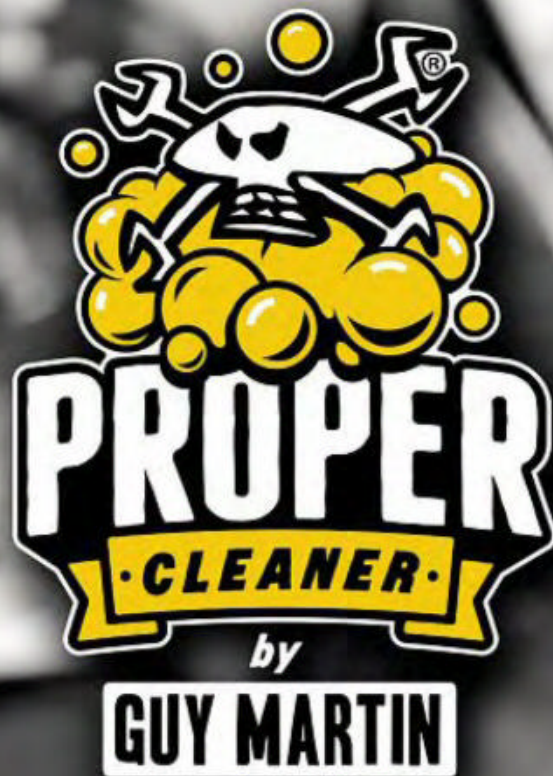




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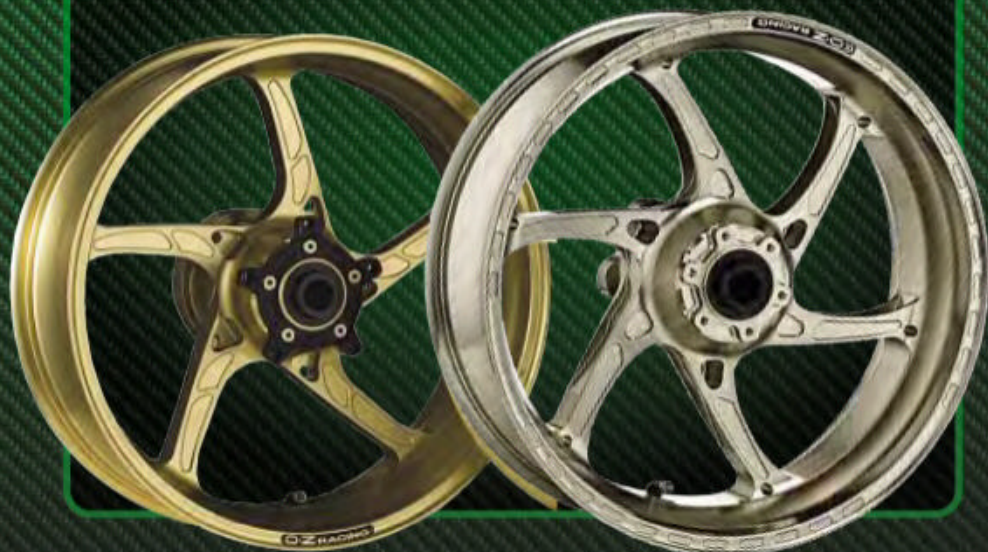
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Fast forward

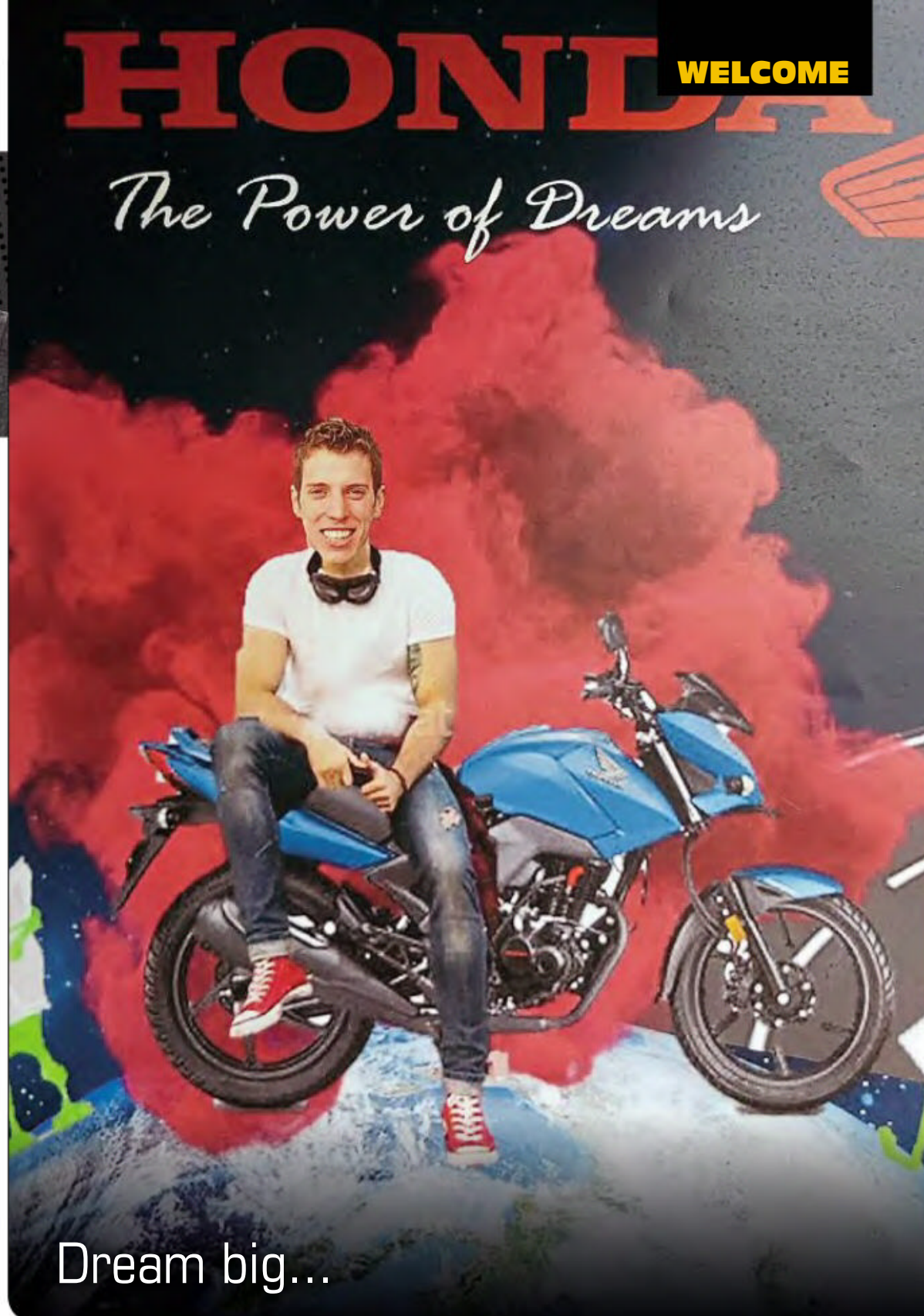
I guess there's only one way to kick this column off and that's by talking about the Blade.

Whether you're a fan or not, it's so much more than 'just a new motorcycle'. It's a statement, a lifeline; another big manufacturer saying that despite the dwindling sales figures and the wittering of keyboard warriors on forums, the sportsbike market is still alive and kicking, and thanks to bikes like this, it's set to carry on for a good while yet. I'm an optimist, and I'm hopeful that despite manufacturers such as Triumph, Suzuki, Honda and Kawasaki (who are now back) culling their supersport segments a few years back, there's still chance of a credible revival... because quite simply there has to be. I'm a fan of all kinds of bikes (apart from ones Boothy owns because they're likely to kill you), but nothing gets your pulse going like a sportsbike, and this new wave of 200bhp-plus crotch-rockets are every bit as exciting as they sound. The thought of people missing out on that experience, on the simple pleasure you get when you crack the throttle and feel your eyeballs forced to the back of your head, is sickening, and we at Fast Bikes want to do all we can to keep that dream alive. Firstly, because if we didn't we'd be unemployed, and secondly, we'd otherwise be pretty damn bored and forced to make small talk with one another (no thank you!).

Seriously though, thanks to bikes like the Blade, the future's bright and if there's one thing you do this summer, make sure you book a test ride on one regardless of whether you want to own one or not – it'll blow your mind.

I'm not the only one who's been swanning off to test new metal this month; Boothy's been at it too. He got to cock his leg over KTM's 2020 1290 Super Duke R and he wasn't disappointed. If you read his report you'll get the gist that it's quite the weapon and well worthy of your readies if you're in the market for a supernaked. That said, with Kawasaki's Z H2 and Ducati's new V4 Streetfighter soon to make their debuts, we look set for an epic year of naughty naked. Speaking of epic, meeting Frankie Chili recently for a chin-wag was nothing short of memorable. He was one of the greats that made WSBK mesmerising back in the day, and hearing his tales first hand was both hilarious and a pleasure. Having heard what he had to say about Aprilia, I stopped short of mentioning my RSV Mille project, which is also in this issue and is now very much alive, so take a read to see what we've been up to. Enjoy the mag.

Bruce



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Upfront

PLANET FAST BIKES – NEW METAL, NEWS & REVIEWS

APRILIA ANNOUNCE THEIR ALL STARS EVENT FOR 2020

If you're a fan of Aprilias (and just about everything Italian), then you're going to want to keep your schedule free on May 9, as the Italian fest is back, and bigger than ever.

Taking to Mugello, the Aprilia All Stars 2020 event will host two debuts for the Italian marque: the RS 660 will make its first appearance, alongside the new Aprilia Sport Production Championship, which will give a load of Italian nippers their first taste of the racing machinery. If that wasn't enough, there will be a whole host of other activities going, from Esports, to live music and everything in between.

The event is free to enter for all motorcyclists, and will have a load of exhibits, shops and food stalls to keep you going. We'll see you there!



SUZUKI OFFERING 0% FINANCE ON GSX-R1000

In the market for a new Gixer? Well now is the perfect time, as Suzuki are offering 0% HP finance over 48 months on their

range-topping GSX-R1000R and GSX-R1000, alongside a host of other models.

The deal will run until the end of March 2020.



MV AGUSTA RELEASE ANOTHER SPECIAL ADDITION DRAGSTER 800 RR

Again, I hear you ask? Well yep, but then again, it does look pretty tasty. Meet the MV Agusta Dragster 800 TheArsenale...

It's essentially the same base machine with a special colour scheme, which is pretty boldly adorned in black

and orange. MV tell us that the new Dragster 800 RR is a celebration of MV's collaboration with TheArsenale, which is definitely worth a Google (think lots of big, expensive toys for sale).

There's no word on price just yet, but it will be limited in units...

TRY OFF-ROADING WITH BETA

Every fancied having a craic at some off-road riding? Well read this way...

Situated at three different (but 'clean', as far as off-road goes) MOD locations, the Beta Experience days have been set up by Wayne Braybrook, the super-experienced enduro rider, and his RAW Enduro team. Between them, they've mapped out a whole host of routes through the hills, moors and rivers at each location across the country to cater for every skill level – although it's aimed mainly at road riders, wanting their first taste of the dirt.

It's essentially an 'arrive and ride' type event. You turn up, and they will

supply the bike, all the equipment you need (think helmet, boots, goggles, clean clothing and body armour), and even refreshments.

When there, there's a range of two- and four-stroke machines from 200cc to 430cc to try, or for those who are a little less confident, the Beta X Trainer, which has a lower seat height and a friendlier power delivery.

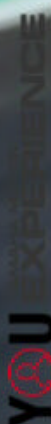
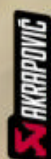
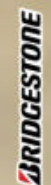
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PLANET FAST BIKES – NEW METAL, NEWS & REVIEWS

DUCATI SUPERLEGGERA V4



THE ULTIMATE *ROAD GOING* SUPERBIKE?

Fancy the most powerful and technologically advanced production bike to ever come out of Bologna? Well you're in for a treat...

Keeping with tradition, the new Superleggera is based upon the current V4 machine, but that's about where the similarities end. See, the Superleggera is the only street-legal motorcycle in the world to come equipped with carbon fibre chassis, swingarm and wheels, giving it an absolutely mind-boggling dry weight of 159kg, or 152.2kg with the racing kit. This is assisted by the extensive use of carbon fibre, titanium and magnesium components, giving the Superleggera V4 a power-to-weight ratio of 1.41hp/kg – a record for a road-legal sports bike.

As far as power goes, the Superleggera makes 224hp @ 15,250rpm, or a whopping 234hp @ 15,500rpm with the race exhaust, alongside 116Nm @ 11,750rpm and 119Nm @ 11,750rpm on the torque front. The 998cc V4 engine itself weighs a whopping 2.8kg less than the V4 you'll find in the 1,103cc V4 machines, thanks to a whole host of weight-saving techniques and expensive materials: the use of titanium and aluminium bolts; a new, lighter disc clutch; camshafts machined to reduce weight; a lighter gearshift drum; an oil pump without a return stage from

the heads; and titanium manifolds that work alongside the road-legal Akrapovič silencer. It's not just about the 2.8kg weight reduction compared to the 1,103cc V4 engine though, as it's also produced a gain of 3 horsepower. Ducati have gone just as hard on improving the bike elsewhere, as the use of extreme materials and engineering has translated all the way over to the gorgeous aerodynamic package, which, Ducati say, offers 50kg of downforce at 270kph; 20kg more than the wings on the standard Panigale, for additional anti-wheelie and braking stability.



Those wings could take someone's eyes out!



It looks even better naked...



A work of art.

What about the suspension and the brakes, I hear you ask? Well, Ducati have gone to town on those as well, equipping the Panigale V4 Superleggera with a lighter Öhlins suspension system, that include a pressurised fork and lighter machined aluminium fork bottoms, alongside a titanium shock absorber spring and GP-derived valves that improve the damping of road bumps during the initial compression stage. As far as stopping goes, the braking system is the best in the Brembo production range, with an MCS calliper featuring a remotely adjusted lever gap and Stylema® R callipers, exclusive to the Superleggera V4, which Ducati say provides greater front-brake stroke consistency, especially on long runs.

Electronically, the bike has been developed with three re-programmed riding modes (Race A, Race B & Sport) alongside, for the very first time, five additional Riding Modes that can be personalised with the rider's preferred settings. Oh, and if you end up heading to Laguna Seca, Mugello, Jerez, Sepang or Losail, the upgraded lap timer will allow you to record finish line and split times for these circuits, as a default setting. Nice.

Fancy one? There will be just 500 made, all individually numbered and provided with a certificate of authenticity for good measure. It will set you back around £90,000, and if you fancy, you'll also be able to purchase an exclusive air-bag suit and carbon lid so you can match up.

But the best part? The package that Ducati have prepared for those lucky devils that manage to nab a Superleggera V4 also includes access to the 'SBK Experience', allowing owners to ride the official Panigale V4 R, which competes in the SBK World Championship, on a test day at Mugello. If riding a Superbike wasn't quite up to scratch for you however, 30 Superleggera V4 owners will have an exclusive opportunity to enjoy the 'MotoGP Experience', which means that for the very first time, they will be able to ride on the Desmosedici GP20 used by Dovizioso and Petrucci, with the close support of the Ducati Corse technicians. Does that sound factory, or what. **FB**



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When doing silly things at silly speeds, it's absolutely vital to be wearing the best kit – and after using, and indeed abusing, Dainese's Misano 2 suit, I can safely say that it really has (and still does) look after me well. I'm a bog standard off-the-peg size, but from the very instant it felt incredibly comfortable and snug; I could barely even feel the airbag as it's incredibly light, and the suit is an absolute doddle to get on and off as well. It has some great little features, like grippy pads on the inside of the knees to help hold on to the tank, and a drinks bottle included that you can stick in your hump as well if things get a bit warm. I've worn it for literally days on end, from morning till night, and not once have I had any issues with comfort; it honestly surprised me straight from the off. I've had this suit for almost a year now, and even so, it's still held itself together really well – there're no massive signs of wear and tear, and all the stitching, zips and panels look pretty good... although it has been back to Dainese once, to get the airbag re-gassed. I had a little lowside going into turn one at Croft, and I have to say, the D-Air system was absolutely incredible. It seemed like before I even realised that things were going south, the airbag was already inflated and looking after my shoulders and collarbones, and I walked away without a scratch or mark on me. I do have to say though, if you're going for one of these suits I'd recommend getting a set of the inside boots to go with it; they're made for the suit and fit a lot better than a going over set like you'd get for a traditional set of leathers. To be honest, they're a lot of money, but then again, it's a lot of suit. The finish is lovely, fit is perfect and they definitely do the job when it comes to protection. I don't like the fact that the airbag only has one charge before it needs to be sent back to Dainese, or that they don't do enough colourful colourways (it's basically all black, or black and a touch of white), and also the titanium on the knees scratches up really easily when kneeling down to do tyre pressures or other bits, but other than that, it's still a proper quality suit. I'm still wearing mine, and I'd definitely recommend it.



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PRICE: £279.99

WEB: www.rst-moto.com

Sometimes a one-piece race suit is too much isn't it, so it's always good to have a decent leather jacket to hand. RST stuff has come on in leaps and bounds over the last handful of years and despite their gear being reasonably affordable, a lot of it is pretty bloody good – and this jacket is no exception. It's got proper shoulder and arm protection, but the standard back protector doesn't feel mega substantial so if I'm going far, I whip it out and use a proper back and chest protector. It comes with a removable thermal waistcoat that zips in, which helps in the winter months (or it would if I could find the bloody thing). You can get the matching trousers for £219.99, which zip to the jacket if you want to go on the track, but I tend just to wear mine with jeans on the road. It's dead practical too, with two zip-up outer pockets and three inside. The speed hump seems like a bit of a gimmick, but I won't hold that against it – it's a decent jacket for a decent price.



RESPRO FOGGY ANTI-FOG MASK

TESTED BY: Carlos

MILES: 3000

TIME: 4 years

PRICE: £22.99

WEB: www.respro.com



There's nothing worse than getting a fogged-up visor, and no matter how many wonder cures, fairy liquids and other bits I've tried, nothing works quite as well as my trusty old Respro. I bought this absolutely yonks ago and with some additional Velcro I've transferred it between my lids; it fits in nice and snug over every different brand I've used,

and although it takes a bit of positioning to fit perfectly, it always works like a treat. It essentially stops your breath from coming up, and it actually looks pretty cool as well, alongside being comfortable on and lasting for yonks, with no evident signs of wear and tear. It's definitely worth the cash...



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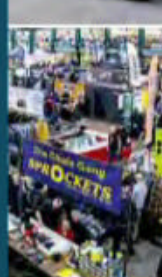
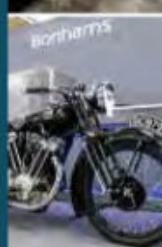
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Gearred Up

ALL THE LATEST, COOLEST & TRICKEST PERFORMANCE PRODUCTS

HJC RPHA 70 SAMPRA

HJC seem to be constantly expanding their operations with new helmets every month, and it looks like 2020 isn't going to be much different. This time, it's their all new for 2020 RPHA 70 Sampra lid, a full-face job which comes in slightly cheaper than their range-topping model. Don't fret though, as it still comes equipped with a lightweight and shock-resistant shell, thanks to its Carbon and Carbon-Glass Hybrid fabrics, while a dual-purpose top vent takes care of cooling. The RPHA 70 Sampra also comes with a Multicool interior that helps to dry out sweat and get rid of bacteria, alongside an integrated drop down visor.

RRP £359.99

www.oxfordproducts.com



TW STEEL YAMAHA RACING WRIST WATCH

If you've got a Yamaha and fancy matching up with a fairly fancy wrist watch, then TW Steel's collaboration with Yamaha racing will be right up your alley. Constructed with a Miyota 2115 3-Hand movement, the sporty looking watch has a carbon fibre design dial that includes the VR46 logo, alongside a steel back case which carries the Yamaha Factory Racing logo. It's water resistant to 10 metres, and comes with a genuine carbon case as well.

RRP £85

www.yamaha-motor.eu



VENHILL SUZUKI GSX-R CABLE AND HOSE UPGRADES

If you've got yourself a GSX-R that's been created in the last 25 years or so and fancy pimping it out a bit, then Venhill have just the thing in the form of their cable and hose upgrades. The cables are designed to improve braking performance, lighten up the clutch and fine-tune the throttle operation, which they say will shave years off the feel of older machines. The cables exceed DOT and TUV standard and are made in Venhill's UK factory, where they're pressure tested to 1500psi before heading into your hands. They're usable without the need to modify your machine, and come with everything you need, with kits for near enough every GSX-R 600, GSX-R 750 W, GSX-R 750 & GSX-R 1000 spanning over the past 25 years.

RRP (around) £152.55

www.venhill.co.uk

K-TECH 25IDS FORK CARTRIDGES FOR HONDA'S CB1000R

Fancy sprucing up the front end of your CB1000R? Well now you can with the K-Tech 25IDS kit, or Independent Damping System, front fork cartridges. Designed to fit into the original forks, which do not allow compression adjustment, the new cartridges have been designed and manufactured in-house, using the highest grade aluminium, which has been hard anodised. They give you 30 clicks of independent compression and rebound adjustment, alongside 18mm of preload adjustment and increased stroke over the original equipment.

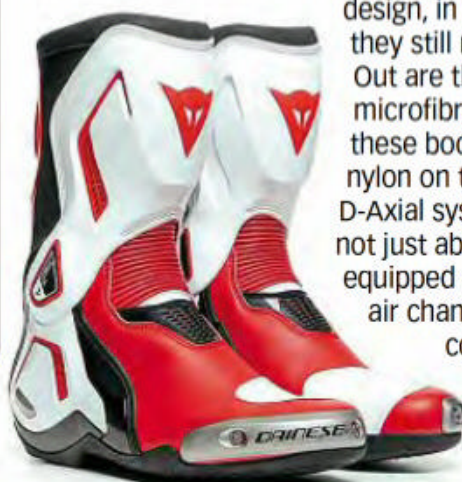
RRP £839.94

www.ktechsuspension.com



DAINESE TORQUE 3 OUT BOOTS

There's no denying that Dainese are famous for their different design, in having the boots going inside the leather. Yet, they still make some great outer boots, and their Torque 3 Out are the new range toppers. Constructed from microfibre and D-Stone fabric with high grip TPU inserts, these boots offer safety in abundance, thanks to protective nylon on the shell, heel and toe, alongside their exclusive D-Axial system, which prevents the twisting of your foot. It's not just about the safety though, as they also come equipped with an internal retention band, flexible joints and air channelling systems to keep you cool and comfortable.



RRP £299.95

www.dainese.com

ALPINESTARS DOMINO TECH HOODIE

If you fancy looking the part whilst still staying protected, then you couldn't go far wrong with the Domino Tech Hoodie from Alpinestars. Featuring a water-repelling treatment and strategically positioned mesh lining for breathability, the hoodie comes with Level 1 CE-certified Bio Lite shoulder and elbow protection, and has compartments to accommodate external back protectors as well. It's designed to fit either underneath a jacket or on its own.

RRP £149.99

www.alpinestars.com



FURYGAN FULL RIDE ONE-PIECE SUIT

Constructed from high-grade cow's leather with high tenacity bi-stretch inserts, the new range-topping suit from Furygan looks like a corker. As far as safety goes, it has aramid fibre reinforcements at the hips and seat, while level 2 D30 protection covers the elbows, shoulders and knees. The lining is removable, although currently it comes in just one colour. Oh, and of course it's also compatible with Furygan's In & Motion Airbag system, which is sold separately.

RRP £709.99

www.nevis.uk.com



MOTUL 300V FACTORY LINE ROAD RACING OIL



We all love our bikes, and it's important that we keep them all as shipshape and shiny as possible, both inside and out. That's where Motul's 300V Fully Synthetic oil comes into play. It takes advantage of ESTER Core Technology in order to ensure a great power output, without compromising reliability or wear. You can get it in a whole range of sizes, which go from a 1 litre bottle (as pictured) to a monstrous 208 litre drum...

RRP (From) £15

www.motul.com



SUOMY SR-GP

Who here still remembers the likes of Suomy on the world scene, protecting the noggins of Bostrom, Biaggi, and so on? We do, and we missed it. Thankfully, they're back and looking better than ever, with a whole new range of lids, including the SR-GP, which is the one that a certain Andrea Dovizioso wears in MotoGP. Made of a Tricarbo composite material, the SR-GP offers what they say is incredible performance in the case of a crash, while the peripheral field of view has been improved massively. There are five air intakes and three air extractors to keep you nice and cool, alongside the FIR breathable textile inners, which are removable for easy washing. The SR-GP comes in four shell sizes and a variety of colours.

RRP £639.99

www.reactiveparts.com

ARMR HARADA R JACKET

If you're looking for a sporty leather jacket on a budget, then ARMR's offering really is up there with the best. Constructed from cowhide leather, the Harada R comes with C.E. Certified armour in the shoulders and elbows, alongside external shoulder and elbow protection. The cuffs and collar are made from Neoprene for added comfort, and the jacket comes equipped with stretch and ventilated panels. It also comes equipped with a wallet pocket amongst two external pockets, and YKK zips for good measure.

RRP £249.99

www.tri-motive.com



LAUNCH

WORDS: DANGEROUS IMAGES: HONDA

CUTTING

It's the moment we've all been waiting for, but is 2020's new Blade worthy of the wait?





No one warned me I'd need a PhD in mechanical engineering to attend the launch of Honda's 2020 Fireblade SP, but as I nestled down to the hour-long overview, halfway up a Qatari skyscraper, my intellectual shortcomings soon hit home. Here it was, the Blade we've all been waiting for! Heard that before? Probably, but this time it's true. It had to be true. Off the back of more facelifts and tweaks than you'll find on a seasoned Page 3 model, the time had finally arisen for Honda to deliver to the masses with an unequivocally brilliant motorcycle. A Blade that wouldn't just topple its rivals, but set new standards, embrace new technologies and reincarnate that wow factor the model's been missing almost as long as Lord Lucan. It's human to be cynical, especially after someone's cried wolf a few times, but the realisation of the flagship SP's magnitude didn't take long to sink in. There are certain figures we all like to know: power; torque; weight. While the latter factor had unfortunately gone up a few notches, so too had the other redeeming elements with the suggestion being the Honda was now 13% more potent than its processor. And despite piling on those few necessary pounds, the power-to-weight ratio was actually improved by 9.7%. »



*"WITH A CLAIMED 215BHP ON TAP,
THIS WAS TO BE LIKE NO BLADE
WE'D EVER KNOWN BEFORE"*

» With a claimed 215bhp on tap, this was to be like no Blade we'd ever known before, waving goodbye to the restrictive virtues of a good, torquey road bike in favour of being a head-warping, top-end assassin. To achieve gains of this scale meant a complete revolution of the Blade's motor was necessary, with the fundamental DNA being influenced by the same manufacturer's exotic RC213V-S. Just like that V4-powered sibling, the CBR has incorporated an over-square piston (up from 76mm to 81mm, making it the largest bore in-line-four on the market), encouraging a shorter-stroke, buzzier

inclination and plonking peak power so high up you'd need a stepladder to reach it (14,500rpm). To help the engine spin freer a specialist, friction-reducing coating, Diamond-Like-Carbon, was also brought into the mix, alongside saucy titanium con-rods, finger-follower rocker arms and more innovations than you can shake a stick at. Even the oil lubrication system has benefited from multi-point injection tech that sees additional cooling jets of lube sprayed when revs are increased and temperatures rise. This isn't just the smallest and most powerful Blade engine ever, it's a work of art, and it's

backed up by bigger throttle bodies, a larger airbox and a wholly new Throttle-By-Wire system that headlines an evolved plethora of electronically governed rider aids, including rider modes, nine traction levels, three engine braking options and two switchable levels of ABS (...but Euro5 regs mean you still can't turn it off completely).

Let's be honest, the last Blade's tech didn't exactly cut the mustard and Honda was the first to acknowledge its foible during the presentation, explaining how they'd learned a hell of a lot and, now armed with a Bosch 6-axis IMU, the game was on a whole

A standing on the seat view...

