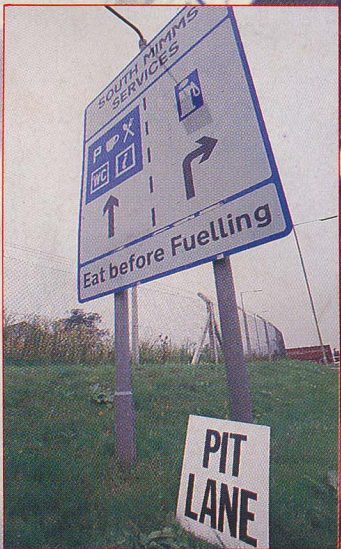
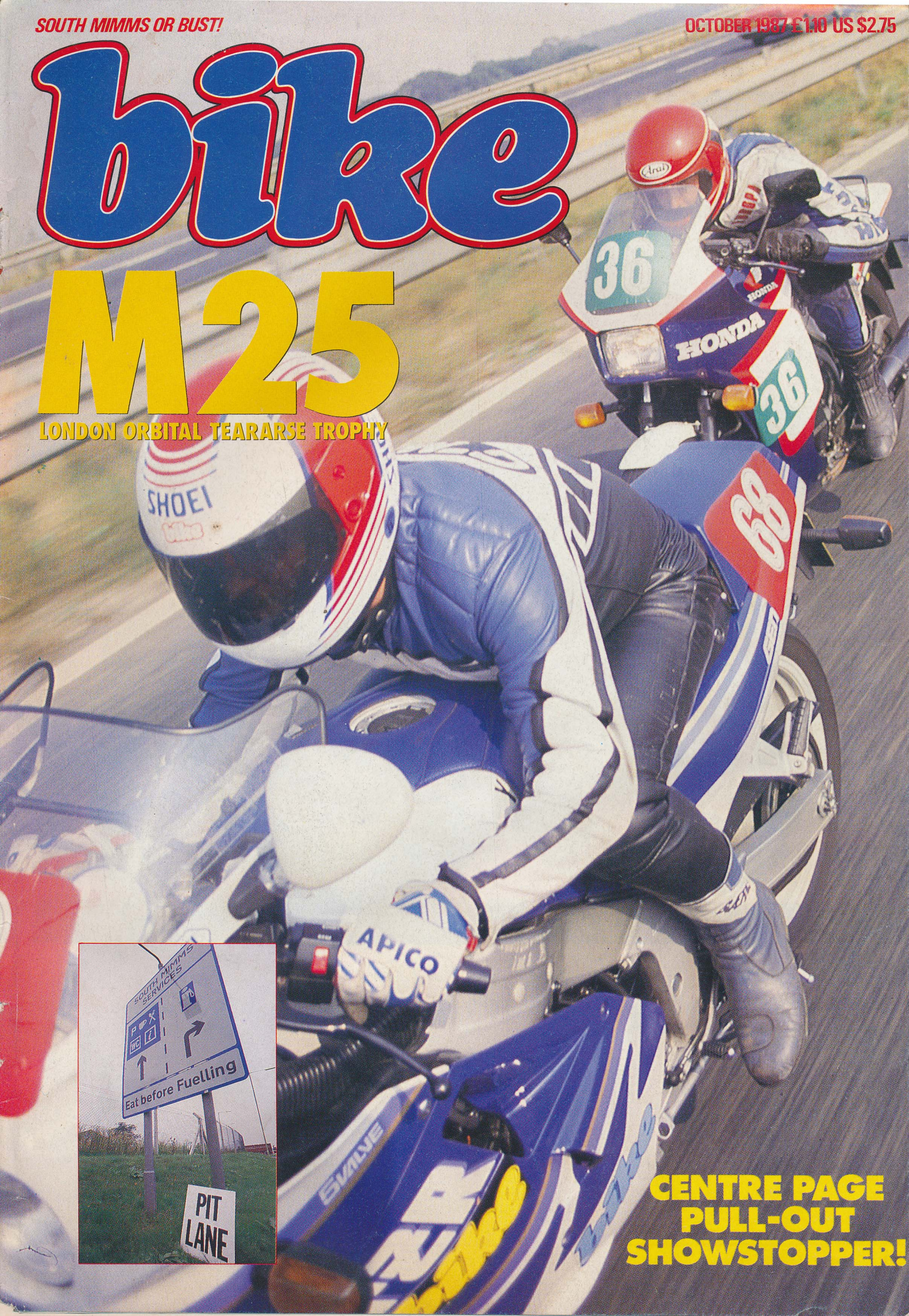


