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Performance



BACK TO MA HOOTS

MACKENZIE TESTS THE RD350R

600s GROUP TEST

FOUR BIKES SWAMPED IN CATFISH DISASTER

BRITISH GP

ATMOSPHERIC PROBLEMS





class

Like all good power crazed despots, the 350 Powervalue is spending its twilight years under an assumed name in South America.

"If I can't wheelie this, I'm going to retire", quoth Niall. In the end he had to hoik the front wheel up on a passing truck and drive along like that for a while so Patrick could take some nice pictures. Niall came along to Bruntingthorpe to make amends for us having to dress up in kilts for the August issue and was a jolly good sport, never once complaining, even when we subjected him to Brunters' horribly greasy caff, which is enough to make strong men quake at the knees.

of '83



It's really great to hang out with someone famous and find out he's just a really nice bloke. Niall MacKenzie thinks so, anyway.

Lights please. Now pay attention 3c. This is a Yamaha RD350LC YPVS. Commonly known as 'The Elsie' or 'The Powervalue,' it was produced in vast numbers during the mid-eighties. Its skinny tyres, spindly frame and evil powerband led a whole generation astray. Gangs of youths roamed the streets on these machines, dressed in black bomber jackets, Doctor Marten's boots and Simpson Bandit helmets. They worshipped the charismatic revolutionary leader Stan Stephens and were dedicated to tearing down the fabric of state, church and democracy as we know it with the noise of their Allspeed expansion chambers. Fortunately production of the 350 ceased in 1990, all the youths bought purple Ford Capris with whale tail rear spoilers instead and civilisation was saved. Any questions? Yes, you at the back."

"Sir, sir, that's all wrong sir. The Elsie was a brilliant bike with lots of power and fine handling for its time and they had races with just Elsie's and that's where Niall MacKenzie got his start sir but with the remorseless march of technology the Elsie got more sensible without actually changing much and by the time they stopped making it people were buying it to go touring on and then Yamaha sold the plans to Brazil in exchange for some more rain forests and now they make it there and it's a modern classic sir it is it is it IS!"

"See me after class, boy."

Well, that's the history lesson over. The new Elsie, made in Brazil and called the RD350R, is just the same as the F2 except for a new twin headlight fairing and some washers in the exhaust to make it a bit quieter (and slower). Hmm, this could be a very short test. But wait, put it back to back with a 'real' Elsie and the South American version shows its true colours: Dulux pastel shades rather than the F2's bright primaries.

Following Paul Astbury's immaculate F2 along the A1, and then down a selection of Northamptonshire lanes, the Brazilian bike immediately showed a lack of power. Paul could pull away easily out of bends, hanging onto each gear a fraction longer than the

R's drop-dead-at-9,500 power band would allow. This would have been bad enough, but he was carrying his girlfriend Lisa on pillion as well! At that point the only explanation we could come up with was that the motor had been detuned to accept whatever passes for petrol in Brazil. We didn't find out about the washers in the downpipes until later. Apparently they're there to keep the noise down, and they certainly do that — the R is quieter than the already stifled F2. What they also do is change the shape of the power curve; where the F2 peaks rapidly and falls away gradually, the R peaks more gently and then effectively stops dead. On the road this makes overtaking a bit of a chore and means you have to have exactly the right gear pulling out of bends if you want to avoid an undignified scrabble for the gear

lever.

The gearing's good for the road, though; go looking for another gear and you find one — remarkable. This allows a long-legged cruising ability and with the R's comfy seat, sensible riding position and effective fairing means the once-radical Powervalue is now a more comfortable tourer than some big four-strokes (the Exup springs to mind). The big twin-headlight fairing is the biggest single change from the Powervalue's of old, leaving behind the lean, hungry look of the F2. Purists hate it for hiding everything behind acres of plastic. I liked it for keeping me out of the wind, carrying two superb headlights and having a screen big enough to tuck down behind and clear enough to see through. I can't avoid griping about the way it's fixed on though; the inner panels simply don't fit, and the



Tacky inner fairing panels, a dodgy ignition switch, a great screen and a rev counter that stubbornly refuses to go past 9,500.

