

Is the ZXR an oven-ready racer or just junk food? Can Honda's benchmark 750 eat the Greens, stay regular, and make

**T**he world waits with bated breath. The moment is fast approaching. In Akashi, Japan the huge Kawasaki plants are still: thousands of production line workers sit patiently, nervously . . . awaiting Tojo's



# Fast

**Kawasaki's Superbike dream  
pie-in-the-sky? Brown and Thompson  
dial in regulo 10 to dice the carrots,  
chew the fat and talk turkey**

return. Upstairs, in the  
sterilized, air-conditioned  
atmosphere of KHI's top-  
managerial offices,  
immaculately groomed, silver-  
haired supremos sit motionless  
and without expression. The  
only clue to their inner agony  
comes from the light as it ▶



PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GOLDMAN

# Food

reflects off glistening brows  
... where is Tojo?

Across the world, distributors and dealers sit on their sweaty palms – eyes transfixed on telex machines. Soon word will come from Japan, soon Tojo will return.

The security gateman leaps from his chair. Tojo – a Kawasaki messenger since leaving school – is coming! The old gateman flinches as he sees Tojo hang on to a hospital-slide with his denimed knee, another set of his AR125's sports comp tyres succumbing to the combination of Tojo's breathtaking riding and equally stylish port rifling.

The gateman reaches the barrier – but too late. Tojo flattens himself against the AR's bruised tank and his computer-designed custom Arai sneaks under by a layer of lacquer. Fumbling for his radio, the gateman draws heavily on a lungful of synthetic premix. His panting, hysterical voice crackles over the factory PA, cutting through the silence like a machete, gripping and twisting the collective heart like an iron fist:

"Tojo return! Tojo has *Bike* magazine, he has test of ZXR and RC30. Tojo has answer to billion yen question: is it possible to mount 750cc perfection without stumping up the best part of ten grand for it?"

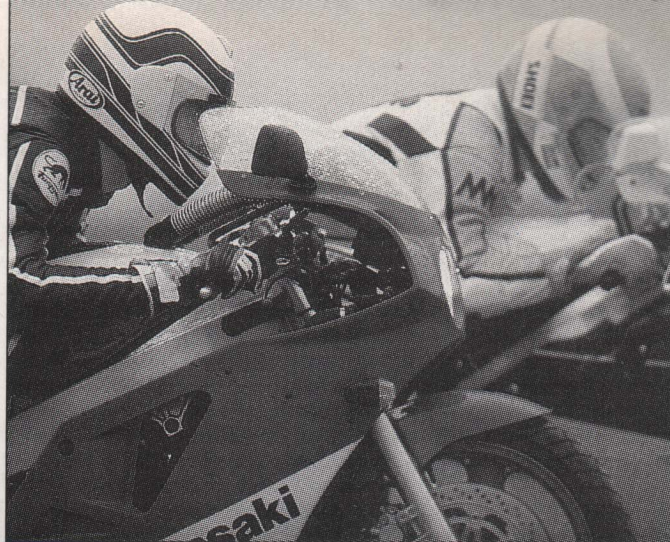
From every corner of the factory they rush for the exits. Tojo sits. 3...2...1, and the factory gushes workers from its bulging doors like water from the Aswan High Dam. Tojo holds his hands high and silence falls over the jostling, heaving crowd.

"I read," he whispers...

## ZXR750: HAVING YOUR CAKE AND EATING IT

**A** sunny Sunday morning in Surrey, and what should have been an enjoyable morning spent scratching round roundabouts and snapping photos was falling rapidly apart. While Timmy Tot-up was sitting in an A3 layby having his RC30 admired and his licence to ride it torn up by the Law, I had screeched Kawasaki's ZXR750 to a halt some miles up the road and stood fuming at the unphotogenic gap where the bike's pillion seat should have been.

Thirty seconds later a car pulled up alongside me and its driver leapt out to announce



proudly that i) he had an RC30 of his own back home in the garage, and ii) he'd watched my seat hump and passenger perch come adrift miles back down the A3 as I'd screamed past in the outside lane, head down and the ZXR revving towards its two-miles-a-minute-and-plenty top speed. He'd been trying to catch the Kawasaki to tell me ever since.

