

THE GREAT EXHIBITION

Take the world's finest three quarter litre road engine. Insert in suitably demented chassis. Don best bib and tucker, open throttle and go ape with the FZX750. Test by Rupert Paul.



Pics: Patrick Gosling

“Ye gads! What are you going to feed it on?”
“Petrol, mother, like all the others.”

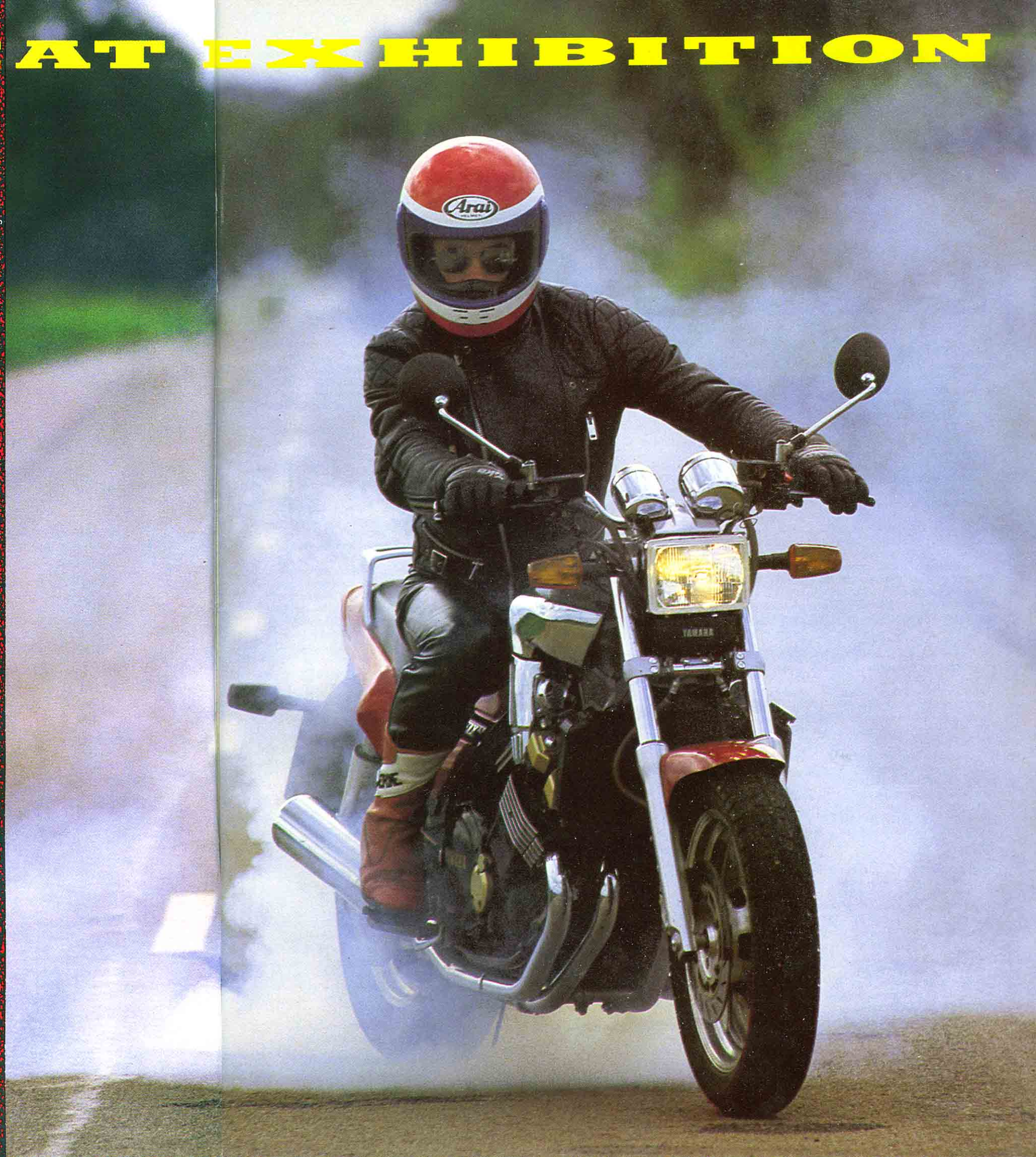
There's a long history of madness in my family, and it's a favourite pastime for them to look on the string of test bikes I bring home as a succession of semi-domestic animals. Thus the VFR750 became a bison, any Guzzi was a rhino and the CBR600 (in blue) a porpoise. We never got round to discussing what the Yamaha FZX750 was and perhaps that's proof of its confused,

though entirely delightful, identity. But it isn't hard to imagine that the people who designed it could, like my parents, be a few coupons short of their respective toasters.

