

FEBRUARY 1996

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THE QUALITY MONTHLY

Motorcycle SPORT



APRILIA RS250



GUZZI NEVADA

On Test: **MUZ SKORPION**

Single stinger

APRILIA RS250

What a Cracker!

GUZZI NEVADA

Italian Custom

HONDA XR250

Dirt Devil

Cagiva v Citroen

Counting the costs!

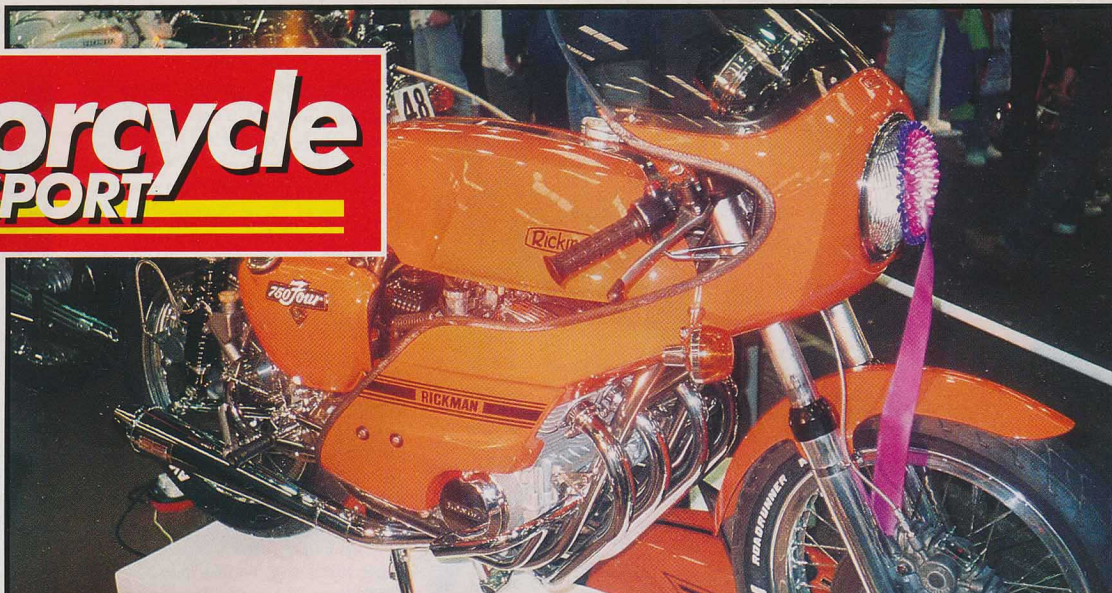
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ISSUE NUMBER: 424

Motorcycle SPORT



Motorcycle shows extend throughout the year these days, culminating of course in the Big One at the NEC in November. Motorcycle Sport is pleased to be associated with several of the 1996 shows, as detailed in the "News" pages in this issue

Investment Chain

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Letters

Advocates of new-age "FF" motorcycles, controlled by supine pilots, ignore loss of the motorcyclist's bonus of a lofty riding stance. Mr Hill writes, mildly, that the conventional bike's riding position helps in overtaking in safety; Mr Thompson says the FF-ers are bonkers. Takes all sorts ... especially among MCS correspondents.

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One Track

OT sheds a tear for all the poor folk out there who don't ride a motorcycle: most to be pitied are the faint-hearted ex-bikers seduced at an impressionable stage into Fiats and Rovers and such .

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Books Reviewed

"Jim likes to preach" - Jim being Jim Rogers who has written a book on investment opportunities ... presumably for bikers ... capitalising meantime on other opportunities while riding with a beautiful companion, Tabitha. They're both on BMWs, though that is possibly not significant, and cover many boring miles together. "Investment Biker" (£12.99 to you, guv) is a world away from Bacon's feel-the-width efforts reviewed in this issue.

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What a Cracker!

