

RIMINI rude BOY

PHOTOGRAPHY: HELMET MUELLER/PETER BEATTIE



Bimota's classy chassis gives Yamaha's FJ1200 the slimmest hips on the Piazza. Snake-hips McDiarmid tries it for size

A 500cc world championship can do a lot for a place, even a dump like Wollongong, New South Wales. Gardner wasn't in but his spirit hung around the place like an air-freshener in a dung heap. "Bet Wayne's bike is quicker than that, mate," said the first of the freckly kids down by the docks. "He's got an 'Onda — yours is only a Yamaha."

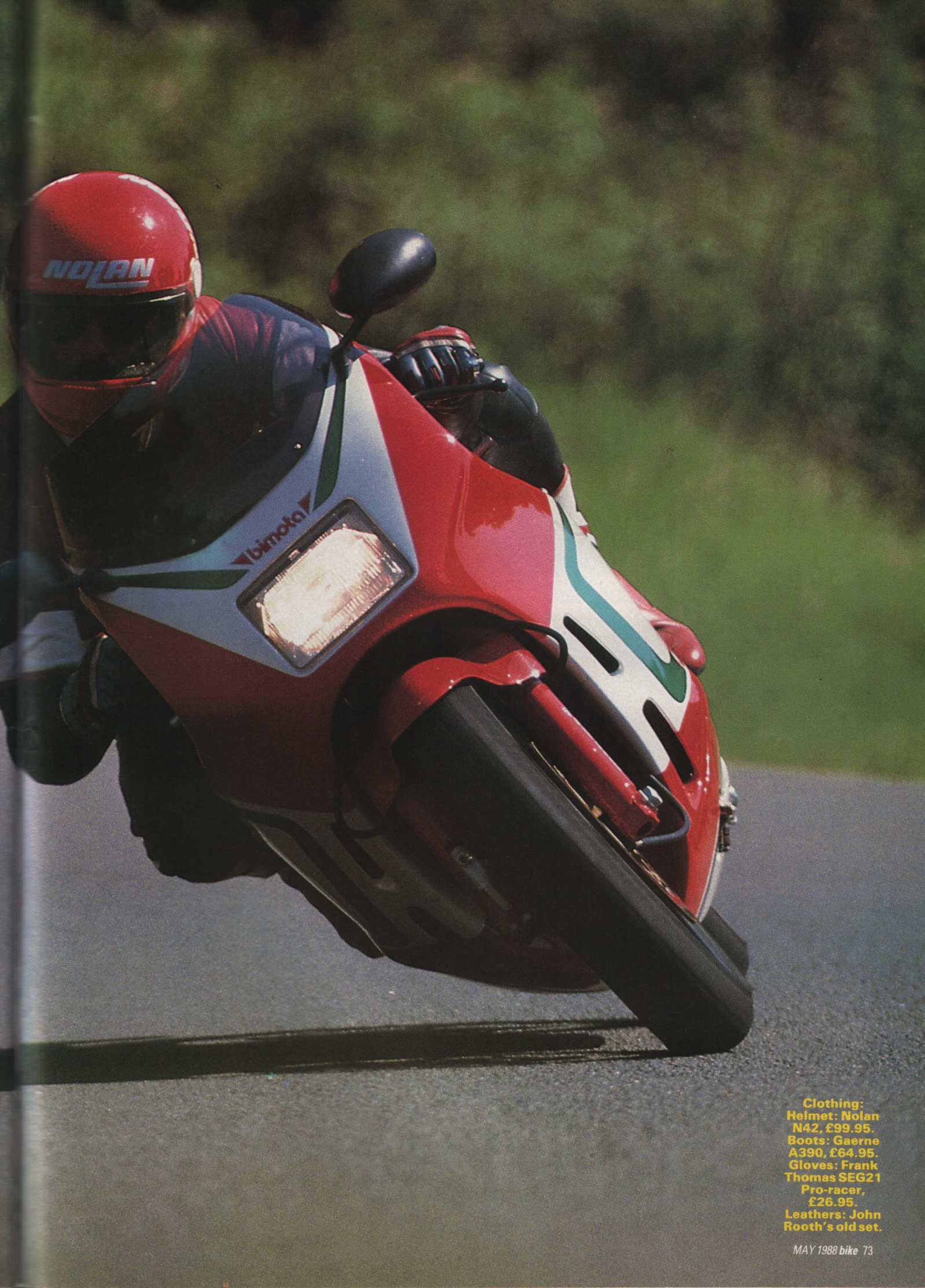
"Bimota," I corrected him. "They're world champions, too." The kid, weaned on xenophobic Ozzie overkill, looked betrayed, as though I'd told him Santa was a child-molester. I felt a bit confused,

too. My most sensitive parts couldn't understand why I was defending the Bim to anyone, let alone an eight year old. The bloody thing wasn't doing much to defend me.

Which is why I was walking, as the locals say, a bit crook. The YB5 had spent much of that morning evoking youthful memories of life with my first Ducati — an 860GTS. That was the model, you're lucky if you can't recall, on which the factory responded to complaints of a too-lofty seat height by stripping an inch of padding out of an already under-upholstered bum perch. YB5s start life with the Mk 2 seat padding.