It must have started shortly after Yamaha found out how to build bikes which handled in a way approaching perfection. And it must have been a terrible blow to have invented the FZ600 and realised that it was not The Answer. As the chassis ignored whatever was thrown at it, people just went

faster and faster until something else snapped — usually the rider's brain. A return to old values was in order. A powerful engine, certainly. But maybe a little less ground clearance. And some inferior rear suspension. And just to make sure 140mph feels like 140, no fairing. Out of a spirit of sheer perversity, FZX was born.

Yamaha haven't done things by halves. Overall styling you can see from the pics, but have you noticed the sideways pivoting choke on the left hand





Bikus interruptus. How very droll. Five minutes before setting off for MIRA, one discovers a two inch nail in the rear tyre.

carb? The false petrol tank; the electric fuel switch on the left hand switch cluster; the silly speedo markings; or the small matter of four fork stanchions where other bikes have two? Most people, including me, loved it. A few took the piss mightily.

The riding position's a long way from the carefully worked out man/machine relationship you'd find on a sports 750. You can sense, as you reach out to grab the quaintly raised handlebars, that an extra few inches on the pectorals, dorsals and biceps would be just the thing for counteracting any aerodynamic deficiencies in the seating posture. Not to mention the neck muscles of an ox should you be inclined to hold or exceed 110 statutory miles per hour.

Even on MIRA's 1600-yard timing straight, top end performance was difficult to get at, but this is no bad thing. In road terms, I rarely went over 100mph, which is a lot more legal than Yamaha's other five valve per cylinder bikes.

The motor's in a softer state of tune than the stock FZ: different inlet cam, pistons, carbs, airbox and exhaust. Apparently the result is more midrange, but I was danged if I could tell. It seemed more or less standard FZ issue, a.k.a. a carefully controlled bomb which tries to go off every time you open the throttle even a fraction. Regardless of gear or revs. It feels good just going down to the petrol station.

Ah, yes; petrol. The puny tank just in front of the seat holds so little of the stuff that I ran out twice. The supply usually hit reserve at about 105 miles, then expired just before 120. To quote John Robinson, I can think of several bits of road with petrol stations more than 15 miles apart.

Other items deserving a place in the silly category are silencer guards which don't work (the pipes get covered in melted shoe sole),

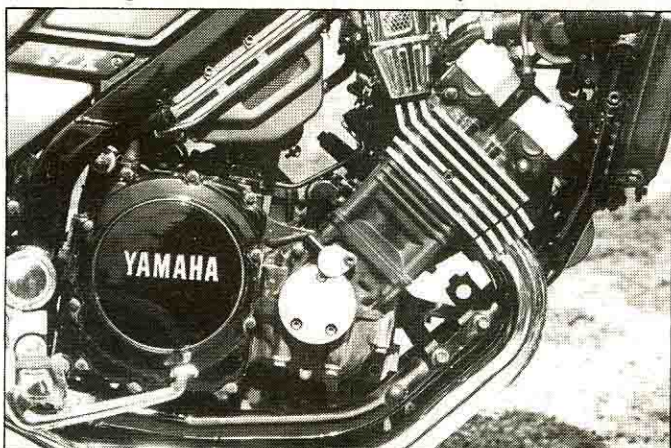
vibro-massage pillion footrests and a miniature grabrail which is, in a word, ungrabbable.

Let us not concern ourselves with such things now: imagine instead that you are at the controls of an FZR to which, over the first ten seconds following a standing start, you have been applying maximum grief in every gear. As this equates to around 100mph you will want to do one of the following things: go faster, go round a corner or stop. The FZX is quite capable of all three, but it has its own ideas about how to do them.