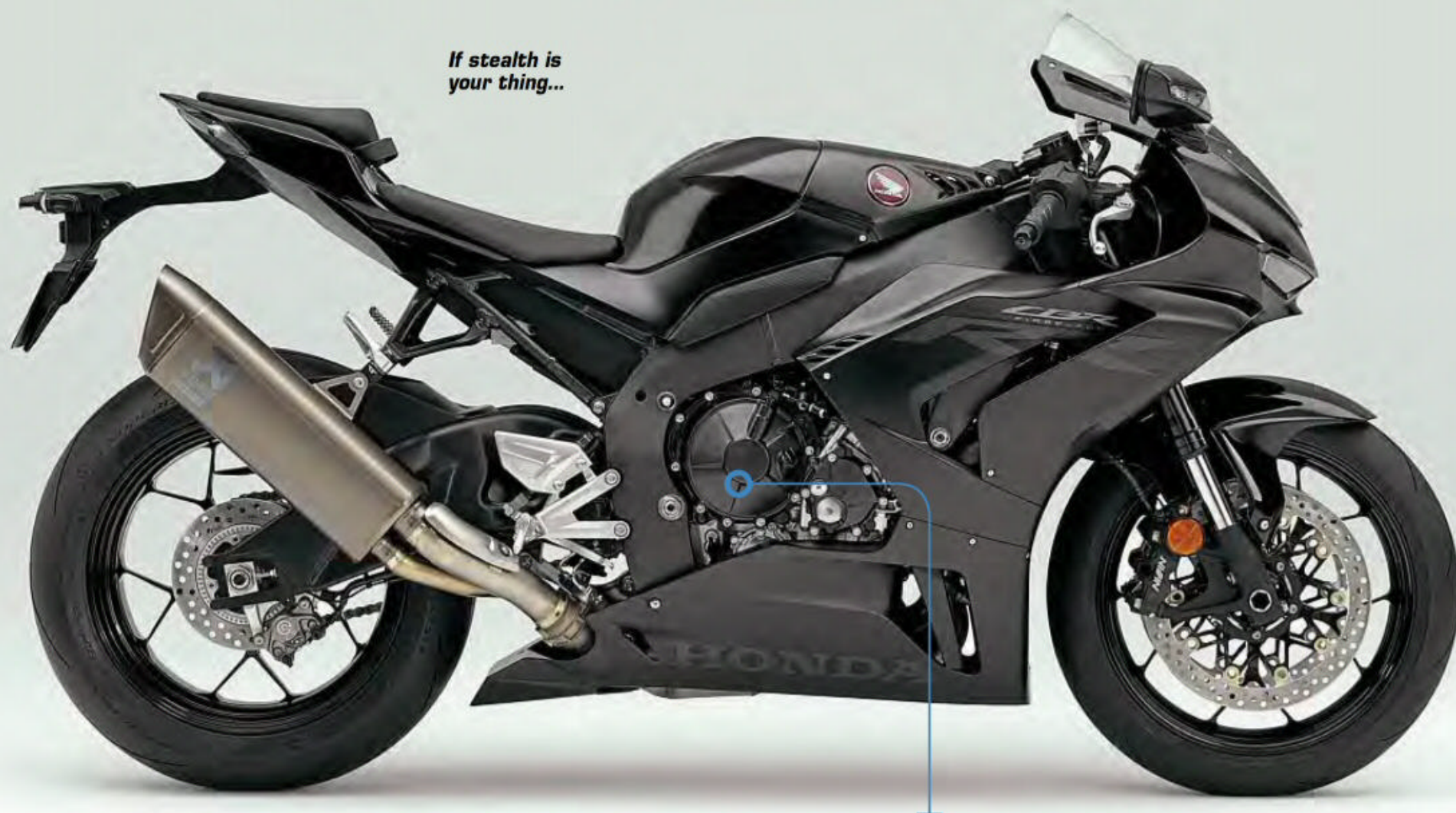
different level. The other thing they were keen to shout about was the chassis and running gear. The Blade's wheelbase has grown by 50mm, with the RC213V-S replica swingarm accounting for 35mm of that. It also offers the bike some much needed horizontal flexibility, and the same direction is offered by the box-fresh frame that's as thin as 2mm in certain places. The headstock angle's been relaxed by 1° (from 23° up to 24°) in a bid to improve stability, and to make sure the bike didn't feel like a lump of lard through the bends, the Centre of Gravity was raised. The list of changes and innovations on the bike proved mind-blowing and endless. For instance, to help the frame feel just right, the decision was taken to remove the top bracing bar (where the shock used to mount) and fix the engine in six places, rather than the traditional four. Another key addition is the uprated Öhlins Electronically Controlled suspension. The last Blade was the first bike to run the second generation of the brand's smart pogos, and these latest offerings were said to think even smarter, act quicker and, thanks to using pressurised forks, to feel much smoother.

Last but not least was an overview of the new aero package. Everyone seems to be

sporting wings these days, but no other bike can say it's using the exact same set up as the one which powered Marquez's RCV to the MotoGP glory in 2018. I personally found the second-skin design a classy addition, and listening to its virtues of better straightline stability, braking stability and less unwanted wheelies, I was liking the sound of them more and more. Every inch of the Blade has been sculpted to make it as slippery and aero friendly as possible, from the way the mudguard directs air flow on to the fairings, to the way the rear hugger is missing a chunk of plastic in its centre to reduce lift pressure. To me or you on the street the gains might not feel that significant, but for top-level racers, and bragging rights down the pub, the Blade's an absolute gold mine. »

*Bruce, A.K.A the mobile chicane...**Sharp as a blade.*

*If stealth is
your thing...*



MOTERING ON:

Every single ounce of the Blade's motor is box-fresh for 2020. As you'd expect, it's the lightest, smallest and most powerful Fireblade powerplant yet, claiming 215bhp at 14,500rpm. The new lump benefits from the same over-square 81mm bore as the RC213V-S (up from 76mm on the last Blade), with an abundance of other fancy features and tech such as finger-follower rocker arms and a Diamond-Like-Carbon coating on the cam lobes to help reduce friction. Titanium con-rods have also been brought into the mix and a new multi-point piston jet system has been introduced to encourage a cooler running engine and better lubrication. The list of enhancements is both massive and mind-blowing, with the end result being that the Honda's motor is 13% more potent than the last generation's in-line-four.

» I slept well that night, and woke up gagging to give the Honda a good thrashing. The Qatar circuit is a track I've ridden before on most contemporary sportsbikes. It's fast, flowing, and packs several hard braking zones, plus quick changes in direction. It was a prime venue to test at, especially with the accommodating warm sunny weather that would allow us to get the most out of the Pirelli Superbike Slick SC1 rubber our bikes were kitted with. Lined up with warmers glowing, the Hondas looked an impressive sight and my adoration continued once I'd cocked a leg over mine and had a good reach around. The Honda's cockpit was easy on the eye, with a 5" colour TFT dash at its centre, and easy to digest switchgears that allowed you to alter everything from the suspension set up to the visual backdrop you preferred. For the first time ever the Blade has gone keyless, which meant the top-yoke looked exceptionally racy, devoid of an ignition barrel or any other clutter. To turn the bike on required the press of a button to the left of the dash cluster, which became intuitive quickly, just like the reach to the 17mm lower bars and the 21mm higher pegs. As cramped as you might imagine it to feel, my 5' 10" frame felt pretty comfy on the Honda, which has also seen the tank dropped by 45mm, so you can get lower behind the bigger, broader screen. Another welcoming addition is the Akrapovic-partnered exhaust can. The Honda doesn't necessarily get your juices going at tick-over, but by the time I'd reached the end of pitlane and the revs had risen into double figures the sound was openly imitating a superbike (how the hell did they get that past the fun police?).

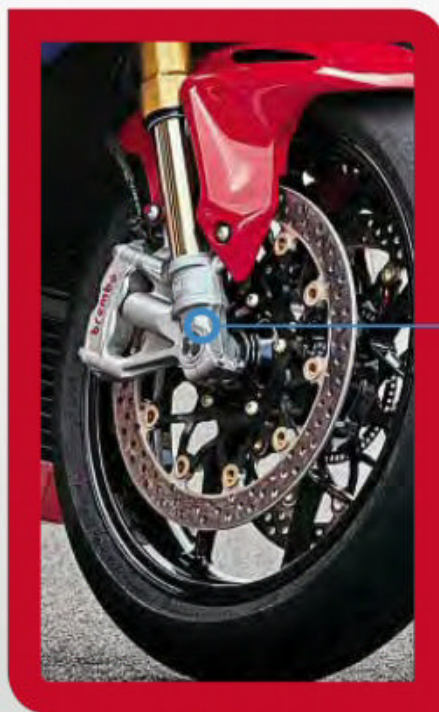
So that no one took the wrong turn and ended up in Kabul camel market, the first session on track saw the pace governed by three times world endurance champ Freddy Foray. He wasn't exactly hanging about

TECH DATA

Honda Fireblade RR-R SP		Honda Fireblade RR-R	
ENGINE			
Type:	999.9cc, liquid-cooled, in-line-four	Type:	999.9cc, liquid-cooled, in-line-four
Bore x Stroke:	81mm x 48.5mm	Bore x Stroke:	81mm x 48.5mm
Compression:	13.0:1	Compression:	13.0:1
Fuelling:	EFI	Fuelling:	EFI
Claimed power:	215bhp @ 14,500rpm	Claimed power:	215bhp @ 14,500rpm
Claimed torque:	113Nm @ 12,500rpm	Claimed torque:	113Nm @ 12,500rpm
ELECTRONICS			
Riding Modes:	Yes	Riding Modes:	Yes
Traction Control:	Yes	Traction Control:	Yes
ABS:	Yes	ABS:	Yes
Quickshifter:	Yes	Quickshifter:	No
Wheelie Control:	Yes	Wheelie Control:	Yes
Launch Control:	Yes	Launch Control:	Yes
Autoblipper:	Yes	Autoblipper:	No
CHASSIS			
Frame:	Aluminium diamond	Frame:	Aluminium diamond
Front suspension:	43mm Öhlins NPX Smart-EC forks USD forks	Front suspension:	Showa 43mm fully-adjustable USD forks
Rear suspension:	Öhlins TTX36 Smart-EC monshock	Rear suspension:	Showa Balance-Free Fully adjustable monshock
Front brakes:	Four-pot Brembo Stylema calipers, 330mm discs	Front brakes:	Four-pot Nissin calipers, 330mm discs
Rear brakes:	Two piston Brembo caliper, 220mm disc	Rear brakes:	Two piston Nissin caliper, 220mm disc
DIMENSIONS			
Wheelbase:	1,455mm	Wheelbase:	1,455mm
Seat height:	830mm	Seat height:	830mm
Wet weight:	201kg	Wet weight:	201kg
Fuel capacity:	16 litres	Fuel capacity:	16 litres
INFO			
Price:	£23,499	Price:	£19,999
From:	www.honda.co.uk	From:	www.honda.co.uk

**BRAKING POINT:**

The last Blade didn't win any awards for its stopping performance, but Honda's ensured that won't be the case this time round. It's now kitted with Brembo's top-spec Stylema, four-pot calipers, and has been paired with 10mm larger Brembo discs, that are now 5mm thick and offer improved cooling efficiency. The rear Brembo assembly is exactly the same as the RC213V-S's, so there should be no issues in that department either.

**CBR1000RR
Fireblade
RR-R SP**

- ▷ 215bhp
- ▷ 113Nm of torque
- ▷ Super stable
- ▷ GP-inspired aero
- ▷ Electro pogos
- ▷ Stonking soundtrack
- ▷ 201kg wet

➤ BRAKING	8
Plenty of purchase	
➤ STABILITY	9
Planted	
➤ AGILITY	9
Nice and nimble	
➤ DRIVE	8
Wait for it	
➤ FUN	8
Oh yes!	

FLOW WITH IT:

A major focus of the new Blade is its aero package. The most notable feature is the second skin wings that are there to aid straightline, cornering and braking stability. Sounds a bit wishy-washy, right, but the Blade's new aero design offers the exact same level of downforce as what was achieved by Honda's 2018 RCV Moto GP machine. If it worked for Marquez, chances are it'll work for you, too. There's also been a great deal of work to minimise drag and improve the flow of air around the bike. The new mudguard works in tandem with the fairings and front panel to cut through air with the most minimal resistance. Another change for 2020 is the 40mm lower tank that's designed to get the rider crouched lower behind the screen. From the mudguard to the bellypan, wherever you look there's evidence of effort to make this bike one slippery sucker.

though and my first impressions of the Honda were encouraging. It ticked the box for agility, zest and feeling pretty damn easy to blast around on. If anything, being stuck in rider mode 2 with the equivalently dumbed down softer suspension set up, the bike was maybe a little too accommodating. Being as impatient as I am, I changed the set up as soon as I was able to and the Honda transformed into the best kind of lunatic. From seemingly nowhere it developed a soul, a hefty dollop of oomph

and the tauter suspension tidied up corner exits and made the bike feel so much more focused. I rode around for the rest of that session beaming from ear to ear, blown away by the punch this thing had out of corners, how effortlessly it would change direction and how brilliantly the slick, shift and blipper features worked. I was in love, but I needed a little more time to work out whether the Blade was a Saturday night fling, or the one you take home to meet your mother? 🍷

SMARTY PANTS:

The tech on the Blade has been given a much needed boot up the derriere, with the introduction of a refined throttle-by-wire system, launch control (or Start Mode, to give it its formal name), and nine tiers of a much developed traction control (Torque Control) package that is designed to anticipate the speed of a slip rather than just that the rear wheel is breaking traction. A new quick-shifter, blipper and customisable levels of wheelie control and engine braking are also in the mix, along with three riding modes and several power options, all of which are displayed on a changeable-faced, colour TFT dash. The Blade's new six-axis Bosch IMU is the mastermind behind the multitude of systems, which also links smartly to the next generation Öhlins electronic suspension that comes fitted to the SP version.

**Saucy.****FRAMING IT:**

Think revolution; that's the best way to relate to the Blade's new aluminium diamond frame. It's completely altered from what's come before, with a stronger focus on fine tuning rigidity to suit preferred characteristics. Consequently, it's now as thin as 2mm in certain areas and the top frame bracing spar at the rear of the bike has been removed (meaning the shock absorber now mounts directly to the engine). The steering head is marginally relaxed and wheelbase has been increased. Equally as significant, the centre of gravity has been raised in a bid to help the Honda handle through faster corners. As per the RCV, there are now six mounting points for the engine (there used to be four), and the swingarm is a mirror image of the unit used on the RC213V-S, stamped out of 18 individual pieces of aluminium, being 30.5mm longer and offering 15% less horizontal rigidity.



We love a bit of gold bling.

SEXY SUSPENDERS

Once again the wise folk from the Nordics have delivered their golden touch to the new Blade SP. But just how different is their latest electronic suspension, and what makes it so special? We asked Öhlins' design engineer Emil Åberg for some answers...

The last Fireblade was the first sportsbike to have Öhlins Gen 2 suspension. How have you moved the game on this time?

From a hardware perspective, the biggest change is the front fork. Because more or less, the entire structure of the front fork is new. The damping system is a pressurised system, whereas the previous one featured an open cartridge. You will see at the bottom of the fork leg there is a small ancillary chamber that holds the gas charge, which is designed to eradicate cavitation, so the feel and function is much more smooth and predictable. From a riding point of view, this means the rider gains more control and a better understanding of how the forks are working, so they have more confidence.

How has the software changed?

It's still reactive suspension based on the second generation kit, but it's got a new algorithm package which is faster than it used to be – the calculations take place every 10 milliseconds, so it's constantly determining the need for damping and changes. Of course, as long as you're riding in a straight line or in a corner, the system won't change the settings constantly, but it detects what event is about to take place by listening to the IMU, ECU, wheel speed sensors, etc. It also eavesdrops in on the CAMBUS with the control unit. It helps the bike anticipate pace, and other things, and although the previous generation had this, we've been looking to refine it – especially making the transition between the different modes more seamless. Hopefully, you won't even notice that the bike provides the extra support – if you change between the modes though between A1, to M1 (in manual) you will feel the difference though, and it's on you to make the bike feel right. The system will effectively be able to apply more support than you'll ever do, because it changes on the fly, which you can't do.

How customisable is it?

The front fork features a 24mm compression piston and a 30mm rebound piston, so the same as in the SBK and GP fork. The rebound is bigger because there's more need for rebound damping than compression damping. Also, by reducing the size of the piston used you get more feel and a quicker function – so going bigger isn't always the right thing to do. The shim stack is different to the last generations, and it's also alterable. There are specialist Öhlins service centres where you can take your electronic suspension to have it re-valved or shimmed to suit your spec and the range you're hoping to achieve. If you want to change the spring weights at the front or rear, this is no harder than on conventional suspension. You can also adjust the airgap in the forks like you would on normal units.

What did Honda want from the new suspension?

They wanted to create a more track-focused bike, with more predictable and stable behaviour – we wanted a good communication between the surface of the Tarmac and the rider, between tyre and track. On the initial system we had some comments that you could feel the bike was maybe too hard in some areas, but we worked hard in making the process a nicer feeling. To meet Honda's demands, we've worked hard on dialling out any harshness to the suspension's functions. We're really very proud of what we've achieved and the proof is in the pace. An average rider will be around a second a lap quicker on electronic suspension, and a pro rider will typically find half a second.

Can you retrofit the system on to a standard Blade?

A lot of the electronic systems aren't retrofit, or simply wouldn't be worth the investment – it would be cheaper to buy the costlier model in the first place. We've developed packages that are retrofit, but they feature pre-determined settings, so they're not reactive. A smart system, like the Blade's, would be much harder to retrofit, as the suspension needs the information from the CAMBUS system to know what the bike is doing, to then make a full calibration in order to make changes on the move. To do this you'd need the Blade SP's ECU, the actual suspension units, the suspension ECU and a whole load of other bits, like wiring and sensors. It would be a huge undertaking.

Round two was a much more focused affair; I had a decent idea of which way the track went, and I knew largely what to expect from the Blade. I'd weened traction down to level 1 (least intrusive), had switched the ABS to its most playful option and had reduced the engine brake to level three, so the bike flowed into corners faster. It takes time to trust a motorcycle and that second outing was me dipping my toe in the water, learning how the electronics engaged when the rear tyre broke traction, and how the ABS would kick in during three really hard braking zones. Even by this point I was blown away by how brilliant the front end felt, hugging the ground with a hard-to-match plushness that egged me on into leaning and trusting it farther. Elbow down was a doddle, and so too was hitting apexes. Corner exits were a bit more sloppy because the rear shock felt underdamped, and when grabbing on the awesome Brembo Stylema anchors (that are paired with 10mm larger discs -330mm), the front suspension was left feeling a little overwhelmed.

We had Öhlins technicians on hand who showed me how quickly and easily the electronic suspension could be altered. There's the choice of running a manual or automatic suspension set up (the latter reacting within 10 milliseconds to what a multitude of sensors tell it), with three customisable

“ I WAS BLOWN AWAY HOW BRILLIANT THE FRONT END FELT, HUGGING THE GROUND WITH A HARD-TO-MATCH PLUSHNESS ”

Counting the cost

UNLESS YOU'RE AS WEALTHY AS FRODO AND USE STACKS OF CASH TO PROP YOUR BED UP, YOU MIGHT BE KEEN TO KNOW HOW AFFORDABLE THE NEW BLADES CAN BE USING PCP...

Model	OTR	Deposit	Deposit %
CBR1000ST	£19,999.00	£3,806.50	19%
CBR1000SP	£23,499.00	£4,000.98	17%



He's had harder days in the office.

GLENN IRWIN – BLADE RUNNER

For 2020, BSB, Macau and NorthWest 200 winner Glenn Irwin has secured a seat on the Honda Racing Fireblade. Having already clocked a few days on the new Blade in Spain, he was hungry for more action out in Qatar. We asked him for his take on it?

"This bike bucks the trend.

Speaking from a racer's point of view, it feels a hell of a lot closer to my race bike than any other street bike I've ridden. It's fast, firm and accurate, with great levels of feel and strong technology to back it all up. The thing that impresses me most about the new Blade is its stability, both cornering and straight line. There's a distinct lack of buffeting on the approach to fast corners, like the first bend at Qatar, which helps you make it so much easier to carry high entry speeds and hit your apexes. Cornering is where this bike really excels, because the Blade just feels so agile and planted. Even in road trim, if you kitted it with race tyres, I know you could compete on it at British championship levels at superstock and not be last.

"I wasn't expecting the Öhlins electronic suspension to be as usable or adjustable as it

was. I tweaked away a little with the set up and was really happy with how easily the bike transformed into the platform I wanted it to be – I was elbow down at every corner and felt so confident at all times. The engine is another big talking point... it's fast. It's also really usable with the throttle delivery and the way the motor makes its power. The gearbox is good and the electronics really allow you to make the most of this beast. It shouldn't feel so easy to ride a 215bhp motorcycle with headlights and a sidestand, but that's the score. It's brilliant."

user maps on tap, plus the three pre-determined modes that come as standard. The way the auto package works means you don't have to know naff all about suspension; if it's too soft on the brakes, you ask the front end for more support under braking; if it's pumping on corner exits, you ask for more support under acceleration – it couldn't be easier. My bike was stiffened in those aforementioned areas and the results were plain to see when I hit the track for the third time. The Blade was able to hold its poise when braking hard, so my corner entries were more stable and consistent, and the pumping/running wide on the exit of bends was a forgotten foe. The bike was feeling even sharper, massively confidence inspiring and quite simply brilliant. But was it perfect? The motor is an absolute peach once it gets going, kicking out a powerful and linear rate of drive once you're up around 9,000rpm, but the bottom end of the engine felt a bit flat for my liking, and in anything other than the lowest level of traction, the electronics proved a little too engaging; the laudable throttle connection would be robbed from you by an algorithm that decided it didn't like what you were doing. As for the ABS, it ➤



Amount of Credit	36 Payments of	Final Payment	Final Payment inc Option Fee	Total Amount Payable	APR	Annual Contracted Mileage	Interest Rate pa
£16,192.50	£260.00	£9,499.53	£9,509.53	£22,676.03	6.9%	4,000	6.69%
£19,498.02	£320.00	£11,162.02	£11,172.02	£26,693.00	6.9%	4,000	6.69%

» was only notable on three of the corners, but it was still a few corners too many for my liking. That said, it wasn't aggressive in its engagement and compared to the last Blade, it was night and day better.

My last session was the very best, made all the sweeter by a 1.5mm increase to the rear shock ride-height. The Honda was that bit more on its nose, which made a huge difference on a couple of long sweepers where you're not hard on the gas, but still want to build speed. Previously, the bike would run wide if I tried to crack on, but this tweak proved an utter game changer. The front end felt just as brilliant as it had done previously, and the stability and predictability of the bike hadn't changed in the slightest. It would take a much smarter man than I to comprehensively explain the workings of wings, but I dare say they were largely responsible for the prowess of the package. On all parts of the track, even down the start straight where I was reaching the limiter at 300km/h, the Honda remained as graceful as a swan. It was a true thing of beauty and has proved itself a bike to be reckoned with.

Will it muller 2020's sportsbike scene? Only time will tell, but I dare say it's going to be right at the sharp end of the competition, so is worth some serious consideration if you're in the market for something tasty. I guess the only way to conclude is to re-visit that much pondered question: is it the Blade we've all been waiting for? No, it's much better than that. **EB**

Verdict

9/10

It's been a long time coming, but we've finally got our hands on the Blade we've all been waiting for. Super-smart, super-fast and super-stylish. Now all you need is a super deal down the dealers.

+ GREAT TECH, POWERFUL MOTOR, WINGS
- PRICY, ABS

BRAINS BEHIND THE BLADE – YUZURU ISHIKAWA

Having built Honda's RCV and RC213V-S, you can rest assured that he was the right man to develop the latest Blade. Here's what he had to tell us...

Why has it taken so long to build this bike?

With development, there's often a lot of prioritising which models get worked on first. When a bike is being evolved rather than revolutionised, the process to produce a new machine is much quicker. But the thing with the new Fireblade is it is a ground-up motorcycle. The electronics are on another level, the frame is revolutionary and the philosophy on the whole package is very different to any Fireblade that's come before. To build a bike this special, this competent, it takes a whole lot of time, learning and development. People were expecting us to bring them something special, and now here it is. It's maybe taken us more time than people would have hoped, but we're very sure they'll find the wait has been worth it.

Track first, road second; what prompted this switch of thinking?

It was quite a simple one, really. We had a good, hard look at our customer demographics and we saw that more and more sportsbike buyers were using their bike on track, so we wanted to build a motorcycle that delivered for their needs. Of course, we've always been proud of building Fireblades that are great on the road, and can be made great on the track, but the time had finally come to swing the balance. It was a tough call to make, because it meant we'd maybe have to compromise in certain areas, such as easy town handling, in favour of high speed stability and agility. To achieve these new goals, we had to start from scratch.

How closely linked is the Blade to the RC213V-S?

We transferred a lot of the mentality and

thinking from the RCV into the new Fireblade.

The main implementations were the mirroring the centre of gravity (which is now higher) and matching the RCV's levels of inertia. The frame was largely influenced by the RC213V-S too, as well as the design of the RCV MotoGP machine; some areas of the Fireblade's frame actually mirror the prototype machine's profiles and dynamics. Another borrowed element was the engine's six-point mounting system, which allowed us to fine tune the flex of the chassis.

Why wasn't it a V4?

The back-to-front size and height of a V4 motor really restricts you in terms of layout, which meant it could have held us back a little with the new Fireblade. Obviously there are a lot of great virtues to V4 motors, as used in our GP machine and RC213V-S, including the ability to rev an engine very high and produce lots of power, but to make those gains a reality you also have to look at switching to pneumatically operated valves, which adds cost and complexity. Fundamentally, we were able to build a whole new engine that achieved the goals we wanted for it, so there was no need to pursue the V4 direction.

Did you consider V-Tec?

If you're using a device to enhance performance, in a sense, you become dependent on that device. So we thought the best approach was to build the motor as organically as possible, to make it as strong and powerful as possible without needing to resort to additional technology, and we're very happy with what we've achieved. We're not saying that we will never look to devices to improve the Fireblade's motor, but right now we don't need them.



OUR BEST, APPROVED BY THE BEST.

CBR
FIREBLADE



MARC MARQUEZ
Eight Times World Champion.



BORN TO RACE.

The new CBR1000RR-R Fireblade was built for pure race-track performance. Heavily inspired by the RC213V MotoGP machine and its street legal RC213V-S counterpart, the 2020 Fireblade is powered by the most powerful inline four cylinder engine that Honda has ever made. With 215hp for 201kg, its all new 1000cc, liquid-cooled DOHC engine along with the new ram air duct will push you to the limit. In addition, MotoGP style winglets generate the same downforce as the 2018 RC213V MotoGP machine. Discover the all new CBR1000RR-R Fireblade, a motorcycle which even Marc Marquez likes to ride. Visit honda.co.uk or call 0345 200 8000 for more information.



2020 KTM 1290 SUPER DUKE R IT'S DUKING OUT

WORDS: BOOTHY: IMAGES: KTM

Naked bikes are taking over the world, aren't they? There are more options than you can shake a stick at, and they seem to be selling like the proverbial hotcakes – and for good reason; they're a right laugh to ride. Last year we took eight of the best on one of our biggest road tests ever, and it was probably one of the best, most wheelie-filled weeks of my life. Sure, most of these 'super naked' are in fact just stripped-down versions of their manufacturer's flagship litre sportsbikes – from the R1 we are blessed with the MT-10; from the RSV4, graced with the Tuono; and so on and so forth. But not the KTM 1290 Super Duke R. The Super Duke R isn't just a superbike with its bodywork ripped off and a slightly dullified engine, it's a purpose-built 'super naked'. No compromise. KTM are telling us that this makes the new 2020 model 'The Ultimate Naked' and they invited us out to the international Press launch at Portimão to show us exactly why that's the case.

The bike that KTM are calling 'The Beast' has had some big changes in the chassis

department for 2020. In fact, it's had a complete overhaul. An all-new frame is 2kg lighter and has three times the torsional rigidity of the previous version, thanks to the engine now acting as a load-bearing member. There is a new, lighter composite subframe and the swingarm is mounted higher, altering the geometry of the bike substantially. New wheels equate to another 300g saved and the engine, although very similar to the engine in the old 1290, has shed nearly a kilo (800g to be precise) thanks to thinner crank cases and a re-designed oil cooler and radiator system.

Top-of-the-range WP Apex suspension, Brembo's flagship Stylema brake callipers and more electronic rider aids than you can shake a stick at means the new Super Duke is firmly in the 'premium bike' category and, in all fairness, at £15,699, it ought to be. So to find out just how premium the bike is, and whether or not it's worth the £15,699 asking price, KTM gave us a morning of riding on the road followed by an afternoon blasting The Beast round Portimão. And this is what we made of it...



TECH DATA

2018 KTM 1290 Super Duke R

ENGINE

Type:	1,301cc, liquid-cooled, DOHC, V-twin
Bore x Stroke:	108 x 71mm
Compression:	13.6:1
Fuelling:	Electronic fuel injection
Claimed power:	177bhp @ 8,875rpm
Claimed torque:	140Nm @ 7,000rpm

ELECTRONICS

RBW/Riding Modes:	Yes/ 4modes
Traction Control:	Yes
ABS:	Yes
Quickshifter:	Yes
Wheelie Control:	Yes
Launch Control:	Yes
Autoblipper:	Yes

CHASSIS

Frame:	Steel tubular trellis
Front suspension:	WP fully adjustable forks
Rear suspension:	WP fully adjustable gas mono-shock
Front brakes:	2 x 320mm discs, 4-piston Brembo Stylema calipers
Rear brakes:	240mm disc, 2-piston Brembo caliper

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	1,482mm
Seat height:	835mm
Wet weight:	189kg
Fuel capacity:	16 litres

INFO

Price:	£ 15,699
From:	www.ktm.com

*It's definitely a
looker.*



The first challenge with the new Super Duke is working out how to turn it on. Like the outgoing model, the 1290 comes with a keyless ignition system as standard which, although sounds exiting and mega space-age, is still a bit of a faff if you ask me. Not just because you have to decide which pocket to stow the fob in (that's if you are lucky enough to have any pockets in whatever you are wearing), but because the firing-up ritual feels like a bit of a nuisance. You press a button to unlock the system, which takes a second or two before sparking into life; only then can you start the engine. It just seems to take that little bit too long, which I know isn't going to be a deal breaker, but you wouldn't want to rely on a Super Duke as a getaway vehicle on your next bank job.

When the new dash does finally spark up though, everything is all pretty sexy. The new interface is straightforward and easy to use, despite the switchgear buttons looking a little bit daunting, so it didn't take me long to set The Beast to performance mode and disable the anti-wheelie system.

Our road ride involved a mixture of roads; some fast, some slow, but a lot of them quite bumpy, and straight away the plushness of the KTM's ride impressed me. The work they have done on the WP Apex suspension, alongside the super-squishy seat, have given the bike a really executive feel – even when the going gets rough. When riding within the speed limit, there is no denying that the Super Duke is a comfortable bike. The hand-foot-ar-se triangle that the big KTM puts you in is as natural feeling as any other option in the naked bike category, or it certainly was for my shape and size, anyway. And if it hadn't have been, I could always

have altered the position of the adjustable foot pegs, but that was far from necessary.

Bumpy though a lot of the roads were, there were still plenty of opportunities for knee skids and general childishness, and the KTM was happy to oblige. To be quite frank, the new Super Duke felt a lot like the old one on the road. Although the bike's big stature gave you a feeling of being the king of the road, the tallness of the thing didn't inspire oodles of confidence when really trying on roads that were unknown and largely unsighted... or not at first anyway. The Beast is exactly that – it's big and it's not exactly light. Ok, I know it's lost a few kay-gees here and there, but it's still pushing 190kg dry, and a lot of that weight is high up, especially when you've got a tank full of fuel. The centre of gravity is slightly higher on the new Super Duke, which may have been why I felt a little uncomfortable thrashing the thing at first, but after a while, once I'd got used to how it reacted to my inputs, I started to realise just what you can get away with on the KTM. As I went faster and faster, it did take a little more effort to get it buried into the corners, but the bike never once protested, and if I'm being honest, really quite impressed me.