When Bimota launched the model at the '86 Cologne Show, they billed it as the Bim designed for people who like to high-profile in pairs — a two-up street racer, if there is such a thing. The theory presumably went that there's little point wearing full mating plumage without somewhere to perch your love-lorn hen if the display works. I suppose it follows from this avian analogy that their situpon must be half-hatched.

Seat padding half an inch thick coupled with suspenders of the hard-gives-handling persuasion hadn't ended me to the YB5 in contriving an escape from the overheated ►



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clutches of Sydney's traffic that morning. The boy-racer, unnatural-bends-in-every-limb riding position coupled with tight borrowed leathers and a serious dose of sun-struck Pomburn hadn't helped, either.

Then we found a bit of interesting road. Sydney's sprawling suburbs dropped behind like a virgin's veil and the real stuff arrived: miles of sinuous freeway followed by the twists and turns of the high country inland of Wollongong. Bimotas don't have a bit (in fact they have a great deal) but if the YB5 had had one, it'd have champed right through it. On with the gas, push the torquiest motor in creation through the revs — quite needlessly, but who can resist a dancing tacho? — and aim at speed for nowhere in particular.

Thus I learnt that this Bim, like most of the others, has a classy chassis. By comparison Yamaha's interpretation of the FJ is a bus driven by a menopausal bore on Mogadon. Dial in 200kph, aim for the vein in the fallen leaf — you've got it. Encounter an idiot lane-changing 200 yards ahead of his indicators — no problem, instantly, with yards to spare. In effect the YB5 simply doubles your reaction times.

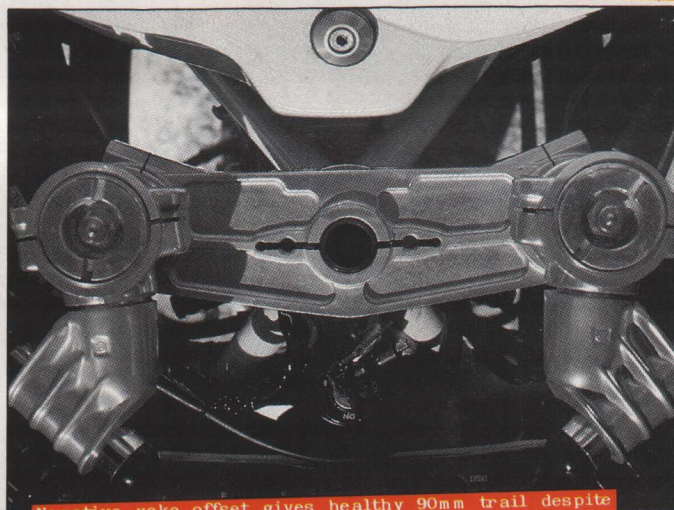
In fact the bike harbours a quite uncanny combination of high-speed stability with gibbon-like agility. At an indicated 240kph (150mph) it felt as solid and sure-footed as anything I've ridden. But the truly impressive thing was the featherlight ease with which it chopped line at speed — the merest hint to the bars and you were two lanes away from where you'd started.

According to popular theory these characteristics in this combination are common as gills on horses. Indeed the effect was so rare for a machine of this size that I suspected a surfeit of Mr Tuohey's excellent brew the night before had addled my judgement; a quick swap onto a CBR1000 followed by a vigorous spin on a GSX-R1100 convinced me the effect was real. (The other effects of the previous night were equally real but beyond the scope of this test.)

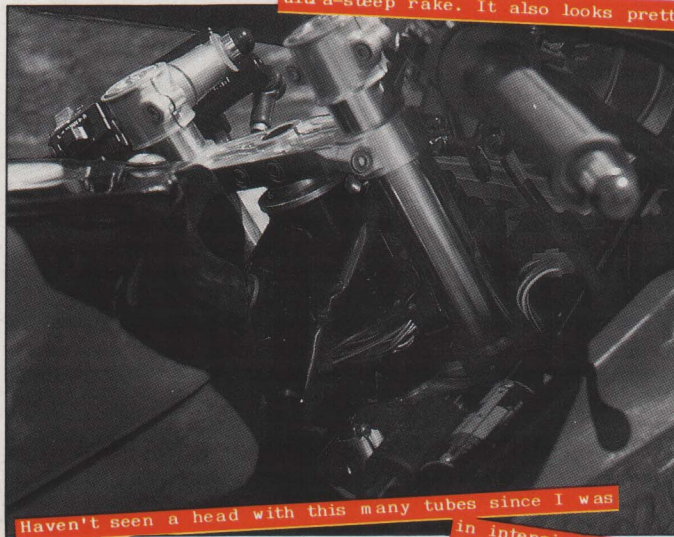
Not that the YB5 is a lightweight. Although the chassis and cycle parts are as light as an 11-grand price tag



Try this on an FJ12 and your footrests are history



Negative yoke offset gives healthy 90mm trail despite ultra-steep rake. It also looks pretty



