

SOILED SIXES



KAWASAKI ZX-6R F3
£3995

Sep '97, one owner, FSH, part-exchanged for BMW (eh?). Datatagged

YAMAHA THUNDERCAT
£4495

Sep '97 (was on private plate), FSH, one owner, part-ex-ed against used Blackbird

Secondhand sports 600s? We've the four popular makes, all no more than two years-old, in fair condition and reasonably priced. Take a second look





**“Back-to-back
on the road,
the Cat kept up
with the others”**

LION SLEEPS TONIGHT

I'll never forget the looks of surprise when pics of Yamaha's Thundercat first appeared. Comments about its styling were very memorable and very unprintable. From a full-on race rep (FZR600 and FZR600R), Yamaha's 1996 middleweight sports 600 had turned into a tour bus.

Despite verging on the ugly, and the sit-up-and-beg riding position (read comfy), the Cat does surprisingly well at being, sorry, a genuine all-rounder. Exactly what Yamaha wanted, but not you, the buying public – how many Cats have you seen?

On the comfort front, the Thundercat is a complete opposite to the GSX-R. Plush seat, soft suspension and a motor that has midrange drive.

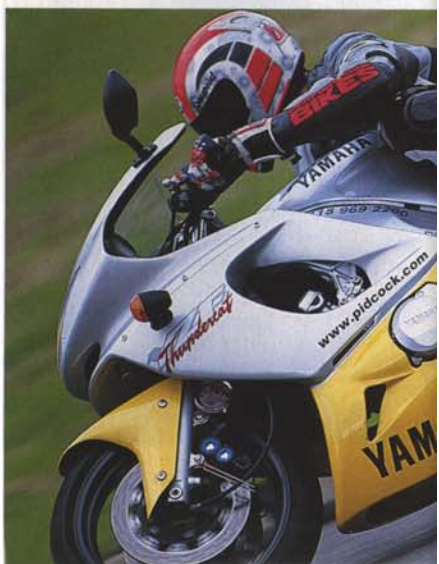
Taking the lump from the FZR600R, tweaking the ignition, revising cam timing and topping it off with



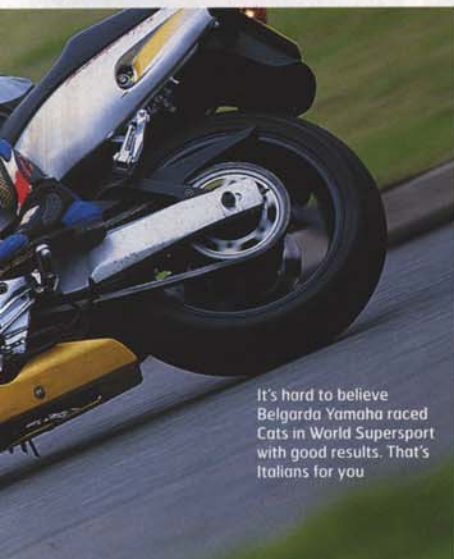
Bob rightly turns away in embarrassment as Trev suggests unspeakable acts involving a “soft arse end”

a throttle position sensor (TPS) to give a nice spread of torque, also means it's got the lowest output (89.2bhp) of the bunch. Not that you'd notice.

Back-to-back, on the road, the Cat kept up with the others. The wide bars help because you can



Not wanting to trust the worn front tyre, Bob does the stabiliser trick with his rusty left knee



It's hard to believe Belgarda Yamaha raced Cats in World Supersport with good results. That's Italians for you

wrestle the bulky and wide Cat into the turns. It also required a mix of effort and bravery on the rider's part because of a duff tyre and soft suspension set-up (see sidebars). But sure enough it hung in there to arrive at the Little Chef at the same time, everytime... Rider wild-eyed but thankfully ache-free.

