

BIKE

NOVEMBER 1992 £1.8
USA \$5.5

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST
MOTORCYCLE MAGAZINE



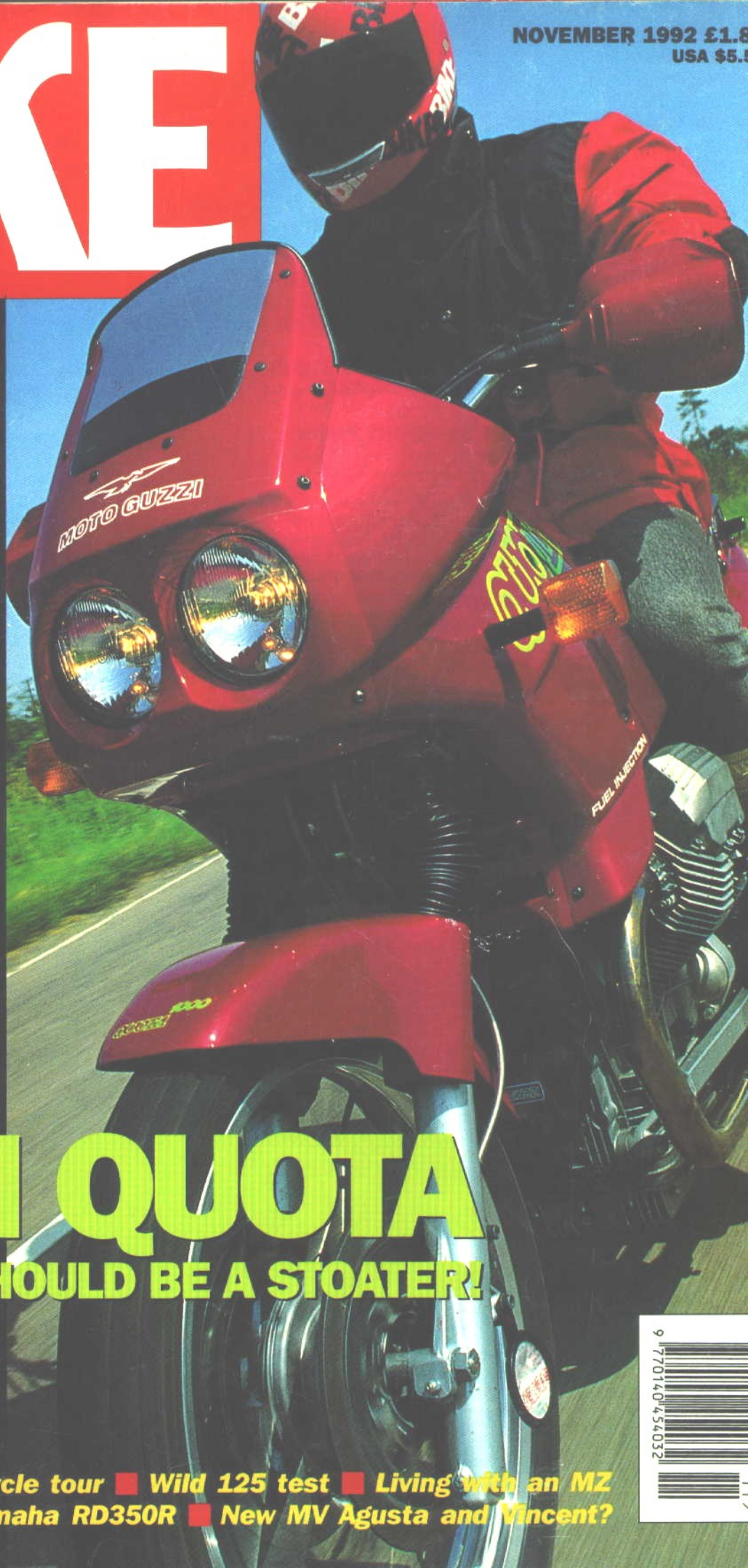
New bikes for '93

GUZZI QUOTA

FOR £7199 IT SHOULD BE A STOATER!

*Best buys for a
grand – our verdict*

BIKE joins the Kellogg's cycle tour ■ Wild 125 test ■ Living with an MZ
Honda CB Two Fifty ■ Yamaha RD350R ■ New MV Agusta and Vincent?



