



## > Yamaha Thunderace

The stop-gap between the FZR1000 and R1. The sports machine of its day makes a cracking real-world road tool

■ Top speed 167mph ■ Insurance NU16 ■ Engine 1002cc, 16v, in-line four ■ Dry weight 198kg ■ Typical mpg 38

### WHAT IS IT?

Take a YZF750R-derived chassis, mix in a revamped FZR1000 EXUP engine, give it a new set of aerodynamic clothes, sprinkle it liberally with new ancillaries and you get a Thunderace. Weight reduction was a major part of the plan. It was 11kg less than the FZR it replaced and 5kg less than the Kawasaki ZX-7R launched at the same time.

According to Yamaha, the tweaked EXUP lump puts out 145bhp, enough for over 165mph. Ally this to what was essentially a 750 chassis and Yamaha had done what home enthusiasts had been making for several years – a litre-class motor in a nimble race-rep 750 chassis – and you could buy it over the counter at your local dealer.

### RIDING

"Turn-in is quick and fluid – very different from the Blade and GSX-R750's chop and drop tactics," said former *Bike* editor Richard Fincher at the 1996 launch in South Africa. "Because the bike relies entirely on the bars to turn, rather than any clever body-shifting, you really notice the steering's precision." The Deltabox chassis puts the wheels

where they're meant to be without fuss.

Of the brakes, we said, "They are fantastic but then again there is an awful lot of power available." Time gradually permeates everything, much like road salt. If the bike's not been looked after then the stoppers, which are awesome when new, will be a little lacklustre by now. This is nothing a little TLC lavished on the calipers won't solve. A good clean and lube followed by some fresh brake fluid and pads will have them back to their former glory.

While comfort is very much in the behind of the beholder, the Ace can only be described as pretty damn good in that department. A cutting-edge superbike when new, time has dulled its edge and it's now in the same class as the VFR800 and the other sports tourers. It might not have the creature comforts of later machines, it's almost as comfy but it has an engine that licks them all. The fact it has a five-speed gearbox should tell you that this is one torque-laded machine.

TT specialist Nick Jefferies gave it the thumbs-up in a group test later in the year with the Blade and 916. "The steering is excellent and the suspension

is well sorted. It's a great machine and certainly makes the best road bike."

### RELIABILITY

The Thunderace motor is just about as reliable as they come. Get it serviced regularly and watch the miles rack up.

