

ANYTHING GOES.

A strange custom, this taste for choppers. Peter Nielsen puts his posing pouch on the Suzuki Intruder

The two white BMWs were holding a steady 50 in the nearside lane, riding side by side behind the black limousine. A couple of hundred yards ahead another pair of coppers rode point on the carload of VIPs, blue lights twinkling in the brilliant morning sunlight. On the other two lanes of the M23 platoons of traffic drifted slowly past the convoy, drivers rubbernecking at the occupants of the black Ford. Obviously no chance of a nick here.

It looked like a job for Intruderman. Rolling off the throttle and pulling into the centre lane, I drew slowly level with the two coppers and backed off a touch more to hold station, waiting until a white-helmeted head turned slowly to the right and fixed me with an expressionless stare. I grinned back and whacked the throttle open, rocking back in the low seat as the V-twin jumped forward and imagining the gnashing of police-issue dentures as the glorious, cracking exhaust note hung in the air behind the rapidly disappearing Intruder.

Around 12 seconds later the limousine and its four nursemaids were dwindling comfortably in the mirrors and I was back in the overtaking lane doing 90. Silly games, sure. But what other kind do you play with such a silly motorcycle? Suzuki's Intruder is no use at all for high-speed cruising. As far as touring's concerned, most 250s would probably do a better job. The very thought of getting one's jollies by punting it swiftly through bendy bits of highway affects a chap rather like an enema. There are only two things you can do with this bike — pose unashamedly, and have a surprising amount of old-fashioned fun.

Many thanks to Expectations, 56 Hoxton Square, London N1, for the gear worn by Nick Hulme in our photo session. Patrolman jacket, £149; leather jeans, from £79; leather shirt, £94; Muir cap, £39; handcuffs, £14.50; gloves, £17.50; chain belt, £17.50; sunglasses, £8.95; boots, £58. Catalogue available for £2.50, Nick's phone number available for a used tenner.



Most of the fun's down to that luvverly engine, a unit endowed with addictive power characteristics and the meatiest, most melodious exhaust note ever to slink through a noise test en route from Japan. The pose value of such an uncompromising custom bike is more of a moot point, though, bearing in mind the psychological differences between the average American biker and his counterparts in these sceptred isles. It's been quite a gamble for usually conservative Suzuki to bring this bike to England, when you look at the generally justified fate of various factory customs that have died agonising deaths over here. Kawasaki, Honda and Yamaha have all dipped tentative toes into the icy waters of a tiny custom market, and the resulting frostbite was well-deserved.

Remember the Kwak LTD750, or the Yamaha SV750? Or the most horrible example of all, Honda's CX500 Custom? The latter machine especially was the kind of bike bought by 35-year-old bank clerks still living with their mums. I remember riding one briefly some years back, along with the burning ears and heartfelt shame brought on by a guffawing troupe of Harley and Triumph riders outside the local bike shop. I mean, when somebody on a *Triumph* can make you feel bad, then you're really in the shit.

Still, you've got to admit that the Intruder's the most *complete* factory custom ever to hit the UK. The wide, heavily chromed forks, the 27-inch seat height, imitation Bates headlamp and most important of all, the engine, are unashamed ripoffs of the image that righteous Harley customisers have spent two decades refining. And man, ya can't beat the price, or at least Harley can't.

It's impossible to write much about this bike without moving back to the engine, 'cos the rest of it... well, handsome is as handsome does, and similar old platitudes like that. Two tall pots are staggered at 45 degrees from the vertical, just like a Harley.

That's where the similarity ends, though, since Japanese evolution hasn't quite followed the same path as America's. Down in the guts of the motor, a Harley's conrods jostle for room on a single crankpin. Both pistons rise and fall together, resulting in what H-D buffs call power pulses and the rest of us call having yer fillings shaken out.

