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JANUARY 1986

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# bike

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silly stories silly pictures**  
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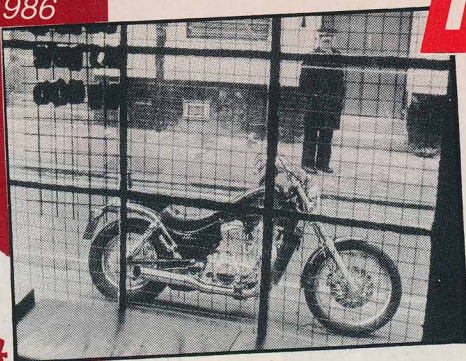
For once, the Italian show was worth going to. New generations of wop screamers, plonkers and chuggers take on the Nips

## KINGMAKERS

How Kel Carruthers and Erv Kanemoto keep pushing those damn Yanks to the top of the pile

## CLONE ZONE

A goodly ogle of the Harris answer to Yamaha's factory Genesis chassis. Stavros Parrish is probably going to race it, too, if he can find time between Truck GPs



## THE 1985 BIKE MAGAZINE AWARDS

Forget Oscars, Humphreys, Grammys and Egberts, as we make prestigious presentations to the fairest — and the foulest — in the land

## BARK AND BITE

Two versions of Frankenstein's monster's dog lurking down in the depths of funny farming territory. A Norton-engined Gilera crosser faces off against the only Honda 400/4 in a Yam DT chassis (fortunately)

## ANYTHING GOES

The bike, you sweet young boys, not the contact pages. Suzuki's cryptopog, the Intruder, goes mincing round leather bars

# ROADTESTS

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Suzuki RG500s as Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee. One's the Gamma road bike and the other's a full-blown Skoal Bandits GP tool. Both the same? I don't think so . . .

## ARABIAN NIGHTS

If Paris-Dakar posing pedestals are nicer to look at than ride, why bother getting cold and wet? Dashing desert doobries from Honda, Cagiva and BMW. (We've heard some dodgy excuses for not riding testbikes in winter and leering at photographer's models but this is ridiculous . . .)



## MOPED MAYHEM

Hold the front page an' quite a lot more inside, too, 'cos this is the not-so-awful truth in all its gory detail

## ON-LINE

To be perused at the reader's own risk . . .

## LIFE IN THE PIT LANE

Scotty tells it like it might be

## FOULKES OFF

Still telling tales out of skool

## AGONY COLUMN

Letters pray (Let us pray? geddit? Jesus, I wish the pub was open)

## STAFF BIKES

We don't really believe he bought it

## LAST PAGE

Till next month, anyway

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RG 50

SUZUKI



# THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Does stepping through the mirror from Suzuki's RG500 Gamma to a Skoal Bandits Suzuki GP bike teach important lessons? Roland Brown runs the Mad Hatter's race replica party

The rain clouds hanging over Snetterton racetrack were getting bigger and blacker with every passing minute; the steady drizzle that had been falling all day was becoming heavier. Abandoning hope of more pictures I reluctantly emerged from the shelter of a gloomy pit and threw a leg over the Gamma to go and find photographer Schiller, who was sheltering under his longest lens somewhere on the far side of the track.

The blue bike fired up on three and a half soggy cylinders but cleared with a few blips of the throttle. As I pulled away it felt strangely different: high, soft-seated, its handlebars raised up almost like those of a custom bike. Through the puddles of the back straight the Suzuki went well enough but it felt somehow quiet and unexciting, as though something was missing.

That was hardly surprising. After an hour or so spent splashing round Snetterton on a real-live grand prix 500, even the raciest, meanest-looking road bike can be excused for feeling a little tame by comparison. If the Suzuki RG500 Gamma is light, taut and powerful then the Heron honeycomb Skoal Bandits GP machine is lighter, tauter and much more powerful still.

