

● Pictures: Martyn Barnwell



A 'cooking' 750 by today's high tech (and high price) standards but the FZ still holds its corner well.

Still a tasty dish

Jim Lindsay returns to a bike

that was top

of the 750

pile in 1985

but has aged well.

This 'cooking'

version in the 750

class still

warrants four

stars out of five



THE 750cc class remains one of the areas of most intense rivalry between the big four Japanese bike manufacturers. The MCN Superstock championship and the American Superbike series before it, started a war that has raged unabated since 1984. Witness some of the craziness in prices that we see these days. Yamaha's latest street legal racer the FZR750R (also known as the OW01) will lighten your bank account by some £12,500. Makes Honda's vee-four RC30 seem like a snip at a mere £9,500 doesn't it?

What we have here, however, represents that same war at a lower level, the level that matters — you don't, after all, expect to sell many bikes at nine and a half grand and even less at twelve and a half. The subject of this test is the "cooking" version, if any 150mph 750 can be described in that way.

The Yamaha FZ750 was top dog in the 750 class when it first went on sale in this country in 1985. Time hasn't been cruel to it either. Four years down the road it is still a very good bike with only the more expensive Honda VFR750 offering a slightly better all round package.

Through the test it was used for all sorts of journeys — the daily round of commuting to work, balls-out fun-only blasts round the local back roads on the weekend and a luggage laden weekend in the North of England, catching some of the year's most appalling weather on the way home.

Development has been pretty low key on the FZ and the fact that it is still as good as it is shows how well Yamaha did their research in the first place.

YAMAHA FZ750

● Engine and transmission

★★★★

THE engine was always the FZ's outstanding feature. It is ferociously quick at the top end but as docile as a senile dog at the same time. It will pull strongly in top gear from 30mph. There is a definite increase in the power at 7,000rpm but you have to be looking hard to notice it. The pull is so strong that it was one of those bikes where I was always looking for an extra gear when battling along at around 80mph. It seemed to be pulling too strongly to be in top although it invariably was.

That power delivery makes brisk 'A' road cruising a doddle. It disposed of traffic effortlessly and you only have to shift down a gear if you've got a particularly long line of tin boxes to gobble up at one go and not much room in which to do it.

If you want to go bananas on acceleration the FZ delivers the goods with equal ease, screaming happily to the 11,000rpm red line through the gears and giving as much arm stretching stomp as most sane people want. There are 750s that go faster flat out and accelerate harder. The point is that they either cost silly money or have an advantage that is so slight it can only be discovered at the test track by the use of sophisticated timing equipment and the use of test riders with unfeasibly large testicular proportions (that's big balls to you and me). None of them does it with such a pleasant feel of ease as the FZ. It's still the easiest motor to live with in the 750 class although Honda's VFR runs it a very close second.

By the same token, it will dawdle happily through London traffic lugging a high gear on a whiff of throttle without making any fuss.

It does all this on unleaded fuel too, please take note, as will virtually all Japanese bikes (check with your dealer if you're not sure about your particular machine). If you don't use unleaded when you can you're daft in my opinion. It's sad but amusing that the achetypal "green" car, the Citroen 2CV, cannot be converted to run lead free.

The technology is the same as before. Like it shouts on the fairing the engine sports five valves per cylinder, making it unique in the motorcycle world. The in-line bank of four cylinders is canted forward at 45 degrees putting the weight low and well forward. The carburettor arrangement is draughted with much of the space under the tank being taken up by the airbox. It is, of course, liquid cooled and Yamaha claim a power output of 105 brake horsepower. For all types of road riding from commuting to flat out back lane attacks, it is not possible to fault this power plant — it's one of the best ever fitted to a modern motor cycle.

It can stand fearsome abuse too. I went production racing on an FZ back in 1986. I'd been using the bike as a road hack for a year during which time it had been lent out to various journalists, many of whom had the mechanical sympathies of a block of concrete. It was serviced from time to time and thrashed to death all the time. By the time it reached the race track it had 20,000 hard miles behind it. The only problem encountered racing it was the clutch which let go after I had fitted some supposedly stronger springs to it. It started to let go in the first hour of a six hour race but held on just long enough for us to be sidelined by a freak accident in the pits. The motor itself was perfectly up to the task and had lost very little of its edge. After



Handy reserve fuel tap switch made need for fiddling with taps unnecessary.

Seat hump is removable to convert bike to dual seat.

track duties it went back to being a road hack and continued to perform trouble free once it had the original springs back in the clutch.

The six speed gearbox is slick in action and the ratios are well chosen. Clutch action is light and you don't need to use it on upward changes if you don't want to which was handy one cold night on the A1 on my home from Yorkshire when even thinking about moving my clutch hand was painful.

Top marks in this department.

● Chassis

★★★

NOT quite the same performance in this department. While the engine does not show its age, the frame is beginning to feel a bit dated when you compare it to what the opposition have to offer. It's still very good but the Honda VFR is better. The frame is made from rectangular section steel tubing with a meaty box section aluminium alloy swinging arm. Yamaha have steered clear of radical geometry changes and a switch to the lighter (and more fashionable) aluminium alloy for the main chassis.

The handling is best described as solid. The steering is heavy and you have to be brutal with the bike if you want to make good time on twisty roads (or have a good time on twisty roads for that matter). It needs to be pushed firmly into corners and held there. I still prefer it to Kawasaki's decidedly nervous GPX750 and for general road use it has the edge on the uncompromising quick steering of the considerably more expensive Suzuki GSX-R750J. But the Honda beats the Yamaha in this department. The VFR750 is more effortless, requires a lighter touch and is easier to change direction on in the middle of a bend on those occasions when you get your lines wrapped round your neck.