No Japanese engineer worth



The seat height is low enough for any laid-back dwarf but, as pillion footpeg position denotes, good buddy lives on the next floor up...

his rice would tolerate such an arrangement so the Intruder's crankpins are spaced at 45 degrees apart, which cuts the vibration down and, not coincidentally, staggers the firing interval so the exhaust sounds a little like... a Harley's, as it happens. I'd expected this arrangement to shake more than a little, but it's only at speeds of 80mph and above that the tank, footrests and 'bars begin to resonate a little. In the words of a generation of (usually lying) bike hacks, vibration isn't a problem, even without such fripperies as counterbalancers and rubber mounting. Those tall cylinders are watercooled, but the cunning Japs have cast on some fake fins that camouflage this fact well enough to take in even the odd

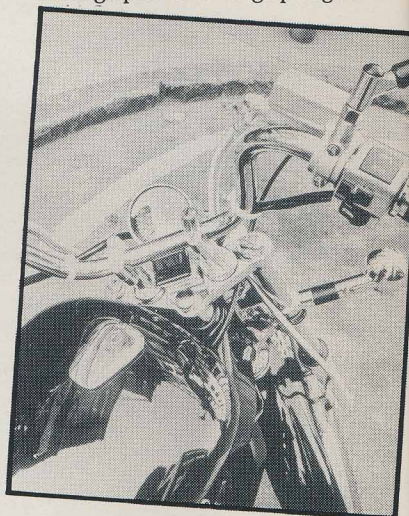
Bike staffer. No names mentioned, huh Murdoch? Bore and stroke is on the oversquare side at 80 x 74mm, and in its European guise the engine displaces 747cc or 45 cubic inches. Funny, that. Stateside, the bores are slimmer so the bike can creep in under the 700cc tariff limit instigated to help bail out H-D. A single overhead camshaft atop each head drives four screw and locknut-adjusted valves, and what would normally be average-looking rockerboxes are concealed by chrome covers. Instant Panhead.

In operation, this engine actually feels a little like a Harley, too. The liquid cooling stifles any incipient mechanical drumming, where even an Evolution-engined Harley seethes with the sounds of

components leaping up, down, around and into each other, and lets a bloke enjoy the fruity exhaust note to the full.

Settling into the Intruder for the first time, I was secretly hoping no friends, acquaintances or worse, enemies would be taking the air in the vicinity of Clerkenwell. I always feel such a prat riding around on a chopper, don't you? Then I fired it up, and automatically looked down to see if some passing crim had nicked the mufflers. They were still there, and better still, unabashedly pumping out a series of staccato blams with every small tweak of the throttle.

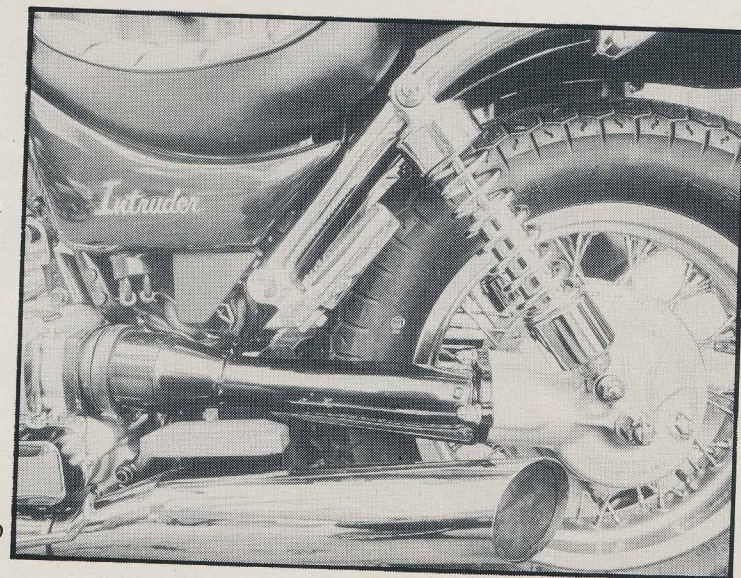
It got better, too. Bottom-end stonk is muscly enough to let you ease the hydraulically-operated clutch out without touching the throttle, and just thud off up the street at five miles an hour on the pilot jet. As well as unleashing more of that sharp, hard exhaust music, rolling open the twistgrip begs a



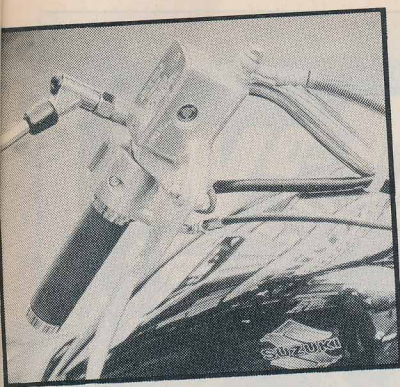
It cannot be said that the Intruder is cluttered with unnecessary instrumentation

kick in the back as the two downdraught 34mm Mikuni carbs squirt juice into thirsting inlet tracks. And with the first taste of that magic low-down and mid-range grunt I fell passionately in lust with the Intruder's engine. It's not a particularly powerful motor — the factory claims 63 bhp at 7000rpm — but what's there is eminently usable, even given the inevitable constraints imposed by steering geometry and general layout of the plot.