Unfortunately for the Cat it has also inherited the clutch basket and plates of the older generation Yams. Only 7430 miles and already a grabby clutch which (sorry Pidcock) turned into a cooked mess after just two attempts at standing start quarter miles. We can't put it down to overuse because the Yam has decent gear ratios and excellent low down drive – cog swapping is minimal in comparison.

Now here's one for you: is it possible to have too good a front brake set-up? The answer is no, but you could think the other way after riding a Thundercat. The front calipers are good, the same but slightly different one-piece four-pot type that grace R1 and R6, and kill speed instantly. They're also capable of locking the wheel under hard braking. Again, we could blame the wankered front tyre, even the soft (but fully adjustable) forks. But no, we've had it

Genuine mileage and very clean with it. Even though the acres of placcy dash trim reminded us of a Datsun Cherry 120Y, the Cat will make someone, somewhere very happy

happen on other Cats. Simply put, sharper than sharp brakes and a top heavy, heavy bike don't mix. Best to roll off earlier and tickle the adjustable-for-span brake lever more gently.

It's hard to tell, but the Cat's frame is a pressed steel item, as is the swingarm. This doesn't mean it's a lesser item than the ally frames of the GSX-R or ZX-6R (CBR is tubular steel). But when it comes to the covering paint getting scratched, you'd best touch it up quick or a fack-awful line of rust will appear.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU THREE

Clean, very clean. So clean its condition belies its 7430 miles. Not even the footpeg rubbers or throttle grip showed wear. A fair-weather person or pedantic cleaner had owned this bike – probably both. Even the caliper pad-retaining pins had Copaslip grease on them – more likely to be the result of warranty servicing and a Yamaha spannerman (sod political correctness) who has stripped one too many seized Yamaha calipers in the past. There.

We can't blame spanner-gadge for the missing paint on the downpipes, or slight scratch on the end-can because any bit of a bike that sticks outwards will meet with grief. Nope, nothing much to report here. It's a minterrrr...



There, there... let me kiss it better for you



It's a job to see, but front pipes do get hammered by road crud

TYRED OUT

Worn tyres aren't good on the wallet or body. Buying a bike privately with worn, mismatched or non-approved (size and type) tyres means you've got to fork out for replacements sooner rather than later because: (1) you're easy prey for the law and the fund-raising judicial system, (2) in your insurer's eyes you may not be covered, (3) they can bugger-up your bike's handling, leading to a get-off and rule #2 coming into play, (3) wet weather riding will be like Russian roulette, and (4) forking out for a set of tyres isn't clever when you've spent every penny on getting the bike in the first place.

Buy a bike from a shop and you've got instant ammunition for a decent set of tyres. A dealer with a good reputation won't want it sullied; legally the dealer would be crucified if you fell off ten yards from the shop door; if you can't cut a deal on the bike's price, and all that stands between you walking away and him taking your wedge is a set of new, sticky hoops, then the bike



A selection of tyres for your delectation. Funny how something so boring as a pair of tyres can cost and do so much

should be yours, with new rubber, as quick as it takes to sign the HP documents.

The CBR came with Michelin M90X Macadams, in the right sizes and speed rating (120/60 ZR17 front, 160/60 ZR17 rear). A strange choice for a bike showing signs of being owned by a thrasher – Macadams are favoured for their high mileage capability rather than peg scraping ability. Saying that, after dropping the rear's pressure

CONCLUSION

Look hard before you buy and ask what sort of deal can be done to get the price down or get some freebies. Get a test ride and take a mate who knows about bikes to look at it. Also ask the dealer for a HPI report (tells the dealer if any outstanding finance is on the bike, but also tells you if an insurance claim has been submitted), buy one that's as near to stock condition as possible, then ask if any goodies came/come with the bike. Make sure it has decent tyres, find out if the original warranty is still running and get a receipt... *phew*.

If you can remember all that then it's highly likely you'll end up with a good buy. But what should I get, you say? Bugged if we know, we aren't you, but... If you want your brain frying and back busted it's got to be the GSX-R.