I couldn't get overly excited by the engine note emanating out of the standard silencer. The 60mm downpipes are obviously no match for the Euro5-friendly twin catalytic converters. Of course, you could buy yourself an Akrapovic 'Slip-on Line' exhaust for the princely sum of £1,137.24 – some of the bikes on the launch were kitted out with the Akra pipe and they sounded great,

but it doesn't half seem like an expensive way to give yourself earache.

One section of the road ride took us along a motorway so I chucked the old girl in top gear and stuck cruise control on. It's dead simple to operate, and you can adjust the speed with the plus and minus buttons in front of and behind the left handlebar grip. In top gear the engine was more than happy at 70 miles per hour – in fact a little too happy. The gearing was super-tall and it made sixth gear feel like a bit of an overdrive gear; you'd be more than welcome to a burst of acceleration, but you'd be well advised to drop a gear or to if you wanted to get a real move on.





Highlights

- ▷ User-friendly electronics
- ▷ Rocket ship engine
- ▷ Eats bumpy roads
- ▷ 140Nm of torque
- ▷ 189kg (dry)
- ▷ 177bhp

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| → BRAKING | 10 |
| Perfect | |
| → STABILITY | 8 |
| Better, but very tall | |
| → AGILITY | 7 |
| Not bad for a big girl | |
| → DRIVE | 9 |
| Punchy | |
| → FUN | 9 |
| Wheelie good fun | |

The bikes we tested all had KTM's Quickshifter+, which allows clutchless up and downshifts (but does cost an extra £349.28), which worked great in both directions during our road ride, as did all of the other electronics. If I'm being critical though, I must admit that I didn't like the indicator switch. There was no positivity or 'click' to it when you tried to activate or deactivate the indicators, so I found myself constantly looking down to the dash to check whether or not I'd pressed the bugger properly. It was a little bit annoying, but I didn't let it spoil my ride.

After a morning on the road we arrived at the Autódromo Internacional do Algarve (or

Portimão for short) to get a feel for what the new Super Duke could do on the circuit. This was what I had been looking forward to.

Because I'm a brave boy, I put the 1290 in track mode, with the most aggressive throttle setting, binned the anti-wheelie off and set the traction control to number 3 (there are 9 modes, 1 being the least intrusive, 9 the most). A track, especially one that you know your way round, has got to be the best place to really see what a bike can do. Portimão, I'd say, is just about perfect for the job. Straight away I was able to manhandle the 1290 round its variety of twists and turns with not very much effort at all. Straight away, it was great.



Boothy, being taken for a ride...

Chassis-wise, this bike is very different to its predecessor, and as soon as you are on a track you can tell. I'm not going to pretend I can put my finger on exactly which change to the frame and suspension systems it's down to (most likely a combination of them all), but the Super Duke's front end felt way more planted than I was expecting. I found myself forcing the thing into the turns harder and faster every lap. It was an apex hunter, and a bloody good one at that.

Mid-corner things felt just as stable too, and it wasn't until getting on the gas that things got a little bit sketchy. Not through any fault of the chassis, instead due to my ham-fisted applications of throttle. With the bike in track mode the throttle was really aggressive. A better rider than me might have been able to tame it, but no matter how gently I tried to open the throttle, there would always be a nasty jerk that unsettled the bike. When I swallowed my pride and demoted the rider mode to sport mode, things were definitely a lot easier.

At one stage I thought I was having a problem with the traction control. On level 3 it rarely kicked in and when it did it was smooth and didn't upset the bike too much (if at all). Every now and then though, the TC would start being more and more intrusive. Confused, I mentioned it to someone else who had had the same problem. We figured out that we had both been inadvertently catching the '+' button (the one I'd previously been using to turn the cruise control up), which was ramping the TC setting up without me realising. What a pair of plonkers.

When I started to up the pace a little bit I found the bike wanting to run on a little bit on the way into some of the slower turns (it was like there was a little bit of drive coming from the engine, just when you didn't want there to be), which was a tiny bit unnerving and took some getting used to – fortunately the front end was good enough that I was always confident I could put the bike where I wanted to, even if I was going in 'a bit too hot'.

Another issue that reared its head as the pace increased was the shifter not wanting to play if the wheel was spinning – sometimes an upshift is a nice way to control a powerslide, but if it goes wrong it can often send you bucking and weaving all the way to

the next turn. For one reason or another, the shifter had a reluctance to operate properly whilst the rear wheel was spinning. This isn't a unique problem to the Super Duke though, as I have experienced something similar on other bikes with both OE and aftermarket shifters fitted.

Track sorties on road bikes are quite often plagued by unwanted ABS interference, but that's not the case on the 1290, who's ABS can be set to Supermoto mode, allowing skids, stoppies and seriously hard braking. The new Brembo Stylema callipers ought to take some credit for that too; they are, as you would expect, very sharp and very powerful. In six sessions on track, some as long as 25 minutes, there was no brake fade whatsoever, so full marks in that department.

In all honesty, a lot of my time on track was spent on one wheel. The KTM loves a wheelie. With all that torque you don't need to rev the nuts off the thing to get it to lift. You don't even need to bother the clutch, just crack the throttle and you are vertical. And I wasn't the only one; everyone was at it, and we laughed and laughed and laughed!

The 2020 KTM 1290 Super Duke R was, without doubt, a fantastic bike to ride. They have taken an already brilliant bike, improved it and made it better on both the road and on track. It's not the cheapest in the category, but it's not the most expensive either, and you do get a decent level of tech for your money. Up to now, the king of the naked bike castle has been the Aprilia Tuono V4 and although I'm sure the KTM has tightened the gap to the all-conquering Tuono, whether or not it has surpassed it, is yet to be established – it's a close call that would take a back-to-back test to tell. Then there is the brand new Kawasaki Z H2 (that Bruce is on his way to test as I type this), and Ducati Streetfighter V4 to contend with. Will the KTM have the minerals to keep up with the other new kids on the block? If I'm being brutally honest I'm not sure that will, but I can't wait to find out. 

We're going to get him some stabilisers.



Someone needs some viagra!

HERMANN SPORN: SUPER DUKE PROJECT LEADER

Whilst at the international Press launch for the new Super Duke R, we caught up with the guy who has been in charge of the model's development – ever since the first 990 Super Duke.

FB: We loved the last Super Duke; it was a hell of a bike, bursting with character. The new bike is obviously a lot different, so how do you go about developing a bike for the better, without losing the qualities that people love about it?

HS: When we started work on this model in 2017 we had meetings about the behaviour of Super Duke to try to decide what it was that we wanted to achieve with the new model. We found that there were a few things that people really liked about the Super Duke that we wanted to maintain. One was that it's an easy bike to ride – even for new riders. And it also seemed important to people that it was comfy, so the new one had to keep a comfortable riding position and comfortable seat. And it is known as the Torque Beast, so obviously we wanted to keep that exciting torque and power delivery that we know people love. But we also knew there were things we could work on, so we worked on the feeling of the front end and decided to make a brand new frame with more torsional stiffness. We achieved this by using the engine as a stressed member in the frame – this also helped reduce weight. That change alone has made this bike feel better when you turn into a corner.

FB: One of the changes you made was to raise the centre of gravity on the bike. To some people that would seem like the wrong way to go; how does it help?

HS: The centre of gravity of a bike is really important. When it is too high you get a lot of weight transfer from the front to rear, and vice versa, when it's too low the handling of the bike is affected badly – so it's vital to find the correct position. We spent a lot of time on the race track to improve the way the bike handled, not to make the bike perfect for the track, but because when you are pushing a bike hard on track, and on the edge, you can better tell what is happening. It was on the track that we spent a lot of time testing different engine positions and different frame set ups. We have made some big changes to the geometry of the bike.

FB: How do these changes in geometry translate to a better bike on the road?

HS: You can definitely feel the benefits on the road. One of the new characteristics of the new set up is the much improved anti-squat – this is something which we dialled in during out track testing. With less squat, when you open up the throttle there is less of a tendency to run wide in the corners. Even under harder acceleration it is now easy to hold a tight line, or change your line in the middle of a corner – of course, this is helpful on the racetrack, but we found that it made the bike so much better for the road too, especially on those roads which you might not know very well – if you carry a little bit more speed into the corner, or the corner tightens up a little bit, you can easily hold a tighter line on the new Super Duke.

FB: Is the new Super Duke frame just an RC8 frame with some modifications?

HS: No. I know it looks a little similar, but it is longer and the tube diameter is bigger. There is also a completely different shock mounting and the engine mounts, which are adjustable, are completely different. The front engine hanger is similar because, like the RC8, the engine is a load bearing part so we have come to similar engineering solutions with this model.



Verdict 8/10

Loads of grunt, enough power and loads of tech. An absolute hoot to do wheelies on and with its all-new chassis, can really hold its own on track, too.

- + DECENT TECH, IMPROVED FRONT END.
- A BIT TALL AND NOT VERY CHEAP.

FLYING WITHOUT WINGS?





In the last 10 years, we've seen the aero envelope pushed harder than ever on two wheels. But what's the deal with all the wacky fairings and wings, and how much difference do they make?

Even in the past 10 years or so, bikes (and particularly sports bikes) have come on leaps and bounds. Not only have they got sexier, but we've been given a barrage of electronic aids that have turned from an aggravating annoyance into a genuine assistance. We've got trickier engines, stickier tyres, a shed load more power, the list goes on... but now? Well, wings are the new hype. Unlike an IMU controlling electronics, or a clever cam system to help maximise an engine's performance, aero packages are an incredibly visible upgrade to the naked eye; I mean, when Ducati released their V4R in 2018 with the big chunks of carbon sticking out the fairing, it turned more heads than a naked supermodel. With the new Fireblade following suit, and now even naked bikes joining the winged fray, it got us thinking about the downforce side of things with aero. Being aerodynamic and 'reducing drag' is a pretty simple theory; you know, the bigger the lump trying to punch a hole through the air, the more drag there's going to be – and therefore, the slower you'll go.

But now, aero has moved much further on. It's not just about being aerodynamic, because that's not enough any more. It's all about creating downforce as well; a force, produced by a combination of air resistance and gravity, that acts on the bike by having the effect of pressing it down towards the ground. I mean, we've seen it in car racing for years, and if you look at the levels of trickery on any modern day race car, let alone an F1 car, it's plain to see the amount of painstaking hours that it's spent in a wind tunnel, in order to shove that car into the ground as hard as it can go. And really, Ducati were first on the bandwagon, plastering their Desmosedici MotoGP machine in more carbon than NASA's latest space rocket. But with all the added forces, the fluctuation in movement, and even the lack of surface area, how effective really is downforce on a motorbike? How much of a difference does it make? And will it make any difference on a road bike? Well, you'll have to read on to find out... »

THE EXPERT'S ADVICE...

Don't just take our word for it, alongside spending hours trawling through the techiest of articles and all the research we could get our greasy mitts on, we also caught up with Ali Rowland-Rouse for (most of) our info, who's a keen biker. Oh, and he's also a full-time aerodynamicist for Alfa Romeo Racing in F1, so he knows a thing or two about aero...



Check out Rossi's rear wheel, and then say you don't need downforce...

WHERE DID AERO ON BIKES ORIGINATE FROM?

So where do we start with aero in the arena of going fast? Well, it's always been about; just think back to the late 1950s with those horrible dustbin-spec fairings. But then again, it was for aerodynamic 'drag' advantages rather than aero-created downforce, and that's a whole different kettle of fish, so as far as wings go it's probably best to start at the beginning... with cars (who stole the whole thing from the aerospace sector). Take F1 as the prime example. In the current climate a car will be cracking on about 5g in cornering and braking, thanks mainly to the advancements in aero; without it, the cars wouldn't be able to hit even a third of that, as there just isn't enough force pushing the tyres into the ground. Hell, they could even drive upside down on a roof at about 70mph (no, it's not a myth), yet even so, there isn't a massive overlay between cars and bikes.

This is because the majority of the downforce created from any car is actually made underneath the car, thanks to the Venturi effect. Without getting crazy technical, it basically means that when you reduce the air going through a contraption, it speeds up, which then reduces pressure, and in turn creates suction – which explains why race cars are so low to the ground (think of the principle in the same way that a carb pulls fuel into an engine). Essentially, a wing two metres off the ground will make a hell of a lot less downforce than one that sits 2mm off the ground, which is one of the reasons that aero developments, like wings, are a lot less effective on two wheels. Another reason is a lot simpler, and it's the fact that it's plain easier to get more effective aero on a car; there's a lot more space, and effective, usable areas. On a bike, what would actually be the most ideal place for some aero is below the belly pan, but thanks to the front wheel bugging up the air, even that isn't »



More wings than you'd find in a KFC.

HOW DID DUCATI TAKE ADVANTAGE?

Technically speaking, they just did what they could within the rules, but they only did that thanks to an aggressive approach. But what is this aggressive approach, I hear you ask? Well, as our expert aerodynamicist points out, it's basically about attacking the rulebook as savagely as possible – which has been happening in Formula One for decades. By employing ex-F1 personnel, the Ducati squad eyed every loophole and looked into every nook and cranny – with the most obvious being how they bypassed the necessity to homologate two sets of fairings for wings, to use throughout the entire year in 2016. Danny Aldridge, MotoGP Technical Director, employed this rule so teams couldn't have different sets of wings at every track, and in turn help to keep costs down. Yet Ducati were really clever; the rulebook said that a machine could still be legible to finish a race with less material than the homologated fairing design – which Danny implemented so that if a rider had crashed and remounted, or damaged the wing in a collision, they could still finish the race and not be penalised. Ducati capitalised on this and released their bike for homologation with the full bike set of wings, all intertwined. Then, where other teams had two sets to choose from, at every race they turned up with they had a different set of wings; literally just trimming the fat off when it wasn't necessary, and sticking it back on when they needed it. That's how they run different wings every weekend to work perfectly with the track... thanks to an F1 engineer looking at the rules in a different light.



WINGS ON A SUPERBIKE?

We caught up with Oxford Racing Moto Rapido Ducati boss and bike set up guru Steve 'Wilf' Moore, to get his take on all things aero...

FB: A lot of people see wings, and success, and link the two. What do you think?

SM: Well, yes of course they're linked – every part of the race bike has value, and aero as a whole is massively important on race bikes. Don't forget though, with machines being so tight it's no coincidence that every manufacturer goes within half a second of each other; there's so much power, it's just how fast we can push them through the air, and that's why aero is important. To be honest, for us it's not so much downforce, but getting it to go through the air! The whole front of the fairing helps to push the bike down – the wings on the side emphasise that. But then again, a lot of the race fairings are already built for it. Check out Shakey's old PBM Kawasaki, with its big duck-billed scoop. That in itself created incredible aero advantage, but still conformed to the basic shape of the standard bike. It's all about the little gains.

FB: Are there any downsides to the wings?

SM: Well yes, it does cost us speed down a straight. At the beginning of last year when we got the bike, we did a load of back-to-back testing with and without the wings. To be honest, at BSB tracks it's not so much of a biggie having them; they really come into effect at incredibly fast speeds... so at bigger, wider GP tracks they'd be much better. If you can exploit any benefit though, it's worth it.

FB: What are the main advantages that you can see in the data?

SM: To be honest, it's only at certain tracks where the gains are most noticeable – like GP-style tracks, or Thruxton. If we were at some of the tracks that don't suit the wings, we'd love to change it and have smaller ones or none at all, because it's not quite as simple as we thought. They really don't do much at low speed or through low speed corners – but then they don't need to do much. The main impact we see comes at the end of a straight. From full gas to heavy brakes, the front end is already loaded and pushed down, so our rider can literally dive on to the brakes as hard as he fancies without worrying too much about the additional weight transfer or even locking the front. It also helps on anti-wheelie.

FB: So it would help if you could alter or remove them?

SM: Yep, if we had the choice, you'd see us using the wings on and off at some tracks, and us f*cking about a lot more than usual! To be honest, it's easier for us as is, to just bolt them on and leave them, as aero development costs are insane, so I'm happy we don't have the choice. You'd need someone who can predict everything and work relentlessly like in GP or F1, and just look at the costs there. We did look at wind tunnel testing, but as a realist, it's not worth it for us.

FB: Is it harder to set up a bike with extra aero?

SM: Yes, and no. It's an extra variable that needs to be worked with, but we can measure it pretty easily. We can see how much fork is moving, and how much force is on it. If the forks at 30mm instead of 20mm, we can then build an aero channel for estimated downforce, thus using that to adapt the suspension to the needs.

FB: Are you happy you got them, and would Bridewell notice if you took them off?

SM: Yes, anything that helps is good for me. He'd [Tommy Bridewell] definitely feel the difference if we took them off and sent him out; as the bike is set up, it would be like losing an extra weight on the front. It's not night and day, but it is noticeable.

particularly incredible – although we have seen Ducati utilise such tech for that little extra gain. They were clever, though. Where Yamaha attached the device to the fairing in order to deflect rain, Ducati stuck it on the swingarm, which means that the force doesn't have to go through suspension and be wasted through travel, rather straight through to the tyre, and thus is more effective. And it's these little breakthrough nuggets that have arguably given Ducati that extra oomph in fighting for a title. Yeah, there's been the odd bit of aero-innovation floating around on the odd Gilera or Aprilia in the last 30 years, but nothing like the onslaught since 2015.

THE HERE AND NOW

And that brings us exactly to where we are now, on the eve of the 2020 season. When wings seriously hit the scene properly back in 2016, there were a lot of people asking, why? Well the simple answer is, if there's something to be gained from an unturned stone, why wouldn't they? But also, if you look at the sheer amount of power and grip on offer, and how far both have evolved in the past 20 years, it's almost a wonder that no one properly attacked the aero angle sooner. Okay, over the last year the extremities in the size and shape of the wings have died down, but even so they're still aggressive; Danny Aldridge and the team behind all the rule-making in the GP paddock

*Wings stop wheelies.
Or not.*



have literally created a silhouette box, that the bike and wings must fit to be eligible this season – talk about keeping it simple.

Away from the racing though, it's in recent years we've seen wings hit the streets; Ducati, Honda and Aprilia have now utilised the tech and transferred it over to their road bikes. Ducati have been the most savage in their design, with big, wide carbon lumps, while Honda and Aprilia have been a little more conservative; yet whether it's mainly a headline grabber, or a truly technical choice is a difficult question to answer – it's both. The difference between having wings and not having wings isn't night and day, but it is noticeable to the trained superbike rider. Maybe Fast Bikes Magazine will have to do a test of our own to find out for sure...

WHAT NEXT?

Well, that's the million dollar question, isn't it? I think we've all heard the rumours of Honda having active, electronically controlled wings... and supposedly they've even gone as far as to patent them. This has to be the way forward for bikes, as a single wing is designed at an optimum angle of attack; that's fine in a car as it doesn't actually move anywhere near as much, or alter in its surface area as much as bike and rider pitches, rolls and weaves. It's crazy, but it's thanks to the fundamentals of riding, combined with the inertia from the high centre of gravity. Then there's the weight transfer from just braking and accelerating, and so much more... levels of which are unheard of in car racing. As a result, the wing might only be in its effective position for 10% of the time; from a straight, to braking, to mid-corner, to corner exit, there's no way a fixed device could deliver for all of these aspects. Yet something attached to a fairing that could move 20 or 30 degrees, so it could adjust its optimum position in real time? That would be a massive help. It could target downforce and stability while braking, or wheelie control under acceleration without having anywhere near as much of a compromise of the two. Technically speaking, with the current wave of IMUs that control the current electronics systems being so complex, there's no doubt they could be given a simple electronic servo to actuate a set of wings – thus being able to perform better, in nearly all scenarios. Yet, with MotoGP rules continually strangling the development in order to keep the cost down, seeing it in the racing arena is unlikely – I mean, it's been banned in car racing since the 60s. But then again, nothing's impossible, and there's no reason that it can't trickle down into superbikes and road bikes... just watch this space. 



WOULD WINGS BE EFFECTIVE AT THE TT?

Technically, it could be the most effective place to have additional downforce through wings, but then again, it could actually hold things back as well. The theory would be, that you'd need to look at where speed is limited by grip; so every single part of the track that the rider isn't at full throttle (if the rider did have enough grip, he/she would be flat out). This is where it could help; giving extra downforce, and even at added stability and weight on the front, to assist when jumping on the brakes at the end of long sections, but this would be offset against increased drag, which would, in turn, slow the top speed. It would take testing, and that's something that the road racing jockeys don't have in abundance...

DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON THE ROAD?

Unless you're doing licence losing speeds, our aero man says absolutely not, and compares it to having 2% more grip on a tyre. Take the V4R for example. Its wings produce just over 7kg of downforce at just over 40mph, so you'd really struggle to feel any tangible benefits. And that figure is probably taken into account with perfect air, so with a rider hanging off the side, or out the bubble, it's going to be worse. Stick your hand out the window at 40mph, and the force pushing it down won't even be as much as what the wings produce...

Inspired by F1...



Green v



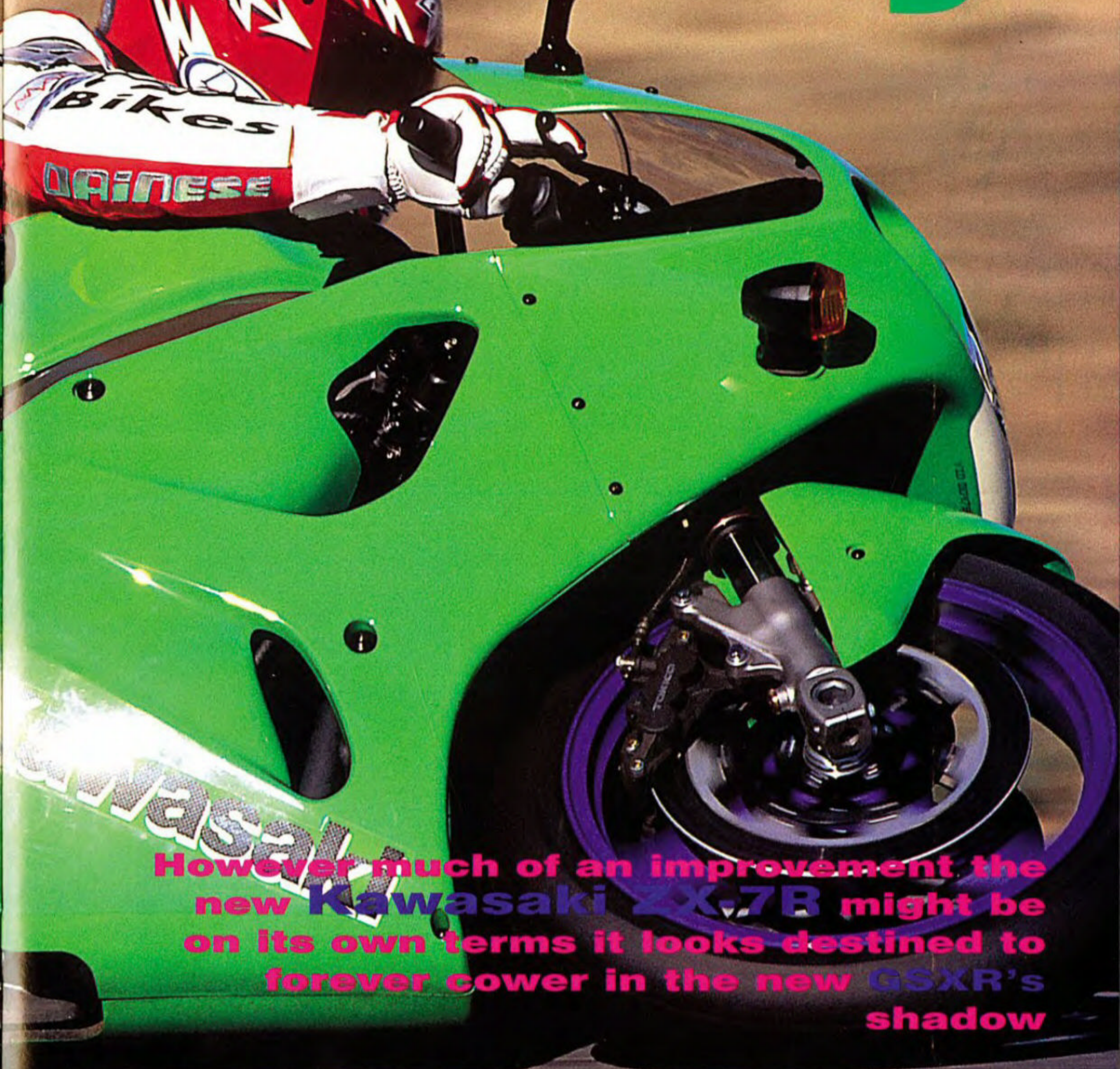
I love Jerez, not just because it means that I end up in southern Spain when the rest of the FB mob are back in Blighty freezing their Bruntingthorpe balls off, but because the circuit is one of the best in the world, and my personal favorite... What 'does it' for me, is the variety of corners, fast and slow, carefully mixed to create one of the most

challenging and exciting laps anywhere. As such, it's also as hard a track on bikes as it is on riders, full of highside and front end washout material, and the sort of place where, if anything's wrong with a machine's handling, it'll be shown up big time.

So perhaps it wasn't really the best place to introduce Kawasaki's all-new ZX-7R, precisely because after the debut of the

stunning new GSXR, it was likely to be shown up as the revised rather than revolutionised bike it really is. Specifically, with damage to the company wrought by the Kobe earthquake - much more than they'd ever publically admit - and a change of management at the highest level (read sacking) there was always going to be a year of consolidation rather than anything too adventurous, and 1996 is it. So whereas

with envy



However much of an improvement the new Kawasaki ZX-7R might be on its own terms it looks destined to forever cower in the new GSXR's shadow

Suzuki could start with a clean slate, and thus incorporate all the best features of contemporary sports bike design, Kawasaki were, in a way, tied to their existing formula and forced to work within its constraints.

On the other hand, some would argue, and not without a degree of legitimacy, that the ZXR750 already represented the pinnacle of 750cc in-line four technology,

and was thus the best starting point anyway. However, whilst this was once undeniably the case, the ZX has slipped back over the last couple of seasons to Yamaha's faster turning YZF and Honda's better all-round Blade, and the introduction of the new GSXR proved that the technology was in a position to move on, and for whatever reason, Kawasaki didn't take up the option.

In failing to keep the ZX-7R at the cutting edge of the sportster genre, Kawasaki have thus effectively blown its development, because not only have they produced a bike that's now (on paper at least) slow in relation to the opposition, but they've also studiously ignored the crucial weight issue, missing the point that Honda rammed home three years ago - that is that weight is more important than even

Green



horsepower. In fact, rather than slimming the bike down Kawasaki have allowed the ZX750 to get fatter and fatter over the seasons in a somewhat irrelevant quest for more top-end via their bigger and better ram-air systems.

As for the competition from Suzuki well, on an individual basis at any rate, the Kawasaki management including marketing manager Hiro Matsumura, claim they feel aggrieved at what they see

as component copying. The Suzuki ram air system is almost identical to the Kawasaki arrangement, and apparently when the race engineers were shown pictures of the Suzuki race kit parts, said Matsumura san, they found it impossible to distinguish them from their own - a rather lovely irony to Western ears.

TECHNICAL

OK, let's run it by you. The 16 valve

DOHC, 748cc powerplant has been given a shorter stroke and a wider bore, (from 71 x 47.3 to 73 x 44.7) the effect of which is to slow mean piston speeds, thus reducing the load on reciprocating components and enhancing reliability.

In keeping with the contemporary thinking, the cylinder head is a closed deck design for enhanced rigidity, and the cam-chain now runs down the right hand side of the engine, both to contain the

with envy



overall width of the motor, and to straighten the inlet tracts. To this end the factory have also re-designed the valve actuation arrangement, and the new bucket and shim set-up ensures that the inlet tracts are as straight as possible.

Staying on the inlet side for a moment, the new ZX-7R now uses a twin ram-air arrangement which, combined with narrower and shorter inlet tracts (39mm) ensure a highly effective cylinder charging

and thus maximum volumetric efficiency.

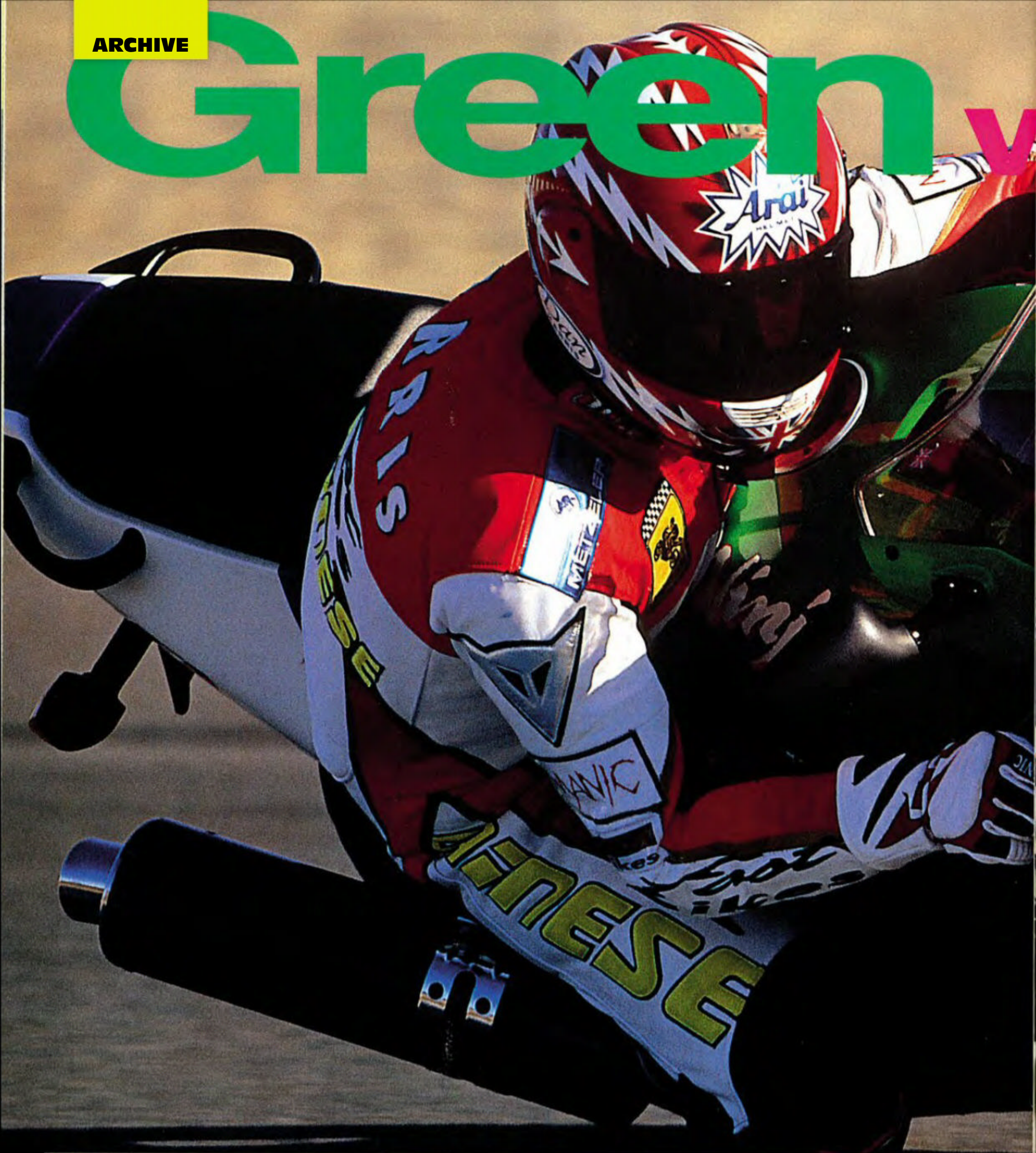
The improvements to the top end required that the bottom end be modified too. A stronger crank and uprated journal support ribs were the prescription, and the area around the transmission output shaft has also been similarly uprated.

