

70s  
Special

December 1990 £1.60

USA \$4.00

# YOUR CLASSIC



★ Bond Bug  
meets  
Honda Z

TR7:

It only looks like you  
can't afford it...



AFTER DECADES OF sedate blacks and sober greys, in the 1960s manufacturers discovered that there were other colours in the paint spectrum. Cautiously progressing through pastel shades and two-tones, they eventually dared to paint cars in bright greens, yellows and reds. And then there was orange . . .

Not just a pallid reddish yellow, either, but full-frontal tangerine, luminous and vibrant. Not many cars dared to use this near-psychedelic shade and still fewer offered it as the *only* colour available. In fact, there were only two: the Honda Z600 coupé and the home-grown Bond Bug.

Both these cars were eccentricities of the early 1970s and were very comparable. But, in an age before 'back-to-back' and group tests, no magazine ever pitched them against one another. So, for the first time, **YOUR CLASSIC** presents a classic confrontation: the battle of the orange boxes.

# Jaffa Japes

**"You can have it any colour you like as long as it's bright tangerine with black stripes." Only two cars in history could this phrase apply to, says Chris Rees: this pair of wild oranges from the 1970s — the Bond Bug and the Honda Z600 Coupé.**

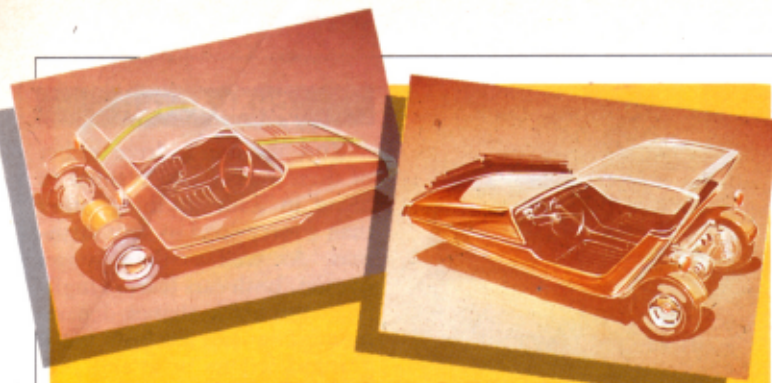
## CHARACTER

You wouldn't drive either of these cars if you wanted to blend in with anything other than a lorry-load of spilt satsumas. As well as their sunset liveries, both cars feature highly in the black stripes department. The Bug has bold black graphics on its nose and rear three-quarter panel, the latter swathed by chunky black stripes, the whole thing offset with cute white decals for petrol octane ratings, tyre pressures, and which way to turn the canopy handle.

There is an apocryphal story about the Z coupé's styling. The bonnet and general profile bear an uncanny resemblance to Datsun's 240Z, if you imagine it squashed in all directions. Is it a coincidence that Honda then called the little car the Z . . . ?

The Z600's thin coachline stripes don't really compare with the Bug's, but it does have that amazing 'TV screen'





## BOND BACKGROUND



The Bug concept came about at the insistence of Tom Karen of Ogle Design. When Reliant took over Bond in 1969, it found itself needing a replacement for the old 875 and Karen persuaded Ray

Wiggin at Reliant of his sports/fun three-wheeler idea.

The initial work was done on a shortened version of the chassis for the forthcoming Robin, with a one-piece shell and a single door (or canopy), a flat windscreen and exposed rear suspension. This prototype (below, right) also had Porsche 928-style pop-up lamps, and indicators on stalks.

But Reliant wanted a lockable boot too, so the Bug was redesigned with a less sharply cut-off tail. It caused a stir with its space capsule styling, uniform tangerine hue and bold black graphics — not tried on cars before.

Introduced in June 1970, it was

targeted at 'those too young to be square' with a low purchase price and low running costs highlighted. Initially it was available in three forms: the 700, 700E and 700ES. The basic version had no sidescreens, no door catch, no heater and no spare wheel! The ES had a high compression engine and a 'luxury' interior.

The base model didn't really sell and was dropped, while the new Reliant 748cc engine was fitted from late 1972, the models being renamed 750E and 750ES. The Bug was finally phased out in 1975 — and the Bond name with it — after 2562 had been built. The Bug's most famous customer was Clive Sinclair. Thought you recognised the C5's shape?



rear hatchback. According to one owner, however, driving at speed with the windows down can cause this door to fly completely off. Characterful, but not exactly practical.

The same phrase applies in double measure to the Bug. For a start, it eschews such concessions to normality as four seats, opening doors and winding windows for two fixed cushions placed on a moulded seat, a forward-hinging canopy on a gas strut and removable side screens. If the Z's tail seems sharply cut off, the Bug's is the automotive equivalent of Beachy Head. Bug-eyed and shaped like a slice of Gruyere, it knocks the narrow-bodied Z into the proverbial hat for its quirkiness quotient.

This also ignores the fact

that the Bug has, well, a wheel missing . . .