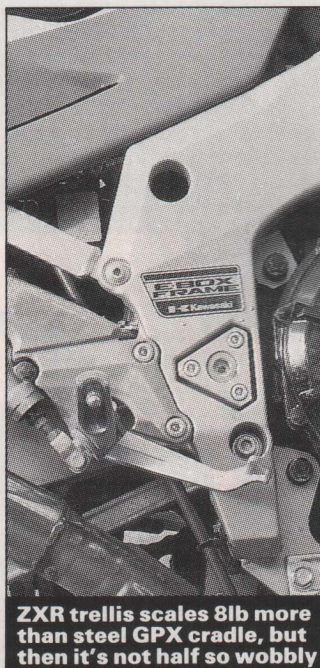
I turned back in a vain search for the seat, cursing my carelessness at not replacing it properly after refitting the plastic cover, and wondered whether the guy would have caught up if he'd been at the controls of his RC30 instead of his tin box. It still wouldn't have been easy: Kawasaki's new entrant in the 750cc Superbike wars doesn't have a fancy four-digit code name or a near-five-figure price tag, but on MIRA's timing straight a few days earlier the mean green machine had shown it had the legs of the tall-g geared RC30 in standing-quarter, top gear roll-on and even half mile top-speed thrashings.

And at least the ZXR750 is fitted with a pillion seat in the first place. With the ZXR, Kawasaki have resisted the temptation to take on Honda and Yamaha's single-seat titanium tracksters in a no-expense-spared scrap. Instead they've produced a bike whose power and weight statistics are nowhere near as impressive but which, at £5299, is far cheaper and is arguably a better, more practical road machine anyway. It too is fearsomely fast and acquits itself admirably at a racetrack, or at least an RC30-free one, as last month's launch report proved.

That should come as no surprise because the ZXR consists basically of a reworked GPX750 motor – watercooled 16-valve straight four, twin cams driven by a central chain – in a butch new chassis based on that of the alloy-framed ZXR-7 racer.

More than 100 pounds in weight and countless thousands in value separate the factory flyer that took third, fifth and sixth places in last season's Suzuka eight-hour from its street-legal reincarnation, but the two bikes share much more than a menacing paint scheme. With its aluminium beam main frame, bolt-on rear subframe, braced swing arm, multi-adjustable suspension and race-tyre sized wheels, the ZXR looks as predatory as almost anything on two wheels.

The view from its saddle shows all the obligatory bizzo cockpit touches to be present and correct: remote-mounted reservoirs for brake and hydraulic clutch; all-important tacho mounted separately from the wimpy and easily-binned warning lights and speedo; milled alloy yoke displaying plenty to twiddle with at the top of the fat forks; and a good portion of ugly but evocative ex-Hoover piping leading from the fairing to holes in the front of the tank,



ZXR trellis scales 8lb more than steel GPX cradle, but then it's not half so wobbly

and thence to the top of the engine. Riding position is less radical than the RC30's, though the clip-ons still pull you forward and down behind a higher and more protective screen.

The ZXR's riding position and fairly harsh, solid feel at low speed reminded me of the first GSX-R750, the machine that shook the roadgoing racer trend into fervent life back in 1985. There's the same sense of purpose about this bike, the same slight buzziness when you fire it up (though vibration from the partially rubber-mounted motor is never uncomfortable), the same subdued rasp from a large silencer behind your right leg. The ZXR pulls impressively from anywhere above 2000rpm, surging forward with a healthy dollop of midrange more reminiscent of Yamaha's similarly-dimensioned FZ750 mill.

Only duff patch is below two grand, where the ZXR falls into a hole in much the way its big-brother ZX-10 does below four. In this case, though, the glitch is at low enough speeds to make it rarely intrusive even in town. Elsewhere the 750 carburets crisply through its bank of 36mm Keihins, stonking up towards its 12-grand redline and 150mph-odd top whack without so much as pausing to draw breath on the way.