The double cradle frame is what you might call a genuine chopper article, or what National Chopper Club members would call a crying shame. At first glance the steering head area looks as though it's benefitted from some good old-fashioned moulding to cover up all the



If the discreet shaft drive's a bit faggoty, the rorty slashed-off shorty mufflers are anything but...



Hydraulic reservoirs for clutch and anchors have an interesting angle of lean

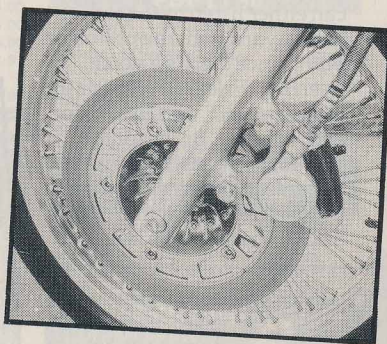
joins and angles, but a closer inspection shows the plates to be screwed on. Oh well, corners are made to be cut. Frame tubes hug the top of the engine closely, but since the fake rockerbox covers are easily removed access to the heads isn't difficult.

From the top of those pots the frame takes a dive to make the seating position even lower than most Harleys'. At 27 inches it's bloody hard not to get both feet on the ground, and even your knees if required. The bike looks pretty roomy, but once you're aboard it forces you into one seating position and holds you there, whether you like it or not. Pullback bars tacked onto short risers keep your arms up and out, and the king and queen seat clamps the old bum into position while you're hoisting boots onto the forward-mounted footrests. The riding setup's not as extreme as that of the Harley Softail, which is obviously a major stylistic influence on the Intruder, but on the other hand it's nowhere near as roomy. At six foot or so, riding comfort was a borderline case for me, and the aches attacked the lower back after a mere 30 miles or thereabouts. After a trip to MIRA, 6' 4" Roland was forced to sit on the pillion seat for most of the way down the M1 to ease his extremely long and cramped limbs, no doubt causing motorists to head straight for the nearest optometrist. Thankfully, fuel range from the 2.5 gallon tank is only a little over 100 miles at our average consumption of 42mpg. It's not the kind of bike you'd want to ride all day.

I've got to say that I've never enjoyed commuting so much, though. The low centre of gravity and the narrowness of the cycle parts allow Intruderman to zap through the trickiest gaps with only a cheeky blip of the twistgrip, and the power spread's perfect for low-speed running. I do wish that Suzuki hadn't aped

Harley to the extent of fitting a pair of low-grade rear shocks, though, for they combine mushy springing with gone-fishing damping that didn't like London's cratered roads much at all. Those wide and heavily chromed forks are on the softish side too, but that doesn't matter so much.

With so much grunt on tap gear-changing could be a vanishing mechanical species, if it wasn't for the irresistible urge to blap the throttle on the downchanges and bask in the exhaust note. Sorry MCA, I just couldn't bring myself to 'do it on the quiet'. But the thing'll pull like crazy in third from 20mph, and once you're in top you don't need to think about changing down unless the needle on the lonely-looking speedometer drops below 30.



Single front disc does its job. Quite right, too

The shaft drive is one of the best around, too. A weak-willed specimen such as myself will go up and down through the rather notchy five-speeder like a maniac, though, just to feel that stomping acceleration.

Even the kicked-out castor angle of over 56 degrees and trail of five and a half inches don't inhibit the Intruder's progress around town, and nor does the back brake, an item prone to locking up at the most distressing moments. The single front disc does a good

job, with plenty of feel at the lever end and a solid bite to haul up 504lbs of gassed-up bike. Suzuki claim a dry weight of 410lbs, but the MIRA weighbridge's groans told a different story.

While the steering is on the slow side, the bike's easy to throw around in traffic and steady as a lorry on the highway. The marriage of a fat 15-inch back wheel and a scrawny 19-inch front is hardly the most blissful of unions from a purist's point of view, but it's unlikely to divorce rider from machine unless you push the limited ground clearance too far. Touch it down, and the Intruder displays a strong tendency to follow that front wheel into roadside hardware. Ride the bike in the manner intended, slowly, and there won't be any problems, will there?