### PERFORMANCE

With engines whose combined capacities are less than



PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIAN MACKIE

the average family car's, and with outputs of 31 and 36bhp, these cars might not be expected to perform like a Cobra. Surprisingly, both cars are really quite agile. Both will exceed the national speed limit (just) and are roughly comparable from rest to 60mph. The lighter and probably more aerodynamic Bug has the slight edge, however, despite losing in power to the Z.

### ECONOMY

Owners of either car may be forgiven for not knowing where their fuel fillers are, so seldom do these beasts need filling up. In their respective road tests, *Motor* magazine recorded 38mpg for the Bug and 45mpg for the Z. But more than this, at a constant 30mph, one tester achieved an incredible 102mpg driving the Bond. And at the same speed, the Honda recorded the best ever figure achieved in a road test — no less than 136mpg!

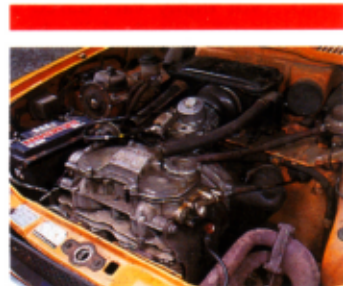
### INTERIOR AND COMFORT

Since both these cars were intended to be budget fun cars, comfort levels are not high on the agenda. However, the Honda scores above the Bug in almost every respect.

Entry into the Bug is irksome, requiring the hefty canopy to be lifted, albeit supported by a gas strut. Putting your leg over, you plonk into a fixed seat in an arms-straight-out position *à la* Graham Hill. It's comfortable once you're in, but sore buttocks are the order of the day if you're planning a long journey.



Honda's well-equipped dash includes a rev counter



The Z is much more conventional. Not that it's particularly easy to get into or, for that matter, a particularly comfortable driving position with its offset pedals. At least you're greeted by an impressive array of instruments, including a rev counter, radio and one of the Z's celebrated novelty features at the time: its 'aircraft-style' overhead lighting unit, much copied in more modern luxury conveyances.

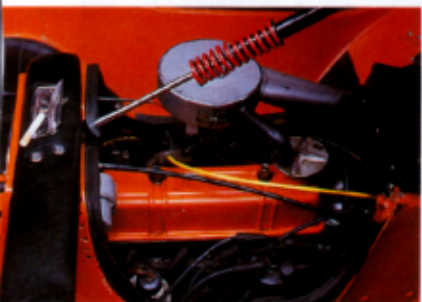
Perhaps the biggest difference between the two is the Honda's extra row of seats. Yes, they *are* very small and, like the front seats, you have to be very friendly with the person you're sitting next to, but four adults can definitely be shoehorned in. There is also a sizeable amount of luggage space behind them, accessible from the cute rear hatch. The Bug's tiddly stowage area, further reduced if you stick the sidescreens in it, can't compare.

The Bug's instrument cluster is housed centrally on the back of the engine compartment (the engine sitting between the knees of the driver and passenger) and is 'old world' with toggle switches, non-self-cancelling indicators and a horseshoe speedo. The Z, in contrast, is very well equipped and modern-looking.

Another little feature of the Honda is a flip-down rear lid



**Bug has cute console; even engine (below) is orange**



behind which the spare wheel is slotted. It's certainly more elegant than manhandling the Bug's spare from the boot.

#### DRIVING THE CARS

Once installed in the cosy cockpit of either car, you are faced with differing degrees of oddness. The view through the Bug's flat screen ends in a pair of bug eyes; its single windscreen wiper clears only the driver's side; and a considerable wrench of the head is necessary to see the instrument (there's only one). The Z, on the other hand, is more normal, apart from the strange, dash-mounted gearlever.

As the Honda's tiny air-cooled twin fires up with a sound like vegetation being shredded, accompanied by a myriad minor vibrations, the gearlever is the first thing you have to come to terms with. Its unusual up/down/in/out motion is easy to master, however, and you're quickly on your way. Well, *sort of* quickly as the high-pitched engine applies its available power through the front wheels.

Unfortunately, Honda reserved its synchromesh gearbox for the USA, Europe receiving the constant mesh four-speed 'box. Consequently, down-changes must be effected by double-declutching or matching revs very carefully. This, combined with the driving position, is the main



drawback to Honda's 'sporty commuter' claim.

The Bond is designed very differently to the Z with its all-alloy, water-cooled engine (from the Reliant Regal) mounted directly behind the front wheel and thereby intruding into the cabin. (Access, incidentally, is through a cover in the interior.) Bringing it to life produces a barely silenced growl which only increases once the car is in motion. The sound coming from the exhaust is sizzlingly rotry. Engaging the stubby gearlever, take-offs are easy and surprisingly quick.

