my cruiser (by a wide margin), they best my Honda Bros and pull up pretty much as well as my 1800 Goldwing so long as you don't need ABS. And just for perspective they're astronomically better than my 66 Honda Dream, which are hilariously bad, hilarious because that little retardation has to be some sort of joke. The Dream is basically brake limited.

Anyhow, the bottom line, I don't ever have those "Oh crap" moments any more, so potential owners can rest easy regarding braking.

Looks

Beauty as they say is only skin deep, but ugly can go right to the core. We motorcyclists can be a pretty superficial bunch, we like a pretty face. Sure ugly bikes may have a certain muscular attraction to some riders but only if the bike has strong redeeming performance characteristics.



So is the Spada pretty? Well looks are subjective, but I'd say out of the box, yeah she's a cute looking machine, some might say she has great bone structure. A little makeup on those bones and she can be quite the princess.

The Spada is one of those bikes where colour can have a big impact, and the Spada was birthed in a wide array of colours across several markets, it's not identified by any specific colour, so should you choose a non-standard respray colour it's not going to look like a fake youtube influencer.

As far as I can tell, Spadas have been available in red, orangey red, maroon, black, mid blue, turquoise, silver, gold, black, yellow. I have also seen white, but it may have been an older non standard respray. Green is the only colour missing in action, though I've seen pics of one painted in British Racing Green that looked rather fetching.

I think there may have been some special tri-colour versions as well.

Additionally the wheels have been variously painted in white, black and gold.

Lots of combinations for refinishing whilst keeping the original look, but there's no reason to not get adventurous and try something different. We're not dealing with a Brough Superior here, where anything other than black would be sacrilege, then again miss Spada does look lovely dressed in classic black.

As best as I can judge from testing at 5000rpm the max speeds in each gear are as follows, but note there is likely some small variance due to speedo and tach flutter but the figures should be close. These are all at redline, which is 13,500 rpm.

1st.	80kph
2nd	102kph
3rd	130kph
4th.	148kph
5th	166kph
6th.	174kph Theoretically?

7750 in 6th equals 100kph and it will pull top from 40kph without undue snatching

If you want to cruise and short change 4000k works well as a change point and the natural change point is 5500, which can be done clutch less with perfect meshing.

Low speed fuelling is smooth and snatch free so crawling in traffic is no issue, assuming the bikes carbs are in fine fettle.

Power production is linear, so no surprises making for very predictable riding with 90km is being a very relaxed cruising speed. Surprisingly the Spada will run quite happily at 135-140, so if you really want to loose your licence, you certainly can.

Around town most corners and the roundabouts are taken easily in 4th, you could slip back into 3rd if you're in a real hurry.

The ability to crack 100kph in second gear is a bit special for a 250, consider that many 250 singles struggle to top 100 in top gear. Second gear and a sequence of tight 50k corners can be a source of giggly high rev fun.

One of the most endearing performance aspects of the Spada is its ability to hold 100-110 in top gear over hills and longer climbs via throttle twisting that would have lesser 250s sliding back through the gearbox. It really is uncanny in this respect and every owner or rider I have come across will offer the same surprised conclusion. This makes for a relaxed ride in comparison despite the high rev nature of the engine.

Weight

The bike weighs in around 145 kg sans fuel, although some specs claim it is 140 kg, it's not what you'd call an ultra lightweight, but it's within its contemporary 250 ballpark. The V twin Yamaha SRV250 which came onto the market around the time the Spada was exiting the rear door was a few kilos lighter and the sibling CBR250RR MC22 was around 7kg lighter. To me weight within reason isn't a major consideration, too light and things become a bit flighty in cross winds and even unstable on the rough tracks we laughingly call roads in my part of the world. Too heavy for the power available and things get a bit, well tardy.

A modern equivalent like a Yamaha MT03 is about 10kg heavier and the Honda CBR300R, a single by the way, hits 165kg, that's 14kg more pork despite the 35yr age difference.