Sumptuous ride and strange looks with the means to get a spurt on when needed, go Thundercat.

Pleasing in-betweeny, guaranteed to keep you happy whatever mood you're in, definitely the CBR or ZX-R. But as nine out of ten Thundercats said their owners preferred Honda's CBR600, you've got to go with the flow.



One reason for squared off rear tyres and decent fronts

SECONDHAND OPINIONS...

TESTERS



Ronnie Smith, 2, ex-owner of every bike made since 1922



Jonathan Bentman, 34, been with lots of bikes



Robert Gray, 10, wants to learn how to pick up bikes

HONDA CBR600

Better midrange than the GSX-R, more top end than the Thundercat, only the Kwak ran it close. Best brakes of the lot, especially high speed response. The gearbox has improved but it still felt rough to me. Shame about its condition, it spoiled what is perhaps the easiest 600 to ride.

Nice bike gone bad. Felt very much secondhand to ride in comparison. Boring in black with chrome stickers. The tyres were shocking, no confidence in them whatsoever. It's got an alright motor, bit flat, but it revved out OK. This CBR was simply below average compared to the others.

Another Honda that has stood the test of time, if you look past the damage. Handles good. You point it, it goes, no guesswork involved. Unlike pissing in the dark where you have to guess whose room you're in. Novel gearbox, nine-speed I think, six normal and three neutrals. Tyres? 'Nuff said.

YAMAHA THUNDERCAT

Good points? Hmm! Well all of it is good, just not so exciting as the rest. It does the job perfectly and would suit a person who wants to get around without fuss. It'd be a good bike to buy because all the headbangers would have the CBR, ZX-6R and definitely the GSX-R... So you'd be different.

I'd buy the GSX-R, but in all-round use I just know the Suzuki's committed riding position would eventually piss me off, so the Yam it is. First off I'd beat the salesman down on his price and clear off to treat it to a decent rear shock and front fork makeover. The motor's smooth, with a healthy power build-up. Doesn't feel revvy the way the others did.

Worn front tyre, mismatched rear and yet still better than the CBR's. Bouncy little bugger. It would've been nice to firm up the rear shock, then throw it away and buy summat better – didn't Yamaha buy Öhlins, the factory? If so, why don't they talk to each other? I could say this is the VFR750 of the 600 class, but I won't. Please don't print that...

KAWASAKI ZX-6R

Kate Bush of the bike world: lovely to listen to but now to look at. I'd vote this as the best package, but I won't because it's ugly and you can see what happens if you don't spend time looking after it. Get it for the right money though, and it'd be money well spent.

Wrong colour, wrong shape, but the motor's strong. After skating through what feels suspiciously like a weak midrange, the motor winds up to a shrieking top end like the adrenaline pumper it is. It's got attitude all the way... typical Kawasaki, bit like the warped discs, which seem unnecessarily expensive to me. Who designed the clocks? A copper I bet. Legible they are not. Lots of numbers in one space, ugh!

I'm sure the brakes on this are better than the new model's six-potters, even with the judder. It's a toss-up between this and the GSX-R for the sweetest handling award – it turns fast without any effort and stays put. And being more comfortable it isn't so hard to ride for long periods.

Top motor. Barks at you when in full flight to make you think it's the most powerful. Yeah, OK, it is...

SUZUKI GSX-R600

If someone else was paying, this would be the bike I'd have: it's mad and bad in one lithe chassis. Sweet. All that mileage and still looking new! Who said Honda have the best build quality? Not me. I could live with the discomfort of such a radical riding position, only 'cos I'm too tight to pay for an osteopath. Best looking, best suspension, best fix. It'd cost a fortune in polish with those white wheels tho'...

