

S C R E A M I N G

Having previously been used to such motorcycling legends as the CX500 I didn't find it difficult to excuse the old FZ600 for some of its less endearing qualities. For sure it was harsh and uncomfortable but after the pig-on-stilts repertoire of the maggot I was in Nirvana.

Like the new FZR it went Exactly (that's with a capital E) where it was pointed and with such precision that it was nearly a spiritual experience. All that it needed to make it the ideal scratcher's bike was a little more power and a more interesting power delivery in keeping with its impeccable handling.

The '89 FZR600 is now the archetypal, totally committed headbanger's bike-cum-production race winner. It feels crude, in comparison to the GPX and CBR, at up to anything approaching seven tenths but above that it brings out the best in you.

It really is the sort of bike that encourages delinquent behaviour in the same way that a 1340 Harley begs to be ridden ITS way. With peak power being made at between 8 and 11 its power delivery is more



Although the FZR600 competes with the opposition head-on it's a different kettle of fish altogether. The 600cc LC.

radical than a 350LC's and very similar to an RC30's. In fact, the FZR600 is the rich man's Power Valve and the poor man's RC30.

Like the RC though this is a bike designed specifically for riding hard all the time. Its benefits don't come to light unless it is. A two position

throttle and ferocious front brakes aren't a recipe for IAM riding techniques, unless of course you have the willpower of a trappist monk. I haven't, so



H A B D A B S

I enjoyed it. If you like to ride sensibly at all times regardless of how hot and sunny it is I suggest that the CBR or GPX would be a better choice.

At lowish speeds the FZR just doesn't gel. The gear box is noisy, clunky, stiff and a pain the the left big toe when shortshifting through built up areas. The firmly damped sus-

pension rattles every filling and vertebra over ridges and pot holes and the radical riding position and thinly padded seat are a pain in the wrists and bot respectively. To make low speed matters even worse there is very little bottom end grunt to drive away sedately in a high gear, in fact, last year's two valver was much better at pottering — and that was far from good.

To dwell on the FZR's slow

speed misbehaviour would be missing the point though. At the Snetterton round of the MCA production championship Rodney Knapp not only wiped the floor with everybody on his FZR but did so comfortably. Point taken?

