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1973 Honda CB750 Buyer's Guide

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1973 Honda CB750

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

IronHead single-year guide · Model year 1973 (CB750K3) only

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1973 only — the **CB750K3** (production code 341), the US-market designation for model year 1973. Frame serials begin **CB750-2200001**; engine serials begin **CB750E-2200001**.
- **Engine:** 736 cc air-cooled SOHC inline-four, two valves per cylinder, chain-driven single overhead camshaft; 61 mm × 63 mm bore × stroke; 9.0:1 compression (9.1:1 in some listings — see Section 4.2); **67 hp @ 8,000 rpm**, 44 lb-ft (60 Nm) @ 7,000 rpm.
- **Induction:** four 28 mm Keihin carburetors with a restricted 1973 air-cleaner inlet — quieter than the K2, and deliberately so.
- **Transmission:** 5-speed constant-mesh, left-foot shift; multi-plate wet clutch; chain final drive, 18-tooth gearbox sprocket / 48-tooth rear (4.99:1 final).
- **Chassis:** tubular steel duplex cradle frame; non-adjustable telescopic forks (revised damping for 1973); dual rear shocks with new five-position spring-preload adjustment.
- **Brakes:** single 296 mm front disc (with 1973 splash guard and pad wear-indicator tabs) and 179 mm rear drum.
- **Wheels/tires:** 19-inch front, 18-inch rear; 3.25-19 front, 4.00-18 rear. Wire-spoked wheels.
- **1973 colors (all three confirmed):** Flake Sunrise Orange, Candy Bacchus Olive (one model year only), and Maxim Brown Metallic — tank stripes in white, gold, and black.
- **Fuel:** 17 L (4.5 US gal) tank — 3.2 gal main plus 1.3 gal reserve; period test average ~45 mpg mixed riding.
- **Dimensions:** 1,453 mm (57.2 in) wheelbase; 800 mm (31.5 in) seat height; 226 kg (498 lb) wet.
- **Production context:** K3 production ran September 1972–June 1973; roughly 38,000 K3 machines were built. Total CB750 sales across all models were approaching 100,000 by November 1973.
- **Key 1973-only features:** restricted air-cleaner inlet; quieter mufflers; fuse box behind the left sidecover; clutch-lever starter interlock; double-filament running-light turn signals; revised handlebar switch layout; five-position rear shocks; front-disc splash guard; red brake-pad wear tabs.
- **Market caution:** the K3 was built for the US market — in Europe the K2 remained the common CB750 through this period, so a "1973" CB750 outside North America needs its serial numbers checked, not its registration year.

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> ***Year chosen: 1973.*** *The third US K-model of Honda's original superbike — and the year the CB750 stopped trying to be faster and committed to being better. Cycle magazine's November 1973 road test called the K3 "a slightly slower but more refined version of the CB-750 K2," and the detail list backs it up: a quieter intake and exhaust, revised suspension, a fuse box instead of inline fuses, brake-pad wear indicators, running-light turn signals, and five-position rear shocks. The K3 is the most civilized of the early SOHC CB750s — and the one whose year-specific electrical and trim details are most often gotten wrong in restorations.*

1. Manufacturer history: Honda

Honda Motor Co. was founded in **1948** by **Soichiro Honda**, a mechanic who had developed his own piston-ring design in 1938 and, after Toyota declined it, started his own company a decade later. The first Honda-branded motorcycle, the 98 cc Dream D-Type, arrived in 1949; the 146 cc E-Type Dream became the company's first big seller.

The CB750, introduced in **1969**, was Honda's assault on the big-bike establishment. It was the first mass-production four-cylinder motorcycle — an air-cooled 736 cc SOHC inline-four with an electric starter, front disc brake, and five-speed gearbox, sold at a price that undercut the British twins it outperformed. Its significance is institutional, not just commercial: the CB750 sits in the AMA Motorcycle Hall of Fame's Classic Bikes, was named among the Discovery Channel's "Greatest Motorbikes Ever," appeared in the Guggenheim's *Art of the Motorcycle* exhibition, and is held by the UK National Motor Museum.