bike

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LONDON ORBITAL TEARARSE TROPHY

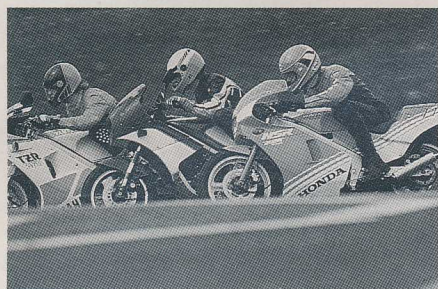


**CENTRE PAGE
PULL-OUT
SHOWSTOPPER!**

gizmos

ROADTESTS

24 TRIO BRIO
Road race clone-ettes of the 250cc variety from Honda, Yamaha and Kawasaki get the treatment—and need it afterwards



36 THE LADY'S COMPANION
Is the Honda Rebel one for the girlie's?

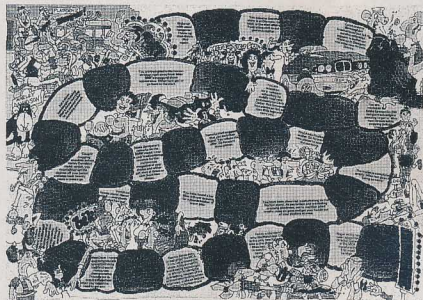


48 THE HANNIBAL SYNDROME
Cagiva's Elephant tries to get across the Transalp

FEATURES

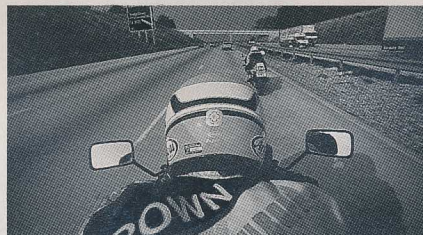
20 FACES AND FACE-OFFS
The four top dogs in our CBR Challenge profiled. Woof, Woof...

40 GIVING THE GAME AWAY
Trying to guess the boredom quotient at this month's NEC show and helping to solve it our own special way (Throw a double six to nuke Birmingham before 7 Oct)



44 HELP (I NEED SOMEBODY)
A consumer's eye cast over the roadside techno-mercy-dash specialists

60 THE M25 TEARARSE TROPHY
Britain's finest race circuit now encircles London with all the dread certainty of a Soweto necklance...



OTHER STUFF

8 FRONT PAGES
The usual last-minute drivell chiselled on a bar stool

14 AGONY COLUMN
You tell Auntie. She tells you where to go...



17 LIFE IN THE PIT LANE
Michael Scott savages road racing friends and foes

32 TEAM BIKE TOURS
Time to damage the Dutch and booze with the Belgians

76 SPANNER IN THE WORKS
McDiarmid makes a big noise

81 OGR!...busy as ever



82 LAST GASP
The final funnies

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T R I O



Some pointed and nudged their mates to get a look, others shook their fists and spat strings of expletives, and the police didn't even seem to care.

Even when we'd stopped circulating the roundabout and the three bikes were standing silently at the side of the road as the first drops of yet another British summertime deluge soaked slowly into our

leathers, the reactions didn't change.