Kawasaki have reduced the frontal area by using a curved radiator, and the thermostat now activates at 60° rather than 70° to reduce mechanical loss

through excessive heat. To this end the oil cooler capacity is now increased by some 12%.

On the exhaust side, the 4-2-1 system features a balance pipe between numbers 1 and 4 headers, the aim of which is to boost the midrange power. Further along, the main exhaust collector pipe has a full diameter unobstructed path to a larger volume silencer, for maximum gas flow at higher speeds.

Green



As far as the chassis's concerned, geometrically it's identical to last year's frame. The main spars are bigger to the tune of 5mm and, as well as the engine being used as a stressed member, there are CAD inspired alterations intended to improve rigidity. These changes should pay off most at higher speed.

The suspension has also been subject to a fairly major uprate. At the front the 7R now features new fully adjustable 43mm inverted forks, with lighter walls, whilst

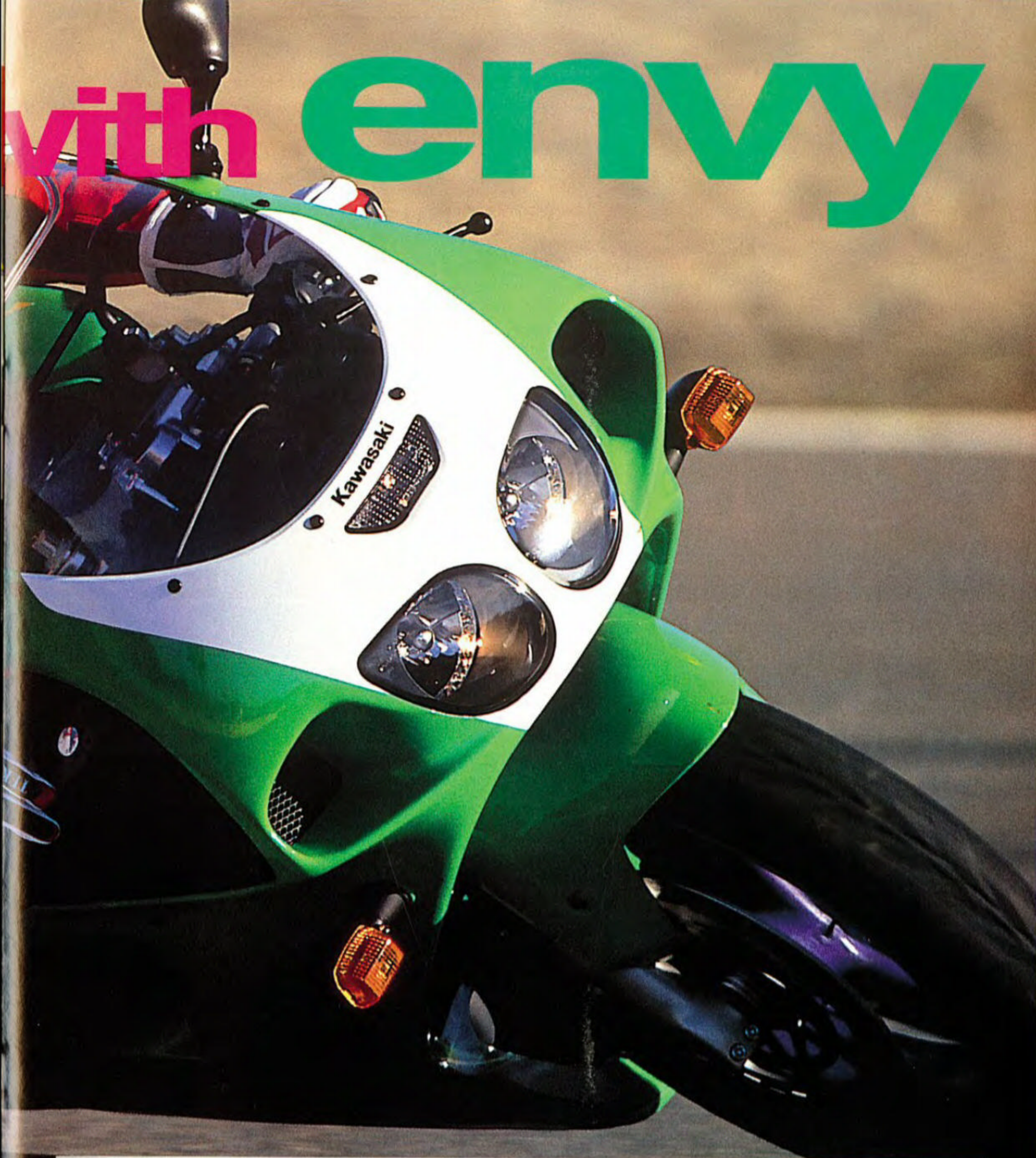
the race orientated 'RR' features a finer range of adjustments. Both bikes run a fully twiddleable nitrogen gas charged 'piggy back' rear shock, and again the RR's unit is that much more programmable.

Like the new Suzuki, the brakes are Tokico's finest six-piston affairs. At the back the single opposed piston brake is now mounted directly onto the swingarm, obviating the need for a separate torque arm, whilst the six inch rim has been shod

with a 190 section tyre. The front still sports a 120/70.

Save for a moderate amount of extra adjustability, a close-ratio gearbox, some minor frame modifications and a set of flat-slide carburettors the RR derivative is much the same as the standard bike. Traditionally, though, because of the dodgy low speed carburation, the RR hasn't made a particularly good road bike, which effectively negates it as a serious retail contender.

with envy



RIDING

With all the fuss in the press about the comparative weight and power of the GSXR and the ZX-7R, it didn't come as any surprise when, at the international press conference at Jerez, there was an addendum to the normal barrage of boring speeches. To cut a very long and tedious story short, the official party line was two-fold. For a start the factory re-iterated their original claim that the extra weight was imperative to beef up components and

ensure longevity, and secondly they claimed that their formula had produced a far more stable and rider friendly machine. To be frank, it sounded like hog-wash, particularly in the light of the 185kgs Fireblade's remarkable reliability over the last three years. However, having ridden the bike, I'm inclined to agree that there is at least some justification for the claim to greater managability.

Under normal circumstances I wouldn't even consider comparing the Suzuki and

the Kawasaki from separate launches, such is the normal distance of time and procession of other different motorcycles to test between them. But as the Suzuki was deliberately the last bike I rode, and no more than 10 days ago, and as the differences between the bikes are so huge, it's safe to include a few generalisations.

What better place to start than the respective power to weight ratios. The Suzuki at 128bhp and 179kgs boasts a class-leading power to weight ratio of



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715bhp/tonne, while the Kawasaki at 125bhp and 200kgs (625bhp/tonne) gives away a massive 90bhp/tonne.

Thus as you'd expect the Suzuki simply blows the Kawasaki away in a straight line, and the latter is less susceptible to an unsympathetic use of the throttle. Conversely crack the twistgrip on the Suzuki open in first and sooner or later it'll throw the front wheel in the air; on the Kawasaki it does no more than drive the bike conventionally and controlled forward.

This doesn't mean that the ZX-7 motor is gutless, far from it; it's urgent enough from 5-6,000rpm and at a push you can force it to drive cleanly from as low as 2,500 rpm. Towards the top end, though, where the GSXR motor is really churning out the stomp, the Kwak is already tailing off, and there's no denying it does feel lacklustre, if not boring by comparison. Again, if you hadn't ridden the Suzuki or the 918 Blade, then power per se wouldn't be an issue, but if you have...Psychologists call it 'relative deprivation' and apparently it causes revolutions.

The Kawasaki PR machine kept reminding us that the ZX-7R was primarily a road bike not a track machine, the same sort of thing they said about the ZX-9R when they realised it could be off the pace even before its launch. More to the point, not only was the RR (track bike) derivative conspicuous by its absence, but it was difficult to throw off the idea that the ZX-7R was anything other than a

supercession of the ZXR750, one of the greatest track 750s of all time and the basis for the most competitive four cylinder machine in world superbike. And that's the irony of the ZXR's performance vis-a-vis the Suzuki; for whilst the latter will undoubtedly struggle in its tuned, competition guise, the ZX-7R looks like it could be the race bike to beat next year, proving that the basic package still has the potential to compete at the highest level either on the track or the street if the engineers, or perhaps more

front, and then more latterly the over-softening of the rear in an attempt to redress the problem. Ironically, just as Kawasaki seem to have got the balance about perfect, Suzuki have upstaged them on both counts.

Having said that, the rear end is now far more compliant than it's ever been, yet it doesn't suffer from wallow or weave. Similarly, despite that compliance, the back end displays a high level of control, ensuring that the rear wheel is kept firmly in contact with the road surface, regardless of surface inconsistency and power variation. Moreover, even after an impressive eight hours and 500 miles of continual track work on the first day alone, the rear shock still appeared to be working perfectly, a testimony to the temperature variation equaliser valve incorporated in the unit.

The forks are similarly refined. Okay, so if you were racing the bike you'd probably run slightly harder springs and heavier oil, but the truth is that the only marginal difficulty appeared under heavy braking, where the forks had a tendency to dive a little more than is desirable. Even so, mid corner the front end was excellent, a trait that's blessed the model

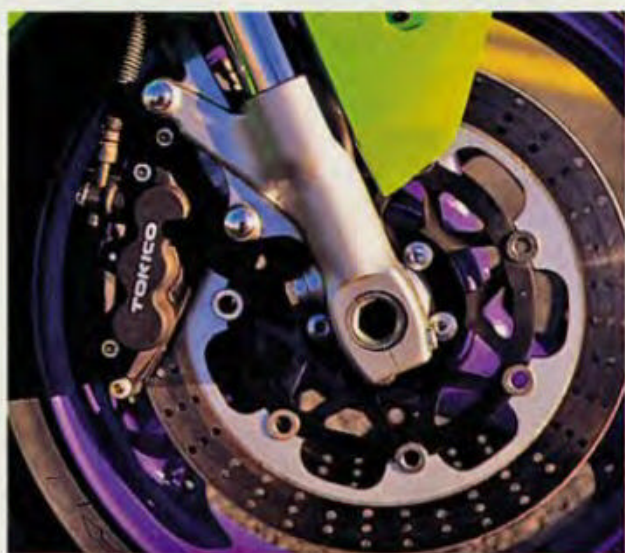
throughout its life-time, and for normal road work, and even most track work you could get away with leaving them as standard. On the roads round Jerez sweeping into Andalucia proper, the suspension felt even better, and it's perhaps here that the ZXR if not better than, is certainly more appropriate than the Suzook.



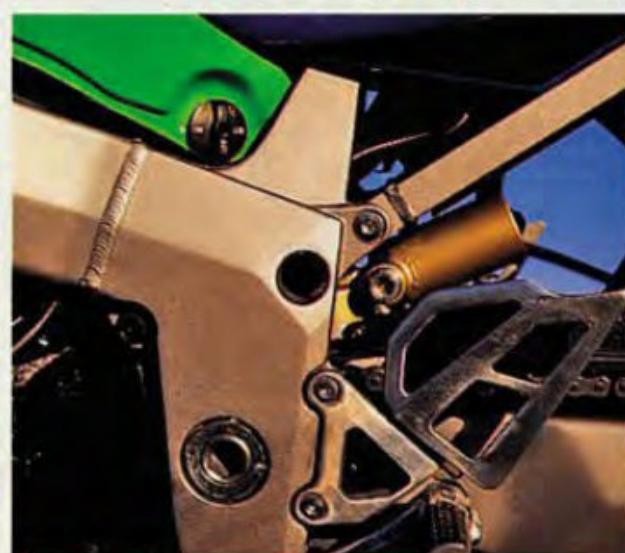
importantly, the marketers put their minds to it.

As for the handling, the ZXR is now one of the most finely honed and user friendly packages on the superbike market. This hasn't always been the case, if you think back to the problems that consumers had with the ferociously hard rear ends of the earlier models despite the brilliance of the

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TOP LEFT: Double ram air scoops should guarantee the highest 750 top speed despite the bike's all-up weight compared to the Suzook
TOP MIDDLE: Little has changed to the rider's eye
TOP RIGHT: Styling wise Kawasaki has certainly made more of the '96 changes than Suzuki's GSXR
BOTTOM LEFT: Tokico brakes are the same as the new Suzook's but nowhere near as fierce
BOTTOM RIGHT: Geometrically frame is identical to last year's. Rear susp is fully adj.



During the course of the Dunlop Sportmax 2 tyre launch at Jerez some eighteen months ago, I built up an appreciation of the tyre as an all rounder, as opposed to an out and out sports product. It's intended as a competitor to Michelin's A/M89/90 series, a job that it does extremely well. All the same, on the ZX7 the standard rubber simply wasn't up to the job of what we were asking it to do, and ultimately the tyres were the limiting factor, specifically the rubber's ability to transmit drive to the track, and because of this it was difficult to draw ultimate performance parallels with the Suzook. The latter transmits drive incredibly effectively, and although not being able to crack the twist-grip open sooner was a minor irritance on the ZX-7R, this was more down to the nature of the tyres than any geometric or suspensional deficiency in the bike. In saying that there's no doubt that the rubber contributes to the bike's general feeling of utter stability.

Being the painfully honest person that I am though, I'd suggest that at least part of the reason for the stability is that the combination of power and weight is just too tame to allow the bike to get out of shape, and at 25° the ZX-7R doesn't turn anywhere near as hard and fast as the GSX-R, although this shouldn't necessarily be seen in a negative light. After all, the 916 is one of the slowest turning supersports bikes on the planet, yet it seems to manage OK in WSB.

After the violence of the Tokico six piston brakes fitted to the test machines at Misano, I was expecting to have to apply the same amount of caution to the similarly equipped Kawasaki. I shouldn't have worried, because either the pad combination or otherwise the hydraulic ratio was different, making the ZX-7R's stoppers much

better set up. In terms of power the six potters are extremely potent, but unlike the GSX-R's, they're also much more progressive and manageable. In short, with the possible exception of the Nissin alternative, they are probably the best brakes currently fitted to a production motorcycle.

CONCLUSION

When we tested the 1995 ZXR750 at Goodwood earlier this year against a ZX-6R, I expected the 750 to completely trounce the 600. Instead the thrashing was the other way round to the tune of a full two seconds a lap. The conclusion we came to at the time was that the combination of weight and power had at last shifted in favour of the smaller class, but in retrospect it was more that there's been a comparative lack of development in the three-quarter litre class proper. Manufacturers seemed to have been so gobsmacked by the advent of the Fireblade that they just stopped, dead. Until the new GSXR. Now Suzuki have shown exactly what can be done with a clean slate and contemporary technology by applying it to such good effect on the new 750. However the Suzuki is also an extremely focused bike, suitable really only for the experienced rider, whereas the 1996 Kawasaki which still possesses 90% of the latter's performance, is one of the best behaved and most manageable large capacity bikes on the market and certainly more suitable to general all-round road riding. As such, whilst the Suzuki undoubtedly is a better supersports bike, if the Kawasaki had been launched before the GSXR and the '96 Blade, this would have been a rave review and not just a good one.

Kawasaki ZX-7R Specs

Engine

Type	DOHC 16-valve water-cooled in line four
Displacement	748cc
Bore & Stroke	73.0 x 44.7 mm
Comp' ratio	11.5:1
Carbs	Keihin CVKD38 x 4
Gearbox	6 speed
Primary drive	Gear
Final drive	Chain
Clutch	Wet, multi-plate

Frame

Type	Twin spar aluminium
Susp: front	43 mm upside-down cartridge fork with adj' preload, rebound and compression damping.
Susp: rear	Uni-track rising-rate with aluminium swingarm and gas-charged shock adj spring preload, rebound and compression
Rake and trail	25deg/99mm
Tyres: front	120/70 ZR17 TL
rear	190/50 ZR17 TL
Brakes: front	2x286 mm semi-floating dual opposed six piston caliper
rear	single 197mm piston

Dimensions

Length	2,090 mm
Width	740 mm
Height	1,130 mm
Wheelbase	1,420 mm
Ground clear'	105 mm
Seat height	790 mm
Dry weight	200 kg
Fuel capacity	18 lt

Five Blade FANBOY

Ben Dale's had a handful of 'Blades but this, his 2008 model, is his favourite. We went for a ride with him to find out why he thinks his big Honda is the perfect sportsbike.

WORDS: BEN DALE/BOOTHY
IMAGES: CHAPPO



Highlights

- ▷ Reliability
- ▷ Handling
- ▷ No electronics
- ▷ 179kg dry
- ▷ 167bhp
- ▷ £5,000

→ **BRAKING** 8
Do the job

→ **STABILITY** 10
Perfect

→ **AGILITY** 9
Great at speed

→ **DRIVE** 8
Plenty

→ **FUN** 10
I'm always smiling

When I passed my test, these had not long come out and I remember thinking back then how much I wanted to have one – it really was my dream bike. This is the fourth Fireblade that I have had so its safe to say I really like them. I've had two 929 Fireblades (that was actually the first bike I got when I passed my test), and I've also had the old fox-eye Blade. Oh, and multiple CBR600s in the meantime, too. I decided it was time to get another Blade a few years ago so I took the plunge and bought this one; the wife was actually on holiday when I bought – I've had it nearly three years now and she still hasn't mentioned anything, so I think I must have got away with it.

I've still actually got a CBR600, which I sometimes still ride, but that's usually if I'm just going out to do some wheelies and doughnuts and stuff – I used to use a CBR600 as a stunt bike when I was into that (before the kids came along) – but the Fireblade is definitely my main bike.

I've had quite a bit of work done to the bike whilst I've had it. I put a big piston rear shock out of a 2012-2006 model in because the standard one I found got a bit springy

when it warmed up. It's got R&G bobbins and bar ends as well as all of the engine covers in case the worst happens and I throw it down the road. It's got AC levers on, a double-bubble screen and a few other nice little bits like that. I've had some captive spacers put in the wheels, so now it's loads easier to take the wheels in and out, which is dead handy. My favourite things are probably the exhaust and Power Commander though, they have made a real difference. The exhaust is from SC Project and it's really, really loud, but I like it. It actually made the bike run a little crap when I first put it on, so that's why I opted to get a Power Commander and that made it a lot better.

I took it to P3 Tuning in Liverpool. They put the Power Commander on and set it up for me. They do all the servicing and MOTs and things on my bikes. With the Power Commander it ran smoother and made another 5bhp, from 162bhp to 167bhp, and the mid-range was definitely a lot smoother. The only problem now is that it hunts a tiny bit on idle; they said it's just down to the exhaust so they said they'll sort that next time it goes in for its service. I think it just needs the throttle setting up to get everything balanced. »



MEET BEN

Ben Dale is a 31-year-old bricklayer from Warrington and has been riding bikes for 10 years. After spending a couple of years stunt riding on streetfighter-style 600s he decided to grow old gracefully and get a Fireblade – and he's never looked back. If it hasn't got two wheels and an engine, this Fireblade fan isn't interested, and for that, Ben, we salute you.



A match made in heaven.

They put an HM quickshifter on for me last year, which I'm still trying to get used to. I'm not convinced I'm a fan of them really, I think they are a bit of a gimmick, especially on the road. It's taking a lot of getting used to, but I suppose it's nice to have and it makes things easier on your hands if nothing else.

I think the main reason I keep coming back to Hondas is because of how well they handle, and it seems to be all the Hondas that I ride. I've had a few Suzuki GSX-Rs and never felt that comfortable with them, and I've ridden a lot of newer stuff, like my mate's BMW S1000s, Gixer 1000s and stuff, and none of them make me feel as good as this does. I think it's got a rawness to it that the really modern bikes don't have, they are all too electronically controlled.

I find a lot of lads are too frightened to ride bikes hard without all the electronics nowadays, especially on track, and they rely on traction control and all the other rider aids. To me, that's not really riding the bike. I want to feel like I'm doing it all myself. It's

quite rewarding when you're riding round on trackdays passing lads that have spent £20k on their track bike, when you're on a 12-year-old road bike, with the reg plate still on. It's a good feeling!

I've done quite a few trackdays; we tend to go to Oulton Park and Anglesey a lot. My last one on this bike was Anglesey a few months ago, and it doesn't have any trouble keeping up with newer, more powerful stuff whatsoever, and I'll always go in the fast group.

It's mainly a road bike though, to be honest. We do a lot of riding in the evening when the roads are quiet. Sunday nights are always good so we tend to head down to Matlock and Buxton and places like that; there are loads of great roads to ride in the Peak District, and it's not that far from me. You can have so much fun with 160bhp on the road, you don't really need a lot more, so I think the Blade really is the perfect bike in that respect. And because it handles so well, it makes riding through the twisty, windy roads so easy. »



An actual needle, how quaint.



Earplugs needed.



Nothing wrong with this front end.



Ben loves giving it the beans on the Blade.

TECH DATA

2008 Honda Fireblade

ENGINE

Type:	998cc, W/C, DOHC, inline four
Bore x Stroke:	76 x 55.1mm
Compression:	12.3:1
Fuelling:	Electronic fuel injection
Claimed power:	167bhp @ 12,000rpm
Claimed torque:	115Nm @ 8,500rpm

ELECTRONICS

RBW/Riding Modes:	No
Traction Control:	No
ABS:	No
Quickshifter:	Yes HM
Wheelie Control:	No
Launch Control:	No
Autoblipper:	No

CHASSIS

Frame:	Aluminium twin spar
Front suspension:	43mm fully adjustable USD forks
Rear suspension:	Big Piston Shock (off 2014 model)
Front brakes:	2 x 320mm discs, 4-piston callipers
Rear brakes:	220mm disc, 2-piston caliper

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	1,407mm
Seat height:	820mm
Wet weight:	179kg
Fuel capacity:	17.4 litres

INFO

Price:	£ 5,000
From:	The Internet



The perfect road bike?



Weapon.

We often go to the bike nights in Southport and even though the Fireblade might be a bit older than some of the bikes there, it still gets a bit of attention. I think there are Fireblade fans wherever you go!

Whilst I've had this Blade, it's never let me down once. I think that's another thing that attracts me to Hondas – the reliability of all my Hondas has been brilliant. They really are bulletproof. This one uses a little bit of oil, but the 08 model is known for that anyway. As long as you keep it topped up, it's fine. Other than that, in the three years I've had it I've not had one issue with this one whatsoever. It had 16,000 miles on when I got it. It's on 28,000 now, so it's done a fair bit, and it's been mint (apart from topping up the oil every now and then). Maintenance-wise, I think the only thing I have replaced on it (other than the normal service items) is the battery, just because it started to sound a bit sluggish to turn the engine over, and charging it wasn't really helping, but I caught that before it let me down, anyway.

I went over to the Isle of Man for the TT in 2018 on this bike and we did about five full laps round the TT course and then a few extra ones over the mountain section. It was my first time over there, but it was such a good place to really get an idea of what your bike can do, so I'm hoping to go back soon. The Fireblade was in its element, up on the mountain on the big, fast, sweeping corners, it would just change direction effortlessly – it didn't seem to matter how fast you were going! It was an unreal feeling and going past police cars at 100mph-plus was nuts, they didn't even bat an eyelid. You see the coppers out of the corner of your eye, and even though there is no speed limit, you still roll off out of habit; it takes some getting used to! It was such good fun though, and being from Liverpool, it wasn't a big commute. It was about a 10-mile to the ferry and you are there. We went during practice week too when it wasn't so busy and we had really good weather (there was only one evening when we got a bit of rain). It was a brilliant trip, and if you want to see what your bike can really do, it's the place to go!

For now though, I'll just stick to riding on the roads over here and if I can get the odd trackday in on the Blade, I'll be happy. I won't be selling it any time soon because it really is the perfect bike for me. I just wish they still made bikes like this! 

Verdict 9/10

I think this Fireblade is the perfect bike for me and the perfect bike on the road. Riding it is what motorcycling is all about and it never fails to put a smile on my face.

- + BRILLIANT HANDLING
- USES OIL

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2008 YAMAHA YZF-R1

Private: £4000 Dealer: £4500

With its new four-valve head delivering some fierce top-end spirit, this generation of R1 is a bit of a live wire compared to the cross-plane models that followed.

Engine: 998cc, l/c, DOHC, inline four

Power: 155bhp @ 12,200rpm

Torque: 102Nm @ 9,400rpm



2008 SUZUKI GSX-R1000

Private: £3800 Dealer: £4700

Typical GSX-R, a lovely bike to ride on the road, but it feels a generation behind the competition when pushed hard. Which it is. That'll be why!

Engine: 999cc, l/c, DOHC, inline 4

Power: 159bhp @ 12,000rpm

Torque: 103Nm @ 9,500rpm



2008 KAWASAKI ZX-10R

Private: £4000 Dealer: £4700

A proper old-school Ninja that has enough spunk to thrill, but manages to do so without scaring you too much. A good step up from the previous model.

Engine: 999cc, l/c, DOHC, inline four

Power: 188bhp @ 12,500rpm

Torque: 113Nm @ 8,700rpm



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addiction

MATT STEVENS'

NORTON V4 SS

Now in administration, superbikes don't come rarer, or more exclusive, than Norton's Chrome V4SS...



WORDS: FRODO/ MATT STEVENS PICS: CHAPS

At the time when I put the deposit down (along with 200 others) I felt like it was a cool bike; and that it would be somewhere near the forefront of technology and exclusivity at the time. It was, but it isn't so much now. To be honest, it goes well with the Domiracer I had and I thought it would look cool... and it does! From a financial perspective, it was less than a Ducati Superleggera at the time and a bit more special; not to mention the fact that it was both chrome, and loud. I never had any anticipation that it would be the nicest bike to ride, but the story was good, the design was good – it just reeled me in. There was

always something in my mind about the fragility of the business; I was worried if I would actually get it, and if they'd keep on going after! But as long as I had it in my grubby mitts, I didn't mind. It's just quite a cool thing in reality. I was hoping the purchasing experience would be a bit less traumatic, having paid in full for it, but it's one of those things. The bike in isolation is fantastic, but I'm also acutely aware that the customer services I had weren't great by any stretch. God knows what happens if it becomes unreliable, but I just hope it holds itself together. I would love to razz it round a track, but it wouldn't be my full-on race bike, that's for sure... 

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addiction





WORDS: BOOTHY

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TIGERFEAT

Ready to swap your leathers for textiles and see the world from a slightly different angle? Adventure bikes are the new black and Triumph's new Tiger 900 range has got all the bases covered.





Is that the best you can do, Boothy?

It doesn't seem like two seconds ago that Triumph were launching their last new Tiger range – that's because it wasn't two seconds ago, it was two years ago – and I remember being impressed back then not only by the comfort and ease of use of the whole Tiger family on the road, but also their capabilities off-road, too. Particularly the Tiger 800, which with me on board, a very average off-road rider, managed to do things that I reckon plenty would struggle with on a proper enduro bike. Scaling steep climbs, bouncing over logs and railing motocross berms were all par for the course on the Tiger 800, so when an invite landed on the doormat of Fast Bikes Towers for the launch of its successor, the 2020 Tiger 900, I made sure I got my name down for it before Dangerous or Frodo could get chance!

I've almost lost count of how many versions of the new Tiger 900 there are, but bear with me and I'll try and remember them all. Let's start at the beginning, with the basic model – it's £9,500, has two riding modes (Road and Rain) and that's about it for techy stuff. Then there is the 900 GT for £11,100, which also comes in a low seat version for the same price; that's your mid-spec tourer, but if you're serious about getting the miles in then the 900 GT Pro might be right up your street. Its £12,800 and comes with a big 7-inch TFT dash, heated grips, heated seat, cruise control, a 'shifter and My Triumph connectivity system so you can connect your music, satnav, phone and even your GoPro. The standard bike, the GT and

GT Pro all come with Marzocchi suspension.

The other two models in the range are the Rally and the Rally Pro, £11,700 and £13,100 respectively. As the name might suggest, these are the more off-road based options (if the name doesn't give that away, the wire spoked wheels and crash bars will), with the Rally Pro being the highest spec model, having just about all the tech the GT Pro has, plus an Off-Road Pro riding mode. The Rally and Rally Pro both come with Showa suspension with an extra 60mm of travel at the front and rear.

The six different versions of this bike might

all be unique, but they all share the same engine. It's a new 900cc triple with 10% more torque than the 800 which it replaces as well as 9% more power in the mid-range. But they haven't just given the bike an extra few cc, they have adopted a 1,3,2 firing order to give the bike a feel (and sound) closer to that of a twin, with a new crankshaft, pistons, con-rods and a whole new lubrication system which uses less oil, helping to shed 2.5kg over the weight of the old 800 motor.

