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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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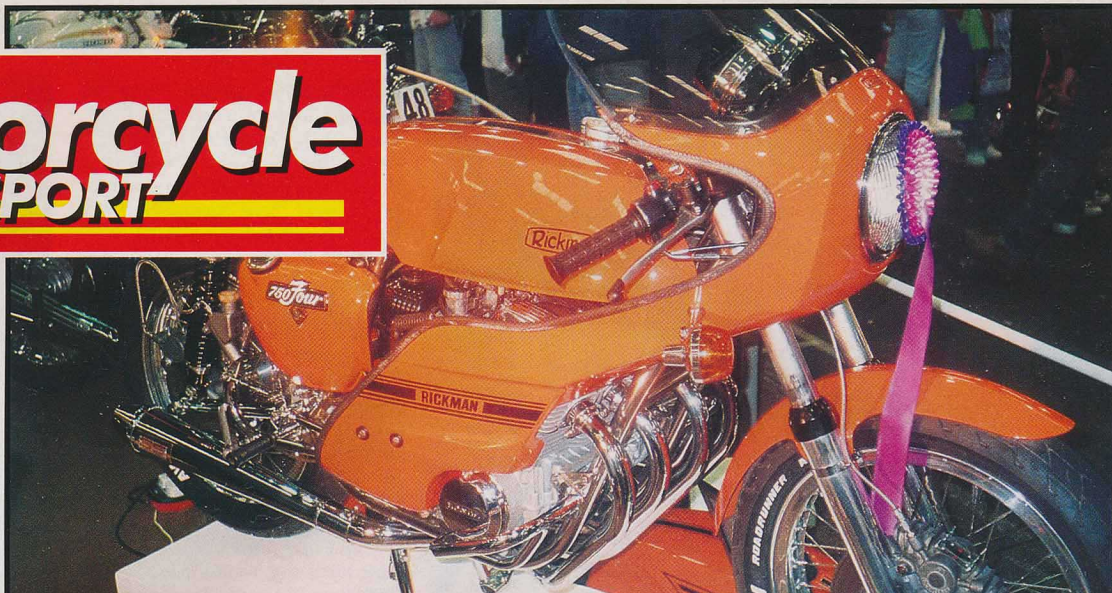
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SIDECARS PLUS GPs AND WORLD SUPERBIKES**



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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

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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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Odd sort of title for an MCS article? Perhaps. The Spy examines the surprising proposition that a company man might not be better off financially in opting for a motorcycle instead of a car over a 15-20,000-mile year. A diesel engine and low-cost servicing make quite a difference

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Seymour Powell have the design brief and MZ will make it. "BSA" on the tank should sell it. We think ...

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

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Designers: David Mills / Nathan Hallett
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MOTORCYCLE SPORT
PO Box 2, St Columb, Cornwall TR9 6SP.
Tel 01637 881201 Fax 01637 881203
E-Mail: mcs@easynet.co.uk
Internet Ref:
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WHAT A CRACKER

Aprilia's RS 250 looks like a **racing** bike; and, appropriately, goes like one

"DROP dead gorgeous". "Flair, flowing lines". "Very pretty". "What a cracker". I could go on with the comments from people examining the Aprilia RS 250. There is no doubt the bike looks good – like a real racing bike. In fact, comparing it with Loris Regianni's RSV 400, as displayed at the Paris show, I thought it was difficult to tell them apart.

For the record: fluo red, Nordic blue and matt-grey are the colours used on the bodywork which has been designed for maximum "aerodynamic penetration." The bodywork fits the bike like a glove, its front tip barely clearing the outline of the tyre, and at the rear reaching back with a tail piece identical to that of the RSV to form the rearmost end of this compact machine.

The radical styling and flowing lines do not, however, disguise the fact that this is a *small* bike. But, despite its modest dimensions, it quite easily accommodates riders like myself who are over six feet, leaving them room to move around if necessary. The pilot's weight, though, is all taken on the wrists, and at low speed that's painful

Basically Suzuki RGV
90-degree twin makes 70bhp ...
so "they" say ... in Aprilia guise



Nearside beam is polyellipsoid dipped. Maybe you guessed?
(Offside is old-fashioned "main".)



