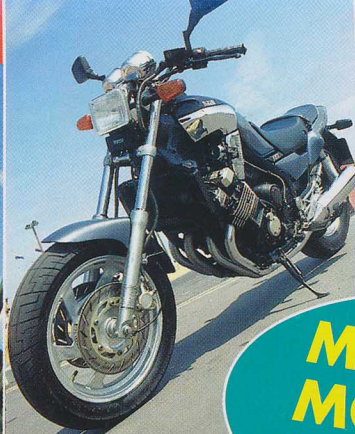


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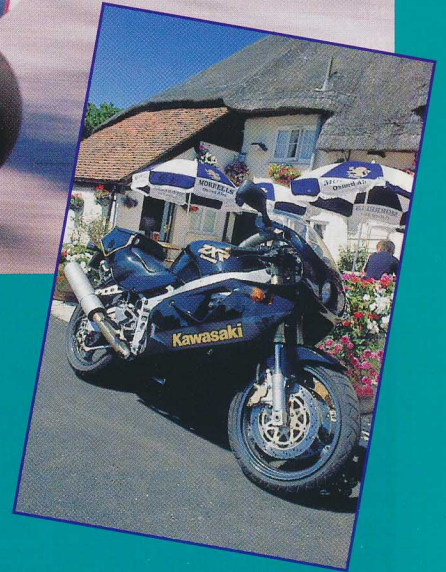


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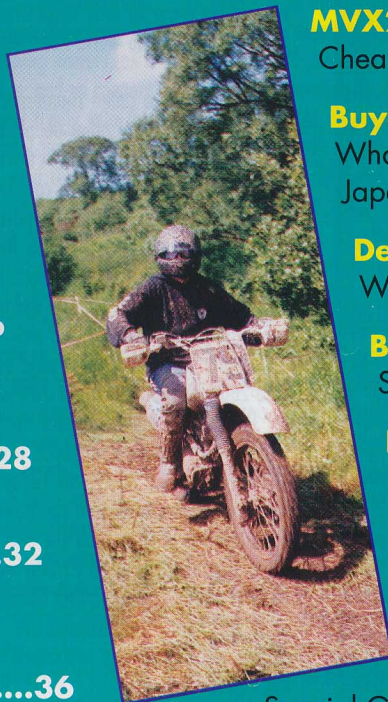
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FZX750 FAZER

The Fazer is one of those awkward bikes which taunts roadtesters to stray into naff cliché-land. I mean, just look at it; how can you not say 'Love it or hate it, you can't ignore it...'? It's a peculiar looking bike, which of course explains much of its appeal. The Fazer did make a brief appearance as an official import into the UK in the mid-80's, but bombed miserably, was discounted heavily, and henceforth dropped from the range, never to return.

Yet it's qualities were not so easily overlooked by the rest of the world, and in fact it's still a current Yamaha model - a production run of virtually a decade...

The FZX750 Fazer was introduced in 1986, as part of Yamaha's quirky 'custom cruiser' model range and eventually slotting neatly between the existing V-Max and the later 600 Radian - not just in terms of engine size, but also as a fairly obvious intermediary style-wise. Whether you think the styling works or not

is a matter of personal opinion - beauty being in the eye of the beholder, after all (see, and another cliché creeps in almost unnoticed...), but at least Yamaha must be credited with having the courage to push the boundaries of conventional motorcycle style and try and discover new territory.

When it came to creating the Fazer, Yamaha drew on existing technology at least as far as the engine was concerned, utilising the soon-to-become legendary 750 motor, which had first appeared a year earlier in the 1985 FZ750. With its water-cooling, inclined cylinders, 20-valve head and downdraught carbs, it was both bulletproof and powerful, kicking out some 90bhp - enough to keep the Fazer on a par with its rivals in the muscle-cruiser stakes, and probably about as much as you'd want on a bike with twin shocks, a 140/90/15 rear tyre, and a 110/90/16 front at the end of long forks... Still, don't let that oddball combination



"Well I think it's absolutely gorgeous and I want one" - Li'l Annie.

"It's quick but it looks like a tart's handbag" - Oddie

For those who've never experienced them FZ Series motors are a delight - strong and gutsy, with an appealing tendency to run forever



put you off, how well does it perform in reality?

For those who've never experienced them, the FZ series motors are quite a delight. Strong and gutsy, with an appealing tendency to run forever, combined with a sweet throttle response, the 750 lump in the Fazer is no exception, making its presence felt with a sensual vibration throughout the bike when you blip the twistgrip, and a promise of more to come out on the open road.

Once out there, the FZX750 is a long-legged beast, with 70mph cruising coming up at a leisurely 4,500rpm, making for relaxed and effortless motor-

way manners. The price you pay for such laid-back demeanour is a necessity to cog down if you want to really go sports-bike hunting - such is the tall gearing, two or even three stamps of the left foot are needed to get you into the serious hyper-zone. But the six gears are nicely spaced, and shift sweetly despite nearly 25,000 miles of use on this particular bike, and to prove the bike's long legs, third gear is good enough for hitting the ton before changing up...

Power starts around 5,500rpm, but real power kicks in with around 7,500 on the tachometer, pulling

strongly all the way through to the 11,000 red-line with no perceptible tail-off. Around town that tall gearing translates into a measly 2,000rpm at 30mph in top gear, which isn't a realistic proposition. But by 2,500 the motor's working well enough to haul you around, so if you do want to stay in top and grunt it round town, it's no real problem (it's also a bit pointless with a bike that revs so willingly...).