The objects responsible for instigating this barrage of longing stares and incessant insults were a trio of 250s, all direct descendants of world beaters, with pedigrees longer than ten generations of Crufts winners. A TZR, a near TT winner and wearer of innumerable accolades from both the world's biking press and public; an NSR Honda, no

mean performer on the Mona turf itself and race replica with mirrors. Plus a Kawasaki KR which proved to have legs a fraction too short to make any real impression on the TT's leader board, but's nonetheless impressive in both looks and performance.

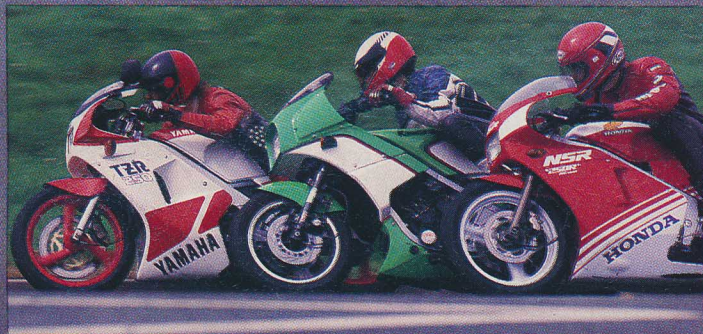
References to the TT are not just coincidental as all three bikes — the NSR and KR especially — owe their British presence to the annual



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PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GOLDMAN

Pat Devereux stacks 250cc stroker street racers in piles of three

gathering of the world's motorcycling fraternity on that hallowed lump of the GB in the Irish Sea. If it wasn't for these offshore two-wheeled battles, it's likely that the TZR would have been the only one to damage the nation's balance of payments as the other two bikes were exclusively intended for the thriving Japanese market — a fact constantly impressed onto any rider by the puzzling red

warning beacons on the consoles.

Not being familiar with any of the 16,000 odd characters of the inscrutable Japanese language that aren't regularly featured on the local take-away's menu, it took a while to suss these lights' message. Despite suggestions that they could be indicating the availability of the local crumpet, it transpired that they were merely a visual slapped

wrist from Big Brother for exceeding the Nips' 80kph speed limit. Tom looked disappointed.

The NSR here is one of only six imported privately with this particular bike being ridden to a ninth place in the '87 proddie TT by Alan Dugdale. Alan knows he could have been higher up the placings had he not stopped for a pessimistic and, in retrospect, over cautious petrol top-up which ▶

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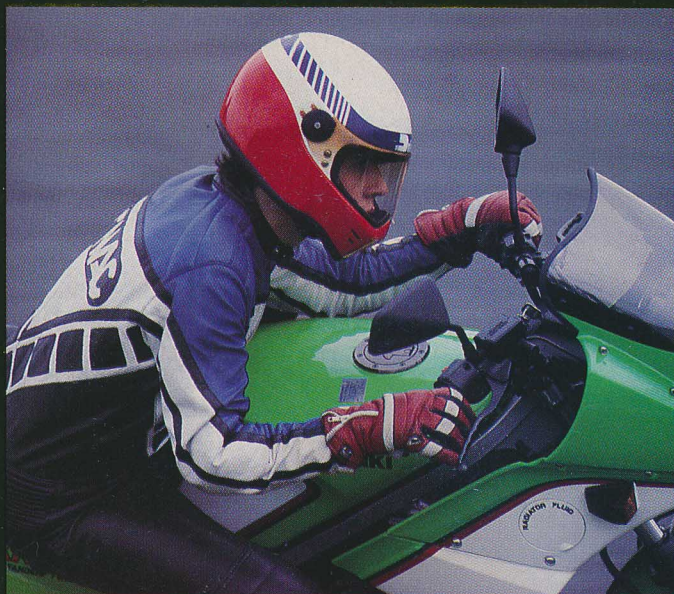