Class of '83

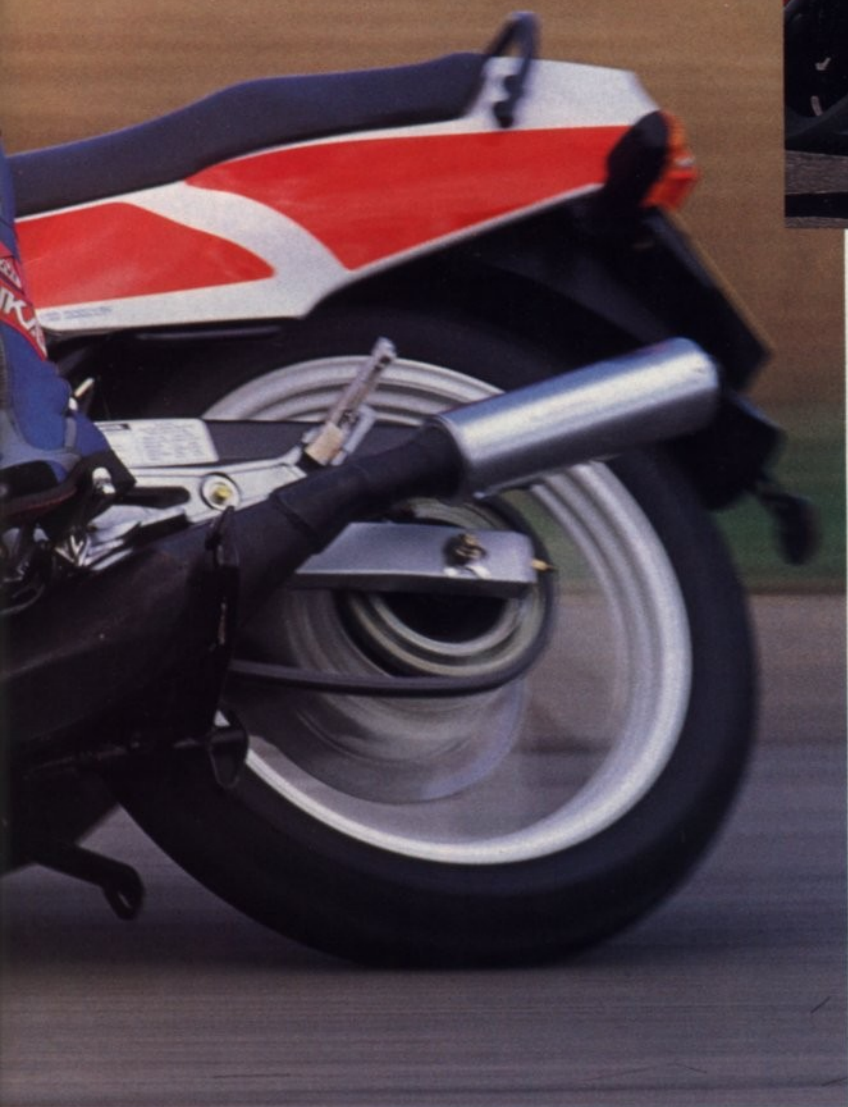


main panels are held on by what look suspiciously like bits of string, although I'm sure they're Yamaha-approved bits of string with their own part numbers.