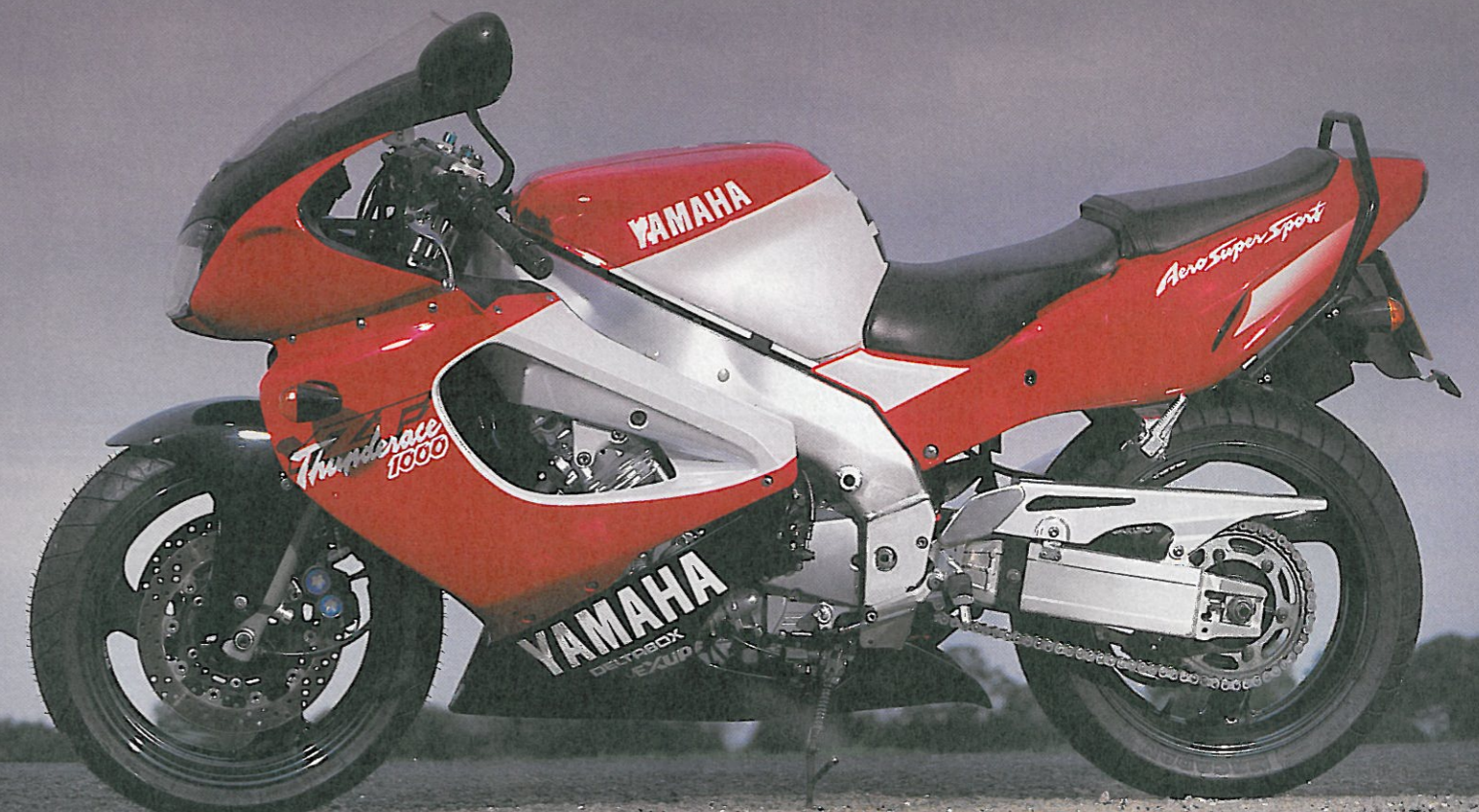
The oil light is activated by a level switch rather than a pressure switch. Owners rush to their dealer as soon as the light comes on, but it's just a reminder to top the oil up. It comes on almost as soon as it drops below the upper level mark. Don't worry. If there's oil in the sight glass it's fine. Like some other Yamaha engines, they use a fair bit of oil. It's not uncommon for them to drink up to one-and-a-half litres in the 4000 miles between services.

The EXUP valve that boosts midrange performance is hidden in the depths behind the fairing panels. The valve runs in a bush and if it's not greased regularly it'll seize, robbing you of either midrange or top-end power depending on its final resting place. Ordinary high temperature grease isn't man enough for the job. Use either grease designed for assembling turbos or get the proper grease from Yamaha. >>

WORDS BY BEN WILKINS PHOTOGRAPHY KENNY P

### Headlights

Not exactly overpowered for a bike that can hit almost 170mph. Try swapping the standard bulbs for Philips VisionPlus bulbs to brighten things up a little. Some owners have fitted Philips car-type 55/60w bulbs. You need to bend one tab over to make it fit, but the results are worth it





**PRICE GUIDE**

The Thunderace was launched when superbikes were costing over £9000 new. You can still pick them up new if you hunt around the dealers, but Yamaha haven't brought any into the UK for a couple of years. In 1998, bike prices dropped across the board with the booming trade in grey imports. Yamaha reduced the list price to £7299.

The classified ads only seem to have early P and R-reg models up for grabs. Most have less than 10,000 miles on the clock and you can get a whole load of bike for £2995. A 2000 bike on a W-plate with less than 7000 miles showing will only set you back £4200 in a private sale.

There are later machines available in dealer showrooms. A clean 2001 bike with minimal mileage will be up for about £5100. In comparison, a 2001 ZX-9R with 4000 miles on the clock will only cost you £4995.

**RUNNING COSTS**

Actual day-to-day riding is pretty cheap on the Thunderace. Take it steady with the throttle and you can see up to 50mpg, which is remarkable for such a torquey motor. Even when you look at the flip side, it'll return low 30s when you want to crack on a bit.

How quickly the Ace wears out its tyres is entirely up to you. Wheelies and full-on acceleration are going to wear out just about any back tyre within a couple of thousand miles. Owners reckon a set of BT-010s will last for 5000 or more miles without trying too hard.

Servicing comes with a bit of a sting attached. The dealers we spoke to told us the fairing is a pain to remove and adds a few quid to your service costs. Every 24,000 miles the valves need to be checked and adjusted. How the bike has been ridden and looked after will determine the price you'll pay. Add 6.3 hours of your favourite dealer's labour to oil, a filter and other consumables and you'll be looking at the best part of £400.