Engine wise the most directly comparable new bike is the Kawasaki Versys 300. Which I also own. Torque and peak power are almost identical, the Honda produces max torque 1000rpm lower with peak power around 500rpm higher, overall though very close. The Spada has a better low end, is 20kg lighter and has a lower profile, so it's no surprise it out accelerates the Versys.

As a Versys 300 owner I can confirm that despite the similar performance figures the Versys is no match for the Spada in terms of smoothness and vibration. At no point in the rev range does the Spada's engine exhibit any harshness, it's almost uncanny in how it goes about its work. The Versys unit is a good but a typical parallel twin, running a bit lumpy at anything below 4500 rpm then getting smoother at 5000rpm followed by a very silky feel at around 6500-7500 after which it progresses to an increasing level of vibration above 8000 rpm. The Versys unit is a nice engine with some character but the Spada in comparison is just exquisite. Ah progress.

The Spada has good straight line and corner stability, major cross winds or B double Truck Blasts can move you across the tarmac but nothing that approaches problematic. Mass centralisation seems about ideal, low enough to be flickable, high enough to be stable. Certainly it's much better than a 250 trailie if that's been your past 250 weapon of choice or point of reference.

Fuel Economy

Who cares, it's a vintage bike you will probably only ride for smiles on the dial. Ok so you're curious, let's clear it up. Like any 250 it depends on where you ride and how hard you ride. Physics are a thing, any bike at 100 kph will need about 10-15hp to maintain a constant speed, it all depends on frontal area and weight of course, but that's about it. So it matters little what the capacity is, fuel economy at 100-110 is going to be very similar between machines of similar weight and design.

However, single cylinder machines can be a little better in the 80-100 km range due to less frictional losses and better efficiency in that narrow rev range, above that things kind of even out. Testing my Spada, which is in perfect mechanical fettle, shows economy ranges between 3.1 and 4.3 litres per hundred, representing easy town and country running up to say 80kph through to "let's give you a bloody good flogging" territory. I conducted a pretty serious test of short town runs with country spurts up to 100kph and got 3.55 litres/100. By comparison, that's pretty much line ball with my modern fuel injected Kawasaki Versys X300, but at higher speeds, say 110km plus it bests the Versys, which due to aerodynamics starts to get progressively thirsty.

For comparison a Royal Enfield 350 is better in the economy department up to around 90kph but that is tempered when you realise that the Spada is out accelerating the Enfield at any point and from 85kph onwards the Enfield may proceed to a higher speed but it could hardly be termed as accelerating, where as the Spada can be knocked into 4th and zip past the hundred mark easily. The bottom line is that for a 34yr old bike the Spada is very competitive and is nicely fuel efficient considering the available performance.

Ride and Handling

At 1280 mm the wheelbase sits between say a KTM RC390 and the later Honda VTR250 and identical to a Yamaha YZF R3. Rake is the same as the R3 and RC. The Honda is around 25kgs lighter than the KTM and 3.5hp down on power... which gives it a very similar power to weight ratio.

As you might expect the Spada is not keen on seriously poor road surfaces, moderate weight, 35yr old suspension with limited suspension travel all conspire to make many of the very rough pot-holed tracks we euphemistically call roads, a test of spinal fortitude. That being said, many of the roads in our locale are so horrendous even my Goldwing gets bucked about by them.

On moderate to good roads the ride is fine, probably better than you might expect given its age, the main limitation is front fork travel and the harshness at the end of that travel, the rear with the spring set on the middle setting is ok.

I'm sure the the ride could be refined by upgrading the front springs and tinkering with fork oil weights to suit the specific rider weight. An upgraded rear spring/shock unit would probably have a significant impact as well. Would it be worthwhile? If the Spada was your main bike and got a lot of use, absolutely, especially modding the front end, but for riders like me using it as a club bike, optimising fork oil weight, adding the right preload via washers, and finding the right rear spring setting and tyre pressures is probably enough, just choose your roads wisely.

