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1968 Honda CB450 Buyer's Guide

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1968 Honda CB450

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1968 (CB450K1) only

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1968 only (CB450K1). The CB450 ran 1965–1974 (K0–K7); this guide does not cover other years except where differences from 1968 are explicitly noted.
- **Model:** CB450 Super Sport — the road-going standard. The high-pipe CL450K0 Scrambler arrived in February 1968 as a separate model, not covered except where noted.
- **Engine:** 444 cc air-cooled DOHC 180° parallel twin; **9.0:1 compression** (up from the K0's 8.5:1); **45 bhp** @ **9,000 rpm** and 29 lb-ft @ 7,000 rpm. Torsion-bar valve springs — no coil valve springs.
- **Fuel system:** Two constant-velocity (CV) carburetors, one per cylinder.
- **Transmission: 5-speed** constant-mesh manual (new for 1968), left-foot shift, chain final drive, wet multi-plate clutch.
- **Electrics:** Battery-and-coil ignition with dual breaker points and centrifugal auto-advance; electric starter plus kick starter.
- **Chassis:** Steel frame; telescopic front fork with **rubber gaiters** (new — the K0's sliding metal shrouds are gone); dual rear shock absorbers; drum brakes front and rear; wire-spoked wheels; chrome fenders.
- **1968 colors (US):** Candy Red or Candy Blue Green — tank and side covers in the base color with a gold tank stripe and gold side-cover emblems; metal HONDA tank badge; black upper forks and headlight shell; pleated seat; rectangular taillight.
- **Frame serial:** The identification compilation used for this guide gives **CB450-3000001** as the K1 start; a conflicting secondary source gives CB450-2000001 (see Section 4.1). Engine numbers carry the prefix CB450E-.
- **Key 1968-only context:** First year of the five-speed, the redesigned tank, rubber fork gaiters, and separate instruments. David Silver Spares catalogs K1 parts across 1968–1969 — K1 and K2 interchange heavily.

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> ***Year chosen: 1968.*** *The redesign year — the five-speed K1 replaced the Black Bomber's four-speed, chrome-paneled tank, headlight-shell instruments, and metal fork shrouds with a new tank, rubber fork gaiters, and separate speedometer and tachometer above the headlamp. Compression rose to 9.0:1 and claimed output to 45 bhp. The 1968 K1 is the hinge the whole model run turns on.*

1. Manufacturer history: Honda

Honda Motor Co., Ltd. was founded in 1948 by Soichiro Honda, a mechanic who had spent a decade developing his own piston-ring design — a design Toyota had rejected in 1938, which only hardened his resolve to build his own company. Honda's first product was the A-Type: a motorized bicycle cobbled together from surplus generator engines. It was crude, but it established the formula that would define the company — simple, reliable, affordable personal transport.

The breakthrough came in 1958 with the Super Cub. With its step-through frame, automatic clutch, and bulletproof 50 cc four-stroke, the Super Cub became the best-selling motor vehicle in history and financed Honda's global ambitions. In 1959 Honda did something audacious: it entered the Isle of Man TT, the most dangerous and prestigious motorcycle race in the world. The team didn't win that year — but they learned, returned, and by 1961 Honda was winning TT races outright, announcing to the British-dominated industry that the Japanese had arrived as engineers, not just assemblers.

In 1963 Honda launched the American advertising campaign "You meet the nicest people on a Honda," which deliberately broke motorcycling's outlaw image and sold bikes to suburban families. It worked beyond anyone's expectations: by the late 1960s Honda was the largest motorcycle manufacturer on earth, and its American dealer network was the envy of the industry.

The CB450 was Honda's answer to a harder question: could the Japanese build a *big* bike — one to stand against Triumph, Norton, and Harley-Davidson? In 1964 a visiting journalist discovered a mid-sized twin undergoing tests at Suzuka, and the British industry felt the shock. The CB450 appeared in the United States in August 1965 as the "Black Bomber": a 444 cc double-overhead-cam parallel twin — the first mass-produced DOHC motorcycle — with Honda claiming 43 horsepower at the crankshaft and a top speed of 98 mph. At about $1,000 it was comparatively expensive (a 1966 Triumph T120R was $1,309), and it never sold in the huge numbers Honda had anticipated. But it was fast, had good brakes, started on a button, and did not leak oil — and to riders who wanted to get to school or work and have fun on weekends, that reliability trumped the British handling advantage. It did not kill the British twins outright, so Honda tried again: development of the four-cylinder CB750 began in 1967, and the 1969 CB750 Four detonated the superbike era. But it was the CB450 that proved Honda could build a big twin — the necessary rehearsal for everything that followed.