Replacement parts aren't cheap. A top fairing is £308, a mirror £48, a brake lever £28.30 and the end can £420.

**IMPROVE IT**

You want more power? Adding an end can and re-jetting the carbs frees up a couple of horsepower at the top end and makes it sound much more fruity.

Binning the whole exhaust system and fitting an aftermarket race item will again improve the top end, but you'll lose out on the midrange because you'll have junked the EXUP valve.

The suspension is soft as standard and the rear shock will probably be in need of replacement on a four-year-old bike that's done 12,000 miles. Add a new rear shock from the likes of Maxton or Technoflex to get the rear end back under control and tighten things up. Throw a new set of springs and some fresh oil at the forks to give them a new lease of life.

**CHECK THIS**

As with the EXUP valve, the suspension linkages are out of sight and out of mind. If the bike's not been looked after these linkages get covered in road crap and wear out in no time, giving a sloppy feel at the rear end in the corners.

The Thunderace isn't a heavy bike but all that power makes lugging the front easy. Lots of cack-handed wheelies will pit the steering head bearing races, as with any bike. If they're notchy when you turn the bars from side to side then they'll need replacing. Lots of straight-line motorway work will wear the centre of the races, causing stability problems when turning at low speed.

Like many of the old FZR's, the clutch doesn't have the best action in the

**> Know your Thunderace**

**Wheelbase** 1425mm.  
**Dry weight** 198kg.  
**Fuel capacity** 20 litres.  
**Tested top speed** 167mph.  
**Tested standing quarter** 10.7s @ 127mph.  
**Claimed power** 145bhp @ 10,000rpm.  
**Claimed torque** 79.5ft-lb @ 8500rpm.

**Jan 1996 N** Red/white or black/grey, YZF750-based alloy Deltabox frame, four-into-one exhaust, five-speed close-ratio gearbox. 1002cc, 145bhp, 198kg, 167mph.

**Dec 96 P** Minor modification to the wiring harness for alarm fitment. Black/blue or black/red/white.

**Dec 98 S** Colour change. Black/blue only. No other modifications.

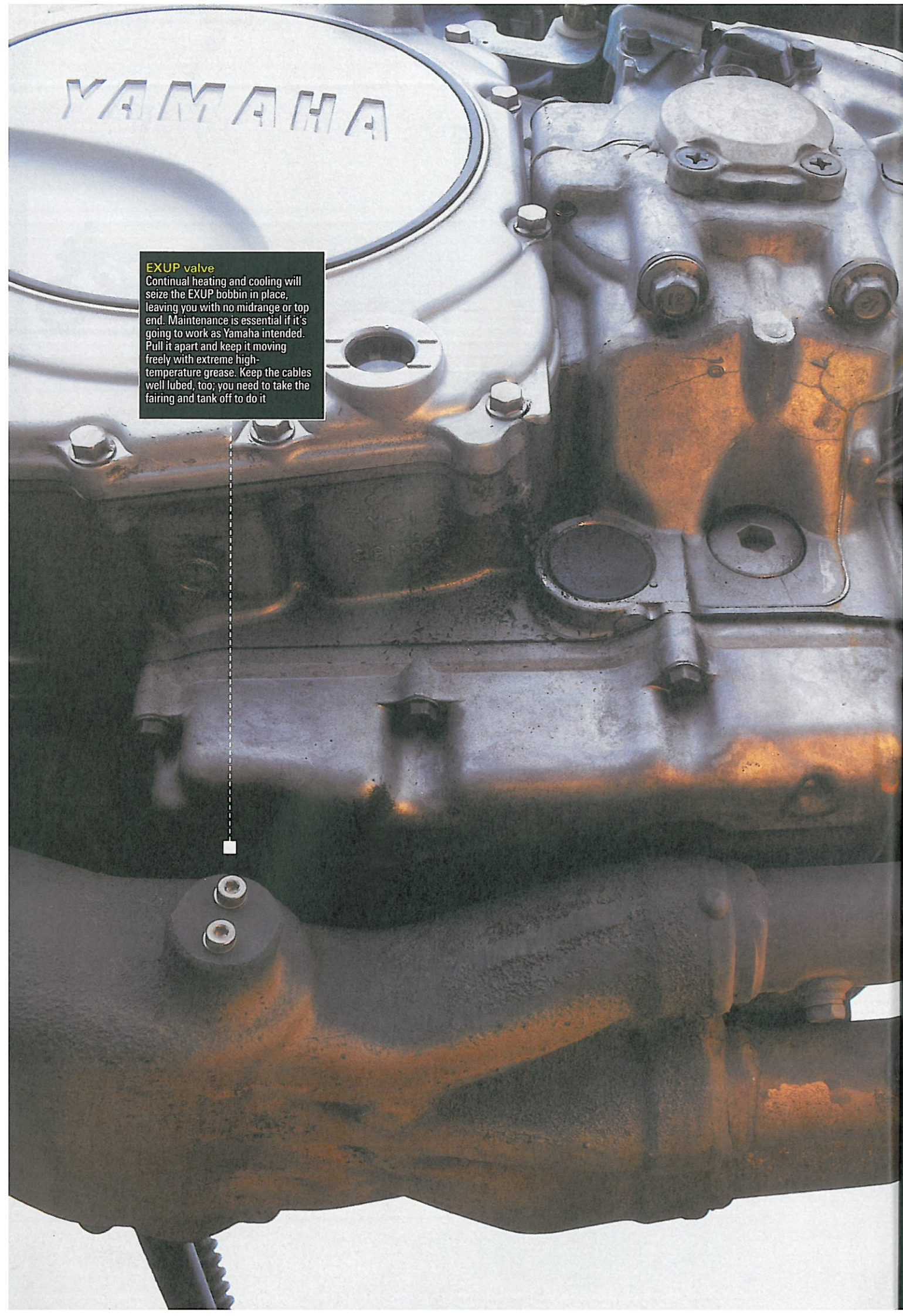
**Jan 00 V** Colour change. Black or red only. No other modifications. Not a lot to know really. Which colour do you prefer?