Haven't seen a head with this many tubes since I was in intensive care

permits, Yamaha's aircooled mill is a massive lump by any standards. By the use of thin-wall chrome-moly tubing, lightweight alloy fabrications and lighter wheels and ancillaries, Bimota claim to have shaved around 55lb from the FJ's weight of 540 with a ▶

SPEX BIMOTA YB5

Price.....	£11,800
Importer	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey
Warranty	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine	Yamaha FJ12 aircooled dohc, 16-valve transverse four
Bore x stroke	77 x 68.8mm
Capacity	1188cc
Comp ratio	9.7:1
Carburation	4 x 36mm Mikuni CV
Gearbox	5-speed
Electrics.....	12V 14Ah battery; 60/55W headlamp

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Michelin radials
Front.....	120/60 VR 18
Rear	160/60 VR 18
Brakes, front	2 x 300mm Goldline Brembo
Rear	260mm Goldline Brembo
Suspension, front	41.7mm M1R Marzocchi tele. monoshock
Rear	monoshock

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1455mm (57.3in)
Dry weight (claimed)	216kg (475lb)
Fuel capacity	22 litres (4.9 gal)

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gallon of gas. That still makes for 475lb dry, every one of which tells when pushing the lump around a car park.

That the Bim can be so massive and yet still hustle the way it does is a credit to its frame rigidity, geometry and weight distribution.

Wheelbase is a fairly conservative 57.3in — about par for current 750s — which goes some way to explaining the bike's stability; rake and trail, on the other hand, are a mere 23.5 degrees and 90mm respectively, which puts the plot right in the cut-and-thrust 250cc league and accounts in full for its agility. (The '88 FJ12, by comparison, has far more indolent figures of 27.5 degrees and 112mm.) That the YB5 tolerates these figures without slapping itself into apoplexy testifies to the rigidity of the frame, swinging-fork assembly and those beefy 41.7mm Marzocchi M1R forks. Weaving just isn't on the bike's curriculum.

On the face of it 18-inch wheels at each end contradict this analysis. The rolling diameter of these ultra low-profile 60-series Michelin radials, however, is about two inches less than that of a conventional tyre with 80 per cent aspect ratio, so in effect the YB5 has 16-inch wheels at each end. Actually, despite what you may have read elsewhere, it's not quite that simple; the rim, being farther from the spindle and one of the heaviest bits, makes for a comparatively large gyroscopic effect. For the sake of argument, let's say the set-up equates in practice to a pair of 17-inches.

Weight distribution is something you'll hear Bimota designers talk about more than most. In a world where most of the Jap quasi-racers seem to favour a pronounced front-end bias — and shag front slicks accordingly — Bimota put great store by a 50:50 weight distribution ideal. The result, when they get it right, is a superbly balanced, neutral feel to the steering. Yamaha's bulky FJ12 plot probably denied them some of the design scope they'd have liked (and this bike was derived from the Suzuki-engined SB4/5, anyway) but the YB5 still has impeccable road manners. This neutrality is particularly inviting out of corners, where

the bike all but demands early and energetic handfulls of throttle yet sneers at rear-wheel slides with unruffled aplomb.

Where it does fall down is in its woefully oversprung suspension. What might work over Imola's smooth curves is sheer purgatory over backroad bumps. The Bim kicks, judders and rattles, tormenting wrists and bum and last night's tandoori with every painful leap. The rear end is worst and completely beyond rehabilitation despite a theoretical multitude of adjustment. Sitting on the bike depressed the shock scarcely at all, whereas rule-of-thumb suggests 1 1/2in might be nearer the norm. If I'd just paid the best part of a year's wages for one I'd expect something to be done about it, free of charge.

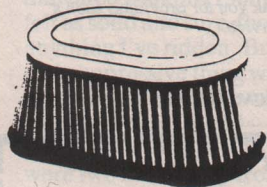
The engine deserves more than the passing mentions it's received so far. Almost any tester you care to name has placed the FJ11/12 motor close to, if not actually at, the very top of his all-time list of Careless Torque Generators, even in the stock chassis. In Bimota's lighter, slippier guise it almost defies description — despite a mild ignition glitch which saw it misfire above 1500rpm. Even in this trim, pitting it against a GSX-R1100 and a CBR1000 in a 70mph roll-on turned out to be the non-event of the decade; the Suzuki was left for dead and the Honda relegated to the scarcely-born. It's conceivable that with on-song propulsion the YB5 could be the world's fastest production bike. The one negative value in the new equation was a slight increase in vibes above 3000rpm, probably a function of the lighter chassis' inability to soak them up or, perhaps, the aforementioned glitch.

In real terms this defined the YB5 as the most schizoid street racer since Freud discovered fun; streetrace handling combined with Mack truck locomotion — a special combination indeed. But I can't help feeling that anyone who considers changing gear too plebian for his dainty little Guccis might also rebel at the lack of creature comforts elsewhere. For the price you get exquisite detailing, the finest workmanship money can buy and more ground clearance than you know what to do with; you're also entitled to expect the very best of something functional. But in choosing to shoehorn an FJ12 engine into a previous-generation trellis, all Bimota has done is produce an eye-catching compromise. ■

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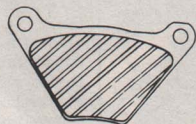
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