The art and reality of a two-stroke's exhaust on journeys over 20 miles. This is a no-compromise bike!

To be fair, that was Aprilia's aim in producing a road-going version of the bike that "Mad Max" Biaggi rode to win the world championship in 1994 and 1995. To quote the makers: "It is a bike

for a public of real enthusiasts who are fully able to take advantage of the performance that it offers, while respecting their own driving abilities. A motorcycle to ride with your head, not with your muscles, without having to give up any of the pleasure of high performance."

They have certainly achieved their aims in every respect, but at a price ... which I will come to later. This is a bike that any student of design would be pleased to present as an object d'art.

GP fans and engineering students will admire the work that has gone into the frame, designed in close collaboration with the racing department. Gaetano Cocco, racing guru, has stamped his mark on the bike with a beautifully polished beam frame having removable front engine cradles.

It is a mixture of fabricated thin-wall aluminium and magnesium alloy sections welded together, with internal ribbing for extra strength. The rear part of the main structure is waisted to enable the rider to tuck his legs in.

The swinging arm has a similar construction to the frame, but with two asymmetrical arms. The left is trussed, with an aperture to allow the chain line to run straight, whilst the other side is pure "banana" or "boomerang", which allows the expansion chambers to sit inboard, to increase ground clearance when banked over. All identical to GP bike style

Frame and swinging arm are beautifully polished to form part of the overall styling of the bike, giving it an air of quality and purpose.

As one would expect on such a machine, the 40mm-diameter Marzocchi forks are inverted and adjustable. On top of the left (UK nearside) leg is the

It's a small bike, but six-footers like Mr Kerr can be accommodated





And here's Kerr, the incredible shrinking man, looking even more at home, going the other way

pre-load, while the right leg has the damping adjustment above the top yoke. This is similar to the BMW system in which the legs have different roles to play, relying on the link between the two to ensure that they work in symmetry.

At the back, the single shock has pre-load which is adjusted by toothed rings. The damping control on the remote reservoir is easily accessible, being located just inside a scoop on the fake carbon-fibre rear sub-frame. This hides the actual steel-tube item that is bolted to the rear of the main frame.

The chassis rolls on 17-inch aluminium-alloy wheels, with five tangential spokes, shod with Pirelli rubber, 110/70 front and 150/60 rear. This is a bike aimed at the twists and turns of road or track, with every item brought together for that purpose – there are no extras other than a tool kit!

The light weight (141kg dry) ensures that very little effort is needed by the rider, at low or high speed, to change direction; manoeuvring the bike is certainly a doddle. The bike revels in being pushed hard – the more you push the better it is – but it is also very stable in a straight line as well as being flickable through bends.

Despite pain for one's wrists, two days of commuting into London in peak-hour jams showed that the steering lock is not too tight and is no handicap to traffic negotiation. The bike made excellent progress through traffic aided by its slim lines. Mind you, I would never recommend a town centre as the bike's best habitat, even for short periods.

The mirrors, whilst being slim and tucked in, may aid filtering but are

almost useless in conveying rearward information: despite numerous attempts to dial them in, I failed to get a clear view to the rear. All of which gave me no confidence to exploit the bike's performance for any length of time.

Performance is something this bike has lots of ... and, obviously, it helps if you have the ability to use it. I have always maintained that "two-stroke" riding is an art, and it's something that I lack, because of the need to keep the motor forever on the boil to get the best out of it.

Because I ride on the throttle, and there is little or no engine braking available with a two-stroke, this confuses my aged brain. Basically, you have to rev the guts out of a two-stroke and rely heavily on the brakes, and that's a technique I find alien to my riding style.