And it's an Aprilia - the RS250. Mr Kerr rides the road version of "Mad Max" Biaggi's world-championship-winning bike and thinks it's, well, pretty fair. (He quoted somebody else saying it was a cracker and drop-dead gorgeous, and that sort of thing; Mr K keeps a tight rein on his own adjectives.)

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Titch Allen recalls Ixion, masterly commentator on the world of motorcycling for over half a century.

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Should a motorcycle be cheaper to run than a car? Or are they really very different beasts, in concept, style and, for the most part, function, thus defying reasonable comparison? We get down to the nitty-gritty behind some eyebrow-raising pence-per-mile statistics.

MY first company car was a 4x4 International panel van provided by the Department of Railways New South Wales – surveyors and chainmen for the use of – whilst I was engaged in upgrading the standard-gauge railway line between Condoblin and Broken Hill in the late '60s. It carried bed rolls and equipment and transported our motley crew of "surveyors" to work and watering holes.

Back in Britain, I had my next company wheels in the form of an Austin Cambridge provided by Times Newspapers for "sales executives", a flattering title bestowed on eager young men purveying classified advertising from 200 Grays Inn Road in the days before decamilitarisation and refuse collectors' strikes. My third and last company car was the archetypal Mark II Cortina, courtesy of Texaco Ltd, for whom I looked after service station business in West Cornwall. After this, company cars took on a very different complexion, when I became my own employer. Resources were minimal and the need for dual-purpose vehicles led to a gradual evolution from ancient Thames 15cwt pickups, to a VW Transporter and finally an early Citroën CX Safari.

For most of the 80s, I also used a Guzzi Spada for long-haul business

COMMI CARS

ZX costs more to tax than it does to service!



trips, whenever the Citroën's cargo deck was not required, and it distinguished itself by being extraordinarily cheap to run. Fuel consumption usually exceed 50mpg, service costs were minimal, and Dunlop K181 rear tyres lasted upwards of 8,000 miles. Ferry costs were trifling and I charged the fuel to the business. In comparison to the big 2.4 litre petrol-engined Safari, with its C-matic transmission the Spada seemed to run on thin air.

But as soon as we could run to a van and a car and discovered that diesels could return better than 45mpg and cost

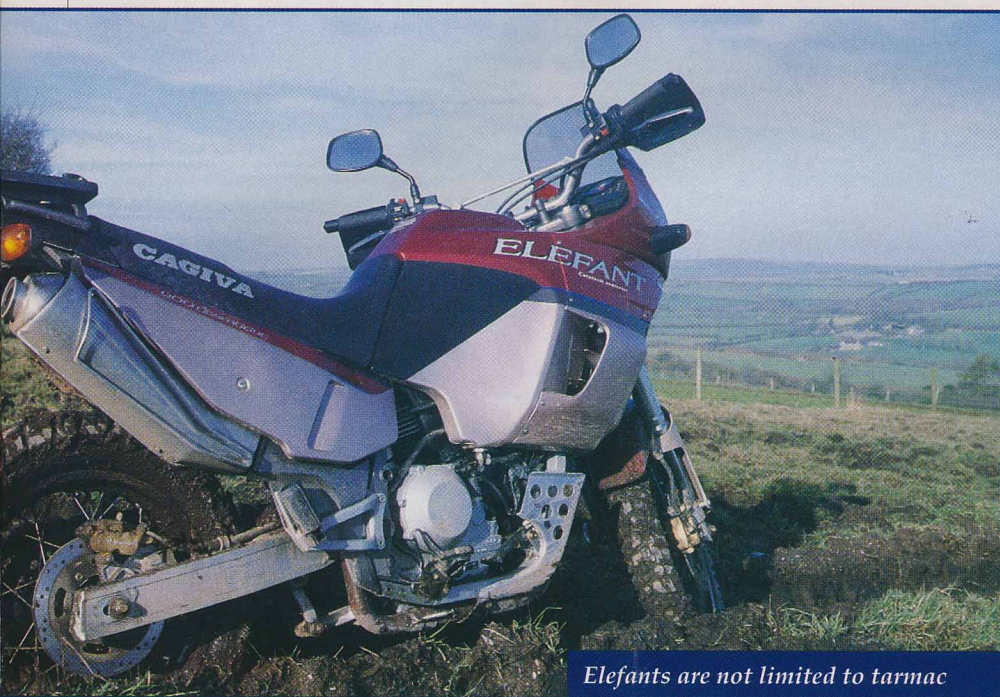
even less to keep on the road, the Spada became redundant. Besides, four wheels were often more convenient than two – until we started farming again. In no time at all the company car gave way to a utilitarian 4x4 and an older BX diesel was acquired as a private runabout, leaving Joe Bloggs without a sensible set of long-distance wheels again.