The chassis is lighter too, by 5kg, thanks to a new lightweight modular frame, with each of the different model's chassis being

“THE BIKE DRIFTED GRACEFULLY ACROSS THE SAND, FULLY BROADSIDE UNTIL I RAN OUT OF SPACE – IT WAS BRILLIANT”



Highlights

- ✔ Go absolutely anywhere
- ✔ Strong build quality
- ✔ Tons of electronics
- ✔ 198kg/201kg
- ✔ 94bhp

→ BRAKING 10

Super Stylemas

→ STABILITY 7

Not bad for a bus

→ AGILITY 5

Impressive off-road

→ DRIVE 7

Adequate

→ FUN 6

In the right hands

“NO TC MEANT
WHEELIES WERE
HAPPILY CATERED FOR
AND NO ABS MEANT
STOPPIES WERE, TOO.”

tweaked slightly to suit the way Triumph expect you to ride them. All the models come with a new 20-litre fuel tank and Brembo's all-singing, all-dancing Stylema brake callipers. Are you still with me? I hope so, because I'll be asking questions at the end.

The launch event was in Morocco, where Triumph had a bunch of GT Pros and a bunch of Rally Pros lined up for us to try. The plan was to spend a day on the road on the GT Pro, followed by a day off-road on the Rally Pro. I couldn't wait to get stuck in.

On the road again

The first thing to smack me in the face (metaphorically) when I threw a leg over the GT Pro was the new dash. Not only is the new screen bigger, it has been bonded to the glass in an attempt to give it a clearer image – and it has worked, even in bright Moroccan sunlight, it was a doddle to see.

Thankfully, despite the GT Pro being one of the top spec Tigers, you still get an actual key to operate the ignition so I slotted it in and fired it up, but the typical Triumph three cylinder whine that I had been expecting didn't materialise. Instead, thanks to the new 1,3,2 firing order, the engine note was low

The Brembo Stylemas worked a treat.

and thumpy; in fact, if I didn't know about firing orders and t-shaped cranks, I'd have sworn it was a twin cylinder engine.

It didn't take much shuffling around on the bike before I'd got myself more than comfortable. You might think that having a 20-litre fuel tank between your legs would cause somewhat of a nuisance, but it didn't really feel any chunkier than the last one to wrap your legs around.

After a quick scroll through the menus to re-acquaint myself with how the menus and modes work on the Triumph, I slotted her into gear and away I went. Up to this point everything had felt reasonably plush – comfortable, easy and light. It was a bike that I could see myself doing serious mileage on, quite happily.

I'd set off in Road mode with both TC and ABS working which, when riding normally, didn't cause a problem, but the second you overstepped the mark you knew about it. The slightest wheelie or wheelspin, deliberate or not, caused the TC to quell the power quickly and, particularly in the lower gears, violently, and it would take far too long for the bike's brain to reinstate the power that it took away. The GT Pro had an Off-Road mode which lessened the interference of the TC and ABS, but not enough to pull mining wheelies and stoppies. TC could be turned off manually, in the Rider Mode, but ABS was mandatory on the GT Pro. If I'm being brutally honest, all the modes and electronic settings did seem like a bit too much of a faff at first, although it's not so bad once you get used to it.

CHASSIS

A new tubular steel trellis frame with a modular construction has helped the new Tiger shed 5kg. The set up is now even more off-road focused, with each of the new Tiger models having a dedicated and unique footrest position, to suit the type of riding that the boffins in Hinckley think you ought to be doing on that particular bike. The new bolt-on aluminium subframe holds the new bolt-on pillion hangers and a twin sided, cast aluminium swingarm holds the rear wheel in place. Overall wheelbase on the Rally and Rally Pro is slightly shorter than the standard, the GT and the GT Pro (by 4mm). However, a smaller rake angle has resulted in a longer trail, better for off-road riding.



Saddle Time

Once I'd got the Tiger's electronics exactly where I wanted them, I started to really enjoy my time in the saddle. Should the temperature have been low, I could have turned on the heated seat and grips, but it wasn't, so I didn't. For a bit of extra wind protection the screen can be adjusted really easily by simply grabbing it, pushing it and pulling it either up or down, which certainly helped whenever we found ourselves doing any motorway miles. Whilst rolling along a long straight rode, I decided to have a play with the different dashboard screen options. There are four different options, none of which I fell in love with, but they all made sense. I also had a play with the electronic shock, which the GT Pro comes with (but not electronic forks). The preload adjustment is really simple, it gives you four options – rider, rider plus luggage, rider plus pillion and rider plus luggage plus pillion – in the name of investigatory journalism I tried each and every one of the modes, but I'd be lying if I said I could tell a real difference between any of them – I like the thought of being able to simply set the bike up for what it is carrying, though. The damping adjustment on the shock was on a sliding scale from 'comfort' to 'sport', which when altered was a lot more discernible; there seemed to be a lot more support on hard acceleration with the shock set all the way to the sportiest setting, albeit a little bumpier.



ENGINE

It's a brand new three cylinder 900cc engine that powers the new Tiger, with more power (94bhp) and more torque (84Nm) across the entire rev range compared to the 800 that it replaces. A new and unique 1, 3, 2 firing order has given the 900 a boost of twin-cylinder-like power low down, without taking too much away at the top end, as well as a new and distinctive engine sound – loads of induction noise. A twin radiator set up has reduced coolant volume, allowing for an overall lighter package, but has also reduced the ambient heat felt by the rider. The motor itself has been moved 40mm forward and 20mm lower to improve weight distribution and handling, whilst some clever tweaks to the sump and cooling system mean ground clearance hasn't been affected.

SUSPENSION

With five models of Tiger 900, this is where it gets a little bit complicated. The 45mm Marzocchi forks in the standard Tiger are non-adjustable, but are fully adjustable in the GT and GT Pro models. The rear gas pressurised RSU shock (also Marzocchi) can be adjusted, manually on the standard and the GT, and electronically on the GT Pro; settings are adjusted via a dedicated menu on the TFT dash and there are nine levels of damping control, from Comfort (softest) to Sport (firmest). Everything is Showa on the Rally and Rally Pro with adjustable (manually) 45mm forks and adjustable (also manually) gas RSU shocker. The Rally and Rally Pro also have an extra 60mm of travel front and rear over the standard, GT and GT Pro models; from 180mm to 240mm at the front and 170mm to 230mm at the rear.

What'll it be, sir?

TECH DATA

2020 Triumph Tiger 900 GT Pro

ENGINE

Type:	888cc, W/C, DOHC, inline triple
Bore x Stroke:	78 x 61.9mm
Compression:	11.3:1
Fuelling:	EFI
Claimed power:	94bhp @ 8,750rpm
Claimed torque:	87Nm @ 7,250rpm

ELECTRONICS

Riding Modes:	Yes/five
Traction Control:	Yes
ABS:	Yes
Quickshifter:	Yes
Wheelie Control:	Yes
Launch Control:	No
Autoblipper:	Yes

CHASSIS

Frame:	Tubular steel trellis
Front suspension:	45mm Marzocchi fully adjustable USD forks
Rear suspension:	Marzocchi electronically adjustable RSU monoshock
Front brakes:	2 x 320mm discs, Brembo Stylema callipers
Rear brakes:	255mm disc, Brembo single piston caliper

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	1,556mm
Seat height:	810mm/830mm
Dry weight:	198kg
Fuel capacity:	20 litres

INFO

Price:	£12,800
From:	www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk

2020 Triumph Tiger 900 Rally Pro

Type:	888cc, W/C, DOHC, inline triple
Bore x Stroke:	78 x 61.9mm
Compression:	11.3:1
Fuelling:	EFI
Claimed power:	94bhp @ 8,750rpm
Claimed torque:	87Nm @ 7,250rpm

Riding Modes:	Yes/six
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Traction Control:	Yes
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ABS:	Yes
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Quickshifter:	Yes
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Wheelie Control:	Yes
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Launch Control:	No
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Autoblipper:	Yes
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Frame:	Tubular steel trellis
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Front suspension:	45mm Showa fully adjustable USD forks
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Rear suspension:	Showa manually adjustable RSU monoshock
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Front brakes:	2 x 320mm discs, Brembo Stylema callipers
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Rear brakes:	255mm disc, Brembo single piston caliper
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Wheelbase:	1,556mm
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Seat height:	850mm/870mm
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Dry weight:	201kg
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Fuel capacity:	20 litres
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Price:	£13,100
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From:	www.triumphmotorcycles.co.uk
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ELECTRONICS

As well as electronic suspension on the GT Pro, the top-of-the-range 900s come with some seriously saucy electrickery. The new 7" TFT screen offers a mega crisp image in a variety of four different styles (the base model has a 5" TFT), allowing easy selection of rider modes – Rain and Road in the base model, plus Sport and Off-Road in the Rally and GT, plus Rider Mode in the GT Pro and plus Off-Road Pro in the Rally Pro. The new anti-stall feature in Off-Road and Off-Road Pro modes automatically increases revs to avoid an engine stall, with Off-Road Pro being Triumph's most extreme off-road set up, in case you are thinking on going on a proper adventure – no ABS, no TC and a full-fat throttle map. The Pro models also come with a shifter and blipper, USB phone charger, heated grips and seat, cruise control and a tyre pressure monitoring system.

The new 900cc motor is probably the jewel in the new Tiger's crown. Not only did it sound like a twin, it had quite a few twin-cylinder-like characteristics too. Compared to the 800, lowdown grunt and midrange power were noticeably stronger, but it didn't seem to the detriment of top end, or smoothness. It wasn't like an old twin, which would chug away clunkily at the bottom of the rev range and then run out of puff when you made it rev, it was as smooth as you would expect a Triumph to be. And it might not have had stacks of power (94bhp), but there was enough to get the thing up on its hind legs if you gave it enough of a handful. If you couldn't tell already, I was a fan.

One small niggle I had with the Tiger was the indicator switch, which is situated right above the 'switchcube' (the toggle switch for the rider modes and stuff) – the problem being that both these items feel pretty similar to your thumb. It was a 50/50 chance of getting the right one and I found myself opening up all sorts of menus on the dash, rather than making other road users aware of my intentions. As it happens, nobody in Morocco really cares about indicators anyway so it didn't really matter, but it would have to be something that I'd have to get used to if I was to ride one in a country with a Highway Code.

Before long we found some saucy little mountain roads with twists and turns galore, which gave me a chance to test out the Tiger's road-holding capabilities. Now, I know the 900 is the smaller of Tigers, but it is not a small bike, nor is it a sportsbike, but with the suspension set to the sportiest mode, you'd be surprised just what the thing can do. The Brembo Stylema callipers got everything hauled up quick smart and even though it's a tall bike, you could rail round most corners with your knee down, if you so wished, and the grunty engine always seemed to have enough to pull you out of the turns with purpose.

After a reasonably long day in the saddle, I jumped off the bike with no real aches and pains at all, such were the comfort levels on offer. If I'm being super critical, I did have a slight tingling in my little fingers, presumably from the vibration of the bars, but I only noticed it when I dismounted, and it only lasted a minute or so after I stopped riding so I'm not going to deduct any points for that – I could still hold a pint, after all.

Down and Dirty

Day two of our Moroccan Tiger adventure was spent on the new Rally Pro. To me the rally looks the more aggressive bike and the one that, on looks alone, I'd be keener to see parked up in my garage. Particularly in the Matt Khaki green get-up. The long suspension gave the Rally Pro a tall, imposing stance that the crash bars and wire spoked wheels only added to. And as soon as I jumped on the thing, it seemed to suit my tallish (six foot eleven and three quarters) frame even better than the GT had on the previous day, probably thanks to the 50mm higher seat height.

Electronics-wise everything was pretty familiar, but with the option of Off-Road Pro mode, which I selected for our day of



Sometimes, it's the small things that count.



off-road riding. Triumph say this is their most extreme off-road riding set up for an advanced off-road adventure, with ABS and traction control turned off and an off-road throttle map. That's more like it!

Instantly the extra travel on the suspension was very noticeable. Before we got to our off-road ride, there was a bit of road riding where I was able to get a feel for the bike, and the forks and shock were very soft – for a road ride, you'd definitely want to stiffen things up.

No TC meant wheelies were happily catered for and no ABS meant stoppies were, too. Even before we got off-road, I was having a blast! Before long we were on a long

sandy road that led down to beach. Even over some really rough ground the suspension did a cracking job of smoothing the ride out, which gave me loads of confidence to go faster and faster. And then we got to the beach. The tide was right out and the damp sand was billiard table smooth. I could have stayed there all day, power-sliding my way round big wide loops and figures of eight. The bike drifted gracefully across the sand, fully broadside, until I ran out of space – it was brilliant, and I quickly forgot that I was on a big 900cc adventure bike. I felt like I could have quite easily been on a motocross bike, or even a speedway bike, come to think of it.

For the most part, our off-road ride wasn't very extreme – it was mainly gravel roads





Everything he touches comes back soiled.

and not anything that you couldn't have taken a car down; it wasn't really enough to see what the bike was truly capable of, but it was certainly enough to give us a feel of the poise that this bike has when you're giving it the berries on dirt or gravel roads. The soft suspension and smooth power worked in harmony, allowing you to throw the bike about, over the rocks and bumps, and then drive meaningfully out of any turns. Yes, you do get a bit of wheel-spin, but it was rarely enough to cause a problem, most of the time is just makes you grin. There was the odd occasion when I overdid it, with excessive power; that's when you remember you are sat on a big old bike and when it goes, you have got to be ready to get your foot on the ground to save it – but that only really

happens when you are showing off!

The adventure bike market is a fiercely fought sector in the motorcycling industry and there are some very capable machines. If you are thinking of going down the adventure bike route, then the first question you need to ask yourself is, do you get a big one or a small one (I'm putting the '900' in the 'small' adventure bike category – it's small compared to a 1200)? I know the temptation for a lot of us is to 'go big', but if you ask me, a 900 is probably big enough, and if you are planning on doing some off-road adventuring then you can easily find yourself on a bike that is too big. The 2020 Triumph Tiger 900 definitely has a place in the market – the new engine is a peach and the chassis does everything it says on the tin. The top

spec Rally Pro might not be the cheapest option in the market, but with six options to choose from, there is a Tiger 900 to suit almost any budget. If I was planning an adventure (and I could afford it), out of the new Tiger models I think I'd have to go for the Rally Pro, but realistically, any of these new 900s would be capable of doing 99% of what most people want. And they'd do it well, too. 

Verdict

7/10

Each of these models would be capable of doing almost anything that you're likely to throw at them, and the top spec models have got some serious tech too – almost too much, though.

- + LOADS OF OPTIONS
- A BIT BUZZY



WORDS: URRY PICS: FB ARCHIVE

Used Bike Guide

Natural **BALANCE**

In 2002 Yamaha released their most refined R1 to date.



2002 – 2003 YAMAHA YZF-R1 5PW



Releasing a new sportsbike in the 2000s was like walking a tightrope. On the one hand you had to unveil something that had enough power to put your rivals to shame or you were instantly out of the running, but on the other you had to also ensure it wasn't too unwieldy for the roads. Remember, back in the early 2000s electronic assists such as traction control didn't exist and so what manufacturers gave riders at their right wrist was what the rear tyre received - which wasn't always a good thing...

Having unleashed the often somewhat wayward 1998 R1, Yamaha had used its first update to calm its chassis down, but in 2002 they faced a dilemma. The Suzuki GSX-R1000 was now on the scene and had moved the goal posts in terms of sheer brute power – should Yamaha respond in kind or continue to refine the R1 instead? In the end they opted, much like their current MotoGP project, to make their bike easy to ride at the sacrifice of headline performance figures. And when you sample the 2002 YZF-R1 5PW, you can't help but applaud their decision as it is one of, if not the, most balanced and beautiful R1 generations to ride. So how did they do it?

Developed under the philosophy of 'total control', the 5PW took the basics of the R1 that predated it, but added a whole heap of refinement. While the 998cc engine owes much of its bare bones to the original 1998 model, a new suction type of fuel-injection system that mimicked the operation of carbs gave it not only a lovely throttle

PRICE GUIDE: £2500 - £4500

Cheapest private: £2600
47,775 miles, red 2003 model in fair condition considering mileage.

Our choice private: £3390
24,145 miles, just serviced and clean with a good service history and Akra pipe

Cheapest dealer: £3448
15,963 miles, 2003 bike in silver and in good original condition

Our choice dealer: £4280
12,537 miles, lovely low mileage 2002 bike with a long MOT in blue

Ex-demo: n/a

TECH DATA

2002 – 2003 Yamaha YZF-R1 5PW

ENGINE

Type:	998cc, liquid-cooled, 20v, inline four
Bore x Stroke:	74mm x 58mm
Compression:	11.8: 1
Fuelling:	Digital fuel injection
Power:	137bhp @ 11,300rpm
Torque:	97Nm @ 9,000rpm

CHASSIS

Frame:	Aluminium twin spar
Front suspension:	43mm Kayaba USD fork, fully adjustable
Rear suspension:	Kayaba monoshock, fully adjustable
Front brakes:	Four-piston calipers, 298mm discs
Rear brakes:	Two-piston caliper, 220mm disc

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	1,395mm
Seat height:	820mm
Weight:	174kg (claimed)
Fuel capacity:	17-litres

SPEED

0-60:	3.94 sec
0-100:	7.03 sec
0-140:	n/a
Standing ¼mile:	11.59 sec
Standing mile:	n/a
Top Speed:	173mph

FAULT CODES

The R1 does the old 'tacho tango' to display a fault code, which is generally a sticking EXUP valve or a sensor failing. When on a test ride look for the rev counter to drop to zero, swing back to a number and hold there and then return to zero again before reverting to displaying the actual revs. This is the R1's fault diagnosis system telling you there is an issue.

DAMAGE

The 5PW has always been a popular model, so prices have never dropped that low. However, always be wary of an ex-trackday bike or one that has been in a crash. Run an HPI check to see its history, look for aftermarket fairing panels, scratches on the swingarm/fork legs and also inspect the lock stops for damage.

EXUP

A traditional Yamaha issue is a sticking EXUP valve, so check it is opening and closing freely. Some owners wire it open, but this will throw up a fault code unless you fit an EXUP eliminator to fool the ECU. It's a Marmite issue, with some riders believing in leaving it connected while others prefer to junk it.

BEARINGS

Any bike of this age will be requiring new bearings. Although cheap items, they can often be a fiddle to replace so ensure the headstock, wheels and swingarm bearings haven't got any play or notchy sensation in them.



response, but also when combined with modifications to the engine's internals a welcome boost in performance.

At a claimed 152bhp (which equated to a genuine 137bhp) it wasn't that much of a leap forward, but it was delivered with far less aggression than before, making it more accessible to riders. A theme that was repeated in its chassis.

Again, taking the bones of the previous generation, Yamaha refined the Deltabox chassis and in its third incarnation made it 30% stiffer than before while also altering the swingarm pivot point and engine's mounting position, all moves aimed at improving its feel and balance. But don't think they went all-out relaxed. The geometry remained decidedly sporty with the same fork off-set as the R7 and beefier 43mm Showa forks ensuring the R1 could cut it in the bends or on track. The end result was, and remains to this day, a genuinely lovely sportsbike for those wanting proper performance without the slight worry that you are on the verge of entering a hedge should you start to wind the throttle on with any real enthusiasm.

Nowadays you can't help but enjoy riding this fabulous generation of R1 as it is such a far cry from a modern sportsbike.

Devoid of any electronic assists, you need to actually think about what your right wrist is up to because while it delivers about 70bhp less than the current R1, that's still a fair chunk of power. But what is so impressive is the R1's mid-range, which is silky smooth and packed full of grunt, making it a joy to ride on the UK's roads as there is no urge to go searching for the redline to keep the pace up. This is a bike that rewards smooth riding and if you aren't aggressive on the throttle, the chassis will respond with far greater eagerness.

We are talking a bike that is 18 years old here. However, on the road you would struggle to believe that the R1's chassis is that dated. Balanced, agile when needs be and with brakes that have more than enough bite, all it really requires to be able to keep up with a modern litre bike is a fresh set of tyres and possibly a suspension refresh. It honestly is that good and where the generation that replaced it, the first underseat pipe R1, can feel a bit heavy and cumbersome, the 5PW is light and eager to respond without ever giving the impression it might get slap-happy like the earlier carbide bikes. It's all about the balance – see? But happily the 5PW also looks pretty damn fine as well! 🏍️



ELECTRICS

There is a large connector junction on the left-hand side below the R1's air scoop that is very prone to corrosion and shorts. Once it starts to go the lights flicker and the speedo cuts out, so if this is happening replace it with a more robust item before it does serious damage to the bike's electrics.



RUNNING COSTS:

Service interval:

Minor:	4,000
Major:	8,000
Valve clearances:	24,000

Service costs:

Minor:	£150
Major:	£220
Valve clearances:	£400

Right fairing: £284.65

RH Engine casing: £186.13

Brake lever: £46.18

SUSPENSION

There is a fair chance that if the bike is running on its original shock then it will be knackered by now, so factor in the cost of a replacement unit into any offer. A fork rebuild will set you back around £150 and is also worth doing.

SUSPENSION LINKAGES

Again, more a fault of the bike's age than build quality, but suspension linkages are very prone to seizing on older bikes as few owners get them stripped and re-greased on a regular basis. Ensure all is moving smoothly and look for signs of grease in the system.

GEARBOX

The 5PW has essentially the same gearbox as all carbed R1s, which means 2nd and 3rd gears are pretty fragile. Always check they engage nicely and don't hop out under hard acceleration on a test ride as each gear is around £120 and then you need to remove the engine to fit them, which is a bill of close to £1000. Avoid any bikes with quickshifters fitted as they increase the gears' wear rate.

FILTERS

Older bikes are often robbed of power due to blocked filters. The air filter is an easy replacement, but very few owners bother also cleaning/replacing the T-bag filter on the fuel pump, which gets clogged with rust and grime from the tank. A few hours' work changing this filter often released a few extra ponies.





Are the mirrors big enough?

ALSO CONSIDER THESE:

2002 SUZUKI GSX-R1000

Private: £2,300 Dealer: £2,800

The bike to beat in 2002, the K2 is identical to the K1 aside from paint. Roomy and packing a monster engine, it's a wild and unrefined, but fun, ride.

Engine: 988cc, l/c, 16v inline four
Power: 144bhp @ 10,800rpm
Torque: 99.5Nm @ 8,650rpm



2002 KAWASAKI ZX-9R

Private: £1,600 Dealer: £2,100

The ZX-9R was the whipping-boy of the litre bike class. Outgunned in the day, nowadays it is best thought of as a fast, comfortable and quite sporty sports tourer.

Engine: 899cc, l/c, 16v inline four
Power: 127bhp @ 11,000rpm
Torque: 86Nm @ 9,400



2002 HONDA FIREBLADE

Private: £2,999 Dealer: £3,600

The '954' Blade is a great all-rounder that makes for a superb road sportsbike, thanks to its super-smooth motor and sorted chassis. A lovely machine to own and ride.

Engine: 954cc, l/c, 16v inline four
Power: 132bhp @ 11,300rpm
Torque: 90Nm @ 9,000rpm



You have to hand it to Yamaha's styling department because the 5PW is an incredibly elegant bike to look at. The LED tail light (which was a first in the motorcycle world) combines seamlessly with the sculpted tail unit and under tray to create a beautiful back end, while the fairing's highlighted triangular main side panel and superb use of colours only adds to the R1's style. It is, quite simply, a beautiful bike – especially in silver.

So with style, natural balance and strong performance, is there anything this generation of R1 lacks? Not really, it is an excellent example of how when you get every component of a motorcycle working together instead of fighting one another, the end result is something very special indeed. If you are after a road sportsbike to ride and thoroughly enjoy at a brisk pace, the 2002 YZF-R1 should be right at the top of your shopping list. 

Verdict 8/10

As a road sportsbike, the balance and mid-range offered by this generation of R1 is hard to beat. A really lovely bike to ride that also looks pleasingly elegant.

- + MID-RANGE GRUNT, REFINED NATURE, LOOKS
- LACKS THAT R1 WILD SIDE; PRICES QUITE HIGH FOR SUCH AN OLD BIKE

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FEATURE

WORDS: DANGEROUS IMAGES: CHAPPO

PROJECT MILLE: PART 2

Having nearly set the Mille alight, Dangerous decides to seek some professional help.



There's a time and place for a fire, and in my garage, on my Mille, wasn't it. I'm easily distracted at the best of times, but hearing the Aprilia boom into life for the very first time completely consumed me... so much so that I didn't clock the leak from the fuel tank drowning the rear exhaust manifold. To prove the old adage wrong, there was smoke, but thankfully no fire. Just at the point of robbing the contents from my daughter's sand pit to smother the inevitable flames, the excitement seemed to edge off quicker than the atmosphere in a room after Boothy's told a joke. I was buzzing, not just because I'd avoided the great fire of Horncastle (my hometown), but because I'd been in disbelief that this box-of-bits bodge would actually work. Better still, to my primitive ear, the motor didn't sound too bad. But what did I know? When it comes to 60° v-twin motors from the turn of the last millennia, my knowledge is up there with the best ways to make geraniums flourish. I've come into this world of Milles with a hell of a lot to learn, often left scratching my head as to what's right, wrong or generally considered the done thing with them. I'm not a chancer, especially when it comes to motorbikes, so the time had come to seek out some expertise and to get my RSV a much needed health check. Speak to anyone about Aprilias and there's one name that typically arises: Griff Woolley. He's a guy who's been around these bikes since day dot, kicking





Spending time with Bruce often causes this reaction...

off his love for them as an official Aprilia UK technician, before opening up his own service, tuning and development centre, AP Workshops (Aprilia Performance). A quick chat on the phone was all it took to convince me there was no better bloke to contact, or person to look over my bike, so a date was set, the van was loaded and a three-hour drive to Tamworth got underway.

From the moment the AP Workshops' doors were opened I was immediately made to feel right at home, with a cuppa slotted into my hand as Griff and his mate Angelo wheeled the Mille on to an empty workbench and lofted it up in the air. In the company of the venue's immaculate Factory Racing Tuono, RSV Mille SP and Nitrous-powered Gen 1, my bike looked a real eye-sore, but the only criticisms were coming from my mouth. Griff just took it all in as I reeled off the reality of the build, told him what I was hoping for and asked him whether the project had any potential? Of course it did, or at least to his experienced eyes. "To be honest, I was expecting it to be a lot worse," was his consoling answer, before the tool box got unlocked and the first job of the day was set to get underway.

The gist of the visit was to get the bike running right, to check there were no blatant flaws and to send me home in a state of reassurance that when the time came to ride it the Mille would make it further than my garden gate. Arguably, that leaking petrol tank wasn't doing my maiden ride's odds any favours, so off it came, to be replaced by a later Gen 1 plastic unit I'd bought for £60. Although the tank shapes are different, the pumps cross-over impeccably, and the similarities don't stop there. A common issue with Gen 1 Mille tanks is the warpage of the plastic aperture where the pump slots in. That turned out to be the cause of my fuel leak, and the reason why the bike's previous

owner had invested a year's supply of Araldite to try and plug the gap. It might have worked short-term, but there was only one way to solve this particular quandary, and Griff was straight on the case. While a new pump seal was being plucked from his stores, he set about gauging whether my new tank was just as knackered; it was. "It's the ethanol that does it," he explained. "It causes the plastic to lose its form and the next thing you know your tank's leaking like a sieve." A hot air gun, a straight edge and a bit of muscle proved the tonic. He carefully set about warming the aperture evenly before manipulating the plastic back into form, checking the face with a straight edge as he went. Ten minutes later, and with the fuel pump ridded of any trace of Araldite, the time had come to slot the new seal into place and screw the pump on to its new home.

With the fuel leak a distant memory, a gallon was fired into the new tank before Griff turned the ignition key and thumbed the starter. It gave the occasional bark, but failed to fire into life, which was a little concerning. Even with a booster pack helping to crank over the massive pistons, there was more sign of life on Mars than my Mille. I must have got lucky back home; or fouled the plugs in the process; or simply imagined it had actually started. Nestled on the side of the rear subframe was a bent length of metal. "That's a pretty rare find," Griff chuckled. It was the bike's original tank prop, and it came in really handy as the front of the tank was unscrewed to get to the cylinders beneath it, using the bar to loft it up out of the way. Being the original Rotax motor, my bike had dual spark plugs per cylinder head; the idea being to ensure the most even burn at the point of combustion. When Aprilia updated the Gen 1 they improved the cylinder head shape and managed to bin-off the need for additional plugs, while factoring in bigger



Straight talking.



'Do you like my hole?'

COUNTING THE COST

In life there's always a price to pay, and for this project there is no exception. Here's what we've spent so far:

Used fuel tank	£60.00
Samco radiator coolant hose kit	£155.66
Samco oil hose	£30.54
NGK iridium spark plugs	£41.70
Silkolene Comp4 (4 litres)	£43.21
HiFlo oil filter	£6.22
AP Workshops Air Box Kit	£120.00
Used rear shock and linkages	£40.00
Used Fireblade stand	£30.00

valves to increase the motor's performance. In time, I'll maybe look at upgrading the cylinder heads to the later types, but for now the main focus was checking the state of my bike's plugs, and replacing them if necessary. They weren't the prettiest, but I had seen worse. Aged 16, my mate had convinced me to drill the airbox on my RS50 for added induction noise; the end result being my bike ran so hot the plug's electrode melted.