My girlfriend would want this 'cos it's sex. Uncomfortable sex maybe, but better than no sex. The GSX-R is a pleasure just to look at: alloy frame, honking great air ducts, savage yoke set. Twist the grip at low revs and bugger-all happens. Twist the grip and slip the clutch and ride it like the racer it is. Nothing can be this good and not do some harm, can it? I mean, I'm blind now from all that wan...

My favourite of all the bikes. Bigger the cramped riding position, it has style with a capital S. That's all you need to know... apart from I still listen to Motörhead, AC/DC and love watching *Nightmare On Elm Street* and *Saturday Night Fever*. Does this say something?



SPECS

Model	Honda CBR600FV
Price	£4195
Warranty	3 months
Supplier	Pidcock Motorcycles, 701 Woodborough Road, Mapperley, Notts NG3 5QG (01159 692200)

ENGINE

Type	16v, DOHC, four-stroke, liquid-cooled, inline four
Bore x stroke	65 x 45.2mm
Displacement	599cc
Compression ratio	12:1
Fuel system	4 x 36mm Mikuni CV
Ignition system	digital
Gears	six

CHASSIS

Frame	tubular steel twin spar
Front tyre	120/60 ZR17
Rear tyre	160/60 ZR17
Front brake	2 x 296mm discs, 2-pot calipers
Rear brake	1 x 220mm disc, 1-pot caliper
Front suspension	41mm RWU forks, adj preload & rebound damping
Rear suspension	monoshock, adj, rebound, comp & preload

DIMENSIONS

Castor/trail	25°/94mm
Wheelbase	1405mm
Seat height	810mm
Dry weight	185kg
Fuel capacity	17L

SPECS

Model	Suzuki GSX-R600WW
Price	£4350
Warranty	3 months
Supplier	Planet Moto, 123 Chellaston Road, Allenston, Derby DE24 9AF (01332 704900)

ENGINE

Type	16v, DOHC, four-stroke, liquid-cooled, inline four
Bore x stroke	65.5 x 44.5mm
Displacement	600cc
Compression ratio	12:1
Fuel system	4 x 36.5mm Mikuni CV
Ignition system	digital
Gears	six

CHASSIS

Frame	dual aluminium beam
Front tyre	120/70 ZR17
Rear tyre	180/55 ZR17
Front brake	2 x 320mm discs, 4-pot calipers
Rear brake	1 x 220mm disc, 2-pot caliper
Front suspension	41mm RWU forks, adj preload, rebound & comp
Rear suspension	rising rate monoshock, adj rebound, comp & preload

DIMENSIONS

Castor/trail	24°/96mm
Wheelbase	1385mm
Seat height	830mm
Dry weight	174kg
Fuel capacity	18L

SPECS

Model	Yamaha Thundercat
Price	£4495
Warranty	3 months
Supplier	Pidcock Motorcycles, 701 Woodborough Road, Mapperley, Notts NG3 5QG (01159 692200)

ENGINE

Type	16v, DOHC, four-stroke, liquid-cooled, inline four
Bore x stroke	62 x 49.6mm
Displacement	599cc
Compression ratio	12:1
Fuel system	4 x 36mm Mikuni CV
Ignition system	digital
Gears	six

CHASSIS

Frame	pressed steel dual beam
Front tyre	120/60 ZR17
Rear tyre	160/60 ZR17
Front brake	2 x 298mm discs, 4-pot calipers
Rear brake	1 x 245mm disc, 2-pot caliper
Front suspension	41mm RWU forks, adj preload, rebound & comp
Rear suspension	rising rate monoshock, adj rebound, comp & preload

DIMENSIONS

Castor/trail	25°/97mm
Wheelbase	1415mm
Seat height	805mm
Dry weight	187kg
Fuel capacity	19L

SPECS

Model	Kawasaki ZX-6R F3
Price	£3995
Warranty	3 months
Supplier	Pidcock Motorcycles, 277 Osmaston Road, Derby DE3 8LD (01332 349673)