By the time the 1973 K3 was road-tested, total CB750 sales were closing in on **100,000 units** — the number Cycle magazine cited in November 1973 when it judged that Honda's directors could hardly be convinced they were making a mistake by refining rather than hot-rodding the bike. The CB750 made Honda — and then Kawasaki, Suzuki, and Yamaha — the new force in motorcycling, and its combination of quality, value, and performance effectively ended the British motorcycle industry's big-bike business.

For the restorer, this history sets one expectation: the CB750 is a mass-production machine with superb parts support and deep documentation. The knowledge base — the SOHC/4 forums, the Honda shop manuals, David Silver Spares and CMSNL fitment data, and marque specialists — has spent decades cataloguing exactly which part fits which serial number. "Correct for 1973" is an answerable question on a CB750, which is precisely why buyers pay for the answer.

2. Model history: the CB750 SOHC

The K-suffix system is Honda's own: "K0" denoted the first model in the series, with updated versions identified as K1, K2, K3, and so on, normally changing on an annual basis. (In September 1973 American Honda adopted a year identifier within the model number instead — e.g. CB750K'76 for a 1976 US model — while most other markets kept the K-numbering through 1978.)

Year	Model	Frame starts	Notable
1969–70	**K0**	CB750-1000001	Launch. The earliest bikes carry sandcast engine cases; later K0s are die-cast. The original superbike.

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Year	Model	Frame starts	Notable
1970–71	**K1**	CB750-1044650	Straight-through mufflers with fiberglass-wrapped inserts; #120 main jets; quick-advance ignition (all in by 2,000 rpm).
1972	**K2**	CB750-2000001	5-chamber baffled mufflers replace the straight-throughs; main jets #110 (later #105); spark advance delayed to full advance at 2,500 rpm; sprockets 18/48. Remained the common CB750 in Europe through this period.
1973	**K3 — this guide**	**CB750-2200001**	**Restricted air-cleaner inlet; quieter mufflers; fuse box; clutch-lever starter interlock; running-light signals; five-position rear shocks; disc splash guard.**
1974	**K4**	CB750-2300001	Carries the K3's mechanical package forward with detail changes; the starter interlock remains the K3's neutral/clutch-switch system with the starter-motor safety unit (the once-published "sidestand-up switch" claim could not be verified and was retracted).
1975	**K5**	CB750-2500001	Final year of the small-tank K styling.

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Year	Model	Frame starts	Notable
1976	**K6**	CB750-2540001	Larger turn signals; rubber lip added to the sidestand.
1977	**K7**	CB750-2700009	Engine shared with the new F1 (accelerator-pump carburetors).
1978	**K8**	CB750-2800001	Last of the SOHC fours; the least sought-after K, but the last classic four-pipe.

Parallel lines: the **CB750F Super Sport** (1975–1978) with 4-into-1 exhaust, rear disc brake, and racy styling, and the **CB750A Hondamatic** (1976–1978), a two-speed automatic derived from the Honda Civic's transmission that the public never embraced. Neither is covered by this guide.

Production figures (from published Honda-data compilations): approximately **38,000 K3 machines** were built (September 1972–June 1973). Across the whole 1969–1978 run, roughly 442,500 K-series and 102,500 F-series machines were produced — over half a million SOHC CB750s in total. The practical consequence: 1973-correct parts are findable, but 1973-*only* parts are the ones that get substituted — check every electrical and trim part against the K3.