Comparisons with the RC30 and the OW01 are not relevant as I am sure you will agree.

The brakes are showing their age too. They are still adequate but in this department the Honda is once again top dog with the Suzuki running a respectable second. They work, they're safe and they are powerful enough but they do not give the rider quite so much feedback as they could.

The suspension gave no cause for concern or for comment. It works well combining comfort with the necessary level of firmness.

The wheels are new and flashy being style copies of Marvic items which are still a popular choice on racing machines. Their only drawback was the colour — white wheels are a pain to keep looking clean. They're a good argument for the well-heeled to invest in a power washer.

The standard tyres were fine. The only



Why has Jim
cause to smile?
Read about his
unique way of
testing riding
gloves in the next
issue!



White wheels on the latest FZ. A pain to keep
clean - especially the back.

Brakes are not of the ultra-efficient latest
design in that they don't provide the same 'feel'
even though they work just as well.

Colour scheme made the bike look rather like a
high-powered tube of toothpaste!

Familiar cockpit layout - fairing was excellent.

time that I went beyond their limits was
when my exuberance that all bikes make
me feel at the approach of summer made
me go too fast on surfaces that were too
loose. They were excellent in the wet as a
120 mile journey in a mixture of rain, sleet
and snow proved. They gripped steadily on
the corners and were reliable on the occa-
sions when I had to brake heavily to avoid
unholy communion with car drivers who
obviously think that their rearview mirrors
are nothing more than items of decoration
(why are Volvo drivers always the worst
offenders? In fact why are there Volvo
drivers at all?)

● Equipment

★★★★

NO complaints here. The bodywork
has been extensively revamped to
follow the "Genesis" styling of the
FZR1000 and 600 (bet you didn't know that
the staff of Yamaha also wrote the first
book of the Bible in between designing
bikes). It looks good although personally I
am not too sure about the colour scheme
on our test machine. It looked like a very
fast tube of toothpaste.

That huge headlight does its job well
with a good throw on main beam and a
sensible cut-off on dip.

The bulk of the fuel tank's capacity is in a
section slung low between the frame rails
above the rear of the engine and a pump
is needed to get it up to the carburetors. I
particularly like the reserve facility which
is simply a rocker switch located on the left
of the fairing inner panel — no tedious
fiddling with taps when on the move. The
furthest I went on reserve was 25 miles
although it could probably go to 30 before
you had to get off and push.

The choke is also mounted on the same
panel and is similarly easy to get at and
switch off when on the move. Nice atten-
tion to detail.

With modern tyres making punctures a
very rare event, the lack of a centrestand is
not that serious. I suppose it had to go to
make way for the new four-into-one ex-
haust system (previously four into two).
However, taking the wheels out would be a
bit of a pain requiring a trolley jack or
maybe front and rear paddock stands
neither of which is an ideal solution for the
chap who likes to do his own spannering.

Nothing but praise for the fairing. It looks
great and did a superb job of keeping the
wind off making high speed long trips an



easy task. The seat I found comfortable too
and the riding position is a sensible
compromise for road work. It's even bear-
able for a pillion passenger although the
grab rail could be easier to get hold of for
those shy people who don't like hanging on
to the pilot.

● The price you pay

★★★

WELL, it's not the latest tech nor is it
the highest tech but the FZR still
stacks up well against the opposi-
tion. Only the Honda VFR has it beaten but
the Honda is three hundred pounds dearer
and I still prefer the Yamaha's engine.
Kawasaki's GPX750 weighs in at £150 less
than the Yamaha's £4,449 but is not such a
good all round roadbike thanks to a peaky
engine that needs a lot of revs to wake it up
and handling which is safe but tiresomely
twitchy at high speed.

Suzuki's GSX-R750J comes from a differ-
ent world and is far more of an uncom-
promising road ripper as well as being a
hefty £450 more expensive.

BMW's K75S triple should be a con-
tender. It's nearly £1,000 dearer than the
Yamaha though and its performance and
handling are disappointing by comparison
even if it will hold its price better.

● Conclusion

★★★★

IT rates four stars with proviso that a lot
of people would prefer the Honda. The
FZR750 is beginning to show its age in the
chassis department but it's still a good all
round bike with sufficient speed and hand-
ling to satisfy all but the terminally crazy.

Compared to the VFR, the main rival, I'd
go for the Yamaha simply because it looks
better and the engine is a real peach.

Specifications

Engine

Type: Liquid cooled, four cylinder in-line
four-stroke, five valves per cylinder
Capacity: 749cc
Bore x stroke: 68.0 x 51.6mm
Compression ratio: 11.2:1
Max power: 105bhp at 10,500rpm
Ignition system: electronic
Carburation: four downdraught Mikunis
Gearbox: six speed
Clutch: Wet, multiple

Electrics

Battery: 12V 14Ah
Headlight: 60/55W

Chassis

Frame: Rectangular steel tubing double
cradle
Suspension:
Front: Telescopic forks
Rear: Rising rate monoshock
Tyres:
Front: 120/80 v-16 V-250
Rear: 130/80 v-18 V-250
Brakes:
Front: Twin discs
Rear: Single disc

Dimensions

Wheelbase: 1,490mm (58.7 inches)
Overall length: 2,230mm (87.8 inches)
Overall width: 755mm (29.7 inches)
Overall height: 1,200mm (47.2 inches)
Seat height: 800mm (31.5 inches)
Weight: 229kg (505lb)
Fuel capacity: 21 litres (4.62 gallons)