The engine is surprisingly unchanged from the GPX lump for something driving an all-new bike with such obvious racing heritage and intent. Peak horsepower is increased by the strength of just one mule to form what is now a 107-strong stable. You could regard that as a pretty miserly gain in the two years since the GPX arrived, especially when you look at what the opposition is now claiming. But if the engine is fast and strong, others might say, then why change it at all? A factory race kit will give a healthy increase in poke, but as yet Kawasaki UK haven't decided which bits of it to bring in or how much they'll cost.

The roadster's bore and stroke figures remain at 68 x 51.5mm and, apart from lightened crank webs to give slightly less flywheel effect, there's very little difference between the GPX and ZXR motors downstairs. Most of the engine changes are in the cylinder head, where under-bucket shims replace the GPX's screw-and-locknut tappets as the method of valve actuation.

The ZXR's press kit ▶

manages to fill a page with the advantages of the new system over the old but I know which I'd prefer. The new motor's reduced valve train bulk, absence of rocker flex and decreased strain on valve guides all sound very impressive, and I'm sure the lucky few riders who cram race kits into their motors will be glad of the marginal performance advantages at mega-high revs. But the normal, road-riding 750 owner is likely to be less than impressed to find that his ZXR's 6000-mile service involves removal of camshafts and purchase of shims instead of the GPX's simple tweaks on a screwdriver.

Most of Kawasaki's development has gone into the new chassis, and especially the e-box alloy frame that appears to be stiff enough to justify weighing 8lb more than the GPX's steel trellis. The complete ZXR is 22lb porkier than its predecessor (which lives on) despite its lack of centrestand but it should be pointed out that frame, forks, wheels and more are all sturdy kit that would handle racing abuse without worry.

Unlike even the RC30's wheels, for instance, the ZXR's aluminium 17-inch three-spokers have been given wide-boy 3½in front/5½in rear rims to accept Michelin's single-sized slicks straight away. Brakes are equally monstrous: a pair of foot-diameter discs grasped by four-pot calipers up front; a single nine-inch job at the back, hidden behind a Bridgestone radial that could almost double as a centrestand. The stoppers bite like giant midges and even MIRA couldn't squash 'em, though at low speed they squealed as if in agony.

Front brake and clutch levers are four-way adjustable for reach, and other ergonomic detailing is a mix of good and bad. Clocks, switches, the protective fairing and the simply removed tailpiece (replacement takes little extra care, ahem) all get high marks and the mirrors are better than most, but the lack of grabrail means a pillion needs arms like Guy the Gorilla (or a bus pass), and the fuel tap is impossible to turn while riding. At least a mid-30s mpg figure allowed 120 miles or so before the four-gallon tank's reserve was needed.

Forks are of the 43mm diameter that appeared vast just 12 months ago and now seems almost commonplace.

**T**his year's RC30 is either virtually unchanged or subtly but crucially reworked – it depends entirely on who you spoke to last.

The former seems to be the case, especially if you get it straight from the horse's mouth (Honda UK) which is good news for Honda, racers, riders and spares departments everywhere. The only major mods are to the price, exhaust baffles and valve seats.

Tony Scott has fiddled 26 RC30's to date (Carl Fogarty, Terry Rymer, Steve Chambers etc) and has just laid bare his first '89 spec bike:

"I'd heard all sorts of rumours about deeper sumps and bigger-output oil and water pumps but the only real difference I've discovered (apart from a non-too drastic paler shade of blue) is to the material on the valve inlet inserts. The problem – only a problem on the track – was a valve-hardening process which was more a fault at quality control than at design. Steve Chambers, for example, didn't have to re-shim his valves all season."

The only imperfection in our '89 RC30 oozed out of the coolant overflow and down its gleaming left flank. An hour of MIRA clutch-slipping and

They're adjustable for preload and rebound damping, gave a good taut ride on the stock settings, and still kept the chubby front hoop planted when backed off a bit for more wrist comfort in town. Rear Uni-Trak shock is adjustable for preload and with four clicks of rebound damping. On stock settings it worked fine in support of my 14 stone, though lighter riders found the back end a bit firm.