Equally useful in town traffic is the light, progres-



sive, hydraulic clutch, which is a joy to use and has plenty of feel. The brakes have plenty of feel as well, but in true mid-80's fashion, cannot really compare with the state of the art 90's swag. The brakes work well enough at both ends, but a good squeeze on the front lever means a *good* squeeze, and there's less initial bite than we've come to expect from modern systems. In their day the Fazer's brakes were probably the standard to measure others by, and they're still capable of hauling the FZX to a pretty rapid standstill, even from speed, but brake technology has moved on immeasurably in the last decade, and it shows.

Still, getting out of town and razzing the Fazer along the A-roads is another joy. There's a lovely unique induction roar from those carbs, mounted high up and just under the tank cover, as those 12 inlet valves suck voraciously at the atmosphere while you give it ten through the gears. Keep the motor spinning in the plus-eight-grand zone and you can turn tarmac into the sinuous grey blur edged with green as well as any sports bike. By this stage you and the Fazer are swallowing up the miles far quicker than you perhaps realise, so long distance touring shouldn't be much of a problem either. More to the point, it's actually good fun, and on a sunny day, feeling a bike like the Fazer beneath you is a real pleasure.

The Fazer also handles well enough, again given the restraints of both a typical mid-eighties package and the Fazer's own individual characteristics. Suspension at the rear is the usual oversprung and underdamped affair, but a lot better than most bikes of the era, and not that bad at all. The back end absorbs all but the worst the roads throw at you, only getting jittery over ripples or close-packed potholes. A



pair of decent aftermarket shocks would undoubtedly improve things, but would also be more of a luxury than a necessity.

When the going gets really rough, the front also starts to feel a little harsh, but not so much that I could pin down why. Maybe something as simple as a change to lighter oil would improve it, it's the sort of thing an owner could play with over a period of time

and again probably improve to his or her own personal taste. If they could be arsed, of course, most people would just live with it or not even notice it perhaps...

Handling has a touch of peculiarity about it, though, simply because the bike itself has. A slight tendency to wallow on fast swervery is no more than you'd expect from the back end, but at the front, with that tiny 16" wheel hung out on those long forks, you get a sort of 'quick steering but at a distance' feel. It's no sort of problem, it just feels weird at first, as though the front wheel is stuck a long way out in front of you. In practice, other than a very minimal tendency to fall into slow turns (a trait shared by all custom-style bikes to a greater or lesser degree), the steering is fine - light enough round town, and precise enough for the open road. It's flickable through tight bends, and you can pick the bike up and lay it down into corners with confidence, knowing it'll go where you want it, and stay reasonably stable, although without that 'planted' feel you can get on bikes with more conventional tyres and steering geometry. Only when cornering close to the ton does any real vagueness creep in, the bike's stability compromised by those oddities of styling.

It's the sort of bike which allows you to keep up a

respectable pace and distance. There's a nice comfy riding position, with a well-padded seat, bars that aren't too high, and footpegs that are far enough back for a change, giving a nice easy forwards-lean to accommodate the worst of the wind blast at speed - the only restraint being the usual one of aching neck muscles.

Styling? Well, each to their own. Li'l Annie loved it - if she could afford the insurance, she'd trade her Radian in tomorrow. The FZX certainly does slot in exactly in between the Radian and the V-Max, and in the flesh it does strut its funky stuff (albeit a tad ostentatiously for my own tastes, I think I'd at least have to get some paint on that chrome 'tank' panel if it were mine). But those solid alloy slotted wheels are a real work of art, and that rear seat panel, curving gracefully over the top shock mounts, contrasts sharply with the chunky engine and steeply angled carbs - you can't deny that the bike has presence. The idiot lights set into the panel in the tank form another nice styling mod, but in reality they're too far out of your line of sight to be much practical use. Still, on the whole it's an attractive bike, made all the more so by the fact that Fazers are still pretty uncommon on these shores.

The FZX performs well at its intended role - a stylish, unusual muscle cruiser, with enough looks to grab eyeballs in the High Street, and enough thrutch to haul you round the open road with some excitement when you fancy it. All the major components are well tried and tested, so owners can expect many thousands of trouble-free miles, and when you park it up, you'll be unlikely to see another Fazer parked next to it. Even without that gutsy motor, the Fazer's individuality would make it a serious contender. From a personal point of view, I didn't feel that essential spark which some bikes give you; not the bike's fault, just that perhaps we both spoke a slightly different language. But I suspect plenty of other people will find that level of communication - the Fazer must have something going for it, to be still in production ten years on, or still making the best part of three grand secondhand. Considering the FZX750 was eventually discounted to around £2,800 new in this country, you could have bought one then, run it for ten years, and still got your money back. Dosh-wise that makes it about a grand cheaper than a ZL900, or about the same price as a Super Magna, both of which are perhaps comparable motorcycles in the Premier Cruiser League. A grand less than that would get you a 750 Katana, similar age, slightly better handling, slightly less performance, and almost as quirky styling - you pays yer money and takes yer choice. But if it was my own bank balance I was about to raid (and there was any money in there to start with...), for me it would still have to be that big, black, butch 900 Eliminator...

Odgie

Yet it's qualities were not so easily overlooked by the rest of the world, and in fact it's still a current Yamaha model - a production run of virtually a decade...

SPEC:

Engine: 4-cyl DOHC 4-stroke

Capacity: 749cc

Weight: 203kg

Power: 90ps/8,500rpm

Torque: 7.1 kgm/6,000rpm



Model - FZX750 Fazer. Year - 1986(C). Mileage - 23,756. Price - £2795. Test Bike Supplied By West Coast.