When its power band bit on wet roads the roadster would spin its back tyre in first gear, the engine revving crazily. The racer did this in *fourth* — with 12,000rpm on the tacho, the real-life video stuck on fast forwards and the end of the straight getting far too close for comfort. Riding this thing was an education; racing it in the rain must be mindblowing.

Putting Suzuki's latest racer-replica up against the real thing makes for an illuminating comparison. Before, the roadster's riding position had felt firm and low, with the bars giving a radical leant-forward riding position. But that was like an armchair compared to the racer's seat — just a thin layer of foam on plastic, padded out at the back to adapt it from the bulky Rob McElnea to the diminutive Paul Lewis. Being several inches taller than Big Mac, it was no surprise that I couldn't get my head anywhere near behind the screen.

On the road the lightweight Gamma's eight-piston front brake set-up had felt incredibly powerful; so much so that, when we'd first borrowed the bike, a moment's panic at a pulling-out car had locked the wheel and sent bike and rider bouncing along the local by-pass. But even streaming





Snetterton showed that the racer's twin Lockheeds were in a different class again. The slightest touch of the lever was enough to give the impression of dropping anchor and suggest that in the dry, with a big fat slick up front, the pilot must be in need of a seat belt.

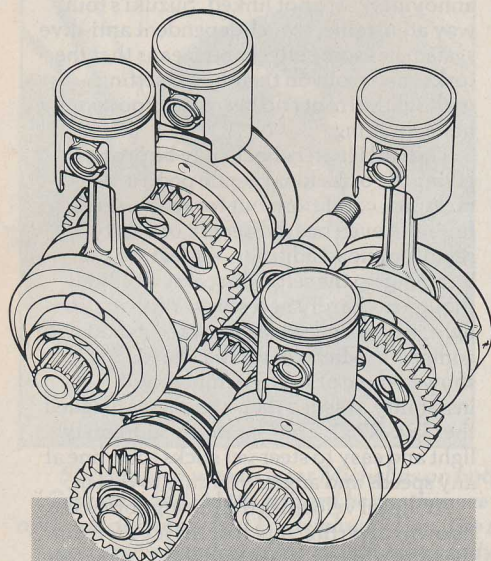
The Gamma has no electric start, just a lever jutting out to the right of the watercooled square-four engine. Find neutral (unusually, the bike can't be started in gear), apply the choke lever and the RG fires up with a gentle prod, the crackling through its four pipes almost drowning the whining from its gears (and the whole thing sounding not unlike a coughing-and-wheezeing Willis before his tenth fag of the morning).

On cold mornings the Gamma needs a good few blips to warm it up before it'll pull away, though that's nothing to the racer which, after it's been bump-started into life, must be tended until the temperature gauge has moved well clear of the stop. Despite a partially taped-over radiator, in Norfolk's late-November bitterness this meant a delay every time we stopped to swap notes on our lines for the photos. Then we'd be off again, with me on the Bandit bike trying to come



*R-r-r-ringing in the rain . . . The Gamma meets its match at soggy Snettters (top) and survives to get back on the road (above)*

round the outside of Mike on the Gamma as we splashed into Schiller's view. The racer's gearchange was a big problem, not only being an unfamiliar one-up, five-down arrangement but proving so hard to change down on occasions that I'd often sail into a bend in far too high a ratio despite all the frantic blipping and foot-twitching that had gone on beforehand.



*The RG's pair of crankshafts are geared to a central jackshaft which takes drive to the clutch through a helical gear. Two-rising pistons shove exhaust gas past Suzuki's latest acronym on the way to the great outdoors: an Automatic Exhaust Control valve works like a combination of Yamaha's power valve and Honda's ATAC, shutting off an exhaust chamber at 7500rpm in an attempt to get the best of both top-end and midrange power*

Fortunately the engine was very forgiving, making smooth and usable power from surprisingly low down (the tach swung around a fair bit) to the 12,000rpm redline. That made the bike easy enough to ride around, even in the rain, though keeping it thrashing away at between ten and 12 grand, where the real power lies, would be a lot more tricky. You'd better believe that there's a world of difference between merely riding this bike and getting the back end hanging out amid the cut and thrust of a 500cc grand prix. And then there's the small matter of the much-developed square-four Suzuki mill's horsepower disadvantage when compared with all those Hondas and Yamahas. Just ask Rob McElnea whether racing it's easy or not...