The Kawasaki's ride height, and to an extent its steering geometry, can be varied by turning an eccentric on the shock mount. The ZXR shares the Yamaha OW01's 1455mm wheelbase, and in the standard, near-fully-raised position has the same 100mm trail figure too. Those numbers are 40mm and 9mm respectively bigger than the Honda's equivalents, and the Kawa's extra ounces and more conservative geometry show in the way the bike steers.

Handling was always solid, stable and confidence-inspiring, without approaching the RC30's sensitivity or immediacy of response (not to mention its edginess if wrongly set-up). On the open road the bike was rock-steady through

mucho revs at the ¼-mile launch point raised the temperature gauge to about 110 degrees, 20 degrees above normal. With the enclosed engine (which warms the seat nicely) switched off the bike simply got hotter until the green gunge dribbled. But in normal road use, if there is such a thing on the RC30, it wasn't a problem. Tony Scott, incidentally, sets-up the plumbing so the twin radiators run in series rather than in parallel.

On the timing straight there was nothing to split the two bikes. The Honda's outrageously tall first gear – or more precisely, its long suffering clutch (by the time Paul Lewis had finished with last year's test RC30, it'd tick over, in gear, with the clutch home!) – prevented us really flogging it through the ¼-mile and was getting into the aerodynamic stride just as it crossed the line. If the ZXR was disappointing off the line it was a surprise on the top gear roll-on: recording a similar time but higher terminal, pointing to less low-down grunt but a steady, if unspectacular, midrange power curve.

Brighton's Pete Birch runs an RC30 on the road and does his own servicing – declaring it "not too difficult" and gets

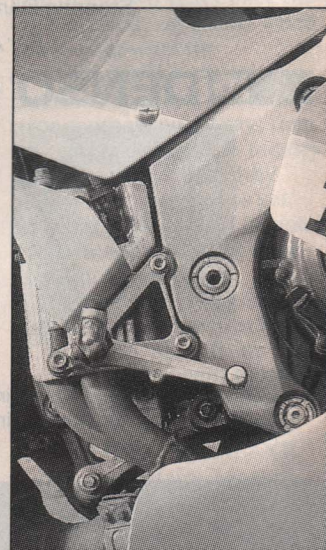
such a thrill from fondling every scummy fastener and racer-wired nut that he wouldn't have it any other way. Routine work is actually easier than on many bikes thanks to its endurance pedigree and detailing. The front mudguard lifts away with the ping of two spring clips; undo a screw and the front pads pull-out; the stub-axle nut releases the lock-wired sprocket, inboard rear disc and wheel in one hit... the closer you look, the more impressive the Honda is. The finish – especially the frame welding – is pure works racer and proved resilient to the worst of the winter-slush. The only gripe is the fuel tap which is as difficult to switch to reserve as the ZXR's.

Tony is full of praise: "It's super to work on, in a class of its own in every way," and he adds: "I'll be surprised if the OW01 is as good. Terry Rymer, though, has been lapping incredibly quickly on one (see Mac's Soft Options, page 48). It's obviously going to be more peaky than the RC30 which has proved so strong out of corners so it won't suit everyone. But the Yamaha's arrival is great for the sport; this season should be much more interesting for riders and spectators alike."

Tim Thompson

## RC30: AND THIS IS ONE THEY BAKED EARLIER

**B**y the time you've got an RC30 taxed, PDI'd, alarmed and bought yourself a matching helmet,



130 lucky Brit burgers had this to relish in '88, but will a year-old recipe cut it against the nouvelle cuisine?

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## IF YOU'VE GOT AN ITCH

# SCRATCH IT

you'll have spent near enough a million pennies. If I had a whisky bottle big enough and full enough I'd smash it today and exchange its contents for a VFR750R (to use its posh moniker). Then I'd slip it in the carpeted lock-up alongside the RGV250 and renew my bus pass until summer.