NSR sticks its nose in the air with little provocation

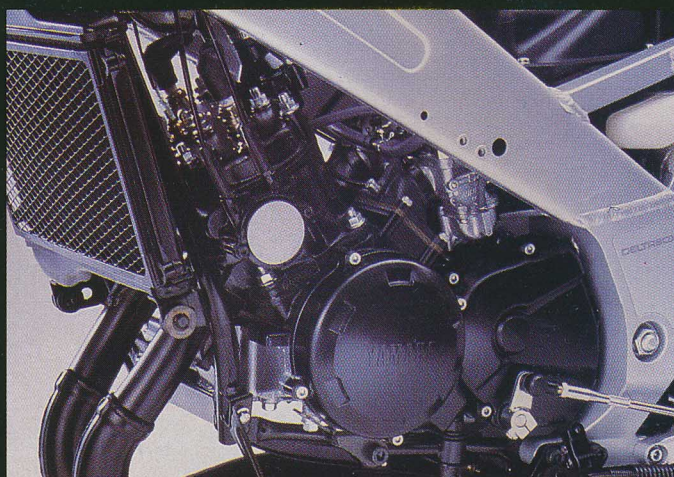
robbed him of valuable seconds and thus a couple of places too. Hindsight's a wonderful thing, eh Al.

The KR is one of a batch of only 18 brought into this country by Huddersfield Kawasaki a couple of years ago; one of which was ridden to tenth place in the '85 TT by Jamie Whitham but failed to reappear in successive years. In other countries such as Australia and South Africa, KR's have been more

successful, winning plenty of proddie races up against RG Gammas and LCs. "Which one's the fastest then?" enquired owner/vendor Alan as the bikes pulled onto the forecourt of his Chester motorcycle store at the end of the day. A simple question but nonetheless hard to answer. We'd only been able to borrow the TZR and NSR for one day, so we had no chance of getting to MIRA and measuring the bikes' performance



KR cuts a rapid dash at the local roundabout rally



TZR's parallel twin looks almost simple next to Honda and Kawa mills



Don't fancy giving the KR's tandem-twin a decoke



NSR's 90-degree V-twin covers beneath towering frame rail

empirically. Added to this the KR was still being conscientiously run-in by Dave Smith, its proud owner, and since he'd trekked all the way from North Yorkshire to let us play with his new toy, it didn't seem fair to blow it up for him. I'm sure he'll get round to doing that himself soon enough anyway.

Despite Alan's insistence that the NSR was one or two mph faster than the Yam on the flat out sections of the TT

course, the TZR felt consistently quicker round the Chester lanes and even on a brief blast down a local section of motorway it would continue to rev out longer than the Honda. In its defence the Honda had had a good caning in the hands of Alan and various other road testers so it did have a slight excuse for being a bit tired. But as they stood, even taking the NSR's higher mileage and gearing into consideration, the TZR ▶

ENGINES

Although all three bikes have notably similar power outputs, the engine designs couldn't be more different.

The TZR employs a revised but still familiar parallel twin arrangement that's been winning races on and off the track for some 30 years or more in various states of tune. The NSR derives its locomotive forces from a longitudinally mounted 90-degree quasi V-twin that's similar, but not identical, to Fat, sorry Fast Freddie Spencer's phenomenal 250 GP bike on which he won one half of his amazing 1985 500/250 world championship crown. And the KR relies on an equally unique tandem twin arrangement first seen on Kork Ballington's repeatedly victorious, and at the time unassailable, KR250 works racebike.

Both the Yamaha and Honda feature an exhaust port mounted power valve to coax a modicum of flexibility from predictably peaky motors. Honda must have burnt a tanker-load of midnight oil trying to stay within the copyright laws, as the NSR's power valve system is almost identical to Yamaha's YPVS set-up. It says quite a lot for the relative simplicity

and effectiveness of the Yamaha system when you consider how much R&D money Honda must have written off when they shelved their ATAC system in favour of the competition's design.