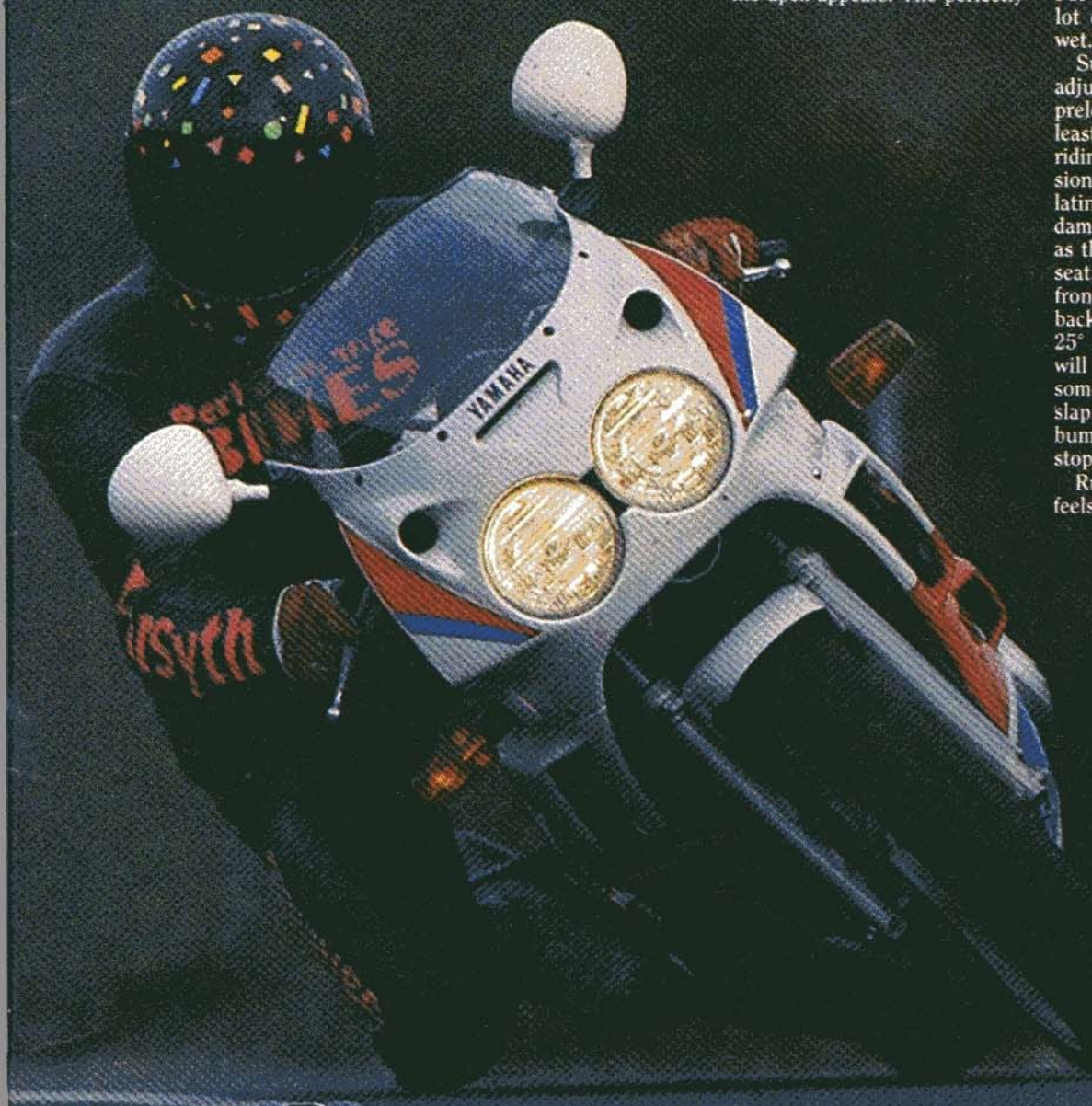
Uncompromising? Yes. Fun? Definitely. Like the old FZ it's as chuckable as a two fifty. Go into bends hard on the brakes with the back wheel in the air and throw it into the bend as the apex appears. The perfectly

neutral steering will do all the rest for you. Braking hard way past the apex, unbelievably, wouldn't upset the steering or the chosen line at all and that's why it encourages lunacy.

Twin piston brakes they may be but their bite is far more sophisticated. Whether it was the light weight of the bike or the master cylinder ratio I know not, but the front stoppers were some of the most powerful I've ever tried on a production bike. For this reason they needed a lot of care and respect in the wet.

Suspension is completely un-adjustable for anything but preload at the back which at least allows more time for riding. As it comes the suspension action is very hard, almost latin in feel. Compression damping at the back is as hard as the spring rate . . . and the seat, coming to think of it. The front fork action is similarly backbreaking and coupled with 25° of rake and 94mm of trail will sometimes lend itself to some pretty hairy-chested tank slappers when high speed bumpy corners are taken on the stop.

Rupert did not like this. "It feels just like the old FZ600.



SCREAMING HABDABS



Up: Post impressionist sunset towards Windscale from the top of Whitbarrow scar. Down: the FZR in its natural habitat; deserted Cumbrian roads.

The suspension's awful, it just tankslaps everywhere." In all fairness Rupert does travel down one of the bumpiest and fastest roads in the whole of Cambridgeshire twice a day and with such familiarity that he even had the RC30 tied in tankslapping knots on the same fast and uneven bends.

When the roads didn't render a steering damper essential (which is all the quick steering FZR needs to stop it shaking its head) the suspension was still noticeably firm but the feeling it transmitted through to the seat of the leathers from the tyres was first rate. Two up though, a function the bike is clearly not designed for, the rear spring would go coil bound and bottom out at every available opportunity, sending the excellent main beam towards the stars.

As a motorway bike the FZR's main limitation is its seat. A full tank of unleaded lasted anywhere between 130 and 170 miles depending on the cruising speed which is just about all a human posterior can cope with. After a 650 mile ride in one day I reached and surpassed the pain



barrier.

Cruising at a licence conscious 80 - 85 takes the weight off the rider's wrists and there's enough acceleration in sixth gear from this speed to make it possible to squirt past any traffic without frenetic cog swapping. It may be a buzz box in the way that its peak power is made above 8,000rpm but there is sufficient mid range to make it quite a capable motorway bike.