All the above should be tempered by considering my own aged condition, several decades have seen my frame and undercarriage approaching worn out, which is to say a younger lighter version of me would probably have far less issue with the Spadas shortcomings.

The star of the show is the handling, this is one classic bike that scythes through corners confidently, it's a real hoot. The first corner will confirm that Honda made a great decision spending the time and money developing the Castec frame for the Spada. Despite the limited suspension travel, the bike holds a line tenaciously yet can be flicked around pot holes and debris almost with mind power alone, It's like Honda waved a wand over the bike and incanted some magical spell that creates a neural link via your contact points when you throw a leg over the seat. Almost universally past or present owners wax lyrical about the handling, if they don't the bike was or is, likely a worn out banger.

Keeping it going

Cutting to the chase, any Spada is going to be at least 32 yrs old, maybe even in its 37th year, mine splits the difference at 34. Anything rubber is likely perished, just like any old bike so check and replace what needs replacing, the main thing to

address are the carb boots that bridge the carbs and the heads, all coolant hoses, the fuel line and vacuum line.

So parts? Well a good proportion of the bike is still available new, but there are some odd omissions, I'll get to that. Oil filters, cables, carb kits, gaskets, levers, blinkers, brake parts, timing chains, tensioners etc are all available either OEM or 3rd party and none are expensive.

What is unobtainium new are tanks, guards, rear bodywork, in other words items that are generally ruined in a crash. The real oddity is the fuel tap, it's a specific fit and there are no complete taps nor repair kits in captivity. Your only option is to modify by making a custom adapter and then fitting some other type of tap.

If you want to keep your Spada running long term, like any vintage bike it's a good idea to buy up spares or perhaps a second bike when they become available. I temper all the above by saying that it's a reliable machine so things don't just break, most issues will relate to crashes and long term wear and tear.

Compared to a Modern/New 250

Tis hard to make a direct comparison and in any case someone looking to buy a Spada is probably not in the market for a new 250.

Obvious differences are the lack of rider aids, ABS, fuel injection and maybe a little less sophistication in ride. Plus of course a new bike is well...new, with all the benefits that entails.

On planet reality however, a good Spada will probably be more entertaining and fun than pretty much any new 250 and some will argue better looking and better built as well. Most new 250 /300s are going to be ADV style single cylinder machines, or faired sports focused singles or parallel twins.

Ok you want to know, what are the new competitors? In no particular order you'd have:

A couple of CF Motos, Honda CB300R, Kawasaki Versys300, KTM 200 Duke, a couple of SWMs, Yamaha Virago 250, Yamaha MT03 and YZF R3, Suzuki Gixxer 250s. Not a massive smorgasbord to choose from.

The only one I'd consider a direct competitor is the Yamaha MT03, it produces very similar power and torque and weighs just a little more. It's also a naked but nowhere near as pretty in my opinion and is of course a Parallel twin not a 90 degree V twin. Motorcycle testers will often claim the MT the best road 250 300 class bike on the market, I'd say it probably is, but it's also about the most expensive, oh and it's actually 315cc not 249 like the Spada.

One obvious difference from a riders perspective is the seat height is higher than the Spada, so those with legs ending just below the crutch will probably be more comfortable on the old girl.

Neither bike could do duty as a massaging vibrator, but the MT03 will be considerably more vibratory at 100-110, whereas the Spadas V2 is Mr Smooth at those speeds.

The one area you can expect the MT03 to cream the Spada is suspension subtleness on medium to heavy hits. On the other hand you could spent some of the \$5,000 saving on upgrading the Spadas springy bits, in fact that would be my first priority along with the stoppy bits if I bought another one in less than optimal condition.

Look here is the truth, you want a sporty 250 V2 that looks pretty, goes great, handles well and is not a 2 Stroke? You want a Spada, it's in its own class, end of story.