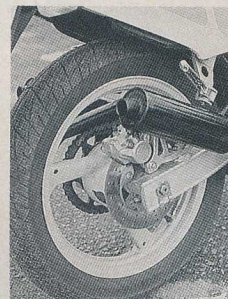
Anyone doubting Honda's need to produce a bike with a TZR-beating spec sheet should have a quick play with their calculator and work out how much the 20,000 odd TZRs already sold have earned Yamaha. This should give you some indication of the potential profits related to producing the right bike for the market; even if it does mean employing a bit of blatant plagiarism.

Copycat design is, however, something the KR could never be accused of. Power valves were still a small eddy in the Jap designers' tea leaves when the KR's engine layout was first conceived. Thus, as usual, Kawasaki came up with their own idea for making their two-strokes more rideable.

By combining the KR racers' rotary disc with reed valve technology — a concept later acronymed down to RRIS — the big K produced an engine with both power and flexibility. This same method is still being used, and to good effect, on Kawasaki's AR125 learnermobile. Pity they couldn't have fitted it to their wild triples though.



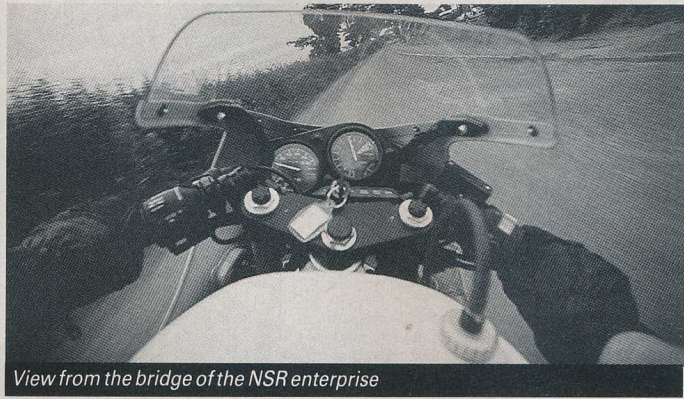
Bungee hooks hint at KR's user friendliness



TZR back end looks meaty until ...



You cop a look at NSR's massive derrier



View from the bridge of the NSR enterprise



TZR is marginally more accommodating than the Honda



KR's fairing wins in the protection stakes



Yam and Honda prepare to pounce on unsuspecting Kawasaki

	HONDA NSR250R	KAWASAKI KR250	YAMAHA TZR250
Price	£2499	£2349	£2699
Importer	Alan Dugdale Motorcycles, Greenbank Garage, Alvanley, Helsby, Cheshire (092-82360)	Huddersfield Kawasaki, 74 Albert Street, Lockwood, Huddersfield (0484- 42680)	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey (01-397 5111)
Guarantee	12 months unlimited mileage (Engine and gearbox only)	12 months unlimited mileage	12 months unlimited mileage
Engine	watercooled 2-stroke V-twin	watercooled 2-stroke tandem twin	watercooled 2-stroke parallel twin
Bore x stroke	54 x 54.5mm	56 x 50.6mm	56.4 x 50mm
Capacity	249cc	249cc	249cc
Comp ratio	6.2:1	7:1	5.9:1
Carburation	2 x 28mm Keihins	2 x 28mm flat-slide Mikunis	2 x 28mm flat-slide Mikunis
Gearbox	6-speed	6-speed	6-speed
Electrics	12V 3Ah battery; 55/ 60W headlamp	12V; 50/55W headlamp	12V 4Ah battery; 60/ 55W headlamp

CYCLE PARTS

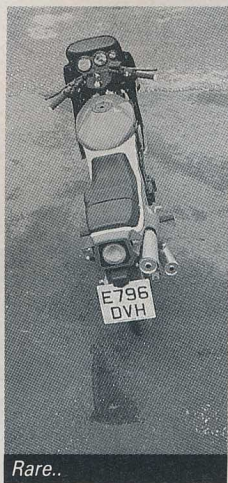
Tyres	Pirelli tubeless	Bridgestone tubeless	Dunlop tubeless
Front	120/80V17	100/90H16	110/H17
Rear	130/70V18	110/80V18	120/80H18
Brakes, front	230mm double discs	230mm double discs	320mm single disc
Rear	200mm disc	205mm disc	210mm disc
Suspension, front	Telescopic air- assisted	Telescopic, air assisted 4 position anti dive with AVDS	Telescopic, screw preload adjust
Rear	Pro-link single shock, screw preload adjust	Single shock, 4 way damping and preload adjust	Mono-cross single shock, screw preload adjust