During the long winter evenings I'd camp down in the garage under a canvas bike cover (the Honda would get the duvet) and shamelessly worship a different part of its gorgeous body each night...

I hope I'm fantasising here, but, if I think about it, maybe I'm not. This bloke I know who runs one on the road nearly gave up bikes to go off and do grown-up things; but he bought an RC30 instead and currently has it in the bath.

The RC30 gets to you quickly. How quickly depends how soon you line up for a right-hander that actually goes left. The oncoming Bejam artic prohibits the straight-on, eyes-shut option so, sensibly, you go for the 6-way adjustable brake lever.

Luckily, you twiddled it's nob to perfection at the last set of lights and two fingers dial in eight Nissin pistons and two floating pizzas with such powerful precision that you're just about under control before this personal crisis has begun.

At this point your old bike's forks took an early bath and tried to walk off in opposite directions, but the Honda's unbraced 43mm stanchions make like a rock as they settle on their springs. You decided not to fiddle with the 12-way rebound (fork top) and 12-way compression (fork leg) damping until you got home. Set up on mid-position, you've got tired wrists and would ideally like the compression off a few turns. But however the forks are tuned, the front Bridgestone Exedra refuses to patter and has a pacifying hotline direct to your worried brain.

You wait for braking forces to build on your Freddie-like tendons and tender Freddies, but that initially odd riding position now feels perfect. Earlier you felt perched on ▶

## SPEC HONDA VFR750R KAWASAKI ZXR750

Price.....	£9499	£5299
Importer.....	Honda UK Ltd, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4	Kawasaki Motors (UK) Ltd, Deal Avenue, Trading Estate, Slough, Berks
Warranty.....	12 months/unlimited mileage; 24 months on engine and transmission	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine.....	Watercooled dohc 16-valve 90-degree V4	Watercooled dohc 16-valve transverse four
Bore x stroke.....	70 x 48.6mm	68 x 51.5mm
Capacity.....	7.48cc	7.48cc
Comp. ratio.....	11:1	11.3:1
Carburation.....	4 x 35mm Keihin CV	4 x 36mm Keihin CV
Gearbox.....	6-speed	6-speed
Electrics.....	12V 8Ah battery; 350W alternator; 2 x 60/55W headlamps	12V 14Ah battery; 2 x 60/55W headlamps

## CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Bridgestone radials	Bridgestone radials
Front.....	120/70V17	120/70V17
Rear.....	170/60V17	170/60V17
Brakes, front.....	2 x 310mm (12.2in) discs	2 x 310mm (12.2in) discs
Rear.....	220mm (8.4in) disc	230mm (9in) disc
Suspension, front.....	43mm telescopic; 12-way compression and rebound damping adjust	43mm telescopic; stepless preload and 12-way rebound damping adjust
Rear.....	Pro-Link monoshock; stepless preload and 12-way compression and rebound damping adjust	Uni-Trak monoshock; 4-way rebound damping adjust

## DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....	1405mm (55.5in)	1455mm (57.3in)
Weight with 1 gal fuel.....	202kg (445lb)	228kg (501lb)
Fuel capacity.....	18 litres (4 gal)	18 litres (4 gal)

## PERFORMANCE

(All figures one-way only)		
Top speed in 1/2 mile, prone.....	130.0mph	130.3mph
Upright.....	124.2mph	126.6mph
Standing 1/4 mile.....	12.89sec/113.9mph	12.04sec/115.7mph
1/4 mile roll-on from 50mph.....	13.10sec/87.2mph	13.12sec/93.3mph
Top gear.....	12.5mph/1000rpm	13.2mph/1000rpm
Fuel consumption overall.....	37mpg	35mpg
Worst figure.....	34mpg	32mpg
Speedo accuracy		
At ind 30mph.....	28.8mph	28.5mph
At ind 50mph.....	46.5mph	46.2mph
At ind 70mph.....	65.6mph	67mph