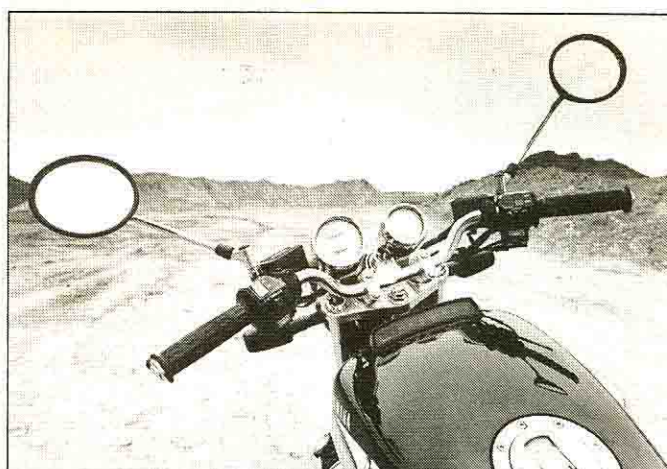
Speedwise, anything much above an indicated 130 can only be endured for a few seconds at a time, unless you lie on the airbox. There's just too much wind blast for any kind of fine control or horizon-scanning.

Stability is such that the bike won't wobble unless it's made to do so. The only time it was a problem was during a top speed run at MIRA; the motor was redlining fourth when the front wheel hit a bump, and I had to throttle off slightly to get the 'bars to settle down again. Things like that rarely happen on the road but when they do, they make the bike worth every penny.

Cornering on the FZX is an



The first time you experience the pull of an FZ motor is the most dangerous. You may find yourself committing a serious crime trying to raise enough money to buy the bike.



Strange speedo markings — 5, 15, 25mph. White faced clocks stare up unblinkingly at occasionally white faced rider.

interesting business. At high speed it shakes its bars and wobbles slightly; nowhere near as precise and stable as a VFR750 but then with no fairing and two back tyres that's hardly surprising. The important bit is how easily you can kid yourself that you're taking it to the limit.

Lower down in the 50-80mph bracket there are far less demands on the rider. The suspension's on the firm side and the tyres are bouncy but otherwise it goes round bends as well as anything else. Nothing is likely to touch down unless the suspension's loaded by bumps, passengers or whatever, in which case highly satisfactory scraping sounds are available from either footrest, with the option of extra centrestand on lefthanders.

It's only at low speed that the FZX gets to be a pain, oversteering dramatically and keeling over from the vertical with less than exemplary smoothness. There's lots of grip from the Pirelli Sportscomps, but they don't have much feel, and a close inspection of the treads immediately after death-defying angles of lean have been attained reveals that the front tyre runs out of tre:

before the rear. It never even felt like washing out but combined with an indifferent wet grip it'd be enough to get me looking for different tyres when replacement time came round, even if they lacked the Pirelli's reptilian good looks.

Unless you're into frying clutch plates the FZX won't do wheelies, leaving banzai braking as its third mode of socially unacceptable behaviour. The raw materials are a pair of thunderously efficient calipers and a set of ventilated discs from last year's FZ. No shortage of power or feel, but the rider is sat upright and poorly positioned to take advantage. It's difficult to tell when the wheel is about to lock too. What the hell: the braking's still exceptionally good just as the FZX's useable stomp and handling beats any of the mutants on offer from the other manufacturers.

It's also faster, even if the performance figures don't back this up. The day of the customary MIRA showdown dawned clear and sunny, but at the last minute I noticed a two inch nail in the rear tyre, necessitating the hurried purchase and application of a Metzeler Palufix tubeless tyre repair kit.

The instructions gave a maximum advisory post-repair speed of 45mph which was honoured more in the breach than the observance on the way to the track; and, I have to say, completely ignored once the bike arrived there. After each run I checked for leaks but nothing went wrong. Even so I decided it was tempting fate to try the FZX on the faster mile loop. Measured top whack was therefore 138 at 11,000rpm in fifth. Plenty fast enough. It felt like hanging off the edge of a cliff (by my fingernails) in a hurricane.

For standing starts, the FZX has the admirable characteristic of accepting full throttle within a few yards of the line; dead easy stuff, and

useful when an endearingly hopeful XR4 pulls up next to you. But blowing off cars is a very limited way of having fun on a motorcycle — unless you're lucky enough to come across a fast car.