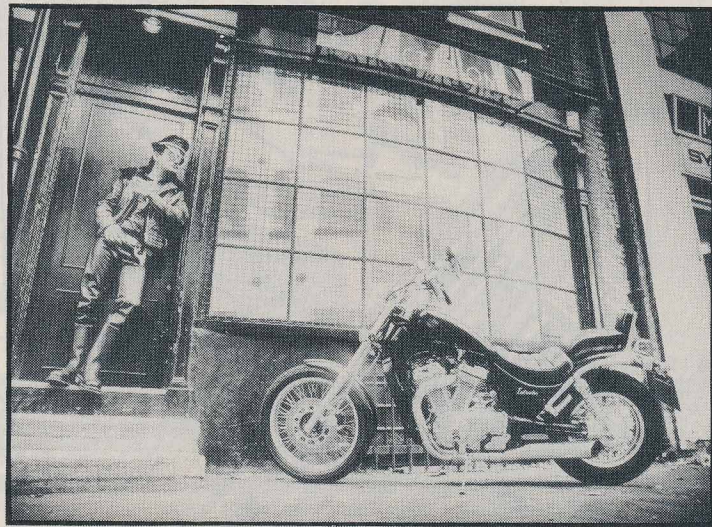
It's also hard to remember a bike that pulled as much attention as the Intruder. Even hard-bitten parking inspectors were too smitten with the gleaming chrome and deep maroon paint to book me for parking on the footpath. Cars slow down, heads swivel, and I always found a crowd around the bike. That's the trouble with non-motorcyclists, though, they're not famed for their discrimination. Park a VF1000R next to a Gold Wing and nobody takes much interest in the sports bike. The single instrument in front of the handlebars, the half-concealed bank of idiot lights, the wire wheels and the nicely contoured lines of the exhaust system attract people like a road accident.

And that's all the justification necessary for indulging oneself, isn't it? Bikes, to the committed, are as much adjuncts to personal expression as a means of transport and there's no way

the guy dressed in racing leathers aboard an NS400 or Ninja is any less of an ego-tripper than the guy in black leather and cutoffs on the Harley. At £2999 the Intruder's a cut-price ticket into laid-back riding compared to a Harley, and in its own way it has just as much right to claim an individual character.

The trouble for Suzuki, and Yamaha and Kawasaki when their custom V-twins arrive next year, will come with developing a market for these bikes. Budding Intrudermen will have to put up with cries of derision from friends who ride 'real' bikes, and all the cutoff and Triumph brigade will think they're wankers. It's not going to do any good just bunging the bikes into dealerships and hoping for the best, as Suzuki have done, or they'll rot there. Which would be quite a shame.

I'll leave the problem of getting across the message that laid back and slow doesn't necessarily mean idiotic and preattish to the Big Four. Me, I'm just hoping Suzuki are gonna put that engine into a real motorbike . . .



Next month, he's promised Boy George impersonations . . .

SUZUKI VS750 INTRUDER

Price	£2999
Guarantee	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine	OHC, water cooled 45-degree 4-stroke V-twin
Bore x stroke	80 x 74.4mm
Capacity	747cc
Comp. ratio	10:1
Ignition	Electronic
Carburation	2 x Mikuni 34mm CV
Air cleaner	Disposable cartridge
Oil filter	Disposable cartridge
Oil capacity	2.4 lit (2 qt)
Clutch	Hydraulically operated wet multi-plate
Primary drive	Gear
Gearbox	5-speed
Electrics	3-phase AC generator, 12V 16AH battery, 60/55W headlight, electric starter

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Dunlop, 100/90 H19 front, 140/90 H15 rear.
Brakes	Single 280mm disc front, drum rear
Suspension	Telescopic oil-damped fork front, two coil spring oil-damped shocks with 5-way adjustable preload rear.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	61 ins
Overall width	28 ins
Seat height	27 ins
Weight (full tank)	504 lbs
Fuel capacity	2.6 gal

PERFORMANCE

Top speed in 1/2 mile	
Prone	103.17 (mean)
Upright	96.72mph
Best one way	107mph
1/4 mile roll-on from 50mph (mean)	12.02sec/91.7mph
Standing 1/4 mile (mean)	13.67sec/93.17mph
(One way)	13.56sec/93.17mph
Fuel consumption, overall	42mpg
Ridden hard	33 mpg
Speedo accuracy	
At ind. 30mph	30mph
At ind. 50mph	50.7mph
At ind. 70mph	70.3mph