## TYRES

Std. Road Tread	
250 x 10.....	£6.20
275 x 10.....	£6.90
300 x 10.....	£8.75
350 x 10.....	£9.95
300 x 12.....	£9.45
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225 x 16.....	£7.95
300 x 16.....	£11.95
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CX500.....	£19.75
GSX250.....	£19.75
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top, now you feel poised and, though you don't believe it for a millisecond, 100 per cent in control. You're incredibly comfy with elbows resting on knees as thighs, slotted along the flat-top tank, absorb the rapid deceleration. Back at the shop, the tuneable 'bars looked a painful stretch from the seat but you realise they're right under your nose and begging for a well-measured tweak. And what's this? Your left knee's involuntarily flicked out from behind the QD, Dzus-fastened fairing. This is supposed to be a panic situation so behave.

The Bejam juggernaut thoughtfully crosses the double-white lines – zero hour has arrived. Last weekend you saw Brian Morrison dump his RC30 into the Bus Stop with such abrupt aplomb that he became God. But you can't do that, surely... You pick out the rust on the trailer's rivets in front of your visor and slam the RC30 down as your fingers lift off the brake. The ground just keeps coming up to meet your bum as it slides naturally and easily off the saddle. To your horror the corner tightens. You've never been this far over before with the engine running so you think 'more lean' and it happens.

Again, you actually feel the front tyre's profile as it rolls over to its edge – but where's the drama?

As the peg's hero-blob makes contact, the front tyre slips. Either it's a class below the bike's or your senses have risen to new heights, you can't be sure. You later find little scratch marks on an otherwise smooth tread and plump for a bit of both.

As the apex (such as it is) appears, you twist the throttle a little. The seductive flat growl that made you buy the thing in the first place gets louder without changing pitch. The Honda surges – instantly. A mere 90 degrees of twist is the difference between about 10bhp and 100bhp (you'd know for sure if the liggers at *Bike* had got off their tester long enough to put it on the dyno) and it's caught you out badly. The foam-mounted tacho is heading towards its 12,500rpm redline; you're in first, 90mph is imminent.

The rear radial squirms but the Showa shock, with enough threaded preload, rebound and remote compression adjustments (12 each) to pass 100 winter evenings, squats gently as it soaks up an ex-cat, a pot-hole and a marker stud.

So now you're confident.

You snick second home – not much different from clutch-torturing first – and short-shift to third in a clutchless nanosecond. The RC30 jumps upright and you follow, just like Wayne. The engine hits a rough patch between 7000rpm and 8000rpm reminding you how indecently deceptive and civilised the vee-four is the rest of the time. As the tacho clears 8000rpm the motor feels unhurried again but the 'bars still go light. You tuck down behind the optically clear screen, thankful for little touches like a clear screen-bead that minimises distractions. Ahead is the crested turn, a real albatross of a bend that had you on your tufted ear when you borrowed your dad's 550 four all those years back...

You don't brake this time. In fact you take it flat in fourth, deep into treble figures. As the Honda flies over you wonder how such a short wheelbase and phenomenally quick steerer can be so stable. You concede that the aluminium frame probably is even stiffer than the RVF item it mimics. The single sided Pro Arm (the other reason you bought the bike) isn't exactly floppy either and you're dying to

have you're first puncture so you can whack the paddock stand on and unscrew the single nut just as Alex Vieira's boys did at Le Mans.

Into a wood and the road looks lethally wet. A Volvo's reversing out from the Masonic Lodge; you check your mirrors – more a reflex action than a necessity – and they confirm that red leathers were the ones to go for. You don't feel familiar enough with the brakes to go for it in the wet so you touch the gearlever with your boot and go down three. The stainless exhaust's quick-fire bark would go straight in at number one if you were Bruno Brookes and although you cocked the revs the back wheel refuses to hop or torque its way into trouble.

The man in the car looks in awe at your bike; he sees that you are obviously monied, an individual of superior style, and beams admiration for you just like everyone's done all day. You drop the Honda right-left like you've been RC30-mounted for years and barrel off into the darkness.

By the light of your 90mph headlights you realise that you may never be good enough for the RC30 and are hardly worthy of its science. But you really don't give a stuff.



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