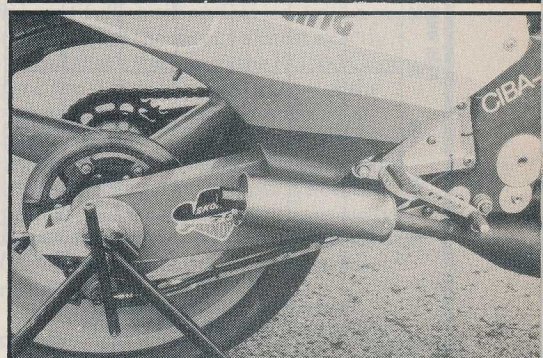
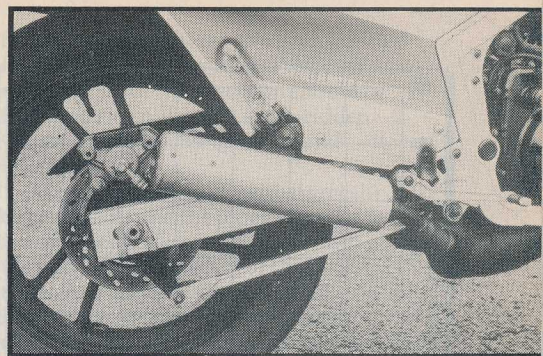
The road version uses a remarkably similar engine layout — disc valve induction with two geared-together crankshafts, the front one sitting slightly lower — but suffers from no such peak power disadvantage. The 99 rear-wheel horses it produced on Motad's generous but consistent dyno is 22bhp up on Yamaha's RD500LC, a massive 45bhp more than Honda's 387cc NS400R and only a couple of horses down on the output of its own GSX-R750 stablemate. The power curve gives an indication of the bike's character: it starts rising steeply at around 6000rpm, hits an 88bhp peak at 9000rpm

and drops off towards the ten-grand redline. That's where one mag's dyno operator called a halt but if you keep the throttle wound open the power climbs again, finally peaking properly at 11,000rpm before dropping away sharply.

It adds up to a pretty wide spread of power by racebike standards — and the Gamma makes more power everywhere between 8500 and 11,500rpm than the 500LC does anywhere. But the Yamaha is more powerful below 8500 and on the road the Suzuki's high-revving nature often puts it at a disadvantage. At around 80mph, for example, the Gamma is barely into its power band — *in third gear*. If you're cruising along in top and want to overtake you have to go down three gears, look over your shoulder (the mirrors, predictably, are too close together to be of much use), blast past at a zillion revs and then change back up and out of the power again.