On one occasion, after peeling off the motorway and onto a long sweeping exit road I was suddenly aware that, despite 250 miles in the saddle, I was grinning from lug to lug. Why? Because it was such a joy to ride hard round corners at massive angles of lean; it felt so safe and excuseable, especially after the upright boredom of the M6.

The engine and the Deltabox look-a-like alloy frame compliment each other beautifully. The engine bears no resemblance to last year's FZ600 as it is a derivative of the Japan-only FZR400. Direct valve opening with shim adjustment keeps things compact and tidy as do the oversquare 59 x 54.8 bore and stroke. The four 32mm Mikunis get a good straight run at the four valve combustion chambers and supply the spark with a cool supply of fuel and air

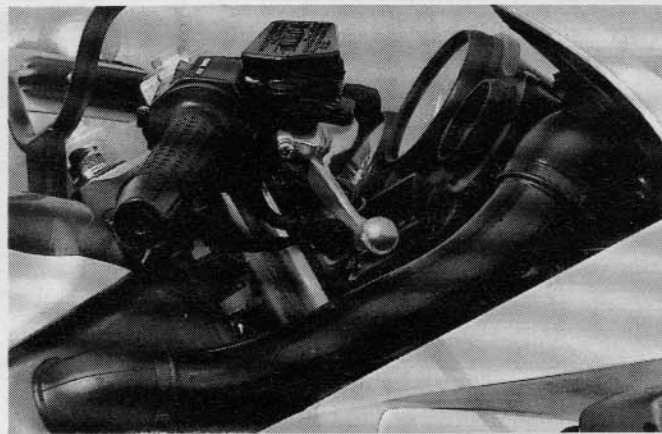
thanks to Fresh Air Ram Technology. But because the great majority of the front of the tank is devoted to air box space under the dummy tank cover, a fuel pump is needed to empty the lowest portion.

As an indication of the new engine's healthy breathing the rider is rewarded with the harmonic induction noise of an RS2000 with twin forties on, just a little more subdued perhaps. It carburates very well right through the rev range and at any throttle opening apart from cold starts.

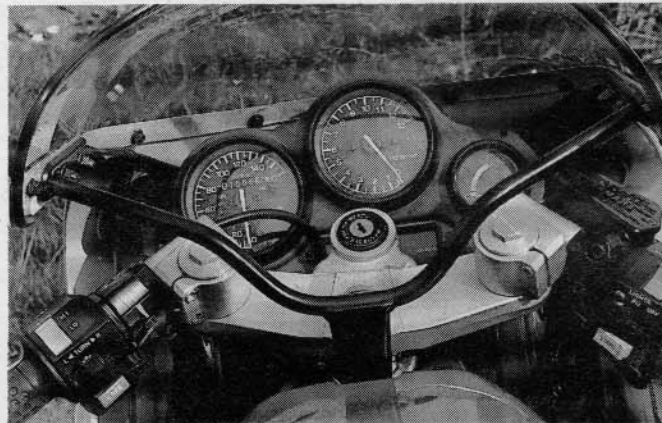
Even with the fairing mounted choke lever (by your left knee) in its fully open position the FZR was never too willing to burst into life after spending the night outside. For five minutes from cold it would feel rough or at least until the temperature gauge moved off its rest. Opening the throttle from tickover would make it wheeze like an asthmatic in a feather duvet if precisely the right amount of choke wasn't being spin-haled.

Its finicky temperament when cold also reared its head in the clutch and transmission. When hot the clutch only needed the first few millimetres of travel of its lever to disengage it. When cold the unexpanded friction plates needed full travel of the lever to avoid gear scrunching. The noise was a real cringer. Cost cutting put paid to a compensatory hydraulic clutch.

It was little things like its cold behaviour and solid sus-



Jewson great rain guttering supplies the air box with as many dead flies as it can handle.



Functional and spartan cockpit and everything else in the rider's view looks just like last year's.

pension that convinced me that it wasn't a production model at all but a Reader's Special. It is so single minded that it could quite easily have been built out of component parts by any of Britain's frame builders. A baby Harris.

This alone led to the bike

adopting a love-hate tag by anyone that rode it. As I love anything that does *something* superbly we got on very well. Whether you could take anything seriously coming from an ex-maggot owner remains to be seen though.