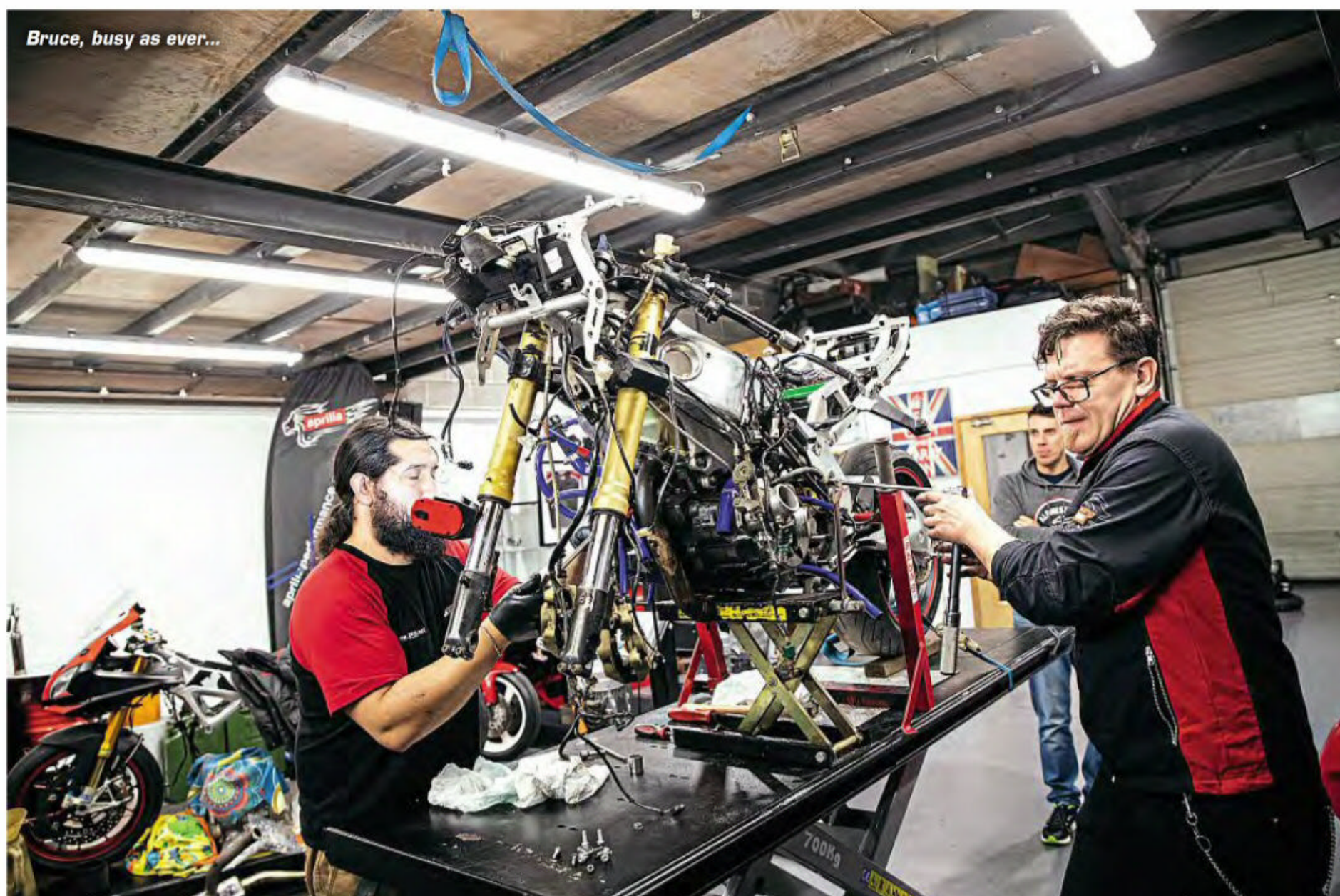
Back to the point, fresh NGK Iridium plugs were fired into the mix before Griff hit the starter once more. In an instant the motor barked back into life, sounding simply awesome once more. It pulsed along around 2,000rpm, hunting a little, but not sounding notably ruff or in pain. "That's not bad that," Griff reaffirmed. "These early Milles can sometimes have a rattling clutch basket, but yours sounds sweet. The cylinders are a little out of balance though, so we'll work on evening them out." The original plan had been to run the bike through a few heat cycles at this stage before fettling any further, but the next crisis soon hit. There was an oil leak from the forward cam cover, trickling a steady flow of golden nectar on to the front tyre. On face value, it looked like a simple



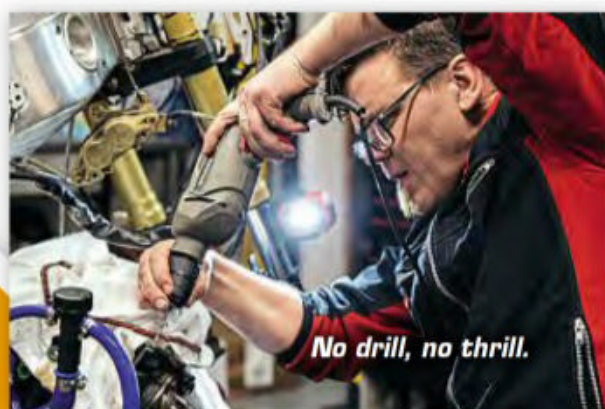
Internal probing...



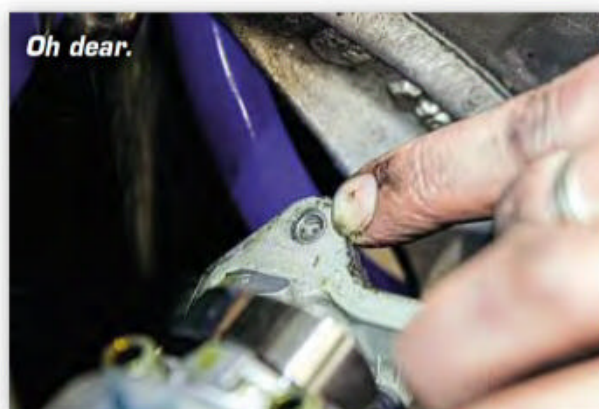
Smoke... but no fire!



Bruce, busy as ever...



No drill, no thrill.



Oh dear.



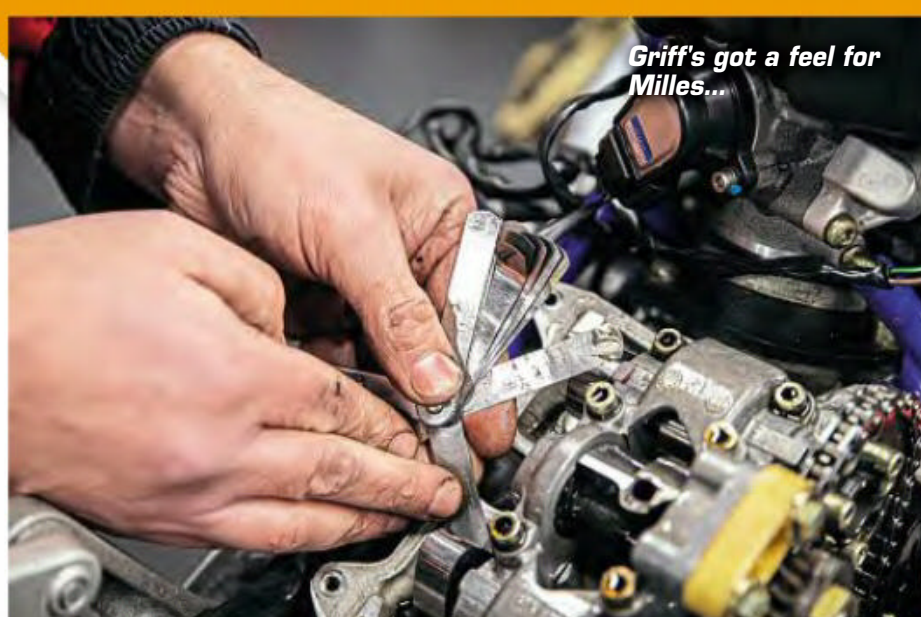
Basically Pac-Man.

fix – a lone cam cover bolt was missing – but nothing in life is ever that straightforward. It didn't take long to work out the missing bolt had been snapped in the cylinder head, with the only solution being to drop the motor to drill it out and tap it. The clock was ticking and it was at this point that AP Workshops really came to the fore. "How do you feel about a late night?" was the question, but before I'd even had time to answer, Griff and Angelo were setting out their stool in readiness for the major operation that was now on the cards. Engine lifts were found, tools were lined up and the bike's coolant was drained from the newly fitted Samco hoses I'd fitted before heading to AP. The original thought had been to pivot the engine downwards on the rear, bottom mounts, but even this wouldn't allow enough access for the awkwardly placed, snapped bolt. The only solution was to drop the whole motor, and that proved a pretty big job.

Without wishing to bore you with the ins and outs, this was one of those times when you realise someone knows their onions. The procedure was an exact science, and the drilling and tapping proved just as clinical, ensuring no debris made it into the vulnerable motor. Eventually the time came to reverse the past process and slot the engine back into place. It was a job I wouldn't have wished on anyone, but Griff and Angelo seemed to thrive on completing it, ready to then crack on with the next part in the process – checking the valve clearances. The job itself wasn't too arduous, removing the cam covers to get at the shims and lobes with feeler-gauges. As luck would have it the tolerances were all spot on (inlet between .22-.28mm / outlet between .12-.18mm), so no further effort was required



Technology has moved on a bit.



Griff's got a feel for Milles...



Level of excitement, out of 10?



Our mate Angelo (AKA Smiler).

in that department, but Griff took the time to turn the motor over by hand and check there were no issues with the cam lobes while he was at it – such as flat spots or wear on the coating. There was nothing to report.

The Mille's engineering is pretty exceptional. It was a trailblazer for many technical features back in its day, and was one of the first fuel-injected bikes to hit the market with impressive results. Ok, the metal-clad ECU might look as though it was developed to withstand a nuclear bomb, but behind that hard casing is some great electrickery. Angelo popped the ECU's cover off and seemed quite pleased to find an FR100SV EPROM (Small Valve – as in the early Mille motor) fuelling chip plugged in. This is a fundamental enhancer to the ECU and the general running of the bike. At a

higher state of tune (such as when you mod the exhaust collectors with added slave chambers), different chips can be added, but for us at this stage, it was exactly what was needed. We were working to a firm foundation and ready to adjust the bike's fuelling. "One of the things I love about Milles is their set up's analogue," buzzed Griff. "Look here, these two screws trim the fuel supply to the cylinders." He went on to explain that the fuelling was typically balanced with the bike's idle lowered to around 1,500rpm, tweaking these screws and altering the injector duration until the motor sounded just right. As the dials were altered, I could hear the impact it made on the motor, which slowly but surely sounded more and more harmonious with every turn. There was no need for a special gauge, a computer or

any other piece of gadgetry, Griff knew exactly the note he was after, and once he was content he'd achieved it, he moved on to the air bleed valves on the throttle bodies and continued the fine tuning. Pre-adjustment, I'd revved the bike before the engine was dropped – it wasn't bad. Once this process was done, the pace the motor picked up revs seemed a whole lot sharper. To maximise the fuelling properly, we'll have the bike on a dyno in the future, but for now it was singing exactly how we wanted it to.

From a mechanical point of view, the bike proved sound. That was the fundamental reason for heading to AP Workshops, who'd given the bike a good going over, had sorted out some pretty fundamental gremlins, and had even tidied the loom neatly into the correct routings... but they weren't finished yet. Another common mod of theirs is to fit their bespoke designed airbox kit. The standard bike's airbox is disproportionately small and struggles to provide enough air for the hungry v-twin motor. The solution comes in the form of a K&N air filter (which I already had), a rubber seal and a laser-cut frame that clamps the rubber seal to the bottom half of the airbox. The seal meets with the underside of the fuel tank and the consequence is a much larger airbox cavity. It's a brilliant product and a great solution to an inherent Mille problem, taking a matter of minutes to fit and costing £120 including the filter. The next upgrade was to my rear shock. The early RSVs had a primitive Sachs shock that got a significant improvement when the Gen 1s were updated. I'd managed to get hold of one of the latter types for £40, including the altered linkage plates, so in it went. The final addition was a Fireblade (2004-2007) sidestand. For such a considered design of bike, the stock sidestand seems like

the kind of warped toy you'd find in a Kinder Surprise; it's useless, standing the bikes too vertical and making them vulnerable to toppling over. The Blade stand is that bit shorter and an easy fit, so it's the common substitute. The more I look into the world of Milles, the more of those types of hacks I find. They're seldom big money, but they're often very innovative and most people are always really keen to share their ideas. The alterability of the Aprilia makes it more versatile than a Swiss Army Knife with a kitchen sink strapped to it. I like that, and it's the reason my brain is constantly ticking, looking at all the different ways I can make the bike exactly what I want it to be. The guys at AP Workshops offered loads of great suggestions, literally firing them out as we drew a close to a long, hard day (for them, not me), as we loaded the bike back in the van and bid farewell. The drive back was a thoughtful one, reflecting all the great things I'd learned and considering what part of this puzzle to pursue next. There's a long way left to go before this bike crosses the finish line, but we're off to a good start, and in between a busy home life and plenty of flights to test fresh metal, I'm ardently putting every free hour in to make this build brilliant. From an engineering point of view, we've got some serious work to do, fitting the bike with new forks and altering the rear swingarm, but the cosmetics are in need of some serious attention. I've been collecting/buying loads of fairing panels and necessary parts in readiness for a trip to my mate Clive at Rapier Paintworks in Hull. He's never short of ideas on paint design and has been mulling over how we can blend the original Mille spirit with a modern twist. All will be revealed next month, but I'm pretty excited with what he's got in mind. **EB**

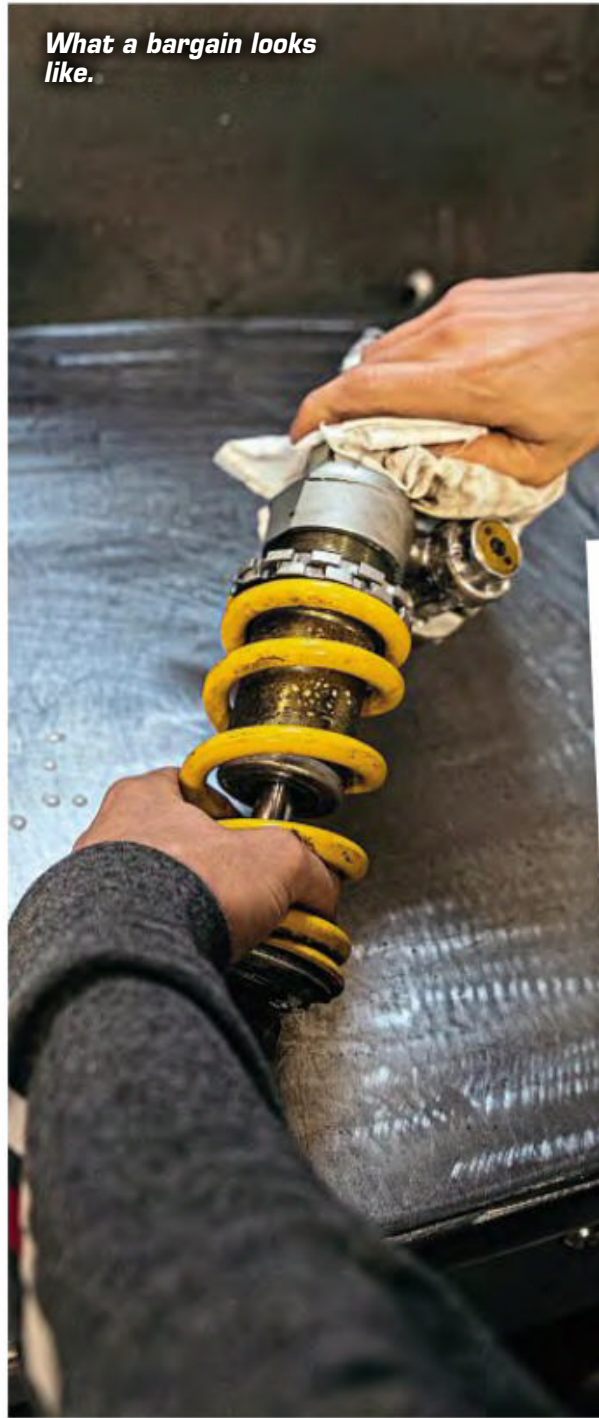
The Aprilia was treated to a Gen 1 Airbox Kit.



'I think you missed a bit, just there.'



What a bargain looks like.



THANK YOU...

A massive thanks to AP Workshops for letting us loiter and witness first hand their brilliance with Milles. If you own one, or any Aprilia for that matter, these guys should be your number one point of call for servicing, tuning or track prep. Their knowledge is massive and their kettle is always on.

Tel:
Web:

01827 285500
www.apworkshops.co.uk



That bit closer to the finish (or start) line!



Can you tell he's a motocross champ?



WORDS: CARLOS IMAGES: JEZZA MORRIS/BSB

TEN MINUTES WITH...

GRAEME IRWIN

With not one, not two, but three Irwin brothers lining up on the British Superbike grid for 2020, things are bound to get exciting. We caught up with Graeme, the newest addition to the Tarmac racing scene, to find out more about the ex-motocross champ...

FB: So Graeme, tell us a bit about yourself?

GI: Well, I'm not sure what you can and can't print these days! For those of you who don't know me, I'm one of four brothers in the Irwin family. We all race and ride, but Glenn and Andrew are probably the most well known. Where those two went on to road racing, I went down the motocross route, and have done a load of stuff on the dirt. I did alright off-road; I managed to bag the British

Youth Championship, the British Masters Championship, won the MX Nationals two years on the trot and even a few Irish and Ulster titles. In 2017 I won the British MX-1 Motocross Championship, which is essentially the off-road version of BSB, but when I moved on to the world scene in 2018, I had a few big injuries, which really messed things up. I broke my scaphoid pretty badly and even after a load of surgeries it really was a nightmare when riding off-road, but it

gave me the opportunity to go and try my hand at road racing.

FB: So was road racing just a fall back, or did you always want to do it?

GI: No, I always wanted to go and do road racing! It's always been my aim to go over on to tarmac, but it wasn't how I wanted to end my motocross career. It's just one of those things though.



FB: You went straight into National Superstock 1000 last year. How much experience did you have and how hard was it?

GI: I don't think you lot are going to believe me, but I was in the very deep of the deepest end. I showed up at the official test at the beginning of the year and I hadn't actually ridden a road bike for a few years, or even seen my race bike, and in my first session, I was out with the superbike boys in testing as they combine classes! It was pretty heavy going, and I had to get my eye in as soon as I could. It was tough, but nowhere near as bad as the first race. Like, for starters, as there were so many entries I had to qualify, like chuck a new rear tyre in and go for it, and it all took me by surprise. I got on the grid, but I'd never even done a club race, so had no idea how it all worked; like I know it sounds stupid, but I didn't even know if the lights went out at the start of a race! I mean like, did they flash, or what? When do you go? And how does everyone know where they are on the grid? I remember riding round on my out lap really slowly as I had no idea – it was just so different to what I was used to. Mind

you, I had to do it; I had just left the world championship in motocross, and I was 27 so I didn't have time on my side to mess about. I managed to get better over the year though, and managed to qualify sixth at the last round, which wasn't too shabby!

FB: Wow. So what are your goals for this year, and why the jump into Superbike?

GI: To be honest, I always wanted to be on a superbike for this year. Last season was about learning the craft, how it all works and finding my way around the tracks. It's so different, but has a lot of similarities, but I think it might actually be a bit easier for me on the superbike, in a way. I've never been told how to ride a bike or had any help in that respect – like I've never had the data and stuff to help out. You know, so to know where I can brake harder, accelerate earlier and stuff to take my riding to the next step. With Aaron in the team being an ex-rider he can help with feedback and explain it easily – it's a big thing that made me want to go ahead with the team, and the bike has a really good engine, so it's definitely a

competitive machine. I've got a mountain to climb, and I'm not going to say I'm going to do this or that, but I'm looking forward to climbing that mountain. My goal is to be the first person to win a British MX and a British Superbike championship!

FB: How much help is it having Glenn and Andrew as brothers?

GI: Oh, it helps massively. Last year, Glenn actually bought the bike for me that I raced! I can say that it honestly wouldn't have happened without him. Glenn and Andrew always believed in me and it made a massive difference in getting me on the grid. They made the transition easier for me by helping with my riding too, although a lot of the time when I was riding, they're racing as well, so they're too busy to be constantly helping me out. Our dad used to be a professional racer and he's a massive help as well.

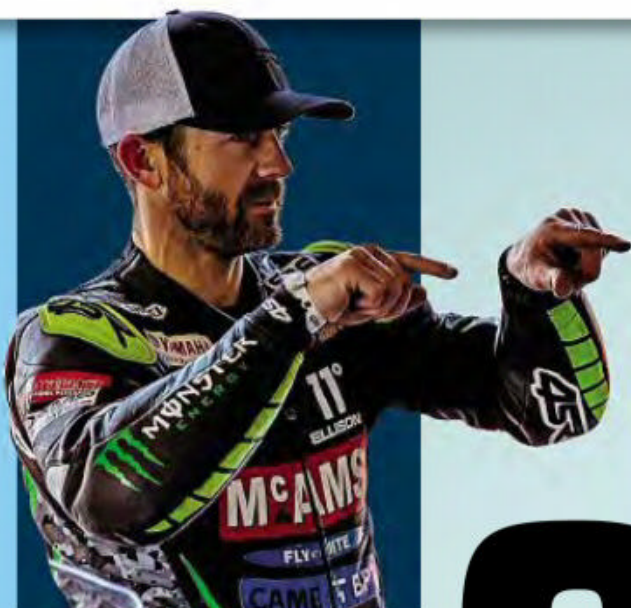
FB: Who's the quickest?

GI: Woah, we'll have to wait and see now we're all on tarmac! If it came down to a last lap dash, I really don't know – we'd always all be hard. Especially if it's for bragging rights! It's not just us three now either, as our other brother races in the Ulster Superbike Championship now. At the end of the day we're four different characters, but we're all really close; but then again, rule number one is beat your teammate... and your brothers.

FB: How's the training been going for this year?

GI: Really good actually! Last year I went in to the season with quite a bad wrist injury. This year I've done quite a lot more riding, and even raced at Arenacross, which is good for keeping sharp on two wheels. I feel like I'm back to my normal self, attacking it the same as I would a motocross season – last year I went in blind. 

Track craft



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WORDS: DEANO ELLISON
IMAGES: FB ARCHIVE

HOW TO STAY SHARP.

It takes more than just a twist of the throttle to go fast, and stay fast. So, if you've spent time and money learning how to ride quickly on track, here's how to stay sharp when you're not riding...

Winter training is a commonly used phrase in biking, not just because riders need an excuse to go somewhere hot over winter, but because it's important to keep your mind and the muscles you use for biking in good shape the whole year round. This is because having too much time away will affect your performance and no doubt your confidence when you do get back on the bike – meaning you'll feel very rusty. So with most of your racing heroes off to Spain or Portugal for a month's intensive MX riding before the season, or even the long haul to Texas for seven days of flat track racing with Colin Edwards at his boot camp, it all just seems a bit extreme (or just a dream) for club racers and track day riders to be doing the same – but twisting any old throttle over the winter months can help you in so many ways. Once you've had a few takeaways, beers and blowouts and the dreaded Christmas is well and truly over, you will soon feel ready for some time on a bike, but the UK tarmac circuits are all closed and

there's just a handful of Euro track days available... so you need to get a fix elsewhere. Or maybe it's mid-way through the year when work is too manic or money's a little tight to take on a trackday. Whatever the reasoning, it's important to stay sharp – and here's how to keep at the top of your game.

See, there's a whole host of things you can do to stay sharp, and I've considered certain off-track training that can still benefit your track skills and improve, or at least maintain the sharpness you had towards the end of the season. Some rest and a break from racing can be needed, as it gives your body time to heal after any injuries you've sustained and also time to reflect on what you might have done differently with the benefit of hindsight. Once you're feeling settled, you should manage your diet (try Paleo) and keep up the regular gym sessions for cardio, core strength and general conditioning for when you do finally get out on your bike again. But, there's no substitute for time in the seat and there's a load of options if you want to

improve your competitive edge before the first race. I always had a motocross (450cc 4T) bike with a spare set of Supermoto Wheels, a mountain bike and a road bike for smashing out the big miles, and between us, I also used a Nintendo game that was developed to improve hand-to-eye co-ordination. It's funny actually as it did improve the more I used it, but that was many moons ago and there's going to be something else out there by now, so maybe check your phone's App Store. Otherwise, here are my recommendations...

Good practice for the mountain!

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Small, but mighty.

Pit Biking

Okay, I'll be honest, I've never tried pit biking, so I won't go into great detail. It's a great concept though, and will certainly help with throttle control, understanding the benefits of transferring bodyweight, better execution of racing lines, and all while taking place in a sociable and competitive environment. Don't forget, racers need to be immersed in this kind of friendly competition if we want to improve and strive to be the best we can be! These little 4T pit bikes (originally designed to ride around the pits at MX events) are relatively cheap to buy. There're practice tracks all over the UK, actually more than 20 now, and about four championships I know of where you can enter a race series all-year round. »



“BEFORE YOU KNOW IT,
YOU’LL HAVE YOUR R1
SIDEWAYS INTO THE
MELBOURNE LOOP”

Must've been an outlap.

Mountain Biking

Being from the Lake District, Mountain Biking was part of my upbringing and was certainly good for general fitness and a good, cheap buzz coming down the hills. Downhill runs are great fun and can be absolutely exhausting if you put in the effort, and these runs will teach you how (or how not) to pick the right line and keep up momentum. It takes a while to understand the best lines and to manage how much or little you pedal in between jumps, berms and turns – and it can be a slow ride home once you’ve burnt your legs out. This will improve your ability to look ahead and pick shorter, faster, safer lines for a quicker time and even just make you better at executing a pass on another rider.

Supermoto

I don’t know how popular Supermoto is now, but the winter series I competed in a few times was pretty hardcore and taught me so much about riding around problems and adapting to changing conditions. Real supermoto is definitely more suited to the MX riders, but some of the Tarmac-heavy circuits can give road racers a chance to slide and drift at a higher speed than MX, but at a more controlled speed than on a Tarmac race track, because you’re on a much slower bike. Your brain has more time to process what needs to be done in order to get a controlled slide we all dream of (like the late Craig Jones #18), meaning that before you know it, you’ll have your R1 sideways into the Melbourne Loop whilst training the front brake towards the apex.

MX

My advice is to find a good-quality practice track that isn’t too technical and only has relatively small jumps. If MX is going to be completely new to your winter or summer training programme, then be sensible and just find a flowing track so that you can learn the basics of riding an MX bike. Pro-MX riders make the big jumps look easy, but that takes time to master and you could end up hurt or just completely put off. So, if you do plan on buying an MX bike, maybe start on enduro courses, or go to the track with a plan of how long your sessions will be (not always possible because of organised sessions/groups), how many sessions you will do and also log your times; no matter what, you need to see if you’re getting faster, more consistent and then if it’s feeling easier. I would vary my sessions, so I’d do a few 30 minutes max effort (Similar to a BSB race distance x two) and then a one-hour endurance session to help improve strength and concentration, trying to be within a second of my fastest lap.

Flat track

Since attending the Texas Tornado Boot Camp with my brother two years ago, I’m now convinced this is the best preparation for road racers, and have seen a number of flat track riders make a successful switch to road racing. The key to success is finding the absolute limit of grip and this can only be achieved if that bike is under load at all times and you’re balancing an amount of grip, with an amount of slip. As with road racing, you need to ensure that there’s no delay between

releasing the brake (rear brake only if you’re on a genuine flat track machine) and opening the throttle, and you can get even better results if you’re skilful enough to overlap your opening of the throttle with the release of brake pressure. Riding a flat track bike on a TT course is also great for working on trailing your front brake and setting up the wheels for getting good drive out, so backing the bike in is the equivalent of turning late and aiming for a late apex. You can try this out at Pete Boast’s Champions Flat track School near Lincoln, or go big and head to the Texas Tornado Boot Camp – I’ve just come back from there, and it’s a blast.

Road Cycling

Having a good-quality road cycle was a treat for me, as you can eat up the miles whatever the weather and going out in groups can make it a little more competitive, whilst still doing your body good by stretching your legs and lungs. Road racing does require strong legs as your quad muscles get a good workout when you’re on track, and if you don’t have sore legs after a race meeting or track day, then you can’t be getting off the bike enough, or gripping on to the tank tight enough. Getting your body and mind conditioned to exercising for long periods of time is also beneficial, not just for the length of a race or qualifying session, but the whole weekend is a constant run of decision making and adapting to ever-changing circumstances, which can be a real drain mentally. This is why you see so many professionals cycling, and for Cal Crutchlow, it’s the only form of training he does.

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Hand-to-Eye Co-ordination

As mentioned earlier, there will be games for your smartphone to help improve your reaction time and hand-to-eye co-ordination and they certainly won't do any harm, but I can't guarantee that you'll automatically find 0.5s per lap. Just remember, it's all about making personal improvements that will then lead on to an overall better performance. Other games such as golf are also good for improving your co-ordination, as it's one thing smashing a 300-yard hit at the driving range (or attempt 59 out of 60 balls), but playing the game by the rules will make you a better decision maker and help you plan ahead because you don't want to waste a shot.



Marquez, eat your heart out.



TYRE TALK

What on earth is cold tear, why does it happen, and how do you stop it?

If I got a pound for every time someone came to me complaining of cold tear on a race tyre, then I'd be a very rich man. Most cold tear we see is tyre temperature related, but incorrect compound selection also plays a factor in a cold tear occurring as well. Let's look at correct compound choice first....

All proper race tyres are compounded. In some brands we have as many as four fronts and five rears to choose from! The reason for this, is we need a tyre that suits different track surface severity and track temperatures depending on the grip level and longevity we desire. Be aware, circuit conditions can change by the hour, never mind by the day, so what works in the morning, may not work in the afternoon. When the track surface is hotter, we would (as a wide sweeping rule as each rider is different) go harder on a Pirelli front, and harder on the rear. With Michelin, we would go soft on both front and rear. Always ask your tyre professional for advice on compound choice, as the wrong one could end up costing you a couple of hundred quid in a short space of time!

A temperature related cold tear occurs when the surface of the tyre is much hotter than the core, which is the bit a few mm below the surface. Race tyres are designed to operate at temperatures higher than 85 degrees, but if the core is sitting at a lower temperature, it means that that elements that make up the tyre compound won't work together correctly. Pretty quickly you'll find yourself with that thick and heavy horrible looking 'tear' type wear. The hotter outside of the compound literally tears itself away from the colder core.

Tyre warmers need to be used to help a race tyre get to operating temperature. Running a race tyre with no tyre warmer, or not long enough on the warmer before use, is a quick way to damage a tyre with cold tear. Look at what your tyre manufacturer recommends with regards to heat management and stick to it. If they say an hour at 80 degrees, don't expect them to work properly after 30 minutes at 60 degrees. Getting the whole tyre, the air in it and the wheel at the same temperature is what you are aiming to achieve. If we can get everything working at a constant temperature, correct compound selection and with correct pressure, we will get the tyre to perform as it was designed. So how do we work out the temperature?

