

# Riding With

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# A Fairing - It's The Modern Way

Sitting up or semi-prone, your choice of riding position runs to two. Everything else is a variation on the theme.

Comfort or style seems to be the choice, but which one you go for will probably be decided by something else, because neither choice satisfies a rider's basic needs. Fashion is as much to blame as anything.

Not so long ago, the young bloods of the highway rode like frogs - splayed out, feet perched up at the rear and arms akimbo, wrists pinned back at right angles, the whole body slipping gracelessly down towards the front wheel spindle. Later they called it the 'cafe-racer' style. It had the compulsive madness of fashion but in it there was also just a dash of method: because the more sedate alternative wasn't all it appeared.

Here's a plain and irritating fact: as the speed of a motorcycle goes up, the comfort of its rider goes down. And that's just as true of the smoothest, best-handling machine in the world as it is of yesterday's gone-but-not-forgotten oil-spraying rattle-trap. It has nothing to do with mechanical efficiency: it's called wind resistance and it is, in every sense, a drag.

It could be worse, and it often is. Because sometimes it's cold, and sometimes it rains. Then the airstream chills and the water in it stings; and then as speed rises, discomfort rises faster and motorcycling gives way to masochism. Only crazies enjoy motorcycling like that. What keeps the rest of us going then is an optimist's memory (it didn't always hurt; there'll be another heat-wave).

That's when the old cafe-style made a little bit of sense, when hugging the tank from your elbows to your knees closer than a skin to its sausage brought just enough relief to be worth the athletic effort. You were out of the wind - a bit; out of the rain - a little; out of the cold - not much.

It was no good, either way. No good being savaged by the wind and no good being strung out on your bike like something fixing to be barbecued.

But there was something

else that was no good. Something called a fairing. There's nothing new about fairings. They've been around for years, long before the cafe crouch showed up. But they really haven't been good.

In the old days no one with high-octane blood in their veins wanted a fairing. They kept you warmer, drier, but they rattled, they slowed you down, and above all they looked dreadful, plodding, pedestrian. They looked unsporty, and they were.

Whatever we mean, exactly, by sporty, there's nothing wrong with it. What we mean is that we bought a motorcycle simply because we enjoy motorcycles. We might want to go fast or we might not. But if we wanted to be bored, we'd go on the 'bus. The fairings of the fifties and often of the sixties and seventies were the worst of both worlds. They took the sparkle out of the sport and, oddly enough, they didn't work very well.

Quite apart from the rattle and vibration, the awkward brackets and the mess they made of your wiring, they usually gave only partial, intermittent protection. Strange wind currents, unexpected little eddies, whipped cruel gusts of icy wind (and the rain that went with it) up your nostrils or into your kidneys. No wonder we stuck with the crouch: at least it was fun, until it began to hurt. No one had heard of aerodynamics; a wind tunnel was something that blew ladies' skirts up at fairgrounds.

Fairings have improved a lot. Over the last few years they have recognised, sometimes even foolishly pandered to, the bikers' liking for style.

There have been half-fairings, handlebar fairings, racing-style fairings and even full fairings enveloping the front wheel. Some of them worked...though mostly you still had to ride with your head down, just like in the bad old days!

The Yamaha big-bike fairing is a revelation...or revolution. You can ride comfortably sitting up behind a big fairing styled to make Ferraris look like milk floats!

Do I exaggerate? Maybe, a little. But Yamaha's achieve-

ment merits stress. A large and blindingly fast motorcycle has been equipped from its inception with a fairing that provides total protection while celebrating the excitement of an astonishing performance.

The XS1100 was intended to operate on the fine edge of motorcycling and John Mockett's fairing was intended to hone that edge, to keep the experience vivid. Anyone who thinks that on the basis of its grand appearance the fairing is going to take the fun out of the XS1100 is making a big mistake. What takes the fun from riding any motorcycle, what could even cut the XS down to the size of the superbike in the street, is wind resistance, rain, numbing cold, and a stabbing pain in the small of the back. Try all that some time - at 135 mph.

I've never thought of motorcycles as being much like aeroplanes - until I rode the fully-faired XS. Fairings trap engine noise, they say. And that's true of the XS. Except that the engine noise is nothing more than a high-pitched hum from the transmission; the exhaust note trails sonorously somewhere out at the back. But that hum is the whine of a jet making ready to fly. And flying is the right image.

At night, the big square instruments are reflected in the underside of the screen; the wind hisses past, the hum rises to a whistle; when the road is clear and the traffic-control centre of your common sense says 'go', you gently unleash the power. Gently is all it takes. This isn't an aeroplane. But it is the fastest accelerating vehicle on the road, and that makes it feel like one.

The concentration required, the experience called upon, are a constant reminder that this is a powerful machine, one that above all calls for a pilot's sense of responsibility. Not least when slowing down. Reaching the end of a motorway, say, bears an uncanny resemblance to landing, the low transmission hum changes pitch; you check the instruments with special care. Sitting behind the fairing has unsettled your

sense of speed. You learn nothing from the wind - it doesn't touch you. The bike itself is so superbly stable that except for the rushing of the scenery you could be anywhere within a range of a hundred miles an hour.

You learn to treat the XS with care, to be sure you know exactly how fast it's going and especially if there are unexpected bends arising. You bank the XS into bends, you don't throw it in, and you check the instruments and check them again. No wind resistance. No feedback from the weather. This flying demands a lot of care.

Don't imagine, though, that a high standard of comfort somehow isolates the rider from the world or from the spirit of motorcycling. On the contrary, it enables him or her to enjoy it to the full. There's no mistaking that you're on a motorcycle. Even the rushing of the wind reminds you of that - but it's going past you, not through you. It's easy to imagine: like a sports car with the roof off (though a little less blustery) or a saloon with the windows open.

The fairing brings freedom. The freedom to enjoy the machine, and also, to some extent, freedom from some of the awkward encumbrances of motorcycling. Clothing, for example. You still need the appropriate kind, but you need, in proportion to the weather, less of it.

Perhaps one of the most enjoyable features of the XS fairing is freedom from the crouch. Sitting comfortably, you're ready to do business, should you care to, with the fastest machinery there is. You wouldn't, of course, because XS1100 riders are sensible - they have to be with a machine so potent, however impeccable its manners - but there's a wickedly enjoyable feeling to be had sitting there like that: no one, crouched or otherwise, is about to leave you behind. 'King of the Road', that sort of thing. The XS1100 rules OK; and rules in style. Of course, it feels a bit like an aeroplane. But surveying the world from that serene centre, that Olympian powerhouse, it feels a whole lot more like a flying throne!