Transalps & Elefants

The immediate answer was a three-year-old Transalp. Sensible, comfortable, reliable and well able to put 80 to 90 miles into every hour, day in, day out, as

PANNY

Counting the costs: Cagiva v. Citroën



Elephants are not limited to tarmac

well as having some useful off-road capabilities. The Transalp was so good that I started to wonder why there were so few big trailies on the road in the UK and decided to investigate by doing a full series of comparative tests for *Motorcycle Sport* on the understanding that I would buy the bike that came out on top of the pile and then do a long-term test on it. The joint winners were the 750 Africa Twin and 900 Elefant. I chose the Ducati-engined Cagiva in preference to the Honda and took delivery of an M-registered Elefant in late August of 1994. The editor inherited the Transalp and the Cagiva became my company car.

Citroën Diesels

Meanwhile the old BX had done well over 120,000 recorded miles and we were looking to replace it with a lower-mileage turbo version. Wisely we decided to try it for size first and, in so doing, discovered that number two son didn't fit! At 6ft 3in (and still growing), his head hit the roof. It had been no problem in the old car with sagging seats, but better springs meant no

headroom and no deal. Meanwhile our friendly neighbourhood Citroën dealer suggested a demo in a new ZX Estate, which was three times as much as we wanted to pay, but had an upward step in the roof for rear-seat passengers. Lots of headroom, a good deal on our old nail, interest-free credit, and free insurance clinched the deal and on the last day of August 1994 we took delivery of a ZX Aura Turbo Diesel Estate.

Almost immediately I felt a comparative test coming on, and so spurred on by DD's vociferous comments about the running costs of modern bikes, here it is.

Head versus Heart

MOST logical and normal people would choose a car as a means of business transport, and a bike for personal use. Not us. Living on a farm in a relatively remote location, we need a car for lots of regular short and passenger-carrying runs to schools, college, buses, shops, churches, pubs – in fact everywhere the family needs to go. The first priority therefore is for a practical load carrier that's economical, sensibly sized for



narrow lanes, easy to handle and enjoyable to drive. Enter the ZX. The estate version has considerably more space than the BX saloon, yet is physically smaller and the programmed rear-wheel steering makes it a joy to handle. All in all, a sensible choice for our personal needs.

My business transport requirements are altogether different. Living in Cornwall and needing to travel nationally involves high mileages, but virtually no passenger or load carrying. And as a road tester I need a vehicle that I can leave with Honda, BMW, Yamaha and Co while I test their bikes. Two wheels are clearly the answer, so enter the Elefant as a company car. Logic would have dictated the Africa Twin, with all of Honda's legendary reliability and build quality, but my heart set on a Ducati engine. So with the company car and personal bike roles reversed, what happened next?

The First Year

Both vehicles covered 14,000 miles in their first months. A typical day in the life of the Citroën would be six separate journeys of between two and ten miles, with an occasional 100-mile jaunt thrown in for good measure. The only long haul travel consisted of two round trips down to the middle of France with a full complement of two adults, two teenagers and sufficient boots, coats, linen and luggage for a fortnight. Being a bit of a finicky old codger about the way cars are loaded, I said all the luggage had to fit beneath the load cover so that rear vision was unimpaired and we weren't mistaken for Lovejoy's Volvo or a Scout Troup support vehicle. In this mode we happily cover 600 miles a day either side of the statutory French lunch



and total some 2,500 miles in the fortnight. So overall the ZX does twice as many miles running round the lanes of Cornwall than it does in the fast lane of Autoroutes.