**Suspension linkage**

Being hidden behind the fairing it's not pulled apart and greased by most home mechanics. A winter's worth of salt water and grime will wear the bearings, leaving you wallowing down the road. If it has been greased recently, you'll see grease marks around the bolts. Otherwise assume it hasn't been done for years

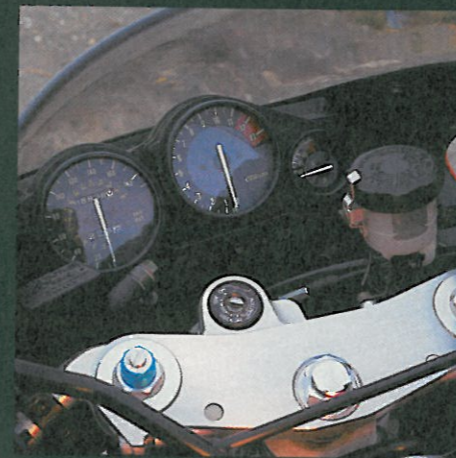
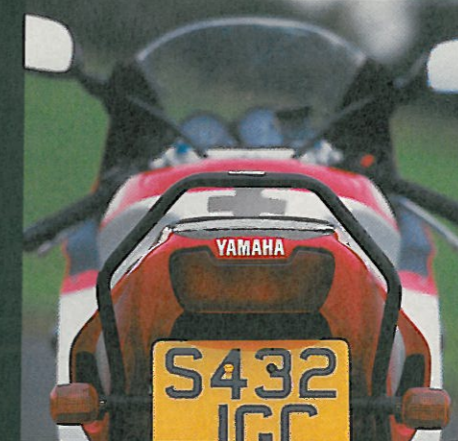




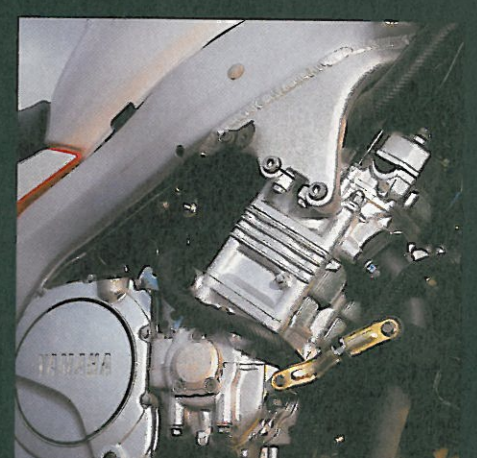


**EXUP valve**

Continual heating and cooling will seize the EXUP bobbin in place, leaving you with no midrange or top end. Maintenance is essential if it's going to work as Yamaha intended. Pull it apart and keep it moving freely with extreme high-temperature grease. Keep the cables well lubed, too; you need to take the fairing and tank off to do it



(clockwise from above left): standard exhaust can is heavy, but efficient. Aftermarket end cans don't give much power increase, but shed a few pounds; aftermarket grab rail is essential for even the shortest of pillion rides; still a good-looking bike. Simple design and plain colours haven't dated, unlike some of the competition; putting an FZR engine into a YZF frame was a popular mod before Yamaha made their own version. This engine is a torque classic – only five gears required; no-frills cockpit has easy-to-read clocks and that's it. No fuel gauge, no clock, no air temperature readout. Fine by us



**Insurance**

Group 16 makes it a little cheaper than an R1. Some insurers have certain requirements that have to be met before they'll offer a policy. Norwich Union will only insure you if you're over 25 and have three years bike NCB.