I can't imagine anybody notching up stupendous mileages on the FZX, or choosing to ride it in anything other than perfect weather. But for what it's worth, after 4,000 miles of being thrashed by the press, the test bike's left rear shock stanchion was starting to wear, with little telltale black marks where the rubber seal had started to scrape off. The bike was also getting difficult to clean at the front where thousands of insects had achieved immortality on the various meshings and grillings protecting the radiator and wiring. The baked-on shoe rubber on the silencers was only removeable with a razor blade, and the back wheel had got about half way through its second rear tyre. By contrast the chain didn't need adjusting once in 1,000 miles. Better still, when some half wit dropped the FZX on its right hand side at about 10mph, there was no damage apart from scratched paint on the brake lever.

All the ancillary bits and pieces worked with predictable Japanese perfection, apart from the mirrors, which weren't clear enough at speed. Some people didn't like the tank-mounted idiot lights being



out of the rider's field of vision but it's all part of the style; even the instruments you can see are only semi-comprehensible. You really have to concentrate to work out when the speedo needle's pointing to 30mph.

Nobody can really deny that the FZX is a fairly trivial product. Sure, it handles and stops quite well, and it goes like

rocket a too; but there's better available for about the same money. At the same time it's a lot more practical than the really silly custom stuff we featured last month. Depending on your viewpoint, you get the worst, or the best, of both.

I know I didn't pay for the privilege of riding the FZX for two weeks, but I couldn't get

myself to take it seriously even for a minute. It was all a hugely enjoyable joke, and I'm sure that's what Yamaha were aiming for in the first place. After all, this motor lets you get away with anything. Serious bikers will go for an FZ any day. The frivolous ones, if they exist at all, will buy squadrons of FZXs and love 'em to death.

TEST SPECIFICATION

Yamaha FZX750

Price.....£3,799
Importer.....Mitsui Machinery Sales Ltd
Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey (01-397 5111)

Engine

Type.....inline four, five valves per cylinder, watercooled
Bore x stroke.....68 x 51.6mm
Capacity.....749cc
Compression ratio.....11.2
Fuel system.....4 x BDS34 Mikuni
Ignition.....transistorised

Transmission

Primary drive, ratio.....gear, 1.896
Final drive, ratio.....chain, 39/17
Gear ratios.....1st - 2.293; 2nd - 2.188; 3rd - 1.778;
4th - 1.500; 5th - 1.273; 6th - 1.125

Electrics

Generator.....n/a
Battery.....12V 14Ah
Headlamp.....12V 60/55W

Chassis

Front tyre.....110/90V16 Pirelli Sportscomp
Rear tyre.....140/90V15 Pirelli Sportscomp
Front brake.....twin ventilated disc
Rear brake.....single ventilated disc
Front suspension.....tele fork, variable preload, 140mm travel
Rear suspension.....twin shock, variable preload, 97mm travel
Trail/castor.....114mm/28.75°

Performance

Maximum speed.....
Sitting up.....131.5mph
Prone.....138.3mph
Standing start 1/4 mile/terminal.....11.79s @ 119.4mph

Fuel consumption

Average.....44mpg
Worst.....39mpg
Best.....48mpg

Dimensions

Wheelbase.....1525mm (60ins)
Overall length.....2245mm (88.4ins)
Overall width.....785mm (30.9ins)
Dry weight.....221kg wet (487lbs)
Fuel capacity.....12.9 litres (2.8gal)

Spares prices

Ignition switch.....£40.50
Oil filter.....£3.29
Pair brake pads.....£35.68 (SBS £13.57)
Silencer.....£210.66
Indicator.....£14.87

Tester's verdict

Good points.....styling, mindblowing engine
Bad points.....tank range, pillion discomfort, mirror vibes

Performance.....yes
Handling.....best mutant by far
Comfort.....suits the tank range
Braking.....limited only by tyres and suspension
Value.....fine for posers; unrealistic for year-round bikers

Quick comparison

bike	max spd*	SS1/4	av mpg	price	issue tested
FZX750	138	11.8/119	44	£3799	hello
FZ750	143	11.3/118	42	£3899	June 87
ZL1000	131	11.8/115	31	£4399	Sept 87
VF750C	116	12.8/105	41	£3599	Sept 87
883					
Sportster	109	14.6/91	50	£4280	Sept 87
750					
Intruder	107	13.2/98	51	£3499	Oct 86

* On MIRA's 1600 yard timing straight