By contrast the Elephant spends January to August parked at Honda, BMW & Co whilst I'm roadtesting, and the other half of the year predominantly on long-haul trips to Italy (twice), Scotland (twice) and up and down to London or Birmingham, but also as my sole means of everyday transport – whatever the weather.

Running Costs

Its first 14,000 miles were covered in less than five months of use and it has already done a further 6,000 miles, since September. The only off-road mileage so far has been on the farm in Cornwall or the *chemins* of central France and probably amounts to less than 300 miles in total. Luggage carrying is taken care of by a 50 litre Givi Maxia top box, which is attached to the integral rack by means of a universal adaptor plate. It is large, 100% watertight, quickly detachable and has its own inner case which is an excellent overnight bag cum briefcase in its own right. There's room for a small selection of spares, chain lube, extra tools and gloves underneath the inner bag in which I can get enough clothes, papers and paraphernalia for a couple of weeks away.

Running costs made up of three elements: fuel, servicing and consumables. The ZX used 1,606 litres of diesel, giving an average of 39.2mpg, and has used no oil, whilst the Elephant used 1,370 litres of unleaded at an average of 46mpg and consumed five litres of oil. With the price of diesel and unleaded pretty much on a par in the UK (currently 57p a litre locally), the Cagiva has cost £135 less in fuel bills. So despite the Ducati engine's healthy appetite for oil knocking this back by £25, the first round goes to the bike.

Service costs, however, were something else. The ZX, as Citroën's '80s advertising promised, loves driving and hates garages. Major services are at 12,000-mile intervals, incur 0.7 hours of labour and cost around £60 inclusive of oil, filters and VAT, whilst the intermediate 6,000 mile services run out at about £32. Our total service bill, including one new windscreen wiper and the parts element of the first 1,500-mile service, amounts to just £107, or 0.76p per mile – which is less than the road tax!

The Elephant, if you'll pardon the mixed metaphor, is an entirely different kettle of fish. Services crop up at 7,500km intervals (a little under 5,000 miles), incur five hours of labour and cost an average of £207 inclusive of oil, filters, plugs and VAT. And unfortunately for the comparison figures, the 22,500km

service, which comes at spot on 14,000 miles, involves new cam belts and an extra hour's labour. My total service bill including the parts element of the first 1,000km service amounted to £784, or 5.6p per mile. Second round to the car, by a huge margin.

And so to consumables. The Citroën has consumed nothing. Not a tyre, a brake pad or even a bulb. Although we did suffer a broken windscreen and incur a £50 insurance excess – a small price for the excellent replacement service. Otherwise the sum total of the ZX's appetite has been a single windscreen wiper. And the tyres even look good for another 14,000 miles!

Elephants by contrast have a healthy appetite for tyres, chains and brakes pads. Rear tyres barely last between services and were renewed at 7,500, 15,000 and 22,500km. Fronts do better, but a change to Pirellis at 7,500km because the original Dunlops were unavailable meant discarding a part-worn tyre; although the new Pirelli then lasted until 22,500km. Three rears and two fronts add up to £369. Add a new chain and oe sprockets at 20,000km (£194) plus three sets of brake pads (£61) and the Elephant had eaten its way through another £563. A very significant amount of money by anybody's standards, and representing nothing short of a walkover for the Citroën.

But there's a little bit more to all this



than meets the eye. The car cost £13,350 on the road and had a book value of £9,650 a year later. The mileage was normal, the condition excellent and we would have been offered £10,000 in part exchange for another Citroën. In this best case scenario it would have depreciated by £3,350. The Cagiva cost £6,250 on the road and had a nominal book value of around £4,500 a year later. But the mileage was three times higher than average (5,000 in the first year and 4,000 annually thereafter is what the CAP Green Book works on) so I would certainly have had trouble getting much more than £4,000, even in part exchange for a new Ducati or Cagiva. In a best case scenario I might have got £4,250 and dropped just £2,000.