For us, we need to know the core temperature. You've probably seen the technicians on TV – or me in the NLR paddock – sticking something pointy in a tyre. This is called a pyrometer. We use this to measure the core temperature below the

surface to make sure the compound is working correctly below the surface. If you buy one of these to use, good on you, but make sure you don't stick the needle in too deeply... you can puncture the tyre!

Another thing we need to consider with cold tear, is pressures. When you are using a race tyre, you need to be on top of both the tyre temperature and pressures.

Pressures are the source of most tyre issues we see, and more often than not it's because riders are running the tyre pressure far too low. What we need to do, as amateur racers and track day riders, is to start by working within the recommended tyre pressure range set by the tyre manufacturer.

To resist cold tear occurring, especially at the colder start and end to the season, we need to increase the pressure in the tyre pressure! Starting with a higher tyre pressure forces the tyre to reach a higher operating temperature.

All levels of professional racing now have minimum pressures they are allowed to go to and they are monitored by TPMS sensors. Moto2 on Dunlops is 22psi. WSBK and BSB on Pirellis is 24psi ... worth considering that if these riders are only allowed to run to these parameters, maybe having more pressure in a tyre is worth considering.

A final chapter in the cold tear section is looking away from out-and-out race tyres for your track day use. All of the above is relevant to a race tyre.

We all love the look and the feeling of a race tyre, but many cases, it is just not the correct solution to your needs. A simple thing to remember about race tyres is that if you cannot generate good operating temperatures in the tyre, grip will suffer. We don't want that!

A more track day focused tyre is what you are best considering. Something that is designed to work with YOU, not a BSB racer.

More and more we are seeing track day specific tyres being made, but they aren't just cheap, hard-as-concrete compounds like so many seem to think. The latest generation of track day tyres have technology in them far superior to some race compounds. High contents

of silica help with generating heat and providing high levels of grip, very quickly. These latest generations of product are the manufacturers understanding the needs of the track day rider. You want a tyre that grips, gives feel, lasts well, doesn't cost the earth and won't tear...

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Tech Talk

WORDS: CARLOS IMAGES: FB ARCHIVE

KNOW YOUR... ELECTRONIC SUSPENSION

We caught up with Andy Notman, Product Manager at Öhlins Suspension, to get the lowdown on all things electric in the suspension world; how it's evolved, how it all works, and why it could be the future, both on and off track...

FB: Tell us a little bit about your electronic suspension?

AN: Well, there's lots to talk about! Simply, it's suspension that is controlled electronically. There are two main systems: the Smart systems, and the regular electronic systems. The Smart systems are found on high-end sports machines, like the Ducati V4S, Yamaha R1M and the Honda Fireblade RR-R SP. These systems constantly adapt themselves to the environment on the go, talking to the machine's CAMBUS and IMUs, while regular electronic suspension, like you might find on a touring machine, is just easily adjustable at a standstill – so you could maybe change from having a one rider set up,



Shocking.



If you don't know the difference between yokes and yolks, Dzus and Zeus, or suspension and suspenders – email the experts letters@fastbikes.co.uk



to a map that adjusts to work with a pillion and luggage.

FB: Öhlins is now on its third generation of the Smart electronic suspension. What's different between this, and the second generation?

AN: From a hardware perspective, the biggest change is the front fork. Because more or less, the entire structure of the front fork is new. The damping system is a pressurised system, whereas the previous one was an open cartridge, which actually makes a massive change on the amount of confidence the rider has on the front end. It makes for much more feedback, alongside a much plusher ride.

FB: How has the software changed?

AN: It's still reactive suspension based on the 2nd generation kit, but it's got a whole new algorithm package



which is faster than it used be – the calculations take place every 10 milliseconds, so it's constantly determining the need for damping and changes. Of course, as long as you're riding in a straight line or in a corner, the system won't change the settings constantly, but it detects what event is about to take place by listening to the IMU, ECU, wheel speed sensors, etc. It also eavesdrops on the CAMBUS with the control unit. It helps the bike anticipate pace, and other things, and although the previous generation had this, we've been looking to refine it – especially making the transition between the different modes more seamless. Hopefully, you won't even notice that the bike provides the extra support – if you change between the modes though between A1, to M1 (in manual) you will feel the difference, and it's on you to make the bike feel right. The system will effectively be able to apply more support than you'll ever be able to do though, because it changes on the fly which you can't do.

FB: Does electronic suspension weigh a lot more than standard suspension?

AN: It does, but not by too much – and compared to the last system, the target value when coming from the open cartridge to a pressurised system meant that the maximum weight we could increase was 500g, for the entire forks – and we ended up well within that limit. As there's additional hardware and a more complex system it's slightly heavier than a manual set up, but it's definitely a price worth paying.

FB: What is the difference in pace between manual and electronic?

AN: We see this asked a lot, but in all honesty, the electronic

stuff is quicker, no question. As an example, in testing we usually find that an average rider will benefit more with about one second a lap, but a professional will still find around half a second.

FB: If you want electronic suspension, you need to buy a premium bike. When, if ever, will Öhlins create a standalone electric kit that you can buy off the shelf?

AN: It's difficult, we have done a few retrofit applications, for example on the previous GS1200, we made a package with two electronic shocks and an ECU, but since the work that goes into the calibration is so extensive, we also need to have a very close cooperation with the manufacturer to utilise the tech properly. For this reason I don't think we'll be able to have a Smart system retrofitted, but we could have a non-smart system fitted easier, in the future. Funnily enough, there's been some law changes that give freer access to a machine's CAMBUS signals as well, which could technically make life easier in the future.

FB: How hard is it setting up a standard setting, for so many different riders and weights?

AN: It is difficult, but of course there's still the ability to change the actual springs, and bits like that – so a faster, bigger rider will need a stiffer spring than a slower, smaller rider. When creating a kit for a production model, we set up the manual side of things first based on the bike's weight, its weight distribution, and then with test riding we fine tune it all. We try and base it around an average ride, but all our high level kit has hydraulic preload adjustment as standard to make it the best it

can be. It's worth remembering that it's not always wise to get hung up on a number, like a spring weight or something on set up, as different bikes will need different settings due to their individual capabilities.

FB: With the electronic forks, can you still get hands on with leccy suspension, so say can you adjust the airgap?

AN: Yes of course, to a point. Obviously the spring rates and everything can be altered easily, alongside the airgap and oil levels, but when it comes to re-shimming, and things like that, it becomes more complicated as the damping system is pressurised. This means you need to charge it and you'd need some special tools, but the forks are still made in a way that you can unscrew the top cap, release the pressure from the main cartridge and do all the things that a regular rider would probably want to do.

FB: Is anyone racing on the technology?

AN: Not so much yet, but it will come, we think. When it comes to the classes where it's not permitted to have electronic suspension, we have two options where there's a pressurised FKR kit, where the fork is replaced and is a little easier to work with and that's the advantage. Or you can just get a non-electronic top cap and use the forks as is without the Smart system.

FB: What's the way to make the best of leccy suspension on track?

AN: Find a good base setting, and then apply to a few different maps – then make minute adjustments to each. You can then change them on the fly and feel them between laps. This means you can test back to back, and find an optimum direction! 

You & Yours

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WINNING RIDE



↑ S Robin & Zara A pram...

After an 'unexpected' arrival, my better half (Frances) made it clear that one of them had to go, hence the glum look in the pic. Reluctantly I had to agree, so one of them did go! Well, Zara never liked that pram anyway! It's a win win. Good job Frances has a sense of humour, otherwise there would be no chance of any further accidents! Keep up the good work.



↑ Steve Garrod Suzuki GSX-S1000F CMC Claycross



↓ Mikey James Yamaha MT-10

Essex on the MT-10 with Max on his ZX-6



← Janette Jolly Honda CBR650

Popped to the Suffolk Food Hall for lunch on Sunday – it's under the Orwell bridge near Ipswich – to test my custom seat with added gel and comfort foam to stop my bum going numb and to test the Ultimate ear plugs we ordered. They were rubbish on the way there, but after my OH gave me a demo of his over lunch they were great on the way home... inserted the right way round. It's ok I'm a natural blonde.



Nick Burridge
Triumph Daytona 675

Went out with my mate Ben Service into the outback of Dorset. I was on my Triumph Daytona 675, he was on his BMW M2. He stopped to take some pics!



Derry Hourihan
Yamaha MT-10

Priests leap. Old track across the mountains in west Cork. On my MT-10



Colin Ian Hutchinson
BMW R1200GS

Boxing Day trip up to Fort William from County Durham with my eight-year-old son for two nights. We just needed to get away from everything and it was great.



Alan Greef
Kawasaki ZX-10R

A run round the Lincolnshire coast and a fast dash back in the pouring rain on Sunday. It didn't look too bad... until it dried!!



Adam Wicks
CCM Spitfire



Adam Wicks
CCM Spitfire

A chilly one up the Ponderosa in North Wales on the CCM! Still... it was worth the frostbite.



Becky Rose
Some sort of dirty Yamaha...

Went to Action Trax, was a little muddy in places.



Chatter

↓ STAR LETTER

Hi, Fast Bikes Team. It's not every day that you're in hospital, awaiting your first-born daughter to come along. but what a way to pass the time than reading a great magazine with pics of yourself. lol. Not sure how many hours Bruce spent looking for a pic where he was at the front. lol! Good read lads. well done.

FB: This made us laugh in the office! Pictures of Bruce at the front don't appear often, so he uses 'em when he can. And by the way, congrats!



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DREAMS

Hey there, been reading Fast Bikes for as long as I can remember and recently found myself in the fortunate position to buy my brand new dream bike! An Aprilia RSV4 RF. Got to say your magazine defo helped me make the choice and damn what a bike! Also had to include my favourite picture of the best trackday ever at Snetterton last year! Can't wait to go back there. Many thanks and keep up the good work!

Antonio Landolfi

FB: What a bike... we absolutely love the RSV4 – good choice! Glad you're enjoying the mag, and I'm sure we'll see you out on a trackday soon enough...



NIPPY?

Hi FB Folks. Here's my new toy, Gixxer 750 out on its maiden ride (for me anyway). A nice January blues blast in the beautiful Scottish winter sun, no better way to get acquainted. Even managed a cheeky ice cream during my Lossiemouth seaside stop; who says Scotland is too cold!

Graham Murdoch

FB: We're loving that stealthy colour scheme! Although we can't say the same for having ice cream in the freezing cold...





Want your greatest riding cock-up, triumph, or just the missus' naked form immortalised in these hallowed pages? Email letters@fastbikes.co.uk

AN OFFER WE COULDN'T REFUSE



Here's my 2018 Aprilia Tuono with RSV4 RF forged wheels and other subtle mods, near the beautiful Wind River in Skamania County, Washington State, USA... Fabio's backyard! It's true! Male supermodel and fellow motorcycle nut owns a huge forest property nearby... no wonder? There's unlimited riding, roads are sculpted beautifully, gorgeous scenery abounds and best of all little traffic! That is until all my new friends from Fast Bikes magazine come over and stay at my humble little estate (just west of Fabio's place!) to use as motorcycle base camp for your own Pacific Northwest motorcycle adventures. Heck, I'd even loan Boothy or any of you blokes my Tuono, Ducati 1098, Husky FE 501, Yamaha wr250x or scooters or bikes to see the sights or watch the Washougal Motocross Nationals. Come on over, the hot tub's ready...

Brett Flemming

FB: Everything about that sounds good... we just need to find an excuse to get out! Mind you, we're not sure we could let Boothy in the hot tub without arm bands...



AS SEEN ON FACEBOOK

Fast Bikes magazine: Jorge Lorenzo signs with Yamaha, as their official Test Rider. Could this be the vital step they need to get them back to their winning ways?

Rob Bellingham Given that he always takes at least a season to get used to a bike, will he be a good test rider?

Simon Gunton This is only going to be a good thing. Lorenzo was strong on the Yamaha when he was there. Should have never left for Ducati imo but his riding style suits the Yamaha and it will be good to see what he can do. Waste of a decent rider if he chose not to come back for one reason or another.

Dave de Vries For sure that Lorenzo can help. Since he left Yamaha the results of the Yamahas kept decreasing.

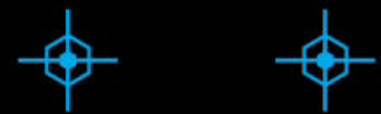
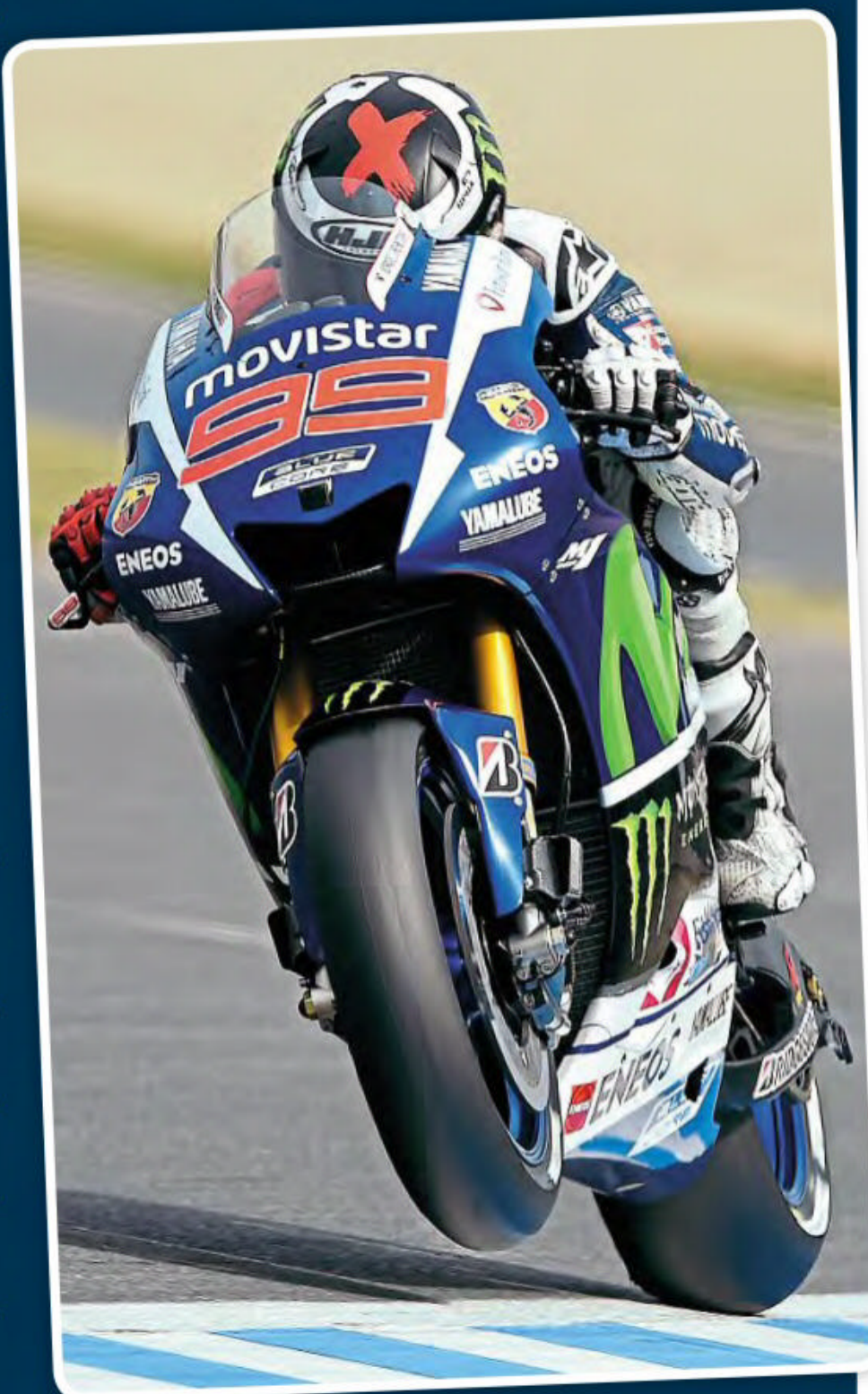
Ivo Colier This could be really good for Vinales and Quarteraro. They have a similar smooth riding style as Lorenzo does.

Eggbert Coyle Good move for Yamaha!

Adrian Jackson This is as surprising as DFS having a sale.

Ben Miller I'm no Lorenzo fan, but I have to say that's a good move on both parts.

Dave Haines Lorenzo steered the M1 in the right direction, Rossi got lost in the past and poor Vinales has been ignored for too long.



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WORDS: DOWDSY/CLIVE WHITE/DANGEROUS
IMAGES: MORTONS ARCHIVE/MARK WERNHAM

A FRANK EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

Italian WSB ace Pierfrancesco Chili retired more than a decade ago, but he remains a hero to loads of Brit race fans. We caught up with him a few weeks ago for a brilliant chat about his past, present and future...

THE UK might have left the EU, but we still love all our European chums from 'the Continent'. Especially the legendary racers who've come from Italy down the years. Valentino Rossi is top of the Euro-pops of course, but guys like Giacomo Agostini, Giancarlo Falappa and the sadly missed Marco Simoncelli have all grabbed the imagination of Brit race fans.

Pierfrancesco 'Frankie' Chili is definitely another man on that Italian hit list. He first appeared on the world scene in the late 1980s, dabbling in the three GP classes – 125, 250 and 500 (the 80cc class ended in 1989). But it was later on in the mid-1990s that he found his spiritual home – production-based superbike racing. Chili had some fiery tussles with Brit legend Carl Fogarty on Ducati 916 racebikes, before switching to the four-

cylinder Suzuki GSX-R750 at the end of the century, then jumping back on to a Ducati for the final years of his race career in WSB.

He stayed at the sharp end for much of the 2000s, and his never-say-die attitude in races, plus his genuine, amiable demeanour off track endeared him to fans worldwide. Those chiselled film star looks made him a big hit with lady fans too, we understand, especially when he stripped off, and threw his leathers into the crowd post-race. His saucy reputation was further cemented after a post-race scrap with Foggy at Assen in 1998, Chili clad only in a shorty bathrobe.... Factor in WSBK's enormous appeal in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s – when Brands Hatch was attracting 100,000 fans – and you see why Frankie was, and remains, a big hit with the Brits. ➤➤



Fast forward nearly 15 years, and Frankie was guest of honour at the Classic Bike Show in Stafford, just after Christmas, giving us the perfect chance to catch up with him.



He tasted (and sprayed) his fair share of champers over the years.

FB So, Frankie, is it good to be here in Blighty again?

“Racing in England for me was like racing at home – the English guys even gave me the nickname Frankie back in the day! It was very friendly, the crowds were amazing and I really enjoyed that aspect – GPs didn’t have the same feel. One of my favourite memories was when I was fighting Nori Haga on his Aprilia, and Regis Laconi on a factory Ducati and I was on a privateer bike. We pushing hard, and Laconi crashed, so it was just me and Nori. And in the last corner, Haga was always a little bit wild! I still had to go for it, and I managed to overtake him on the outside out of Clearways, the last corner going into the last lap. I managed to keep him behind me and won the race! It was amazing with the flags and everything, and I even ended up throwing my leathers into the crowd, I was so happy! I came back, and then the mechanics told me I was second. I couldn’t believe it. But on aggregate timings Haga just beat me. I’m so glad they changed it now, as I was so disappointed – but I was happy as in the press conference Nori even said that I had won, and not him.”

FB An impressive career at the very top – but how did you get started? Was racing your passion as a child?

“I was ready to race at 14, but I lost my father then and my mother didn’t really like the idea. I went through everything, you know, soccer, baseball, and when I got to 17, the soccer team asked me to sign a

contract to play with them. I said, ‘No! I’m only waiting to be 18 so I can race a motorcycle’. When I was younger I used to work with my uncle repairing bikes, and I started the love affair back then.”

FB You spent a lot of time riding for Ducati in WSB – which must be the pinnacle for any Italian racer. But did you ever fancy trying out the other Italian superbike from the time, Aprilia’s RSV Mille?

“I was not interested, from what they were like when I was in 250GP. They didn’t really like me or give me the best kit, so I stayed in Ducati, and then went on to Suzuki. We had big trouble in the beginning, but we fixed it and it was good. I remember one time Troy Corser took me out and I went up to Aprilia and wasn’t very happy with them!”

FB Hindsight is a great thing – and history shows the V-twins would dominate WSBK, and remain competitive even into the 1,000cc fours era. But do you ever wish you’d stayed on twins, instead of switching to the Suzuki GSX-R750 four-cylinder bike?

“The year before, in Superstock, that bike [the Suzuki GSX-R750] was amazing, so we actually expected to win the championship. Yet as a superbike, the year later when I arrived, the bike was just no good – we went from expecting a championship to winning just one race, at Donington. This wasn’t a good year, but it happens.”

FB The switch from Grand Prix racing to Superbikes isn’t an easy one. How did you find it back in the 1990s?

“To be honest, my jump was very high at the beginning of my career. From winning European 125cc to going straight into 500cc was hard work! I was still fast on an old bike though which was good, and I was able to be faster than the riders with more experience as I was young and brave. I improved, and was



Chili being chased by Foggy (2) and Corsa (11) was a common sight.

“HIS SAUCY REPUTATION WAS FURTHER CEMENTED AFTER A POST-RACE SCRAP WITH FOGGY AT ASSEN IN 1998, CHILI CLAD ONLY IN A SHORTY BATHROBE”



A dedicated follower of fashion.

better and really enjoyed it – I wanted to continue, but after the big crash at Spa I missed five races, and I was never going to get a good ride. I went down to 250cc, which I really didn't mind – a bike is a bike! I won on the Aprilia as a privateer, and the year later I had a better bike, I was on pole six times, but we had lots and lots of DNFs. I never really showed my potential in GP racing because of this, so I stopped for a year.

“The following season I asked for a test on the superbike; I thought it was a backwards move and I wasn't very engaged, but I managed to get a ride – I got a win in my first year. At the end of that, someone from GPs came to me and asked me to ride, but I stayed in World Superbike because I'd found my love for it. It permitted me to ride until I was 42.”

E You mention that accident at Spa, which signalled the end of its status as a GP circuit. What happened there?

“I crashed in the corner just before the last chicane, which was incredibly fast. The weather conditions were very iffy, and I went through, sixth gear, down one gear and fire in, and the Tarmac was slightly wet. Immediately the front went, and I had Kevin Schwantz behind me; when he came in he was saying that it was a big disaster. I was sliding and sliding, and then went straight into the rails, and I broke a load of bones, from my vertebrae to my feet. I went to the hospital nearby and wanted to come straight back to Dr Costa at the Clinica Mobile! He put me to sleep as I was in a lot of pain, and when I woke up, he'd worked his magic on things to fix me.”

E Do you miss those types of 'scary' fast circuits, like Monza, Hockenheim, Spa?

“Well, places like Hockenheim were not good for the fans, because a lot of time is spent in the middle of the trees – with three giant straights. For the racing I missed it,

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After a brief spell with Suzuki at WSBK, Franki soon returned to Ducati.



“ I STOPPED THE RACE BECAUSE MY BODY COULDN'T DO ANY MORE. IN MY HEAD I WAS STILL STRONG AND COMPETITIVE. ”

and it looked good on TV, but now the mentality has changed. Now they make the tracks like stadiums, because they want people to see all the track. I never wanted this type of circuit to stop, but I like that they modify to make it safer, and move the barriers and things.

“Monza was good with good corners and it was a great track. People used to tell me that I was the best at Parabolica, the last corner, and I love that corner! I’m not a fan of things like the Melbourne Loop at Donington Park. For me, a hairpin is for motocross riders! Spa for me, must come back. It’s changed a lot with lots more space, I mean, even Mugello used to have absolutely no run off! I remember when I raced there, I went off the track at the last corner where there is now loads of space, and I literally went straight off, over a tiny bit of gravel, and into the tyre wall.”

EB How good were guys like Neil Hodgson and James Toseland back then?

“Haha, I was the older guy there! Toseland, Hodgson, you know, the younger guys, were good. I did find that they used to go slower mid-corner, and then shoot out though! At the end of 2006 I stopped racing, and in 2007 Toseland came to Monza with the Ten Kate Factory and had my logo on the helmets. He won the race and he gave it to me! It’s in my office, before all of my helmets. He did lots of learning and I tried to teach him a lot, so that meant a lot to me.”

EB Do you have much memorabilia from your time racing at home?

“I’m not a collector, so not much, no. I’ve got one set of leathers from each year, and I’ve got some helmets, but I don’t have any of the racebikes. If it’s at my home, it will just become dirty. I like riding them, rather than just having them to look at.”

EB Do you still ride? Do you go fast?

“Funnily enough a few years ago we did a thing with Continental tyres, and there were lots of us – Jeremy McWilliams, Troy Bayliss, Chris Vermeulen. They were all very fast. Step by step I was getting faster, but then I was getting very close to crashing! I remember McWilliams coming in and telling me to calm down a bit as the tyre wasn’t quite made for what we were getting up to on it.”

EB Riders seemed to be more passionate and open back in your day, nowadays it maybe feels more corporate. Would you agree?

“I think the world has changed a lot. Maybe I’m old, and not able to network in the way that riders are now. My wife has Facebook... I have email, and that’s about it. I think it’s about the money now. I started to race to beat people. A lot of younger riders go there now because their father wants them to race. Of 100 young riders, two or three might continue. Most of the time, the father will invest a load of money, and lose it – I know Italian riders that have sold their houses and haven’t been able to make it. “There’s a difference in riding now though, the technology has moved on a lot and they need it, otherwise they’ll spend too much time crashing. Someone like Lorenzo has more like our old school style, whereas the new riders like Marquez are very stop and go.”



EB What do you think of the electronic aids used on road and race bikes now?

“The first time I used traction control, it was home-made in 2006 on a Honda. We tried it at Qatar for two days. First day, first lap, the lap took about 10 minutes! It was like a pitlane limiter. I kept asking for more, and more, and after two days of work, they said that we were in a good range. I do nothing, I open the throttle and it doesn’t move! In the end I actually asked for a new tyre, turned the system off, and I was over a second a lap faster...”

“For me, traction control is now too much. I believe it was more fun for me when we had none, but the younger riders won’t know what it’s like riding without it. Even in Moto3, the bikes have electronic aids so it’s the way the world is going. Two years ago I went to World Ducati Week and I had some laps on the V4 – I got on it, and they said the clutch is only for the start. I didn’t understand that you just don’t need to use it any more, as it’s what I would rely on into corners, and out of corners. I was throwing down the gears with no throttle or clutch and it didn’t even lock up!

“All this stuff is new and against my old style, but it must be good. It’s better for safety of course, so that matters. I rode a Suzuki GSX-R1000 World Superbike a few years ago at Eastern Creek, and it was cool – it would spin out of the last corner, and wheelie after, but it felt safe, and the bike looked after it without me needing to do too much. With an old school 500, you must respect a lot. When the power come in, it was very hard, and it was almost always a highside, whereas now that doesn’t happen so often.”

EB What do you think of the World Superbike championship nowadays?

“In Misano, our beach is a couple of miles from the race track. When I raced there, a lot of people came there, or when MotoGP is there now, it’s completely alive, and crazy and everyone’s revving bikes and being



noisy. But, at World Superbike, there’s nothing... Everything’s changed – it’s not just the different rules and one race on each day. The Superpole race is good because you have to push hard, which makes good racing. It’s almost better than the two longer races, as nothing really happens. Jonny [Rea] is good, riding good, and is a step above. Bautista lost his head, although Ducati help with that. They push and push, whether it’s riders or engineers.”

EB What happened for you after you finished racing, and why did you stop?

“I stopped the race because my body couldn’t do any more. In my head I was still strong and competitive. In the middle of 2006 I broke my pelvis, and from the X-ray it wasn’t completely straightforward. In 2006, I wasn’t allowed to put the leathers on and off by myself as my leg wasn’t working properly. It meant I couldn’t change direction like I wanted to as well, so I went for an operation. Unfortunately, it became infected, and it’s still there now and it comes out to this day. When I work through summer, I still have to change bandages every day.”

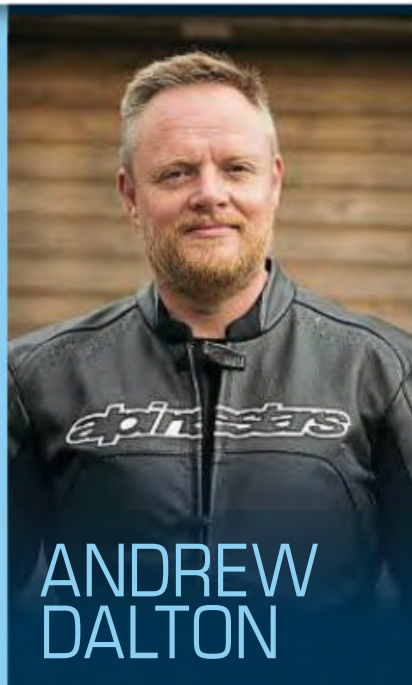
EB Was it tough giving up?

“Nothing changed, it’s everything I knew, and we have a really close family who have all grown up around it. I never thought too far into the future and I think that helped me out a lot. When I stopped racing, or even before, we had a set up, which was a beach near Misano – now we manage it with the rest of the family and I invest my money. I bought a hotel that was old and in bad condition, knocked it down and I’m building it up again nicer, with 14 apartments by the beach. If you’re coming over for something and want to stay, then let me know! Leon Haslam, Jeremy McWilliams, John McPhee, we like having the riders!

“But I don’t like being around the tracks now and not being properly involved – it’s not enjoyable for me.” **EB**

Legal

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PAIN IN THE ARSE

Crashing is one thing, but getting hit by an unobservant road user is something else.

Q I fully expect you to call me a bit of a bellend, but this is what happened. I was going too fast and crashed my bike. I slid along the carriageway, without doing myself any real harm and then, a bit stunned, I lay in the road for a couple of seconds before starting to get up. Coming in the opposite direction were five lads in a Transit van, two loose in the back, three squashed into the front, and as I was picking myself up from the middle of the road this van scooped me up and carried me for about 15 metres. As the van decelerated with me on the front, I rolled off it, but the van was still going forward and managed to drive over my buttock, giving me a condition which I have genuinely never heard of called 'battered buttock syndrome'. I have got no broken bones, but even eight months post-accident I am still having difficulty walking. I completely accept that I ballsed the corner up, but I have been back at work on light duties for two months, and my own medical team are saying to me that I am going to be struggling doing my job in the future. Is it worth bringing a claim, or should I just suck it up, because it was my balls-up?