For the restorer, this history sets expectations correctly. The CB450 was Honda's prestige twin, engineered to a higher standard than the later mass-market CB350 — torsion-bar valve springs instead of coil springs, double overhead cams when the British still ran pushrods. That sophistication is why it rewards careful work and punishes shortcuts: there is no agricultural simplicity to hide behind.

2. Model history: the CB450

The CB450 was introduced for the 1965 model year as Honda's first "big" motorcycle and the first mass-produced double-overhead-cam motorcycle — a 444 cc air-cooled parallel twin with a 180-degree crankshaft, torsion-bar valve springs, and twin carburetors, aimed squarely at the British 650 twins. It arrived in the United States in August 1965 wearing black paint, a chrome-paneled tank, and the "Black Bomber" nickname the press gave it.

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The K0 ran from 1965 through 1967 (and into 1968) with no visible changes — Honda simply let the serial counter roll from CB450-1000001. In 1967 Honda offered a dealer-installed scrambler kit (high pipes, braced handlebar) for the Bomber, testing the off-road-styled waters; the factory-built answer, the high-pipe CL450K0 Scrambler, reached showrooms in February 1968 as a separate model.

For 1968 the CB450 itself was comprehensively redesigned as the K1: five-speed gearbox, new fuel tank, rubber fork gaiters in place of the sliding metal shrouds, separate speedometer and tachometer above the headlamp, pleated seat, rectangular taillight, compression raised from 8.5:1 to 9.0:1, and claimed output up from 43 to 45 bhp. From there the model evolved one careful step a year — the K2's painted fork covers and headlight shell (1969), the K3's hydraulic front disc brake (1970), the K4's new emblem and seat (1971), the K5's chrome forks and black headlight shell (1972), the K6's tilted instruments and grab rail (1973) — until the K7 closed the run in 1974. The CB500T took over for 1975.

Designation	Model year	Notable changes
K0	1965-1967	Launch 'Black Bomber.' Black-with-Silver paint, chrome-paneled tank, instruments in the headlight shell, sliding metal fork shrouds, 4-speed, 8.5:1 compression, 43 bhp claimed. Drum brakes.
K1	**1968**	**The redesign. 5-speed, new tank, rubber fork gaiters, separate speedometer and tachometer above the headlamp, pleated seat, rectangular taillight, 9.0:1 compression, 45 bhp. Candy Red / Candy Blue Green.**
K2	1969	Detail year. Same colors and mechanicals as the K1; headlight shell and upper fork covers now body color (black on the K1). Serial from CB450-3008956.
K3	1970	The disc-brake year. Hydraulic front disc (first year), black rubber fork boots, megaphone mufflers. Candy Blue Green / Candy Ruby Red / Candy Gold.
K4	1971	The emblem year. New 'DOUBLE OVERHEAD CAM 450' side-cover emblem, reshaped and re-pleated seat. Polynesian Blue Metallic / Candy Ruby Red / Candy Gold / Valley Green Metallic.
K5	1972	The chrome-fork year. Chrome upper forks, black headlight shell, gold tank stripe, chrome tank-base strip. Candy Garnet Brown / Light Ruby Red / Candy Bacchus Olive.
K6	1973	The instrument year. Tilted instruments, separate indicator-light housing, chrome grab rail, '450 DOHC' emblem (white/yellow), gold-and-black stripes. Brier Brown Metallic / Tyrolean Green Metallic.
K7	1974	Final year. '450 DOHC' emblem in white/red, gold-and-black stripes, tilted instruments, grab rail. Candy Orange / Maxim Brown Metallic. Succeeded by the CB500T for 1975.

A caution on K-numbers: Honda used "K0" for the first model in a series and K1, K2, K3 for updated versions; from 1968 the K-number on the CB450 generally changed annually (American Honda's own identification guide). When ordering parts, confirm by frame and engine serial numbers, not by the seller's K-designation — and note that parts vendors (David Silver Spares, for example) catalog some K-series parts across two model years where Honda's own parts book shares the assemblies.