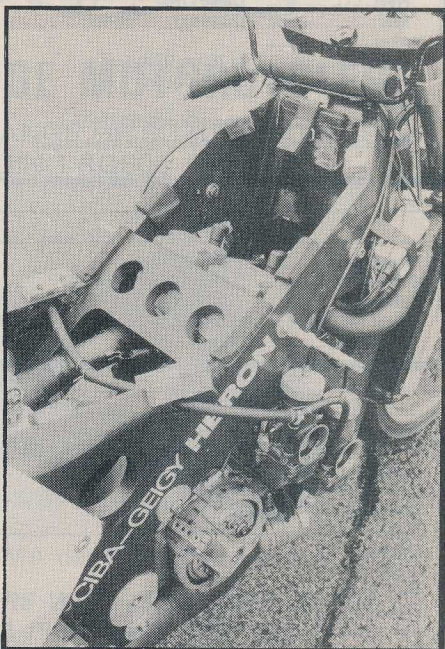
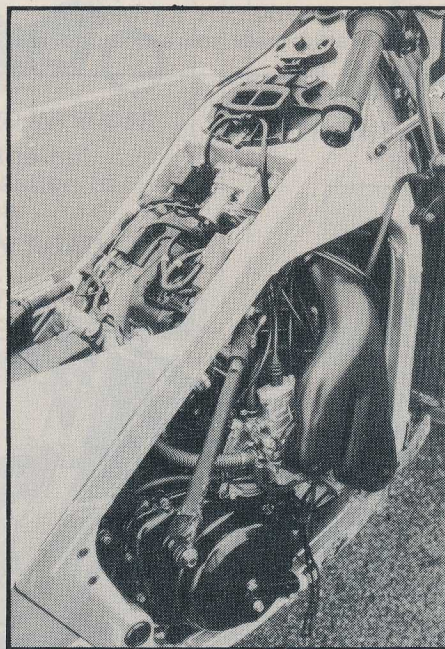
When riding the Gamma you have a choice of three approaches. You can go round below the power band at medium-to-fast speeds; you can rev it hard in the lower gears only, at fast speeds; or you can rev it hard through *all* the gears and travel stupidly, licence-losingly rapidly, everywhere you go. Being thoroughly irresponsible (and with Lord Emap paying for my petrol) I naturally opted for the latter throughout my fortnight with the RG, with forays below the power line in town and whenever I came near a motorway. The result of this was that I developed wild, staring eyes, an adrenal gland enlarged fit to burst, lightning-fast panic-braking reflexes and a sixth sense for chase-happy policemen that just about lasted me for the two weeks. I was glad I didn't have to push my luck much longer.

To be fair to the Gamma it is actually not too annoying in town, where the engine is quite happy trundling along at low speed. As long as you don't expect rocket-like acceleration the bike will pull away comfortably from the lights at 4-5000rpm

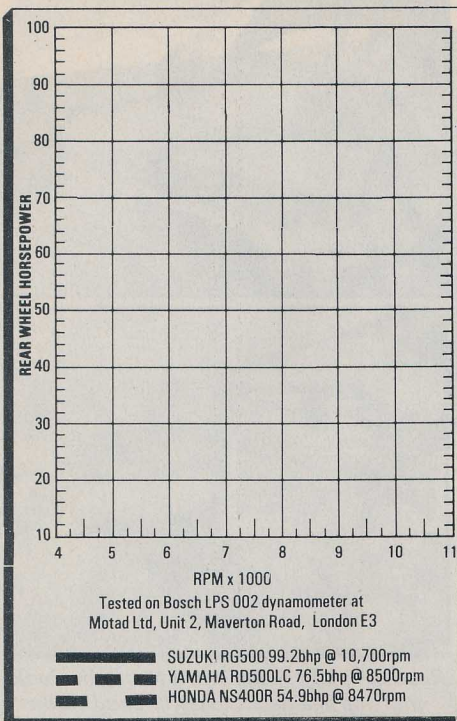


*Roadster's ally swing arm is strong but looks puny up against its massive Bandit-bike counterpart. Well hidden, like the racer's White Power unit, the Gamma's shock is easily adjusted with the remote knob in top right of the pic. Silencer size shows the relative importance of keeping down decibels...*

and is better suited to this than is the 500LC with its extra-tall first gear. Take a bigger handful, of course, and the RG screams off into the distance with its front wheel aloft. At MIRA it proved surprisingly easy to launch and just dipped under the 11.5-second mark in the quarter-mile, well ahead of the Yamaha and beaten only by a select handful of big four-strokes. Top speed is a genuine 150mph — more if you've space to get it near revving out in top.