9 770140 454032



road
test

YAMAHA RD350R



TEEN SPIRIT

Ten years after its blue smoke first terrorised the nation, the powervalve is back. But back as the same good time tool, or back as a dated, emasculated, bargain buy? Test by Phil West

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON CHILDS





Juvenile



Versatile

TEN THINGS ABOUT
1983 THAT MAKE
YOU FEEL OLD

- Triumphs were still being made at Meriden
- CDs are the next big thing, according to *Tomorrow's World*
- 'The Naff Guide' is all the rage
- Leeds Utd are bottom of the 2nd Division
- Freddie Spencer wins his first World Championship
- Japan starts a revolution by making bikes with full-fairings
- Max Biaggi has his 11th birthday
- Barry Sheene is still racing, sort of
- Kawasaki invent the Unitrak
- THE lid to be seen in: Nava 'Fibernet'

BMX BIKES, Men At Work, Oxford Utd, stretch jeans, Yam's RD350YPVS. All of these things were winners back in 1983. Which just goes to show how much things can change in ten years.

Most of all, people change. If you're of a certain age, the early '80s were YOUR time. A time when girls liked Spandau and the Duranies; the lads were into Whitesnake or AC/DC and had crumpled Debbie Harry posters and, bikes-wise, the LC was where it was at.

In 1983 I was 18, had a 250LC which I soon chopped in for a 350, didn't know my arse from my elbow, but, soditall, I HAD a 350LC—a white and blue one with Roadrunner II's, an' Pro-Ams, an' Allspeeds, an' Baja grips that I forgot to glue on properly, an' nice little blue-anodised bar-end weights from Warwick Motorcycles, an' a steering damper—and I wuz a GOD! Boy, I LURVVVVVED that bike. I loved it more than any other bike before, after or in-between. I think.

But things have changed. Since then, of course, I (and my whole generation probably) have learnt a lot of things. Learnt that fitting massively oversize 4.10 tyres on a rear designed for a 3.50 is only done by morons; learnt that sex doesn't always have to be a disaster but that vast quantities of cider usually are; learnt that putting gearbox oil in the two-stroke tank is done by people with the IQ of plankton and learnt how to pull decent wheelies. But most of all, I've learnt that, although gorgeous, by today's standards the LC, really, was a pile of shite.

In other words, the decision by UK Yamaha importers Mitsui to reintroduce the now Brazilian-made RD350R seems to make about as much sense as EMI re-releasing Kajagoogoo's greatest hits. Times have changed, people have changed, bikes have changed. In 1983 I hated bastard power-valves simply because they were so good they made my LC obsolete. Last week I at first hated the new '92 RD350R simply because it's so bastard OLD.

Which it is... but that's not the whole

story. This story starts at why, when Japanese production of the last of the power-valves, the RD350F2, ceased a full 18 months ago, the new RD350R even exists. What happened was that Yamaha's Brazilian outpost took up the old jigs and what-not with the idea to continue production, with a few minor changes, solely for its domestic market. Mitsui, however, got wind of this and, encouraged by the fact that the UK was for years the power-valve's biggest market, decided to bring them in over here. Apparently Italy are getting some too.

Two major differences plus a pair of distinctly naff (sorry, 'ugly', this is 1992 remember...) white-painted wheels distinguish the R from the old F2. Namely: a baggy, un-sleek new twin-headlamp fairing (it looked good when I first saw it at the NEC; after living with it for a couple of weeks I wanted to attack it with a chainsaw and a can of Holts matt black); and a slightly 'softer' motor.

The term 'softer' is a bit of a cover-all here. For some reason unbeknown to Mitsui the bike, as imported, has a couple of restrictor washers in the exhausts which noticeably knock off peak power. They'd already been removed from our test bike. Mitsui is advising all dealers to do likewise to theirs.

But even without the restrictors, Mitsui freely admits the R's not quite up to old power-valve standards—although it's close. According to the spex the motor should be identical to the F2... obviously it's not. They're baffled, we're baffled, maybe the exhausts are more baffled. It certainly sounds quieter than the old F2. Meantimes, other theories involve a slightly softer tune to compensate for dodgy third world petrol; rain forest-scale tolerances, and the current spot-rate for mahogany on the foreign exchanges.

On paper, it adds up to 117mph and a familiar 13.5sec standing quarter, which is near-as-dammit the best the bikes of yore would produce anyway. And, for my money, even though an RGV250 and suchlike is capable of producing far bigger

numbers, the R still has enough to ensure beaming smiles before tea.

The beauty of the old LCs and late power-valves was always in the way they delivered. The fact that in their day they were the undisputed, class-crossing, speed-kings was a bonus. The fact that now those same figures hardly raise an eyebrow shouldn't totally spoil the party.

It doesn't. The R's engine gave me more fun than I've had since I was bed-bathed in Batley Gen' and reminded me in hilarious leaps and bounds of my misspent youth. It's so easy! Power-valves never were all-anything like many of today's highly-strung strokers can be. They give you what you want, when you want.