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3. What is unique about the 1968 CB450 (K1)

The 1968 K1 is the most changed CB450 of the entire model run — the year Honda retired the Black Bomber formula and rebuilt the bike around it. Every one of these changes is a 1968 identifier; fitting K0 parts (or 1969-and-later detail parts) to a 1968 is the originality error this section exists to prevent.

What the K1 changed (1968 new):

- **Five-speed gearbox** replacing the K0 four-speed, with better-spaced ratios (St. Francis Motorcycle Museum).
- **Redesigned fuel tank** — the chrome side panels and rubber knee pads are gone; the tank is painted the base color with a gold stripe.
- **Rubber fork gaiters** replacing the K0's sliding metal shrouds.
- **Separate speedometer and tachometer** mounted above the headlamp — the headlight-shell instruments are gone.
- **9.0:1 compression** (from 8.5:1) and **45 bhp @ 9,000 rpm** with 29 lb-ft @ 7,000 rpm.
- **Pleated seat**, **rectangular taillight lens**, **metal HONDA tank badge**, chrome fenders.

Paint and bodywork — 1968:

- **Candy Red or Candy Blue Green.** Tank and side covers in the base color; **gold** tank stripe and gold side-cover emblems; metal HONDA tank badge.
- **Black upper forks and black headlight shell** — this is the K1-vs-K2 tell (see below).

1968 vs 1969 (K1 vs K2):

- The K2 kept both 1968 colors and nearly all 1968 equipment. The visible difference: on the 1969 K2 the **headlight shell and upper fork covers are painted the base color**; on the 1968 K1 they are **black**. A body-color headlight shell on a claimed 1968 is a 1969 part.

1968 buyer cautions:

- **Serial-number conflict — read Section 4.1.** The identification compilation used here gives CB450-3000001 as the K1 start; another secondary source gives CB450-2000001. Identify a 1968 K1 by its features (five-speed, gaiters, separate instruments, Candy Red/Blue Green paint), not by the serial number alone.
- **K0 parts do not belong.** Chrome-paneled tank, headlight-shell instruments, metal fork shrouds, four-speed cluster — all K0 items, all incorrect on a 1968.
- **The CL450K0 is not a CB450K1.** The 1968 Scrambler shares the engine but wears upswept pipes, a different tank, and off-road trim — a separate model with its own parts book.

4. Technical restoration data — 1968 Honda CB450

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1968)

Pre-1981 Hondas have no 17-digit VIN. Identification is by separate frame and engine serial numbers.

- **Frame number:** stamped on the steering head. Format for this model: **CB450-3xxxxxx**. The 1968 model-year serial allocation began at **CB450-3000001 (see serial note — a conflicting source gives 2000001)**.
- **Engine number:** stamped on the left side of the engine crankcase. Format: **CB450E-xxxxxxx** (the engine prefix is CB450E- on every year).
- **Numbers do not match — and that is normal.** On Japanese-built motorcycles of this era, engines and frames were manufactured separately and mated on the assembly line as needed; the engine and frame serial numbers on an untouched original bike are typically *close* but not identical. A non-matching engine number is not, by itself, evidence of an engine swap. What matters is that both numbers fall in the correct ranges for the model

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year.

- **The frame number is the legal VIN** — it is the number on the title.
- **Ordering parts:** Honda parts fiches key engine parts to the engine number and chassis parts to the frame number. Always quote both when ordering.
- **Conflict disclosed:** the French Honda year-identification compilation used for this guide gives **CB450-3000001** as the first K1 frame number; a conflicting secondary source gives **CB450-2000001**. Both agree the K2 begins at CB450-3008956, and Honda parts-book breakpoints on K1 components (frame CB450-3002264, engines CB450E-3000972 through CB450E-3004196, via David Silver Spares) all sit inside the 300xxxx block.
- Practical consequence: **identify a 1968 K1 by features, not by serial alone** — five-speed gearbox, rubber fork gaiters, separate speedometer and tachometer above the headlamp, and Candy Red or Candy Blue Green paint with a gold tank stripe.
- David Silver Spares catalogs CB450K1 parts across **1968–1969** — K1 and K2 mechanical parts interchange heavily; trim and paint do not.