The detail finish is similarly dodgy, with the unevenly coated frame, rusty seat staples and poorly painted wheels coming in for attack from Paul, although he admitted the original LCs weren't perfect either. Rupert singled out the ignition switch for comment: *"The detents aren't crisp. It's easy to switch on the parking light by accident when you use the steering lock. Definitely made in Brazil."*

I'd have to disagree with Niall's positive comments about the front brakes; they feel as though they've got WD40 on the pads and need a grip like an enraged

baboon clutching a rival's genitalia — not nice when you're used to more modern stuff. The Brazilian Pirelli MT75s are hard and unyielding — they feel as though they've been stored so long the rubber's gone hard. They're not too bad in the dry, although they hardly encourage big lean angles. But in the wet they're a liability; even the R's castrated powerband is enough to spin the back wheel out of roundabouts and slow corners. Maybe they don't have wet roundabouts in Brazil. We fitted the last F2 we tested with soft compound Pirelli Demons and it felt like a different bike; the extra grip had obvious benefits, but the lighter and more pliant construction also gave the suspension an easier time and minimised the Powervalve's inbuilt



tendency to weave in fast sweeping bends. Otherwise the R handles exactly like a proper Elsie, wobbling just enough to make back roads exciting but not so much as to throw you off.

Well, that's compared the old and the new, but in fact they're both old. Compared to any other modern Jap two-stroke, the R feels antiquated. It rattles and wobbles around at tickover and everything feels as though it was bolted together finger-tight and then shipped out by mistake while the mechanic was off searching for his torque wrench. It's soft, safe, predictable and unthreatening. It's overpriced, underpowered and middleaged. It's an Elsie — take it or leave it.

KR

Above: the 350R's a bit wobbly in high speed corners but no more than the original Elsie.

Far left: after a morning practicing standing starts on the 350, Niall promised to be first off the grid in Brazil and South Africa.

Above right: it's immensely reassuring to find that even a highly paid GP star looks just as ridiculous as the rest of us when he tries to get his knee down at 0mph.



A SCOTSMAN WRITES

When I first sat on the RD350R the morning after the British GP I hated it, but the more I rode it the more it reminded me of all those early LCs and Powervalkes. The handling in particular took me back a few years. The forks are just as I remember them — too soft. The hot set-up used to be to preload the fork springs with a couple of car wheel nuts in each leg. I think Mk 2 Escort nuts were just about right. This stiffens up the forks a bit and also improves the ground clearance. On this bike you'd need better tyres before you needed more ground clearance though — the Brazilian Pirellis aren't any worse than the KR124s we used to have (in those days if you scraped your knee it was because you were falling off!), but they're not as good as modern rubber. Even so, high speed stability and cornering stability were quite impressive.

The brakes are pretty good. The rear is very strong and can lock the wheel from any speed. The drum brake on the pre-Powervalkes LCs was better for racing though, as it was less likely to lock up when you used it in a corner. The front needs a good squeeze, but I reckon you could squeal the front no problem.

The engine felt strong, pulling hard from 8,000rpm but dying away by just after nine, probably because of the exhaust restriction. Coming past the radar it was going faster if I rolled off the throttle a bit. I reckon it was leaning off and producing a bit more power. The throttle itself had too much free play for good control, especially pulling wheelies. The gearchange was very sloppy too, but that was a feature of the early bikes; you had to be very precise with gear changing because missing a gear in proddie racing can cost you five or six places.

Ever since I moved on from Pro-Am racing I've fancied another Powervalkes. I'd really love one of the first ones — they were awesome when they first came out. I won second time out in the wet at Snetterton — someone called Mat Oxley was about fifth, I think, which shows you how long ago it was! We used to get given a different bike every race and it was great for an impoverished club racer to ride something that you didn't have to pay for when you crashed it!

Niall MacKenzie

Class of '83

Paul Astbury's black F2 looks leaner and a bit meaner than the 350R. You can feel the difference in the same way; the F2 has a harder edge to it.