*Road Gamma (left) uses square-section ally rails welded to braced cast lumps in the crucial head and swing arm pivot areas. That plastic guttering leads from flat-slide Mikunis to a huge airbox hidden away in the steering head. Heron's carbon fibre Black Bike (right) is derived from the aluminium bodied White Bike we featured last November. No air filter on this baby and no welds either — as the Ciba-Geigy logo suggests, it's all glued together instead. Only trouble is that although the bike's handling has progressed well the Suzuki motor's been down on power in grands prix all year*



### SUZUKI RG500 GAMMA

Price.....	£3299
Guarantee.....	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine.....	Watercooled square-four two-stroke
Bore x stroke.....	56 x 50.6mm
Capacity.....	498cc
Comp. ratio.....	7:1
Carburation.....	4 x 28mm Mikuni flat-slide
Clutch.....	Multiplate, wet
Primary drive.....	Gear
Gearbox.....	6-speed
Electrics.....	12V, 4Ah sealed battery, 60/55W headlamp

### CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Michelin
Front.....	110/90 V16
Rear.....	120/90 V17
Brakes.....	
Front.....	2 x 260mm (10in) discs
Rear.....	200mm (8in) disc
Suspension.....	
Front.....	Telescopic, adjustable preload
Rear.....	Monoshock, remote preload adjust

### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....	1425mm (56.1in)
Overall width.....	695mm (27.3in)
Seat height.....	770mm (30.3in)
Weight (inc 1 gal fuel).....	150kg (333lb)
Fuel capacity.....	22 litres (4.8 gal)

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed.....	
in 1/2 mile, prone.....	129.69mph
Upright.....	125.19mph
Best one way.....	131.39mph
Standing 1/4 mile.....	
(Mean).....	11.69sec/115mph
(One way).....	11.49 sec/117.54mph
1/4 mile roll-on.....	
from 50mph.....	
(Mean).....	14.22sec/77.8mph
(One way).....	13.88sec/80.78mph
Top gear.....	14mph/1000rpm
Fuel consumption, overall.....	24.2mpg
Ridden hard.....	21.4mpg
Speedo accuracy.....	
At ind. 30mph.....	29mph
At ind. 50mph.....	48mph
At ind. 70mph.....	68mph

Despite a dozen or more quarter-mile attempts the Gamma's cable-operated clutch proved well up to the job, though ironically towards the end of the test it began to make the odd square of protest when let out sharply while cold. The gearbox was less impressive, sharing the Honda's NS400's (and several other Hondas') habit of jumping out of second and back into neutral every so often. Frustrating when it wastes a good launch at the dragstrip and embarrassing when you're profiling down the high street in your best leathers and all the Saturday shoppers look round to see who's the pillock making the screaming noise. Thank God for dark visors...

At least the problem could be investigated easily, because the Gamma shares the racebike's side-loading gear cluster — just whip off the clutch and drive sprocket and out come the cogs. A Canadian magazine had the same trouble before their box went on to seize, and one of the bikes at the RG's Hockenheim launch also had a gear-jumping tendency (in fifth). It's to be hoped that the Gamma gearbox doesn't turn out to have been as under-engineered as the GSX-R750's. Suzuki have had enough problems with that bike's transmission (on the racetrack) to last them another ten years.

There are certainly similarities with the 750 in the Gamma's cycle parts, which have been designed with performance and light weight the priorities and help keep overall weight down to a stunning 150kg (333lbs). Its brakes are of the same design, though slightly smaller on account of the reduced diameter of the 500's 16-inch front wheel (the 750's is an 18-incher). With four-piston calipers up front and twin pistons gripping the rear disc the stoppers are predictably ferocious, though perhaps a little less so than the 750's. As we discovered to our cost, they are still quite capable of stopping the Gamma's front wheel dead in its tyre-tracks.