Round town: content, almost silent, 2-4000rpm burble-burbling (guaranteed to produce a nice cloud of blue smoke at traffic lights). "Good morning, Missus." Tuck in: 4-7500rpm of (nearly) responsible, smooth, fast progress. La de-dah, sweep, sweep, swoosh. The brain in-a-bin-bag beyond: 7500-9500rpm. Nutty time. Whip her 'til she screams. Lay that throttle. Stomp those well spaced gears. Control everything with just a single finger on that absolutely delicious clutch. Don't bother searching beyond 9500rpm 'cos it dies quicker than a prawn in a pan of boiling water. Ride her cowboy. Yee-ha.

Of course, what also made those 117mph/13.5sec figures fun back then, and is equally true today, is that the chassis could only just take it. An indicated ton round the corners may be nothing to crow about on a GSX-R750 or FireBlade, on the relatively spindly R it starts to weave and rock even so gently and things become, what's the word, exciting. It's never enough to get close to throwing you off, but it is comparatively crude. The tubular steel frame flexes ever so slightly; the skinny Pirelli MT75s tell you their limit's not far off; the hard front stoppers feel as if their pads are made of Brazilian hardwood and need help from the sensitive but useful rear; and bits and pieces such as the pegs, centrestand and spanners scrape when you're really going for it. But doing all this is fun and relative.



RD350R

CHIPS
HOT
PILKA-PRES

road
test

YAMAHA RD350R



Suspension, tilchy tyres and brakes, all no better than you'd expect from 1983

SPECIFICATIONS

YAMAHA RD350R £3423

ENGINE/GEARBOX

Type	liquid-cooled, reed-valve, parallel twin
Capacity	347cc
Bore x stroke	64 x 54mm
Comp ratio	6:1
Carburation	2 x 26mm Mikuni
Power	63bhp @ 9000rpm
Torque	36.2lb.ft @ 9000rpm
Gearbox	6-speed
Electrics	12V/5.5Ah battery; 2 x 60/55W headlight

CYCLE PARTS

Chassis	steel tube double-cradle, box-section aluminium swing-arm
Suspension	
front	telescopic fork
rear	Monocross single shock, preload adjust
Brakes	
front	twin discs, opposed piston calipers
rear	disc
Tyres	Pirelli MT75
front	90/90 H18
rear	110/80 H18

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1385mm (54.5in)
Rake/trail	26°/96mm (3.7in)
Dry weight	155kg (342lb)
Seat height	800mm (31.5in)
Fuel capacity	17 litres (3.7gal)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	117mph
Standing	
¼ mile	13.52sec/98.1mph
Average mpg	40

FOR

Fun, practical and almost cheap

AGAINST

And so it should be. No trend-setter

TEN OTHER THINGS THAT SEEMED A GOOD IDEA IN 1983

- Cecil Parkinson cops off with Sarah Keays
- The Sunday Times buys the 'Hitler diaries'
- Brinks Mat bullion robbery
- Angela Rippon leaves the BBC to launch TV-AM
- Ogr dropped by BIKE
- Sidewinder leaning sidecar invented
- Gerald Ford makes guest appearance in Dynasty
- Labour elects Kinnock new leader
- Boy George wears a dress, Karma Chameleon goes to No 1
- Geoff Boycott sacked as captain of Yorkshire



sane, believe me. While getting anywhere near it on a GSX-R750 or the like is downright teapot.

The other half of the success formula is how civil the R can be during the times when you're not in the mood to ape Mick Doohan and threaten the peace and tranquility of the neighbouring countryside.

Travelling on the RD350R is nice. The semi-sports riding position is quite spacious compared to more modern tackle. It's light but very stable (thanks perhaps to the twin headlight fairing throwing more weight over the front). The seat is decent, pillion provision is as good if not better than most 600s and the fairing excellent at bouncing 100mph-worth of wind off your chest.

Equipment-wise, yes, the R is a tad *Antiques Roadshow*. Kickstarters and choke knobs and buzzy mirrors. Finish is a bit suspect: the horrid fairing inners, the paint on the wheels. But centrestands, decent grabrails and swing-arms with more grease nipples than a copy of *Easyriders* are ideas that I reckon are worth a revival.

This is a practical bike: easy, simple, comfortable and versatile. More importantly it's also good fun AND reasonably cheap (we've seen dealers already advertising them new for under £3000).

But what may be most critical is that, despite all the above, despite however practical, however much fun, however relevant, the RD may still be, most people will still think of it as an old bike that's had its day. And though it pains me to admit it, I still can't get that thought out of my head.

The RD350 is still the same fantastic blend of hooliganry and practicality as it was ten years ago. It's still valid. But it's also now a poor man's bike and a little embarrassing when you compare your shop window reflection to that given by bikes with the style and panache of such as the ZXR400. That I find quite sad, but I'm sure I won't be the only one. And that, above all, is the reason why I won't be buying an RD350R. But if that sort of thing doesn't bother you, you'll have an awful lot of fun. I did, in 1983. □