TEST SPECIFICATION

Yamaha RD350R



Price.....£3,423
Colour options.....red/white, black
Warranty.....12 months, unlimited mileage
Importer.....Mitsui Machinery Sales UK Ltd., Sopwith Drive,
Brooklands, Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 0UZ (0932 358000)

Engine

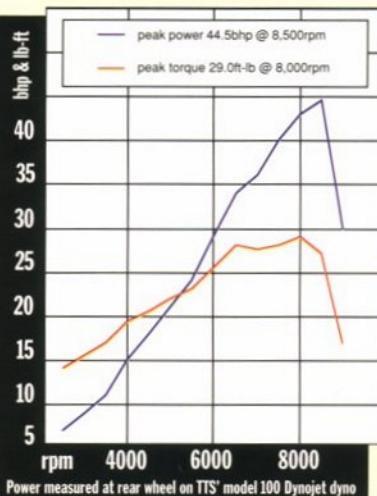
Type.....2-stroke, liquid cooled parallel twin with YPVS
Bore x stroke.....64.0 x 54.0mm
Displacement.....347cc
Compression ratio.....6:1
Fuel system.....2 x VM26SS Mikuni
Ignition.....CDI

Transmission

Primary drive, ratio.....gear, 2.869
Final drive, ratio.....chain, 17/39
Gear ratios.....2.571; 1.777; 1.318; 1.083; 0.961; 0.888

Performance

Maximum speed
rider prone.....117.0mph
rider upright.....116.0mph
SS ¼ mile.....13.12 @ 95.5mph
Fuel consumption
best.....49.5mpg
worst.....32.0mpg
average.....40.0mpg



Terrible South American washers lurk in the header pipes, wait for the power to come past and then throttle it to death — pass me the bastard file Igor.

Chassis

Front tyre.....90/90-18 51H Pirelli MT75
Rear tyre.....110/80-18 58H Pirelli MT75
Front brake.....twin discs, two-piston calipers
Rear brake.....single disc, two-piston caliper
Front suspension.....telescopic fork, 140mm travel
Rear suspension.....Monocross, 100mm travel
Rake/trail.....26°/96mm

Dimensions

Wheelbase.....1385mm (54.5in)
Seat height.....800mm (31.5in)
Dry weight.....141kg (308lb)
Fuel capacity.....17 litres (3.75gal)

Tester's verdict

Good points.....price, nostalgia, comfort
Bad points.....finish, brakes, tyres
Performance.....not as good as the old ones
Comfort.....excellent
Braking.....archaic
Handling.....wobbly, nervous and exciting
Value.....not bad if you want a practical two-stroke

Quick comparison

bike	top spd	SS ¼	av mpg	price	issue
RD350R	117.0	13.12	40	£3423	wibble
GPZ500S	126.0	13.2	48	£2989	Dec '89
GSS500E	108.0	13.71	50	£3425	Mar '87
RGV250	127.0	12.85	35	£4149	Apr '92

THE BLACK ONE

Despite its immaculate appearance, Paul Astbury's RD350LC F2 has over 16,000 miles on its highly polished clocks and gets thrashed two-up to Le Mans every year. Paul bought the bike new three years ago ("It was its third birthday last Saturday.") from Keyne Machine in Milton Keynes (0908 56205): "You've got to give them a plug — they've been brilliant."

One fork leg was replaced under warranty early on and the brakes were stripped and cleaned last winter. Apart from that, normal servicing by Keyne Machine and about three gallons of Mer polish every week have kept the LC looking and feeling as good as new.

For the record, Paul's bike has consumed two sets of brake pads, two front tyres and five rear tyres, all of which were replaced with original parts.

Paul on the RD350R: "I like the twin headlights but don't like the all-enclosed fairing — it doesn't fit, it looks tacky and I prefer mine. The finish is nowhere near as good as on earlier models — although even on my F2 the wheels are very badly finished. Handling-wise, it feels just the same as mine. The tyres don't seem too bad. The gearchange is the same as every other 350 — hook 5-6th gear, pull the throttle and it'll jump out of gear. The throttle is light and easy to use, but the engine feels lifeless and doesn't give you a kick up the arse like a good F2. It's much quieter though. It's very rough between 5-5,500rpm. I'd compare it with a restricted TZR125 — mine's the one with the Powervalue turned the right way round."



If Paul paid Lisa as much attention as he pays his bike, she'd be very happy. As it is, she'll probably run off with a travelling salesman.

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