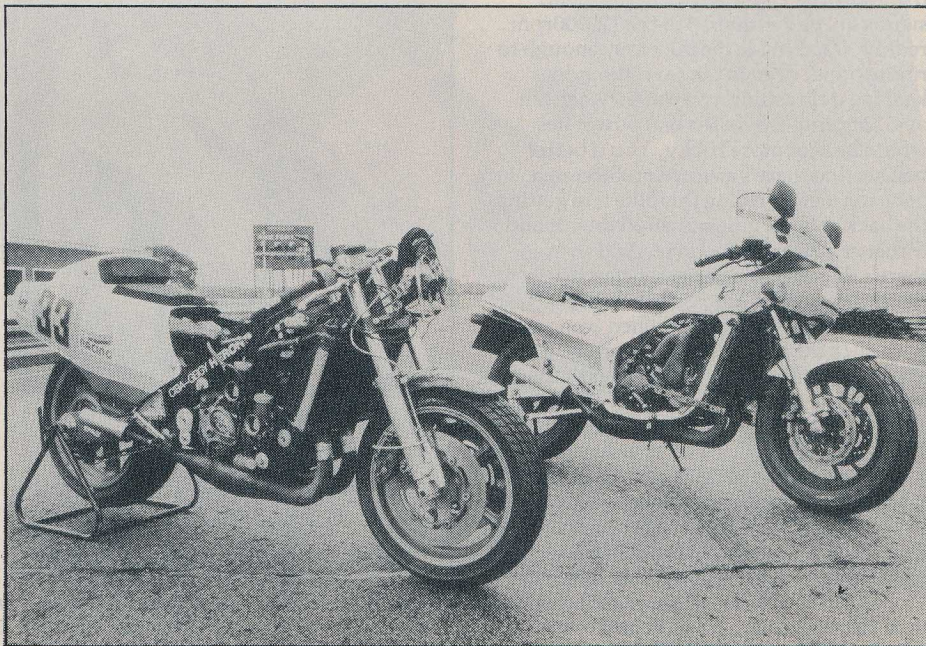
The fame, like the 750's, is a twin-downtube affair made from a mixture of cast

lumps and box-section aluminium rails. The whole steering head area is enclosed by a massively braced casting which hides away the airbox and gives plenty of support to the chunky forks. These have racer-lookalike preload adjuster screws jutting from the top of each leg and air valves which, annoyingly, are not linked. Suzuki's four-way adjustable, travel-dependent anti-dive system has some effect and means that the forks can be run on their lower settings without the front end becoming too spongy under braking.

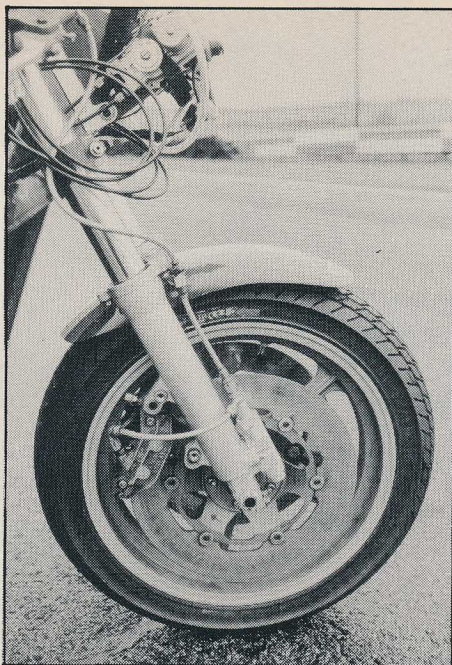
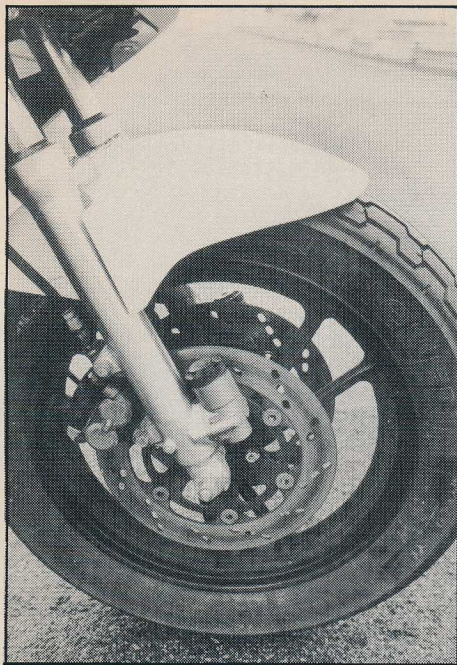
The Full Floater shock may be prone to giving the occasional gentle pogo under racetrack conditions but for road use it's fine, and even has the benefit of a nifty remote preload adjuster — great for bumping up the setting to carry a pillion, though it's hardly necessary. With its ultra-light, easy-bend six-spoke wheels shod with competent Michelin rubber the RG500 showed none of the twitchiness and instability at speed that sometimes plagued the GSX-R750. The Gamma is supremely light and easy to steer yet sticks to its line at any speeds and angles you care to dial in.