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1360mm (53.5in)	1360mm (53.5in)	1360mm (53.5in)
Weight (inc 1 gal fuel)	125kg (276lb)	136kg (300lb)	117kg (260lb)
Fuel capacity	18 litres (3.9 gal)	18 litres (3.9 gal)	16 litres (3.5 gal)



Exclusive...



Rare..



Virtually unobtainable

had the sharpest engine of the trio, delivering a vast torrent of noise, power and fumes every time the seven thou blitzkrieg barrier had been breached. By comparison the Honda's marginally broader spread of poke lessened the effect of entering into the bike's powerband thereby reducing the sensation of acceleration. Plus it refused point blank to spin its motor any more than a gnats over 10,300, a couple of hundred rpm shy of the redline, which knocked a bit off the ultimate top-end.

But what of the Kawasaki? Well despite its at times frustrating seven grand running-in rev limit, the engine was still able to demonstrate its vastly superior flexibility. Whereas opening the throttle

on either the NSR or TZR with anything less than a five on the tacho would result in little more than a yawn from the airbox and little difference to the speedo needle's position, the KR would accelerate surprisingly briskly until the throttle had to be rolled off to avoid entering into the virginal part of the rev band. Once it's run-in the Kawa should be good enough to top a ton-ten on standard gearing, only a few miles per down on the other two. Some of the earlier mentioned production raced KR's in politically unsound places such as South Africa have been recorded at speeds not far off 140mph so the engine's not short on tuning potential.

Snicking through twisting ►

FRAME & SUSPENSION

Much has already been written about the TZR's frame being lighter, stronger and altogether much prettier than anything the LC had to offer. A fact which holds true for the NSR too. Both the Honda and the Yam's frames are twin spar beam-type aluminium affairs with sub-frames — steel on the NSR, ally on the TZR — to support the seat and tail-piece, complete with massive box-section ally swingers dangling off the back. Taken in isolation the two frames are so similar in design and construction, the only distinguishing feature is the small tubular spar between the NSR's main frame rails. Other than that they're nigh on identical.

The KR has a chassis that isn't identical to anything other than er, well, another KR. A three piece item, it kicks off with four square section ally tubes running back from the headstock, two over and two under the engine. These tubes meet and bolt onto a pressed swing arm pivot which acts as the second anchor point for the rear sub-frame that in turn bolts to the main frame to keep things nice and sturdy. It's less complicated than it sounds but it's still pretty unusual.

Each manufacturer has its own ideas for taming the road surfaces' bumps and craters. The TZR's front end carries a set of variably damped forks with protruding pre-load adjusters that stiffen up under compression to provide a degree of anti-dive, whilst the Honda has nothing more than a set of air valves and the KR uses Kawasaki's own hydraulic AVDS anti-

dive complete with air assistance to keep things at an even keel.

In the back wheel department all three bikes use a single shock set-up. The Honda and Yamaha use the shock mounted in an upright position just behind the engine, translating the wheel's movement via rising-rate linkages. On the Kawa, as with the rest of the bike, things are rather different. The double-spring, gas-filled unit is slung longitudinally under the engine where it is stretched rather than compressed when the wheel hits a bump. The TZR and NSR offer only preload adjustments which involve grovelling around on your knees and loosing a fair proportion of knuckle skin with a C spanner to effect a change. The Kawasaki is far more convenient, allowing the luxury of adjustments to both preload and damping via remote hydraulic adjusters from the comfort of the saddle and even whilst on the move. Very civilised.