The motor is a Suzuki RGV 250. This 90-degree two-stroke twin pumps out 70bhp (claimed), with a 13.2:1 compression ratio in the Lavin version – slightly more than original spec. Although the powerplant is basically the same as the RGV, which ironically is this bike's only real competitor, it has been modified for the Aprilia. An increase in power has been obtained by fitting new cylinder heads which feature combustion chamber shapes that come from the racing division. These have increased the compression ratio; with more heat, the cooling channels have had to be enlarged. The expansion chambers have been made to suit, with carbon-fibre-wrapped cans to finish things off. Carbon-fibre gives a quality/expensive look, too

The digital ignition has been re-mapped to give the Italian bike different power curves from the Japanese motor,



Four-pot calipers and 296mm diameter discs ... tremendous braking.



making it more torquey, producing more power. There was, also, some extra work carried out on the cases, most notably a re-design of the clutch cover to increase oil circulation around the plates, for greater clutch reliability.

The most noticeable thing? As I switched on the ignition there was no whirring and clicking as the exhaust valves rotated to clean carbon, as happens with the RGV. Still, the bike started first kick, hot or cold, and revved quite cleanly when the rotary choke was backed off.

Techno freaks will love the Aprilia for the LCD display that sits in the centre of the fairing. The word "Cold" comes up to make sure you do not try to exploit the bike's performance too soon. As it warms up to normal operating temperature, around the mid-40s, it gives a constant readout.

There is a clock at the bottom right of the display, which I maintain is a must on all bikes. By use of buttons, the display will also give battery condition and advise on operation of the charging system.

Those who want to try their hand at racing to the newsagent will find the last-named function useful. The display can be used to count laps and time them, with up to 10 times capable of being stored.

Back to reality. Once warmed up, the bike will deliver the goods in a way similar to the RGV. In other words, get the rev-counter reading above 9,000 and keep it there, and there is little to hinder rapid progress. Slip into sixth, though, and hit a gradient of any consequence and then it's a case of treading down a few gears and winding open the throttle to regain former pace.

Riding can be frantic but rewarding if you are in the mood. Below the power band, it is just like any other two-stroke – functional and unexciting. I found the test bike had a quite noticeable flat spot between 8 and 9,000rpm and had to be coaxed into the power band. Otherwise, there was delay or lag, the kind normally associated with a turbocharger.

As one might expect, such high-octane thrills do not come without penalty and of course it's in fuel consumption that the bike exacts a price. This bike runs onto reserve at between 70 and 80 miles, having drunk three gallons in the process – and that is not counting the expensive synthetic two-stroke oil you'll have used. In hard terms, what this means is that it is going to cost 10 pence for every mile you do on this bike, in fuel alone!

Money is not everything, though. Here you have a bike that is one of the closest you can buy to those on the GP track. You have style and flair and Brembo Goldline brakes! These will ensure that even if you're bouncing the rev-counter off the limiter before changing gear, if you do need to reverse

the process of forward momentum rather quickly it's merely a case of *caressing* the levers – you slow, and stop if required, very, very smartly.

The four-pot calipers at the front have differing diameter pistons to spread the load and even out the pressure and will happily grip the 296mm rotors till the back wheel is airborne, making the single twin-pot caliper at the back almost redundant. It's always comforting to know that you can ... *stop* when you are on a bike with a top speed capability of 130mph. Consider that it is not so long ago that bikes of four times the capacity of the Aprilia could only just nudge that 130 ... some antiques, like BMWs and Harleys, cannot manage it even now, of course!

At night the bike allows state-of-the-art electrics to come into play. The headlight is actually two separate



beams, behind the plastic outer lens. The nearside light is a polyellipsoid dipped beam whilst the righthand beam is a traditional main beam. According to the Aprilia blurb, "this is to ensure a low height whilst maintaining the maximum spread of light". All I can say is that it works, and night-time riding is a pleasure.

The Aprilia has only one competitor when we are talking about normal factory imports, and that is the Suzuki RGV. The Suzuki has a history, but it's getting rather long in the tooth, although it is still able to match the Italian bike on all counts except style and finish.

Pricewise, the Japanese bike is some £200 cheaper than the Aprilia although I should think that saving will not be a consideration for potential buyers. The Aprilia at £5,495 will probably win on looks and pedigree alone.

The RS is an intoxicating bike, in looks and performance. But (like any worthwhile work of art) it is expensive to buy and maintain. Life would be boring without bikes such as this. Long may they continue to tempt us – but I, like many others, will continue to resist!

I.K