At illegal velocities the fairing comes into its own, diverting much of the icy air from the rider's hands, chest and legs. The screen, whose trim repeatedly came loose, is not tall enough to nudge every gust over your head unless a real chin-on-the-tank approach is adopted — there again, when did you last see Rob Mac sitting up on the straight? Taking off the fairing is hardly a racer's quick-release job: its side-pieces detach reasonably easily to give access to the engine an dflat-slide Mikuni carbs but removing the bottom V-section invariably involves dropping several tiny screws on the ground.

The petrol tank has a neat feature in the lock that allows it to be released without undoing any bolts, though the effect is rather spoiled by having to unbolt the frame-mounted fuel tap. The tap is reasonably accessible but still too stiff to turn easily when the bike starts spluttering



A brace of Suzukis bare their chests on pit straight of a typically radiant Snetterton afternoon. At least the road bike carries its own stand around, though a sidestand's not much use when you want to change the back wheel or even lube the chain (there's no centrestand, o'course...)



Sixteen-inch wheels wear Michelins on both bikes but there the similarities end. The Gamma's A48/M48s gripped better than we'd expected but the racebike's deep-cut soft option is definitely Not For Highway Use. The roadster's four-pot calipers feel sharp — until you grab a handful of the Bandit bike's fully-floating Lockheeds. Small round device connected to racebike's tacho is control mechanism for the exhaust valve

onto reserve (why not a Yamaha-style button on the bars?). At 4.8 gallons the tank's capacity is reasonable but with consumption running at a ludicrous ??mpg average that still meant a range of less than 100 miles.

The rider's half of the seat comes off to reveal the oil tank (the battery is a sealed-for-life unit) and is comfortable enough to let you keep riding for longer than that but the pillion's lot is typically hard. The Gammas at Hockenheim had grab rails but

for some reason these have been omitted from the finished product. Whoever was responsible for that decision should be forced to ride pillion on a fast-ridden Gamma until he changes his mind — it won't take long.

At least the seat unit, with its mesh-covered slots and the pipes from the two rear-most cylinders running beneath it, look the part, as does the rest of the bike. From the engine and frame to details like the ally fairing brackets and the sidepanels' carefully-shaped footguards the whole bike is beautifully built and styled, with a profile that matches the racer's almost exactly.

And that's the key to the RG500 Gamma's problem — it is too good a copy of the racebike it resembles. A damp day at Snetterton was enough to show that there are big differences between roadster and works racer but the Gamma is notably peakier, lighter and more outrageously aggressive than the RD500, the NS400, the GSX-R750 and all the other racetrack refugees.

It's the end product of a line of development which has been followed more and more closely in the last couple of years and has hopefully now run its course. As an engineering exercise, a piece of art, a production racer or a Sunday afternoon toy the Gamma is brilliant. As a road bike it has basic flaws — notably power delivery, fuel consumption and comfort — which are dictated by its all-dominating singlemindedness and which are impossible to overlook.

Yes, it's very impressive, Suzuki. Now can we have some slightly more sensible motorbikes, please?

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				GS650	£24.50
					£27.66

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