ENGINE

Type	16v, DOHC, four-stroke, liquid-cooled, inline four
Bore x stroke	66 x 43.8mm
Displacement	599cc
Compression ratio	11.8:1
Fuel system	4 x 36mm Keihin CV
Ignition system	digital
Gears	six

CHASSIS

Frame	dual aluminium beam
Front tyre	120/60 ZR17
Rear tyre	160/60 ZR17
Front brake	2 x 300mm discs, 4-pot calipers
Rear brake	1 x 230mm disc, 1-pot caliper
Front suspension	41mm RWU forks, adj, preload, rebound & comp
Rear suspension	monoshock rear, adj, rebound, comp & preload

DIMENSIONS

Castor/trail	24°/87mm
Wheelbase	1415mm
Seat height	810mm
Dry weight	182kg
Fuel capacity	18L

PERFORMANCE

KAWASAKI ZX-6R

Max prone	157.0mph (147.5mph*)
Max upright	140.0mph (142.2mph*)
SS1/4mile	N/A (10.96s/ 128.5**)

SUZUKI GSX-R600

Max prone	149mph (N/A)
Max upright	133.0mph (N/A)
SS 1/4 mile	11.33s/121mph (the same)

HONDA CBR600

Max prone	150.0mph (157.0mph*)
Max upright	135.0mph (144.5mph*)
SS 1/4 mile	11.56s/121mph (11.41s/121**)

YAMAHA YZF600

Max prone	152.0mph (154.5mph*)
Max upright	130.0mph (145.0mph*)
SS 1/4 mile	N/A (11.57s/119**)

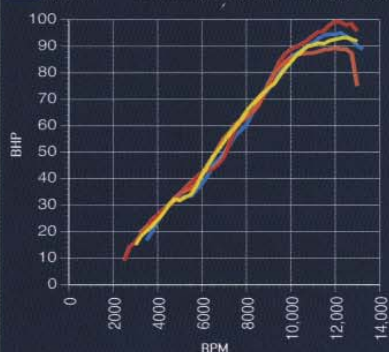
Original test figures in brackets

* denotes 10mph tailwind **denotes 10mph headwind

POWER

(new billie figures in brackets)

GSX-R600	95BHP @ 12,000RPM (94.1 @ 11,000)
ZX-6R	99.3BHP @ 12,000RPM (98 @ 12,000)
THUNDERCAT	89.2BHP @ 12,000RPM (91.1 @ 11,750)
CBR600	93.3BHP @ 12,500RPM (92.2 @ 12,250)

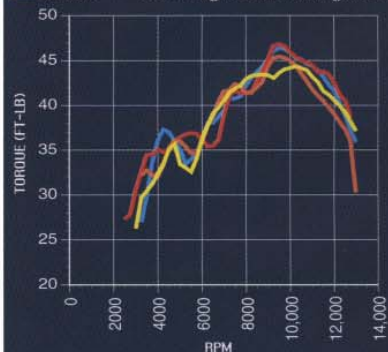


Dig the bones out of this lot. You don't need us to tell you they're all healthy at the top end of the scale, but down below all the bikes had lost a couple of...

TORQUE

(new billie figures in brackets)

GSX-R600	46.4FT-LB @ 9500RPM (46.9 @ 7750)
ZX-6R	46.8FT-LB @ 9750RPM (48.3 @ 9500)
THUNDERCAT	45.4FT-LB @ 9500RPM (47.1 @ 9250)
CBR600	44.4FT-LB @ 10,250RPM (44.1 @ 10,000)



...bhp. Possible reasons: (a) the bikes need servicing. (b) they could have been Dynojetted and refitting standard cans makes them run rich. Should've looked

Many, many thanks to: Pidcock Motorcycles (01159 692200) and Planet Moto (01332 704900) for the bikes. RA Wilson of Grantham (01476 592793) and their dyno operator, Andy, without whom I'd be a lot bolder