

YAMAHA OW-01 FLAT OUT

>>A608 Breadsall-Smalley >>Length 4.8 miles

Words Matt Widmer Photography James Cheadle



I'M LIVING A 17-year-old dream. In my early teens my life revolved around the British Supercup. Loctite Yamahas fought JPS Nortons, and Durex-liveried GSX-Rs battled RC30s. A signed poster of a gangly Terry Rymer was my prized possession. Being the school giant, I identified with 'Too Tall Tel' more than any other racer in my youth. A momentary, but not forgotten, hero.

And now I'm riding his bike. Or at least the bike that he made his own. The FZR750RR OW-01 was Yamaha's barely-legal homologation special for Supercup racing between 1989 and 1992. More race-bike than race replica, it dripped sex-appeal – rough-pressed glassfibre endurance fairings, fully-adjustable Ohlins suspension, a wonderfully-hewn alloy tank and a motor that in the midrange-heavy times of the early-90s was described as 'like a two-stroke'. It made an RC30 seem anodyne, almost clinical.

The OW-01 was alive.

And shunting around town trying to escape the North Midlands drear of Derby, the Yamaha feels like the obtuse race bike that it is. My feet and legs are bent double under me. Knees touch elbows, neck craned. Tallish first gear and grabby clutch do battle.

But then traffic thins. Derby's grey city limits make way for the green of the Peaks. The final glow of a mild autumn sun dries the damp patches and warms trackday-bobbled Supercorsa Pros. Now it all makes sense.

The FZR isn't obtuse – it's willing. All you need to do is ride it like a racer. So I do. Out of the final 30mph limit and the OW is pinned, pulling hard from low down in second gear. Despite the peaky horror stories of the time it drives well from low revs (much better than, say, an R6), building with intensity as the Nippon Seki tachometer sweeps past 8000 rpm. But it loves to rev, wailing to the 13,000 rpm redline, blare from the exhaust harmonising with a deep groan

from the prehistoric ram-air system. In a post-millennial world of frantic gearshifts and blurred needles, it holds each gear for a refreshingly long time. Addictive and usable.

In 1989, suspension on standard road bikes was either under-damped and saggy, or crude and hard. But this is perfect, and perfectly set up – a huge amount of extra ride-height weights the front and gives sublime front-end feel. This is someone else's rare, irreplaceable bike, but when it feels this good you can't help but ride it hard. It's a struggle not to be irresponsible.

The tachometer is touching the redline in fourth as I brake for the looming stone-lined harpin. I leave my braking as late as I can, four fingers needed to help the tired Nissin four-pots. I click down two on the pump-action gearbox, engine wailing on the over-run, and turn in late and hard, pushing the inside bar with the kind of shove ZX-7R owners would be familiar with.

The OW turns with measured reassurance and falls on to its side. My knee nicks a catseye, but it doesn't put the bike an inch off-line. It is completely unfazed. Supercorsa key into Shellgrip. Organic carburation coosets like fuel injection never could and I'm back on the power, chasing the dry-stone vanishing point and riding that 5000rpm-wide powerband again. Bike and rider are talking, working together. There's cohesion.

This is still an impressive bike, even in 2007. Compared to common-or-garden 750s of its era, this bike is so far ahead of its time – it makes my similar age and condition GSX-R750 feel flaccid, imprecise and docile. But then it should. In 1989 the £12,000 RRP was more than double that of GSX-R. Today this OW-01 is still worth £8000 and my GSX-R would fetch closer to £1500.

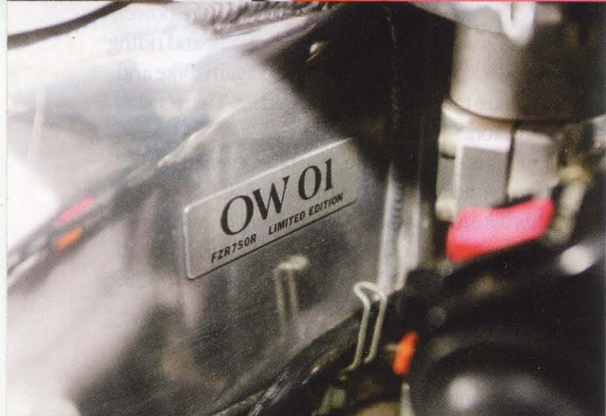
It's a huge amount of money for a bike that would get trounced by a five-year-old 600 but, like an RC30, the feel, exclusivity and cachet make it almost worth the outlay. For some it will be a small price to pay to relive their dreams and live the life of their old heroes. 🏍️

- Price £12,700 new, £7995 now ● Engine 749cc, 20v, liquid-cooled, four-stroke, inline four
- Power 121bhp@12,000rpm (claimed) ● Torque 57.1lb.ft@9250rpm (claimed) ● Dry weight 187kg (claimed) ● Frame Box-section twin-spar alloy ● Front suspension Fully-adjustable 43mm forks
- Rear suspension Fully-adjustable Ohlins Racing monoshock ● Front brake 2 x 320mm floating disc, four-piston caliper ● Tyres 120/70 ZR17 front, 170/60 ZR17 rear ● PB likes Living childhood dreams
- PB doesn't like Contortionist's riding position ● In a word Rymer

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Top: Those needles spin with a satisfying smoothness only an early-90s carb-fed superbike can supply
Left: Only 500 bikes with this stamp exist. Entering this select group of owners won't come cheap
Below left: Be honest, which would you rather have on the driveway – an R1 or this?



Exclusivity comes at a price

Only 500 OW-01s were ever made, but they're not impossible to find, so long as you are willing to pay for the privilege. While they demand a slightly lower price than an RC30, you're still looking to pay £6-8000 privately for a decent bike, and more from a dealer. That's brand-new R1 territory...

Many machines are either hard-ridden ex-racers or hardly-ridden collectors' bikes. Both varieties have obvious problems. Finding one that makes you feel at ease with spending so much cash can be a pretty hard task.

But there are advantages. Keep an OW-01 fettled and in good condition and it'll hold its value better than any 08 bike could. Buy one for eight grand, ride it sparingly and sell it on three years later for similar cash. You'd lose at least £4000 on that R1.

The bike we test rode here was for sale for £7995. Take a look at www.ps-performanceandtuning.com if you're interested.