> Over 36, three years NCB, garaged, low-risk area, clean licence: £415.36 TPF&T.

> Over 41, full licence for 12 years, over five years NCB, garaged, low-risk area: £479.19 fully comp.

**Websites**

> <http://www.thunderacers.com/> If you're into Thunderaces, this is the page for you.

> <http://thunderace.scee.sony.co.uk/findex.html> Thunderace mailing list with online manuals and BIG thread archive.

> <http://www.micapeak.com/reg/bikes/YZF1000/> Register of Ace owners who bare all on their bikes.

> <http://www.motorcyclenews.com> Road test, specs, buying tips and owner's reports from *MGN*.

world. But they normally work well unless subjected to repeated fast clutch-slipping starts. You'll know when it's had enough because it'll slip and lose drive. Check for a clutch that's on the way out by giving it a handful of throttle in third or fourth gear at about 50mph. If the revs don't rise in conjunction with your road speed then you'll need to shell out £87 plus fitting for new fibre and steel clutch plates.

Some owners fit a 190-section rear tyre in a bid to improve the handling. Don't do it, you'll just mess up a fine-handling motorcycle.

**THE COMPETITION**

Kawasaki ZX-9R. Very similar in many ways, but the early ZX-9R had problems with its rear suspension linkage. It has the same kind of sports-touring ability although later machines are more focused with a powerhouse of an engine. It's harder and has more of a raw edge than the Thunderace. There are a load more ZX-9s on offer in the classifieds, but they did sell more of them for longer.

Honda CBR1000F. Bigger, fatter but just as fast. The CBR sits on the other side of the sports-tourer fence to the

Thunderace, but it doesn't mean it's the wrong side. Genuine comfort and a creamy-smooth engine gives the CBR a winning mix on the touring side of things. Get to your destination, though, and the Ace beats it hands-down when you want to enjoy the twisty local roads. There are loads of CBRs about but check under the all-encompassing bodywork for hidden horror stories.

**FIVE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE THUNDERACE**

1. End cans don't make much of a difference because of the EXUP valve. If it sounds nice then okay, but keep the original for MoT time.
2. The braced YZF750R swing arm fits straight in. Two extra sets of bearings in the 750 arm give more rigidity.
3. For a sports tourer the pillion accommodation could be better. Fitting a grab rail makes a huge difference, sorting out the seat is more difficult.
4. The fairing fasteners seize in place and need to be drilled out. A dab of grease on them makes it easier next time.
5. A Thunderace makes a better tourer than the Thundercat, thanks to the engine, but the Cat is better two-up. ■

**> Owners quizzed**

**Roger Gillespie, aged 43, 1999 model**  
"I had it rebored at 13,000 miles, when I fitted a JE 1040cc big-bore kit, and it's made a massive difference to the midrange. I've now got 81ft-lb of torque. I kept the EXUP valve because you lose all the midrange otherwise. I use a Bridgestone BT-010 front tyre and a BT-020 rear and get about 5000 miles from each. It's not bad on fuel, I get 160 to 185 miles per tank. Nobody does hard luggage for the Ace, which is a pain because you're stuck with throwovers. And the standard lights are crap, so I've fitted H4 55/60W car bulbs, which really improve things."

**Darren Sims, aged 30, 1996 model**  
"The standard forks bottom-out when braking and can't handle it on bumpy roads, so I've fitted some race-tech forks. I've added a full Arrow exhaust system and now there's a real kick between 7000 and 9000rpm. The midrange has lost a fair bit but it's worth it for the top-end gains. My main complaints are with the poor lights and those fairing fasteners."

**Richard Allen, 'not telling', 2000 model**  
"In the two-and-a-bit years I've had it, I've not had to replace anything other than normal service items. It's got about 40,000 miles on the clock and it still goes really well. I commute about 100 miles every day on fast roads and I get 40-50mpg. It's only on its second chain and third set of tyres, but I don't race around any more."