3. What is unique about the 1973 CB750

3.1 The quiet revolution: intake, exhaust, and the end of the horsepower race

Cycle's November 1973 road test is blunt: the K3 is "a slightly slower but more refined version of the CB-750 K2 — which had about the same relationship with its predecessor." Three changes cost the top-end power, and all three are 1973-correct features a restorer must preserve, not "fix":

- **Restricted air-cleaner inlet.** The 1973 air-cleaner housing has a deliberately restricted inlet that silences intake roar. An earlier or pattern airbox with a larger inlet is incorrect — and will change the jetting behavior.
- **More restrictive mufflers.** The K2's 5-chamber baffled mufflers gave way to an even more efficient, more restrictive 1973 design. Period testers measured the power loss; Honda accepted it for silence.
- **Subtle valvelift changes.** Cycle attributed part of the K3's performance decline to revised valve-lift specifications versus the K2.

The payoff, in the same test: at ordinary road speeds the restrictions "do little to depress performance in the lower portion of the engine's powerband," the engine is dramatically quieter ("The CB-750 K3 is quiet!"), and the torque curve is "virtually a straight line" — the trait that made the CB750 the era's great all-rounder. A K3 restored with pod filters and an open exhaust is not a restored K3; it is a bike that has had its defining 1973 engineering removed.

3.2 Final drive: the tall gearing year

Honda revised the final drive early in the CB750's life — the original 16-tooth gearbox sprocket and 45-tooth rear wheel sprocket proved unsatisfactory, chewing through chains — and by 1973 the combination was an **18-tooth transmission sprocket with a 48-tooth rear wheel sprocket**, yielding a taller **4.99:1** final ratio (originally 5.61:1). Cycle judged the change "entirely in keeping" with the K3's refinement brief: less busy highway cruising, better fuel economy, longer chain life, at the cost of flat-out acceleration. Check both sprockets when assessing a bike — the 18/48 pairing is the 1973-correct combination.

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3.3 Suspension: new shocks, rethought forks

- **Rear shocks:** the nitrogen-filled DeCarbon units were replaced for 1973 with a more conventional pattern offering **five-position spring-preload adjustment**, replacing the earlier three-notch arrangement. Five clicks, not three — count them.
- **Front forks:** the K2 had used fork damping virtually identical to the CB500's; for 1973 Honda went **back to the original damper-valve configuration**, with revised spring rates and damping front and rear. Cycle's testers were unconvinced the "improvement" was real — but it is the 1973-correct specification regardless of opinion.

3.4 Brakes: the splash guard and the red tabs

The CB750 had a front disc brake from the beginning — a Honda first on a production motorcycle. For 1973 it gained two details:

- A **splash guard (plastic rain cover) wrapped over the disc** to keep it from spitting rainwater at the rider — the amklassiek buyer's guide specifically warns that a K2 wearing this K3 disc cover is incorrect.
- **Wear-indicator tabs on the brake pads** — a small red tab on each pad marking the friction-material limit, added because hydraulic discs give no other warning before the pads scrub down to the steel backing.

The specification is a **single 296 mm front disc** with hydraulic caliper and a **179 mm rear drum**. (Cycle's testers found the rear drum locks too easily and the brake pedal jiggles from the swingarm/brake-rod arc mismatch — a period trait to be aware of, not a fault to engineer out of a factory-correct restoration.)

3.5 Electrics and controls: the 1973 switchgear package

The K3's electrical changes are the richest source of year-incorrect restorations, because most are invisible until you operate the bike:

- **Fuse box behind the left sidecover** — all fuses in a single automotive-style box, replacing the earlier inline plastic fuse holders.
- **Starter interlock** — the starter operates only with the transmission in neutral; the K3 added a **clutch-lever switch** requiring the clutch pulled in to run the electric starter.
- **Double-filament turn-signal bulbs** — the indicators double as running/clearance lights (headlight on = one indicator filament lit). US-market K3s run their lights this way; the setup was not legal in Europe, where the K2 remained the standard bike.
- **Revised control layout** — the high/low-beam and headlight switches moved to opposite ends of the handlebars so they can't be confused; the **emergency kill switch rotated 90 degrees** so it can't be bumped off accidentally; the **turn-signal switch redesigned** with partial actuation for lane-change signaling (push gently and it blinks, then pops back unless shoved fully into the locked position).
- **Bigger rearview mirrors.**

One running change within the model year: **early K3s had a headlight that could not be switched off** (except by pressing the starter button), implemented with a 4-terminal starter relay. Honda reverted this before the end of summer 1973 for reliability reasons, and the conventional ON/OFF headlight switch reappeared on the right handlebar. An early-frame K3 with the always-on headlight is correct; a late K3 with it is a bike that missed the running change.

