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1973 Honda CB450 Buyer's Guide

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1973 Honda CB450

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1973 (CB450K6) only

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1973 only (CB450K6). The CB450 ran 1965–1974 (K0–K7); this guide does not cover other years except where differences from 1973 are explicitly noted.
- **Model:** CB450 Super Sport — the road-going standard. The high-pipe CL450 Scrambler is a separate model, not covered except where noted.
- **Engine:** 444 cc air-cooled DOHC 180° parallel twin; 9.0:1 compression; 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, 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 black upper forks and black rubber fork boots; dual rear shock absorbers; hydraulic front disc brake with rod-operated rear drum; wire-spoked wheels; chrome fenders; megaphone mufflers; **chrome grab rail behind the seat** (new).
- **1973 colors (US):** Brier Brown Metallic or Tyrolean Green Metallic — tank and side covers in the base color with **gold-and-black tank stripes**; **'450 DOHC' side-cover emblem in white and yellow** (new); metal HONDA tank badge; black headlight shell.
- **Frame serial:** The 1973 allocation began at **CB450-6000001**. Engine numbers carry the prefix CB450E-.
- **Key 1973-only context:** Tilted instruments with a separate indicator-light housing between speedometer and tachometer — new for 1973 and the K6's best identifier alongside the grab rail.

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> ***Year chosen: 1973.*** *The instrument year — the K6 tilted the speedometer and tachometer toward the rider, added a separate indicator-light housing between them, fitted a chrome grab rail behind the seat, and introduced the '450 DOHC' side-cover emblem with gold-and-black tank stripes. Two colors only: Brier Brown Metallic and Tyrolean Green Metallic.*

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 1973 CB450 (K6)

The 1973 K6 is the CB450's rider-interface year — Honda left the engine, gearbox, and brakes alone and reworked what the rider sees and touches: tilted instruments, a new indicator housing, a chrome grab rail, new emblems and striping, and a two-color palette. The K6 rewards close inspection; its tells are all in the cockpit and the trim.

What the K6 changed (1973 new):

- **Instruments tilted toward the rider** — new for 1973.
- **Separate indicator-light housing** added between the speedometer and tachometer — new for 1973.
- **Chrome grab rail ('grip pipe') behind the seat** — new for 1973.
- **'450 DOHC' side-cover emblem in white and yellow** — replaces the 'DOUBLE OVERHEAD CAM 450' emblem of 1971–1972.
- **Gold-and-black tank stripes**; metal HONDA tank badge retained.
- **Black upper forks and black headlight shell** (the chrome 1972 forks are gone).
- **Two colors:** Brier Brown Metallic, Tyrolean Green Metallic.
- **Frame serial from CB450-6000001.**

Carryover (correct on a 1973):

- Hydraulic front disc brake, rod-operated rear drum, black rubber fork boots, megaphone mufflers, chrome fenders.
- 444 cc DOHC twin, 9.0:1, 45 bhp @ 9,000 rpm, five-speed, dual CV carburetors, dual points with centrifugal advance.

1973 buyer cautions:

- **The cockpit tells.** Tilted instruments + the separate indicator housing + grab rail = 1973. A 1973 with flat instruments or no grab rail is wearing 1972-earlier parts.
- **The emblem change is absolute.** '450 DOHC' side covers are 1971–1972 items — incorrect on a 1973. The 1973 emblem reads '450 DOHC' in white and yellow.
- **1974 changes are the next trap:** the '450 DOHC' emblem in white and **red** (not yellow), and the Candy Orange / Maxim Brown Metallic colors, are 1974 K7 items.

4. Technical restoration data — 1973 Honda CB450

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1973)

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: **CB450-6xxxxxx**. The 1973 model-year serial allocation began at **CB450-6000001**.
- **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 year.
- **The frame number is the legal VIN** — it is the number on the title.

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- **Ordering parts:** Honda parts fiches key engine parts to the engine number and chassis parts to the frame number. Always quote both when ordering.
- The 1973 model-year allocation began at **CB450-6000001**.
- The K6's decisive identifiers: **tilted instruments** with a **separate indicator-light housing** between them, the **chrome grab rail** behind the seat, and the **'450 DOHC' emblem in white and yellow**.

4.2 Engine specifications (1973)

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.
- **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.

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- **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 (1973)

- **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 **black upper forks** and black rubber fork boots (1973 — the chrome 1972 forks are incorrect). Pitted stanchions destroy new seals.
- **Rear suspension:** Dual shock absorbers with spring-preload adjustment.
- **Brakes: Hydraulic front disc**; **rod-operated rear drum**. Rebuild the caliper and fit a new hose before trusting a forty-year-old system.
- **Wheels:** Wire-spoked; disc-brake-type front wheel. Check spoke tension by tone and inspect the rim wells with the tires off.
- **Fenders:** Chromed steel (1973). Check the undersides, rolled edges, and brace mounts.
- **Grab rail:** Chrome 'grip pipe' behind the seat (new for 1973) — check its mounting points for stress cracks.

4.6 Paint and finish (1973)

1973 US colors, per the Honda year-identification compilation:

Colorway	Fuel tank	Side covers	Other finish notes
Brier Brown Metallic	Brier Brown Metallic with gold-and-black stripes; metal HONDA badge	'450 DOHC' emblem, white and yellow	Black upper forks and headlight shell; black rubber fork boots; chrome grab rail; chrome fenders; megaphone mufflers
Tyrolean Green Metallic	Tyrolean Green Metallic with gold-and-black stripes; metal HONDA badge	'450 DOHC' emblem, white and yellow	Black upper forks and headlight shell; black rubber fork boots; chrome grab rail; chrome fenders; megaphone mufflers

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