None of the bikes suffers from any kind of braking deficiency. The NSR and KR have double front and single rear disc arrangements, the Honda employing four-pot calipers as on the TZR's single floating front frying-pan sized disc, whilst the Kawa seems to need just one pot per caliper to do a similar and occasionally superior job. All three had enough force to get the back wheel hanging in mid-air and the front tyres squealing as they scabbled to hang onto the road — enough for most headbangers.



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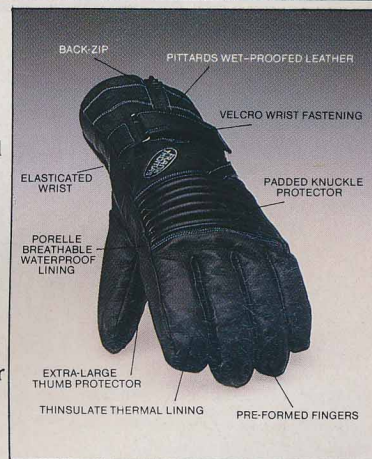
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country lines, returning all the rude gestures from the incredibly unpleasant Chester motorists, all three bikes exhibited remarkable agility, making short work of even the sharpest, most adverse camber bends. There were a few odd moments when the KR felt a bit skittish, its undertyred 16-inch front wheel starting to tuck in slightly when corners tightened up unexpectedly. But there were no such problems apparent on the other two bikes, partly because

of their better tyres and, just as importantly, because of the one inch bigger, happy-medium 17 inch front wheels bolted in between their front forks. The TZR and NSR would pander to the rider's every change-of-direction whim with little more than a fart in the right direction and only a serious attack of the sillies could start anything vaguely unsettling. Overall the TZR feels the most wieldy of the bunch, being a shade crisper than either the NSR or

the KR in almost every type of manoeuvre. The NSR was fractionally less skittish at high speed and the KR's quick steering was the best for town work, but as an all round handling package the TZR gets the nod from me, even though Tom managed to drop it.

The KR may have seemed like an uncompromising racer when it was first unveiled two years ago, but stacked up against the TZR and NSR it now feels almost staid. But don't let that put you off.

Calling a KR staid is maybe being unkind, practical would probably be better. On a day-to-day, do anything basis, the little Kawa wins every time. A well upholstered saddle, comfortably positioned bars and a fairing that actually protects the rider when he's sitting upright, instead of only when he's belly down on the tank, make the KR a pleasure to use come rain or rare sunshine. The other two bikes are less willing to accept a compromise.



The TZR and NSR may allow the rider to lose himself in the red mists of racer technology, but once the novelty has begun to wear off and the harsh reality of bench-hard seats and everyday life has started to creep in they can start to lose some of their original appeal.

All three bikes are capable of a thrill a minute, but none of them are cheap in either price or excitement. If you wanted to buy any one of this trio you'd be looking at a price tag in the

region of two and a half big ones. And even then the NSR is secondhand and complete with battle scars.

Justifying relatively high price tags to anyone who hasn't already ridden a bike of this ilk isn't easy, especially when plenty of much bigger — and arguably better — tackle is available for only a few hours' more pay. However, whilst there is a certain emotional buzz associated with cracking the ton in third gear on a megabike, to my mind, nothing

this side of an orgasmotron beats the rush of adrenalin liberated by winding a well tuned two-stroke into its powerband.

Even as brilliant as these three bikes are, there's still more to come. Rumour has it that both Suzuki and Kawasaki have models awaiting release that will make even the NSR look dated by comparison. The new Suzuki, built to replace the ageing Gamma, should be a V-twin that is essentially half of Suzuki's XR72 GP bike; whilst

the Kawasaki, likely to be another tandem twin, is reported to produce well over 55bhp and be capable of speeds over two miles a minute. It's doubtful whether either of these bikes will ever be officially imported into this country, but there must be a possibility that one or two might appear at next year's TT and eventually make it across to the mainland. Even if they don't I think I'd be quite happy with any one of these three. ■

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