Adding the whole lot up reveals that the Citroën cost £220 more to run over the 14,000 miles than the Elephant with overall costs coming out at 31.23p per mile for the car as against 29.66p for the bike. The equation swings further in favour of the bike if you take into account the interest that would have been earned by the capital invested, purely because the car cost twice as much in the first place. But if you disregard the depreciation and simply compare out of pocket running expenses the ZX costs a miserly 7.3p a mile and the Cagiva an elephantine 19.5p. And yes I know that I've disregarded insurance, but this was done on purpose

because the Citroën's came free and the Elephant was already covered under my Rider policy.

A VALID COMPARISON?

COMPARING bike and car running costs is not an exact science. It might have made more sense to compare a Range Rover with the Elephant on the basis that both are large-capacity dual-purpose vehicles or an XJ600S Diversion with the ZX Estate because they're both utilitarian middleweights. In both cases the bikes would have fared better. But the reality is that bikes and cars are normally bought and used for very different purposes – so why bother?

Perhaps the right way to look at it is through the European Commission's new Green Paper entitled "The Citizen's Network – Fulfilling the potential of public passenger transport in Europe" in which they see positive advantages in the use of powered two-wheelers (PTWs to the Eurocrats) in terms of their relatively more efficient use of space and fuel. A 1992 report by the Commission's Motor Vehicle Emissions Group (MVEG) calculated that PTWs took between 16 and 46% less time to complete urban journeys than cars and used between 55 and 81% less fuel to do so, and the Federation of European Motorcyclists are currently using these statistics to actively promote PTWs. Who said nothing positive ever came out of Brussels?

In terms of the Elephant and the ZX, it is not so much the precise costs per mile that are important but the general conclusions, which are that the bike uses less fuel, occupies less space and gets from A to B more quickly than the car, but costs considerably more to service and keep on the road. And it's not only Ducati-engined Cagivas that cost a lot, because DD's "sensible" shaft drive XJ900 cost £374 over 10,000 miles (*Dixon's Beat – MCS November*).

In some ways, the Elephant's costs are more understandable because the screen, the tank and all the bodywork have to be removed before any mechanical work can be done. But DD is of course quite right in that bike designers do not normally programme ease of access or labour costs into their design criteria. Witness the 5.3 hours of labour for a run of the mill Elephant service! At £25 an hour plus VAT this works out at more than £150 in labour alone. Compare this to 0.7 hours and £20.00 for the ZX! Which tells me exactly what I knew before – that Ducatis are amongst the costliest bikes to service and ZX amongst the cheapest cars!

Perhaps Ducatis should be compared with Ferraris, where it is possible for the parts element of the first free service to comfortably exceed £500.

DD also went on at some length about tyre life. The inescapable fact of motorcycling life is that putting a lot of



horse power down through a small contact patch requires different design characteristics and softer compounds than those used in normal car tyres. Add to this the fact that development and manufacturing costs have to be written off against much smaller production runs and the high cost of tyres is understandable – on high-performance machines, at least.

I've been disappointed at the mileage from crossply Dunlop and Pirelli trail tyres on the Elephant and am now trying some new Avon Gripster radials, in the expectation of improved longevity and performance. But if there is a compromise to be made, I will plump for safety rather than economy, particularly as more and more cars become equipped with ABS.

As a long-standing Guzzi man I had all but forgotten about the substantial cost of chains and sprockets and was disappointed in the 12,500 miles I got out of the DID X ring chain fitted as original equipment until a less durable but almost equally expensive replacement did barely half the miles. I've now fitted a new X ring chain and installed a Scott Oiler and will report on developments. The only practical alternative is shaft drive in the form of an R1100GS, but much as I like the Bee Emm, I'll be sticking to the Elephant for the foreseeable future.