The owner of the Bug we tested, Robert Knight, has fitted a modified 850cc Robin engine in his — a transformation requiring virtually no modifications — so perform-

## HOW THEY COMPARE

**bond  
BUG**



	<b>Bond Bug</b>	<b>Honda Z</b>
<b>Cylinders</b>	4	2
<b>Engine cc</b>	700/748	599
<b>Bhp</b>	31 @ 5000rpm	36 @ 6000rpm
<b>Torque</b>	38 @ 3000rpm	32 @ 4000rpm
<b>Max speed (mph)</b>	75	73
<b>0-60mph (sec)</b>	23.2	24.8
<b>Mpg</b>	38	45
<b>Weight (lb)</b>	868	1301
<b>Length (in)</b>	110	123
<b>Width (in)</b>	55	51
<b>Height (in)</b>	50	50
<b>Boot (cu ft)</b>	3.1	8.0
<b>Fuel tank (gall)</b>	5	5.5
<b>Turning circle (ft)</b>	25	31
<b>Cost new in 1972</b>	£629	£719
<b>Decal rating (out of 5)</b>	*****	****
<b>Orangeness (out of 5)</b>	*****	****

ance is well up on standard Bugs (110mph in top, he claims), but even 700cc or 748cc cars have surprising urge. The only astounding thing about the ride is how board-hard it is: this is to keep roadholding reasonable.

This is one entertaining point about the Bug. Brake too hard on left-hand bends or take a corner too spiritedly and you're motorcycling! The warning signs come in early, but it's all too easy to find yourself nearing the critical topple point. Mind you, it probably has the best handling of any three-wheeler of this layout we've driven.

The Z is certainly superior in terms of handling and roadholding, gripping the tarmac in a typically understeering, front-wheel drive fashion. It's also reasonably comfortable and sure-footed.

Rearward visibility in both cars is impaired by the giant orange girders which form their respective three-quarter pillars. Heating in both cars is rudimentary, the Bug managing to pump most of its engine heat into the passenger compartment without the use of the separate heater. As this can only be turned on and off by taking off the engine cover, perhaps this is just as well. The Z in the UK had a primitive heater box opening directly into the engine bay, with the result that hot air is always accompanied by oily fumes. Yum! Ventilation-wise, the Bug wins hands down, with its removable sidescreens. In theory, the whole canopy can be taken off for the ultimate in open air motoring!

Braking on both cars is competent. The Z has the advantage of disc brakes at the front, but both cars are so light that stopping them isn't a great

**Combined length of both cars is under 20ft — ideal traffic beaters**

problem. Two aerodynamic quirks: the Z is none too happy in cross-winds because of its slab-sided profile; and the Bug at speed in the rain hardly needs its windscreen wiper as the rain mostly flies over the top of the car.

## VERDICT

It's interesting to compare what the manufacturers of both these cars said about them. Honda described the Z600 coupé as 'excitingly different', a 'sporty commuter' and a 'family fun car'. Bond said the Bug was 'something new under the sun' and 'a fun car that does a serious job'.

Honda's Z600 coupé, based around the minute but ever-so-practical N600, naturally has a sensible side to it. It has four seats, a hatchback and is fairly easy to drive and use day-by-day. But then Honda added things like a bonnet bulge, an aircraft type overhead console, and a hatch like a 30in TV screen.

But as a piece of way-out 1970s culture, you could hardly better the Bond Bug, bold up to every corner of its wedge-shaped body. It really is incredible fun to drive, as



long as you don't have to go far, has a rust-free GRP body (not so the all-too-rust-prone Z) and bundles of character.

On the flipside, the Bug is equally impractical. Opening the canopy becomes a drag after the first few times and the noise and lack of usable space confine it to a fun rôle only. Most Bugs are only owned for about nine months before

being passed on, according to the Bond Owners' Club.

In conclusion, on pure personality, the Bond Bug must win by a mile but on almost every other count the Honda Z coupé seems to do a better job of being a car. For tangerinophiles, this may be as much a condemnation as a plaudit, but the Honda simply makes more sense.

## HONDA'S HISTORY

Honda had already established itself in the minicar market with the N360 and N600 saloons, but expanded its range with the introduction of the idiosyncratic Z coupé at the Tokyo Motor Show of 1970. In Japan it was only ever sold with the tiny 356cc, twin-cylinder engine in a variety of states of tune and equipment levels, including an automatic. It was Honda's cheapest model in Japan.

The first Zs arrived in the UK in 1971 although sales did not begin in earnest until 1972. For almost all export markets, Honda fitted its 599cc engine which was more powerful and long-lived.

Although the Tokyo show car was dayglow blue, the Z600 coupé was *only* sold in Europe in bright orange. This was another strange decision as white, blue, yellow, green, black and purple ones were sold in other markets. The distinctive hand-painted black stripes were an optional extra although almost all Zs sold in the UK had them. Other options included headrests and



wing-mounted mirrors.

Other changes were introduced in the Japanese market which never made it over here, such as a split front grille and a pillarless version (above). This is despite the fact that the British market was the best one in Europe for the Z: 2502 were sold until the model was withdrawn in autumn 1974, as compared with only 918 in France, for instance. Dave Lee Travis was a celebrated customer.

The Z had its own impact on the course of Honda's history. It marked a strong change of direction in styling and its basic profile was to recur in the Civic and Accord models of the mid-'70s.



**Useful storage space in Honda — note spare cubby**

**Most of Bug's boot taken up with side screens and spare**