As mentioned previously

however, Rupert hated it but there again he's got a 1978 XL250. (Actually I didn't and I've got a 906 Paso, okay? — RP). My advice would be to ask yourself the following: 1). Do you wish to carry a pillion everywhere you go? If your answer is no, proceed to the next question. If yes look elsewhere, there's no grab rail and the pillion's riding position is bordering on the bloody lethal. 2). Do you like to ride fast 90% of the time? If yes proceed to 3. If no consider a bike like the civilised CBR600 that doesn't mind being ridden slowly. 3). Are you hankering after an RC30 but know you can't afford one? If no start reading Motorcycle Sport. If yes and you can afford half an RC30 this is the bike for you.

Although hardy types have been known to compete in long distance rallies on FZ600s, to be fair that's not really this bike's forte. The FZR is a bike for blowing out the cobwebs and dusting off the rider's reaction times on quiet, early morning thrashes. You'd never get any more luggage on it than a tankbag and toothbrush so its general all round useability is limited to say the least. But if you want a bike that feels as taught as a Spondon, as fast if not faster than anything in its class with probably the nearest you'll ever get to a TZ250's steering responsiveness, this is the one. The big boy's Power Valve.

Mark Forsyth

TEST SPECIFICATION

Yamaha FZR600W

Price.....	£3995
Warranty.....	12 months unlimited mileage
Importer.....	Mitsui Yamaha, Oakcroft Rd, Chessington, Surrey, 01-387 5111

Engine

Type.....	liquid cooled, dohc, in-line four
Bore x stroke.....	59 x 54.8mm
Displacement.....	599cc
Compression ratio.....	12:1
Fuel system.....	4 x 32mm Mikuni
Ignition system.....	digital transistorised

Transmission

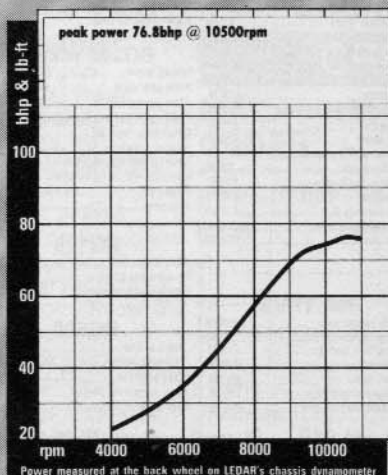
Primary drive, ratio.....	spur gear, 1.708
Final drive, ratio.....	o ring chain, 3.267
Gear ratios.....	1st 2.800; 2nd 1.955; 3rd 1.550; 4th 1.333; 5th 1.192; 6th 1.111

Electrics

Alternator.....	252VA
Battery.....	12V 12Ah
Headlamps.....	12V 35/35W x 2

Performance

Maximum speed prone.....	141.5mph
Maximum speed upright.....	135mph
55% mile.....	n/a (timing lights broken)
Fuel consumption	
best.....	49mpg
worst.....	37mpg
average.....	43mpg



At 6,000rpm the FZR turns from a gutless blandmobile into a rev happy buzzbox. Not much point red lining it.

Chassis

Front tyre.....	Dunlop K275 110/70V17
Rear tyre.....	Dunlop K275 130/70V18
Front brake.....	twin piston, twin disc
Rear brake.....	single disc
Front suspension.....	38mm telescopic
Rear suspension.....	adjustable preload Monocross system
Castor, trail.....	25°, 94mm

Dimensions

Wheelbase.....	1,420mm (55.9in)
Overall length.....	2,095mm (82.5in)
Overall width.....	700mm (27.6in)
Seat height.....	785mm (30.9in)
Dry weight.....	201kg (431lbs) full of fuel
Fuel tank.....	18litre (4.0 gallons)

Tester's verdict

Good points.....	gets better the faster it's ridden, steering and handling, sweet and responsive motor, gear ratios
Bad points.....	comfort, pillion "perch", hard suspension at lowish speeds
Performance.....	with the right gearing it'd be quicker than the CBR
Economy.....	who cares when it goes like this?
Comfort.....	appalling
Braking.....	treat with respect
Value.....	against the plush Honda and GPX in the same price range it looks expensive but for hard riding it's worth every penny