3.6 Colors and trim: the three 1973 finishes

The 1973 K3 came in three factory colors, confirmed across Honda parts-book research and period spec listings:

- **Flake Sunrise Orange** (color code LV) — metalflake orange with a small flake size on the K3 (the flake grew larger on later models). The tank carries white, gold, and black striping.
- **Candy Bacchus Olive** (color code LY, "Candy Bacchus Olive Custom") — a one-model-year-only color. A green K3 is a 1973 tell at a glance.

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- **Maxim Brown Metallic** (color code QQ) — the rarest of the three in the literature.

1973 trim details: the **tank stripes are white, gold, and black**; the **side covers are smaller than the K0's** with no slots on the leading edge; the **upper fork is chromed**; the **headlight housing is black**; the **taillight and turn signals are larger than the K1's**. A brown K3 in Flake Sunrise Orange paint is not automatically wrong — check under badges and in the tank tunnel for the original finish before judging, and verify the color code against the parts-book list rather than memory.

1973 buyer cautions (design realities, not defects):

- **Model year ≠ model designation outside the US.** The K3 was built for the US market; in Europe the K2 remained the common CB750 through this period. A "1973" CB750 must be identified by its frame serial (CB750-22nnnnn), not by its registration year or its paint.
- **The restricted intake is a feature.** Do not "correct" the small air-cleaner inlet or the quiet mufflers — they are the 1973 specification, documented in the period road test.
- **K3 and K4 look alike but wire differently.** The K4 carried the K3's mechanical package forward and kept its neutral/clutch-switch starter interlock with the starter-motor safety unit — no sidestand switch exists in this circuit, and the claim that the K4 added one (single forum post, unverifiable) has been retracted. When ordering electrical parts, quote the full frame number and insist on K3 fitment.
- **Early-vs-late K3 headlight wiring.** The always-on headlight with the 4-terminal starter relay was a running change reverted mid-year — verify which system the bike has before buying a replacement harness or relay.
- **Honda numbers don't "match" like British numbers.** Frame (CB750-22nnnnn) and engine (CB750E-22nnnnn) are separate sequences with different prefixes; closeness of the two numbers is reassuring but not the matching-numbers proof it is on a Norton. Verify both against the 1973 allocation.

4. Technical restoration data — 1973 Honda CB750

4.1 Frame and engine numbers (1973)

- **Format:** frame number stamped on the **steering head**, format **CB750-2200001** and up (e.g. documented 1973 examples: CB750-2221028, CB750-2221890, CB750E engine 2230213). Engine number stamped on the **left side of the crankcase**, format **CB750E-2200001** and up. The engine prefix carries the **E**; the frame prefix does not.
- **1973 allocation:** the K3 block begins at **CB750-2200001** (frame) and **CB750E-2200001** (engine), production code **341** — the same code as the K2/K4/K5/K6, so the code alone does not identify the year. The K4 block begins at 2300001; the frame and engine sequences are Honda's own and were shared across markets, with US-market bikes carrying the model-year designation.
- **Model-year vs build-date caution.** K3 production ran **September 1972–June 1973**; a K3's model year is 1973 by Honda's designation even when built in late 1972. Conversely, a bike first registered in 1973 but carrying a CB750-20nnnnn frame is a K2, not a K3 — the serial decides, not the paperwork.
- **Ordering parts:** Honda, David Silver Spares, and CMSNL key parts to model designation and serial number. Always quote the full frame number (including the CB750- prefix) and state "K3, 1973" — never just "CB750."

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