4.2 Engine specifications (1968)

Item	Specification
Type	Air-cooled 4-stroke DOHC 180° parallel twin
Displacement	444 cc (marketed)
Compression ratio	9.0:1
Max power	45 bhp @ 9,000 rpm
Max torque	29 lb-ft @ 7,000 rpm
Valve train	Double overhead camshafts, 2 valves per cylinder, torsion-bar valve springs
Fuel system	2 × constant-velocity (CV) carburetors, one per cylinder
Ignition	Battery-and-coil, dual breaker points with centrifugal auto-advance
Starting	Electric starter plus kick starter
Clutch	Wet multi-plate, cable-operated
Transmission	5-speed constant-mesh, left-foot shift
Final drive	Roller chain

4.3 Carburetion and electrical

- **Carburetors:** Constant-velocity (CV) type, one per cylinder, with vacuum-operated slides and rubber diaphragms. The carburetor assembly carries an ID stamping on the carb body — record it before disassembly, as jetting varied across the K-series.
- **Jetting:** No verified Honda factory jetting table for the CB450 was locatable in the sources consulted for this guide. Do not trust jet sizes printed in generic specification aggregators — verify against the stamping on your carburetors and against the factory service manual before ordering jets.
- **Air filtration:** The stock airbox is essential to correct CV-carburetor function — pod filters require re-jetting and are incorrect for a factory-correct restoration.

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- **Ignition:** Dual breaker points on a points base under the side cover (Honda parts catalog: "POINT BASE BREAKER"), with a centrifugal auto-advance unit. Set the point gaps to the factory service manual's specification with each set at full lift, then time statically and confirm with a strobe light.
- **Valve gear note:** The CB450 uses **torsion-bar valve springs** — there are no coil valve springs (Honda factory service manual: "Valve and Torsion Bar Spring Disassembly"). This is the engine's signature detail. Follow the factory manual's valve-clearance procedure exactly; no verified clearance figure is printed here because none was locatable in the genuine sources consulted — do not substitute the common 0.05/0.10 mm Honda-twin figures from memory.
- **Charging and starting:** Battery-and-coil system with AC generator and rectifier (Honda catalog: "A.C. GENERATOR", "BATTERY RECTIFIER MAGNETIC SWITCH"), **electric starter plus kick starter** (Honda catalog: "STARTING MOTOR" and "KICK STARTER SPINDLES"). Keep the battery charged: the points ignition will not fire with a dead battery, and chronic undercharging masks itself as carburetion trouble.

4.4 Transmission and final drive

Gearbox: 5-speed constant-mesh, left-foot shift (new for the 1968 K1). No verified factory gear-ratio table was locatable in the sources consulted — ratios printed in generic aggregators are not reproduced here.

- **Clutch:** Wet multi-plate, cable-operated (Honda catalog: "CLUTCH"). Set lever free play per the factory service manual before condemning a dragging clutch — most "bad clutch" diagnoses on these bikes are cable adjustment.
- **Final drive:** Roller chain (David Silver Spares lists a 530-pitch heavy-duty chain for the CB450K1). No verified factory chain-slack figure was locatable — set slack per the factory service manual, check for tight spots by rotating the wheel, and replace chain and both sprockets as a set.

4.5 Chassis, suspension, and brakes (1968)

- **Frame:** Steel frame, black finish. Check the steering-head area for crash damage and the rear frame loops for rust where the fender and seat trap moisture.
- **Front fork:** Telescopic with **rubber gaiters** (new for 1968 — the K0's sliding metal shrouds are incorrect on a 1968). Pitted stanchions destroy new seals — budget for re-chroming or replacement tubes if the chrome is pitted.
- **Rear suspension:** Dual shock absorbers with spring-preload adjustment.
- **Brakes:** Drum brakes front and rear. The hydraulic front disc did not appear until the 1970 K3 — a disc on a 1968 is always a later modification.
- **Wheels:** Wire-spoked. Spokes loosen and rims rust from the inside — check spoke tension by tone and inspect the rim wells with the tires off.
- **Fenders:** Chromed steel (1968). Chrome fenders are rust magnets — check the undersides, rolled edges, and brace mounts.

4.6 Paint and finish (1968)

1968 US colors, per the Honda year-identification compilation:

Colorway	Fuel tank	Side covers	Other finish notes
Candy Red	Candy Red with gold stripe; metal HONDA badge	Candy Red; gold side-cover emblems	Black upper forks and headlight shell; chrome fenders

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