A You should bring a claim. You correctly observed that you ballsed up the corner. You were wholly responsible for being sat in the carriageway, but you had come to a stop, and was clearly on the road in front of the Transit van, which ran you over. The fact that the Transit van had a couple of illegal passengers in the back of the van makes no difference, unless, for example, there was evidence that the van was dangerously overloaded, which meant it could not steer or brake. It would have to have had some

kind of causative affect. It has not. However, your case against the Transit van driver is that you were an unusual, but foreseeable hazard. You could just as easily have been a punctured cyclist and looking at the photographs of the collision scene the driver of the Transit, had he been looking, had a clear view of over 200 metres, but he just did not see you, or if he did see you, he saw you far too late.

In so far as your 'battered buttock syndrome' is concerned, whilst it might sound comical, it is an injury that I have seen quite a few times. It is a serious condition. The subcutaneous fat under your skin has been traumatically forced into your muscle. Muscle is supposed to sit under fat, and the two do not mix very well, as you have found out.

My strong feeling is that if this case were to go to Court the Judge would find each of you equally to blame. You for putting yourself in the position of danger, completely of your own making by overcooking the corner. The driver of the Transit van clearly was not concentrating, because if he had been, he would have seen you and come to a halt. Also, I note the way that you dealt with the Police, and this actually plays to your advantage. Telling the Police that you completely cocked up the corner has had two advantages. The first is you are patently honest, and the second is the Police Officer decided against

prosecuting you for driving without due care because you immediately 'fessed up'. You would have had to have given some explanation as to how you came to be sat in the wrong carriageway on a 90-degree bend with your bike in a hedge, and there are not many explanations which would exonerate you, and had you come up with some self-serving story I suspect it probably would have coloured both the Police and potentially the Judge against you. Your case is actually quite simple. There are not competing causes to your injury. You can only get 'battered buttock' by a crush injury, and bearing in mind there is a crush mark of the approximate size of the front tyre of a Transit van across your backside, it really is not open to the potential Defendants to argue that you had injuries caused by your slide. Your only serious injury arises from the impact of the Transit on you, and whilst a Judge could give a variety of outcomes, I think the most likely outcome is you receiving one half of your damages, with you bearing one half of the blame. And as to calling you a bellend, if any reader of this magazine has not had a moment when they've just got away from overcooking a corner, more by luck than judgement, I say they are either talking cobblers or reading the wrong magazine. I've done it, so if you are a bellend, so am I. I was just luckier.



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NEXT MONTH

KAWASAKI Z H2

It's big, it's bad and it's the hypernaked we've been waiting for. Check in to see why we're raving about Kawasaki's supercharged Z H2.



PIPIN' HOT

There's a lot of tech, graft and thought that goes into making a motorcycle exhaust. We take a closer look at this red-hot topic.



METZELER M9RR LAUNCH

We hit the road to see if Metzeler's latest addition is the fast road tyre of our dreams.



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SUPPORTING ACTS



If you're a fan of the British Superbike Championship, then you're going to want to get down to a round and take in the atmosphere. And if you're making the effort to get down to a round, then you're going to want to enjoy the whole programme, rather than just waiting for the flagship superbikes; you might even find that some of the best racing comes from the lower echelons of the paddock.

See, it's not about the capacity of the engine, it's about the capacity of the racing, and whether it's the noisy little 250cc Moto3 machines or the whopping 1000cc 'stockers', there's always a corker of a race to be had... so what are you missing out on?

BRITISH SUPERSPORT CHAMPIONSHIP & BRITISH GP2

Who doesn't love a bit of Supersport racing? Often the closest battles come from the 600cc championship, and although there've been rumours of the class dying, there's absolutely no signs of it happening here. Last year, Jack Kennedy won the title with unrivalled dominance, but as he's moved into the Superbike arena, expect things to get real tasty, with the likes of Brad Jones, Lee Johnston and Rory Skinner all looking to build on last year's form. If it's half as good as 2018, we're in for a treat... and that's without even mentioning the GP2 lads and lasses.

HEL PERFORMANCE BRITISH JUNIOR SUPERSPORT CHAMPIONSHIP

Following on from its success on the World and European stages, the Junior Supersport Championship really has taken off with BSB. Unlike a lot of championships, budgets are comparatively small here, which means that there's been an influx of new riders, based upon talent rather than just cash. The racing here is great, and is the perfect place to see the art of slipstreaming...

PIRELLI NATIONAL SUPERSTOCK 1000

Now these races really aren't worth missing. Filled with riders and machinery that wouldn't look out of place in the Superbike championship, the National Superstock grid has always been like a shark pool for talent, that makes for some seriously close racing. With the arrival of the Fireblade, expect our man Tom Neave to go well, while he'll have his work cut out against the likes of former champ Coopes, and the Team Green duo of Tom Ward and Chrissy Rouse.

BRITISH TALENT CUP

For 2020, the British Talent Cup has replaced the Motostar championship as the sole GP-style feeder class, which is good news for everyone – the Motostar machinery was getting a bit out of hand. Using the same, stand 250cc Honda machines gives every rider an equal springboard, and as an incentive, two riders will also be given the chance to take part in the Red Bull MotoGP Rookies Cup selection as well. Expect some big battles here!

DUCATI TRI-OPTIONS CUP

The Ducati Tri-Options Cup has been running for years now, spanning over the 848, 899, 959 and now, the new Panigale V2. It's a one make series that always promises some hard racing, with near enough stock machinery. There'll be a seriously packed grid, but make sure you keep an eye out as I'll be racing in it this year...

PIRELLI NATIONAL SUPERSTOCK 600

Who doesn't love Superstock 600 racing? I mean, just head over to YouTube and watch the highlights of the final round, and you'll be hooked for life. The smallest stock championship has always been a massive stepping stone for riders looking to move on in their career, and it's looking like 2020 is going to be no different. Expect some new names to be hard hitting this year...

MOLSON GROUP BRITISH SIDECAR CHAMPIONSHIP

Sidecar fan? Well, they don't come much better than the British Sidecar Championship at BSB, which has a whole host of incredible teams, professional set ups and some really tight racing.



The kid is still quick.

WORDS: JACK FAIRMAN PICS: POLARITY



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DORNA MOTOGP WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

TESTING TIMES,
DESPERATE MEASURES

Exciting times, readers. It's almost back. No, not the hotly anticipated fourth series of This is England, no, not the McDonalds Supersize Meal, not even the Return of the Mack. So what's almost back I hear you ask? Yep. You guessed it. MotoGP 2020 – the biggest season yet, with a belly-busting 20 rounds.

If you spend much time stalking the MotoGP social media profiles you'd easily be forgiven for thinking the winter has been all about holidays in the Alps and the Maldives with supermodels and rock stars. That's true to a certain extent, but the teams and riders have been hard at it over the close season with their development programmes and the traditional pre-season tests.

It's always a bit risky drawing too many conclusions from testing. You never know who is testing what – whether it be chassis updates; different tyre compounds; tweaks to the electrical wizardry; riders chasing lap times; the list goes on. It's also worth bearing in mind that it in no way resembles the time attacks of a blood and thunder qualifying session. Nevertheless, it always throws up one or two interesting nuggets that can teach us a thing or two. Here's a few things we learned from the most recent shakedown and tests.

Yamaha mean business. That is clear. They are throwing everything behind mounting an assault on the might of Marquez and Honda. Sure, newly signed 2021 Factory star Fabio Quartararo topped the timesheets all three days – that wasn't hugely relevant. They've also signed recently retired five times World Champion Jorge Lorenzo as test rider, a role which he appears to be relishing. Rossi and Viñales also seem delighted with this signing as they know just what Lorenzo brings to the party. With Rossi, Viñales, Quartararo, Morbidelli and Lorenzo all working in the same direction, Yamaha truly have assembled MotoGP's answer to the Avengers. Couple this with a holeshot device, a new motor

for a bit more top end and the old GOAT Rossi set his fastest ever lap of the Sepang circuit. It would appear there's still life in the old dog yet.

The biggest revelation of testing was the all-new 2020 Aprilia RS-GP. Given the current goings on with their staffing issues I don't like to make too many references to Italian thoroughbreds on anabolic steroids, but holy moly this bike is quick.

Aleix Espargaro has never been one to hold back with his criticism in the past, but he was positively beaming. Only 0.35s from the top of the timesheets and nearly two seconds quicker than his best in the 2019 race. Christmas has come early for the Spaniard. Or is that late? I don't know, but his bike is quicker than a greased cougar from the planet big bollocks.

While we're on the subject of juiced up Italians, the career prospects of Bradley Smith are currently looking pretty bright, thanks to our chiselled Italian friend. A ride in Moto E is locked up and it's just possible that he could inherit the second Aprilia seat at just the right time. Fingers crossed Bradders.

KTM also look to have found something. They had some funky aero on show and have made a number of changes to both the frame and the motor. Able to run in the 1:58s, something is clearly working. The decision to pull out of Moto2 and Moto3 could well prove to be their best move yet. In Austria it appears the hills are alive with more than just the sound of music, while as far as looks go, the Suzuki's a winner with an awesome 60th anniversary throwback livery. They've not done anything too radical to the bike, with a more subtle development approach to both the handling and minor tweaks to the engine. With Mir and Rins reportedly signed up for 2021, they should be right up at the sharp end again this season.

It's all remarkably dull over at Honda and Ducati. Marquez is still recovering from shoulder

Looking a lot like his brother...



surgery and reported that he's still down on strength and feeling the burn. Rumours persist of the reigning champ needing a second op, but knowing him he'll be topping every session at Qatar before winning the race in typical fashion. His brother made his debut in earnest at Sepang and looked, well, pretty much like a Marquez! Maybe his brother has let him into a few of the secrets to unlocking the unmanageable Honda.

The Ducati looked quick and smooth as ever and it was pretty much business as usual. Ducati's biggest error appears to have been missing out on the cream of the talent for 2021 with Viñales, Quartararo, Rins and Mir all committed elsewhere. It looks like they'll have to promote from within.

The usual caveat of not really knowing where things stand until after the first European Round at Jerez in May still holds true, but with 19 riders at Sepang all lapping within a second, 2020 looks set to be the closest and biggest season yet. Get in there! 

Pit Pass

ULTIMATE ACCESS TO THE WORLD'S RACE PADDOCKS, RACERS & TEAMS

WORDS: JAMIE MORRIS PICS: KAWASAKI EUROPE



@JAMIEMORRIS19



FIM SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

WHO DOESN'T LOVE CLOSE RACING?

World Superbike 2020 is just a couple of weeks away and with all pre-season testing, team launches and rider announcements out of the way, anticipation is building. Many people have said this looks to be the most exciting season for years (don't they say that every year?) and with big efforts from the main factories in terms of machinery and rider quality, it has all the ingredients to deliver.

Kawasaki obviously have to start as favourites again with Rea and Lowes, but Ducati and Yamaha have both looked very strong in testing. Both Redding and Razgatlioglu have been blisteringly fast at both Jerez and Portimao. Honda and the new Fireblade looks to have hit the ground running with Haslam outpacing Bautista in both tests, as well as Laverty and Sykes looking to have made a lot of progress developing the BMW.

The grid is full of high-quality names all aboard decent bikes, so it's all there. But then again, it's not just about the main Superbike class though, as there are two other support classes that run at WorldSBK. The Supersport 600 class is seen as the feeder for Superbikes and produces some of the best racing, while although they have the smallest engine size, Supersport 300 holds the biggest entry list possibly ever with over 50 riders entered!

Now, as far as the 300s go, where do you start? In most of the races you'll find a group of about 15 riders usually split by just a couple of seconds on the last lap, and then it's a total gamble to call a winner – but going on results you have to look at 2019 runner-up Scott Deroue and 2018 Champion Ana Carrasco; they're both back for their third consecutive seasons in the 300 class.

We have to remember that Deroue hasn't finished lower than third overall since 2017, so he will be desperate for the 2020 crown. Mind you, Carrasco will be looking to bring the trophy back home again after a brilliant end to last season. Back in the class after a fairly poor stint in Supersport is Alfonso Coppola. The 2017 runner-up will be hoping to regenerate some of the form that almost won him the championship a few years ago.

A late entry to this year's championship is the Brit Tom Booth Amos. The BSB Motostar champ in 2017 and World championship Moto3 racer last year found himself without a ride after a tough season. But finishes such as an 8th in Australia show his class. It's early to say, but he's my pick of 2020.

But what about World Supersport, I hear you ask? Well, current champion, Randy Krummenacher is back to defend the title – albeit on totally different machinery. He's jumped

aboard an MV Agusta for the title defence, yet there's a list of other riders who I'm sure will be biting at his heels for the crown. Jules Cluzel stays with the GMT94 team and after an impressive run to the end of last season, he will be straight to the front in Australia.

Lucas Mahias looked to have finally got to grips with the Puccetti Kawasaki and the hard fighting 2017 champion will be desperate to bring the trophy back home. Just remember he beat Supersport God Kenan Sofuoglu, and not many people can say that.

Two riders making their way across from Moto2 are Andrea Locatelli and Philipp Oetli. Locatelli joins championship winning team Bardahl, and Oetli sits alongside Mahias at Puccetti Kawasaki. Both rapidly fast riders on their days and both of them good bikes in good teams, meaning all the components are there for them to shine in Supersport.

Another late British entrant is that of Danny Webb. The former 125GP and road racer will be in a team managed by two-time World Superbike champion James Toseland. Let's hope that both of them can jump straight on the pace, as the only British entrant in the championship this year.

So there you go, a brief overview on who I think will be running at the front in 2020. But if it's anything like previous years, and with 50 riders on the 300 grid – it could be anybody! 



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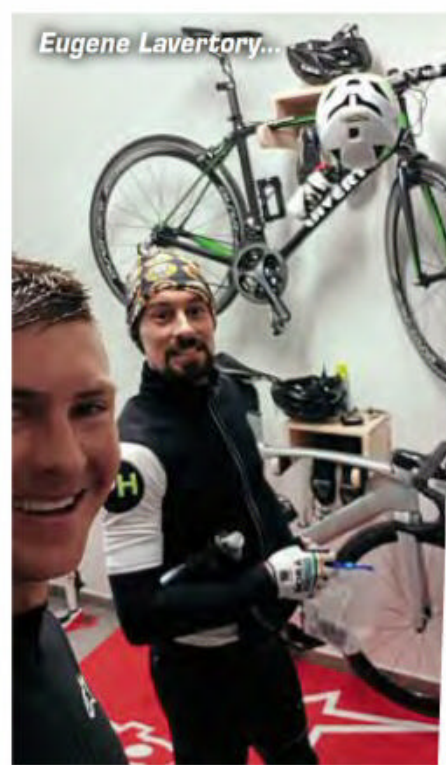


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Christian Iddon



It's the time of year when us racers use our 'need to train' mentality as an excuse to ship out to warmer climates. This year my plans have needed a kind of military precision that would put the most acclaimed travel agents to shame. In fact, once I'm done with my racing I think I may have found my second calling. So, it all starts at the beginning of February. Step 1: get a van, fill it with a Panigale, some tyres, some tools (for someone else to use), my bicycle, two kit bags and a handful of pairs of pants. Step 2: set off in search of somewhere warm and get set for the season ahead.

At the time of writing, Step 1 is fully box ticked. The little PBM Vito is packed to the roof with the essentials for a month away. I'm travelling solo. Starting out with a 650km drive from the workshop to Portsmouth to get the two-day ferry to Bilbao in the north of Spain, followed by an 800km onward drive. Well, that was the plan anyway until Storm Katrina reared her ugly head. Road closures and accidents meant that on a nine-hour trip to Portsmouth, I arrived three minutes before check-in closed. That left me just enough time to find out my ferry was cancelled, and instead of the long sea journey to Spain I was only hopping the Channel to France. Nine hours on a boat in the middle of a storm to France and no sleep in the bank, it was a 2,100km jaunt to Portimao. Not so rock and roll!

Anyway, after 19 hours of solid driving later I finally made it at 5am and here I am, ready for the adventure to begin. I'm starting out with a couple of days of cycling with my WSBK pal Eugene Laverty, who has recently based himself in a nice new pad on the Algarve before my dad and girlfriend fly into Faro. I'll pick them up from there and it's off to circuit number one. A couple of days at Montebianco on the test bike will start things off before I have to fly back to London for an evening (with the missus in tow) for the launch of the 2020 PBM team.

I've not been in the team long, but I already know Paul Bird doesn't do things by halves so we are having our bash at the Shard. Should be epic!

First thing the next morning I'll jump back on a plane to Spain (while the girlfriend gets a different plane back to Geordieland), and by then I hope my dad has found his way to Cartagena (we left him in Spain, remember), and got everything set up for another couple of days of track action. I land at 10am so I figure I should be back on track by noon. Happy days. After we are done at Cartagena, I'll drop El Padre back off at the airport. His mechanic-ing duties duly fulfilled, he can go home happy and I'll be back on my own, to make my way in the direction of Almeria to meet up with friends for a couple of days of cycling.

Then it's back in the van and off to Jerez, where I plan to get three more days on the practice bike (are you keeping up?), and then back to Montebianco ready for the real stuff to begin. The time frame now has taken us up to the end of February. The PBM Ducati boys will have the big rig ready for the BSB official testing and things will be getting serious now. We have three days at Montebianco, a rest day, and then two more days at Jerez, along with the rest of the BSB championship. It will be the first time I'll get to compare myself and my new set up with the guys I'll be fighting against in the championship. It's always an exciting time of year as it's the first time you get to see how the winter prep has set you up for the season.

I already can't wait to get back on the Ducati. Even since my short run out before Christmas I know we have some new parts at our disposal so it will be interesting to see how they work out. Anyway, that's enough from me. If anyone wants me in the next month just leave a message, I'm away on 'business'. 



Neave twins

Whilst the weather's been crap, I've been busy renovating a property on the farm, which has been fun and something a bit different to the usual jobs, but I've not been able to stop thinking about when I can next get out on a bike. I've been doing a bit of trials riding, including a school at Inch Perfect Trials in Clitheroe, which was ace, and some Flat Tracking on the minibike over at the Champions Flattrack School. I've wanted to get out on the MX bike too, but everywhere is too wet!

But the time has finally come, and I'm writing this on the way down to Cartagena for three days of testing with No Limits Racing. I won't be riding the actual Hawk Racing Suzuki that I'll be racing in British Superstock this season, but Steady, my old mate and sponsor, has had a new Gixxer 1000 built that's identical to the one I'll be racing for them, so we are taking that down. We also plan on doing some of the No Limits Endurance championship together on it! Top spanner man Fred has pulled out all the stops to get this bike built in time, so fair play to him, not to mention everyone else that has helped us get the bike ready – we have had some mega help from a lot of brilliant people. Last weekend I spent a bit of time with Steve Hicken, the Hawk Racing boss, when we went to get Steady's bike sorted. They have gone to town with my race bike so I feel like I'm in a good place with everything.

I did look at doing the official BSB test at Jerez with the Hawk lads, but the tracktime alone was too expensive so we thought better of it – if all goes to plan there is plenty to



Slow and steady wins the race.

go at in the UK before we get to the first round of the season; we have got a test at Mallory Park planned, we're doing the official BSB test at Silverstone and then I'm racing at the first round of EMRA at Mallory with the team, just to get my head back into racing mode. That should be enough!

I'm hoping while I'm away my twin brother, Tom, will pull his finger out and start working a bit harder. He's spent that long nursing an injury that his hands have started to go all soft and I think even he's forgotten what he's supposed to have hurt. Every time I drive past the house he has got his feet up on the sofa! We've not done a lot of training together this season, which makes a change, and we've both had a slightly different approach and training programme, so it'll be interesting when we get to round one. I know he is going to be fast on his 'Factory Honda', but there's going to be a lot of fast guys out there and I plan on being one of them.

The first thing I thought after last season was that I wanted to be on a Suzuki for 2020, and I have ended up with the best Suzuki ride on the grid. The season starts now, and it's going to be a good one.



*Who said training doesn't have to be fun.
(Breaking Point Images)*



Gary Johnson

Since my last column, I've spent most of my time over in Morocco with Triumph preparing for the international press launch for the new Tiger 900 models. It's quite a big event because it's a three day launch for each group of journalists so there's been loads to sort out – we have given them a full day of road riding, then a full day off-road, followed by a final half day of road (mainly motorway) riding. So far it's been really good, the bike is fantastic and it's great to spend time with the journalist's from all the different countries. It's always a bit of a culture shock coming to a place like this though, you see some real sights – there are donkeys everywhere you look, camels crossing the road, there are trees full of goats, no joke (I think the farmers are sticking them up there for the benefit of the tourists – they'll do anything to make a few dirhams over here), I've even seen the odd tortoise crossing the road! There are people dressed as Ewoks and Jedi Knights driving Mark 1 Transits and old Mercs round. But everyone is mega friendly and all the villagers always seem so happy to see us, the kids run out and wave when they hear the bikes and even the adults always have smiles on their faces – ok one or two of the kids flick you the bird, but we all find that quite amusing!

We have been doing some long days and it can be quite hard work, but it's in the sun and we get to ride motorbikes, so I can't really complain. As I write this, storm Ciara is in full force back home, so I'm glad to be here if the truth's known. I've spent my days over here looking after the journos with fellow TT racer Joe Ackroyd, we are defiantly A team but I'm in charge – Joe recons it should be a democracy, but I'm pulling rank and calling it a dictatorship, what I say goes.

After this gig, in true Gaz Johnson style, I'm only home for a few days, which I know will feel like a split second, before heading out to a Triumph dealer emersion event

down in Faro in Portugal which should be a good laugh. That will be an event with all the new triumph models, the Thruxton R, the Rocket 3, the Tiger 900 and the Street Triple for the dealers to ride.

Once that's out the way, I'll start really knuckling down to get ready for the race season. I'm still in talks with different people about what is going to happen with the racing job, I'm still on a bit of a blank canvas at the moment, but I have met some good people that might be able to help me sort something interesting out in the near future. Being in Morocco has certainly sowed down my discussions with people as roaming charges out here are horrendous, and being a tight northerner, I can't bring myself to turn my phone on!

Hopefully though, as soon as I'm home we will get some decent testing booked for March on whatever bike I end up settling on. I'm hoping this time next month I'll be able to tell you what that is going to be! 



Gaz's face made them do this...



Slowly does it...



Even the donkey's scared.



It's a strong look.



Steve Parrish



I'm not sure how you lot are getting on, but I'm sitting here writing this from a beach in Cape Town, where it's 28 degrees, there's a nice cool breeze and I've got a gin and tonic sitting in my hand. That's not all bad, is it? Mind you, I'm coming back for the London Bike Show, so I can't wait to get back to all the dodgy cold and stormy weather...

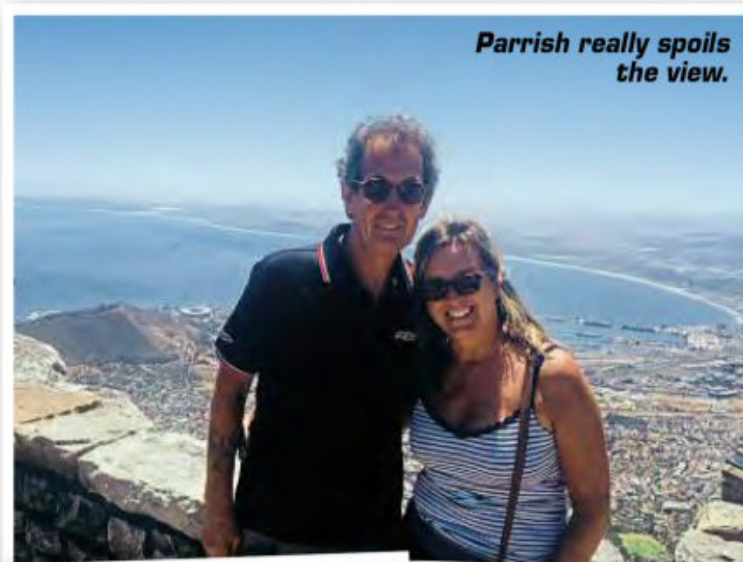
I've got to say though, I do the pilgrimage to South Africa every year and I absolutely love the place. I can't recommend it highly enough; alright, the flights will cost you a few quid, but when you're actually out here, everything is so cheap (the best steak you'll ever eat will set you back about a tenner). I'd definitely recommend giving it a go if you're in need of a sunny holiday away. To be honest, I'm bloody glad it is nice, because the riding I've been doing hasn't exactly gone to plan.

The first track we went to was a place called Red Star, and having arrived, we un-crated the RG500 and went out to spin a few laps of the first session. It literally was just a few laps, though! I didn't even get round three times before the con-rod decided it didn't want to play ball, and wreaked havoc on the engine. I did manage to beg, borrow and steal a few bikes in the meantime, including a gorgeous old Yamaha and a heavy old Kawasaki, but it didn't matter too much, as we were heading down to a place called East London for the second round of riding.

For most of the events here, practice is on the Friday and racing is on the Saturday, so after a good day qualifying, we chilled out on the Friday night to be greeted with torrential rain. It was so bloody bad that they had to cancel the whole day of racing on Saturday as the track was basically underwater!

So yeah, it's not been ideal on the whole bike riding front, but other than that, it's been immense. We've been golfing, swimming, even playing tennis – you know, doing the things that all old fogies do.

Mind you, I've managed to nab a KTM 1290 for the last few days to go and explore, so that should make up for the lack of racing elsewhere.



Parrish really spoils the view.

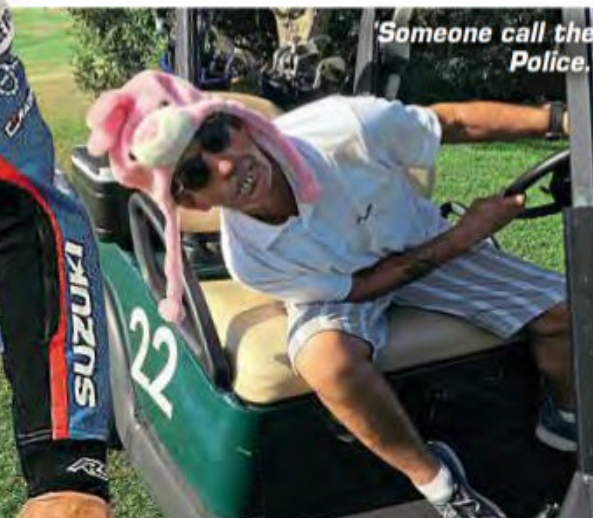
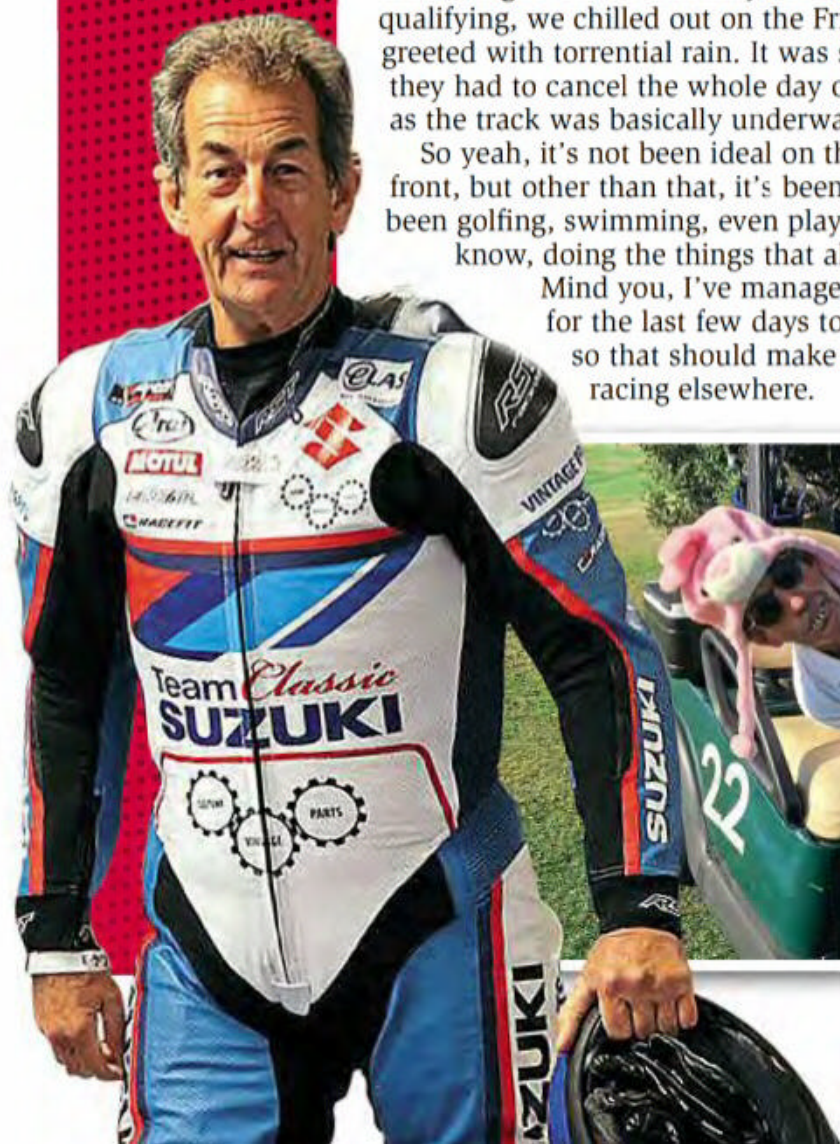


An old beaut.



Grim!

It's also given me some time to catch up on the MotoGP testing, and I've got to say, I'm absolutely buzzing for it to all kick off. I mean, it's looking like it could be the best year yet, especially with KTM and Aprilia going so well... it really did make me smile. I'd like to see some different names and bikes up the sharp end, and I reckon 2020 is the time it's going to happen. Mind you, I still think Marquez is the man to beat to the title. Either way, it's going to be exciting... **FB**



Someone call the Police!



Trailer trash?!



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