In real terms the Cagiva has



Catalytic converter is civilised and eco-friendly

consumed fewer tyres, chains and sprockets than most big bikes and the overall running costs over 14,000 miles are remarkably similar to those arrived at by *Motor Cycle News* in most of their long-term tests. What the mathematics show is that running costs are all a matter of swings and roundabouts. The Cagiva's good fuel consumption and modest bill (by bike standards) for consumables are off-set by costly servicing. Whilst the Citroën's miserly running costs are off-set by a larger capital investment and consequently higher depreciation.

Ought for Nought

You don't have to be Yorkshireman to know that ought comes for nought. So if you want fresh air, independence, speed, adrenalin and sheer selfish enjoyment to come as part and parcel of your company "car", then the price lies in running costs, riding gear and varying degrees of discomfort, as dished out by the British climate. The equation is infinitely variable with sensible commuter tyre PTWs making the most economic sense but providing little in the way of speed and adrenalin, and Race Replicas the exact opposite. For me, at least, the Elephant makes a happy compromise. It's plenty fast enough, costs less to run than a car, provides all the excitement a b.o.f. could ever want and has a Ducati engine. And as for the Citroën, what can I say? A torquey 1.9 litre turbo diesel in a compact and sweet-handling estate car which costs less to service than to tax must make sense. In the first 14,000 miles it has consumed one windscreen wiper, the only niggle has been a creak in the roof trim, and we both enjoy driving it. And it only costs 1.5p per mile more to run than a bike. Common sense has surely never come in a more desirable package.

The only drawback for Citroën lovers is that there's no hydro-pneumatic

suspension and the quintessential character of the DS, ID, CX and GS ranges appears to have disappeared for ever. Ease of servicing and conventional technology clearly sell more cars than character does. A good reason, if reason is required, why bikes should retain character at the expense of complexity. I would rather be riding a desmodromic vee-twin than a two-wheeled Fiesta. What about you?

Observations

The Citroën produces its hefty 148 lb ft of torque at a lowly 2,250rpm which is three times as much as the 900 Ducati and at half the revs. This torque plus five well chosen gear ratios and good aerodynamics is what gives the ZX its winning combination of drivability and economy. The legal limit comes up at around 2,750rpm and it will cruise contentedly at plus or minus 3,500rpm (90mph) day in day out.

By contrast the aerodynamics of big

trailies in general, and the Elephant in particular, are rudimentary, both in terms of noise and drag factor – although the protection is adequate. The Cagiva's natural gait is around 5,500rpm (85mph) and the legal limit comes up at 4,500rpm. There's lots of mid range grunt from the big Duke and the six-speed box provides a ratio for all occasions, although (as with the ZX) little cog swapping is actually required. The Cagiva is always fun to ride, and although fuel economy is good by modern-day standards, it would improve with better aerodynamics.

The car produces 92bhp at 4,000rpm and weighs 1,150kg whilst the bike weighs in at 185kg and delivers 68bhp at 6,500, giving power to weight ratios of 80bhp/per tonne for the ZX and 367bhp/per tonne for the Elephant. As DD says, this is the figure we should promote, because it's what makes bikes so much fun, and simply cannot be matched by anything but the most exotic supercars with so many noughts on their price tags as to make them inaccessible to normal mortals.

The Citroën has most mod cons, including an alarm, central locking, electric windows, radio cassettes, 12 months free roadside assistance, a cargo net, sun roof and internally adjustable mirrors. Everything works. No extras are needed and we have no complaints. The Elephant comes with hand protectors, a screen, a small lockable glove box and no centre stand. The Givi luggage was fitted as an extra and the bike was Datatagged. After 20,000 miles a taller Ermax screen and a Scott Oiler have been fitted, crossply tyres have been replaced with radials and a Dynojet Kit is in the pipeline.

Both vehicles have met all expectations and I would make the same choices again, for the same reasons.

THE SPY



Pirelli MT 60s have been replaced by Avon radials