

YZF1000 THUNDERACE '96

More sports-tourer than superbike, but don't let that put you off.

BACK in 1996 the Thunderace was battling FireBlades, ZX-9Rs and GSX-Rs for superbike supremacy. It lost. And once the R1 arrived two years later the big Yamaha found itself firmly relegated to the sports-tourer league. But don't dismiss it out of hand, the Thunderace is an extremely competent machine and a blast to ride.

The Ace's bulky look made it appear much less athletic than the opposition. A chassis aimed more at dependable handling rather than track sharpness put it in a slightly lower division. Back in the real world, this won't leave you more than a few seconds behind down back roads.

The grunty motor is a real gem. With an unrestricted, claimed 145bhp on tap and a torque curve as flat as a billiard table, sending the speed to obscenely high three-figure speeds couldn't be easier. The five-speed box doesn't need much attention to maintain the scenery-blurring acceleration either. Top speed is just under 170mph, only the EXUP's trademark vibration around 5000rpm spoils the show.

Steering is on the heavy side, but you are rewarded with a safe and stable ride. Where other bikes may frighten riders into backing off, the YZF feels reassuring. Excellent brakes increase your confidence even more; huge power and sensitivity make slashing

speed just as straightforward as achieving it.

And you can stay on the pace all day. The wide seat is reassuringly plush while the generous fairing and screen enhance the Ace's sports touring credentials as do the bungee hooks and decent tank range.

So it's bizarre Yamaha didn't see fit to include a grab-rail, the one on our strip-down bike is an aftermarket accessory. Without it, the Thunderace is pillion hell.

Thunderace thrills are cheap too. The market's ignorance of the Ace coupled with big parallel sales and official discounts means there are plenty around and you can take advantage of this very underrated motorcycle for as little as £3500.

MASTERCLASS

Sharpen your suspension

RIDE freelancer Chris Moss raced a Thunderace at the TT and reckons it's easy to improve the suspension. First set the preload adjusters on top of the legs to show two indicator rings. Now set the compression damping – the adjusters are at the bottom of the fork legs and should be five clicks from max. The rebound adjuster screws on top of the fork leg should be seven clicks from maximum. The rear shock sag is about right when the preload adjuster is one click from max. Compression damping should be two clicks from max, while the rebound damping adjusting wheel should be three clicks from max. Only trouble is, Mossy didn't actually stay on...



Who says the Thunderace isn't sporty?

HEADRACES

Jack the front end from the floor and check the headrace action. Some notchiness is common, but it's not a huge job to sort.

FAULT DIAGNOSIS

Warning light problems are highlighted by the tach. If the needle moves round its dial and sits at a certain rpm momentarily before returning to normal engine speed readings, then one of the lights is faulty.

BRAKES

Never attempt to remove the blue anodised blanking plugs in the calipers – you will wreck the brakes beyond repair.

REAR SHOCK

Can start to lose its damping after as few as 15,000 miles. Aftermarket units cost from £250-£600.

PARALLELS

There are plenty around, almost all still have km/h speedos and illegal headlights. Allow for replacement costs when haggling.

END CAN

The EXUP valve allows Yamaha to build an exhaust which is hard to improve on. Aftermarket systems save weight but don't significantly improve power over standard.

VIBRATION

Vibes at around 5000rpm are normal and aren't an indication of serious problems.

"I bought one..."



David Threfall is a hospital theatre nurse. The 34 year-old from Derbyshire bought his Thunderace 18 months ago and has done 6000 miles on it since.

"I wanted something sporty but my six foot frame limited my options. Luckily the Ace suits my requirements perfectly. It's a fast, reliable, economical and comfortable all-rounder.

"I use it for all sorts of stuff. Commuting, touring and fun rides are all so easy. I ride in all weathers and it's never let me down once.

"Fitting a rack and tank bag has made it even more practical and gearing it down with a 15-tooth gearbox sprocket has made the acceleration truly rapid. An ART race can is the finishing touch – sounds gorgeous.

"The shock is getting a bit tired after 12,000 miles. Apart from that everything is working as well as it should. My only real gripe is that servicing is a bit of pig to do yourself. I leave valve clearance work to dealers."



SPECIFICATIONS

Price	£2500-£3750
Engine	20v liquid-cooled in-line four
Claimed power	145bhp @ 10,000rpm
Claimed torque	79.5ft lb @ 6500rpm
Frame	alloy twin-spar DeLtonas
Dry weight	190kg (420.0lb)
Fuel capacity	20 litres (4.2 gal)
Seat height	79.5cm (31.3in)
Tyre sizes	front 120/70 17, rear 180/55 17

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	168mph
Fuel consumption	30mpg

Verdict: relegated to sports-tourer territory by the R1. Plenty of these cheap and underrated bikes are around. A real-world machine.

Engine	★★★★	Chassis	★★★★
Brakes	★★★★	Suspension	★★★★
Comfort	★★★★	RIDE value	★★★★

"A bike to be reckoned with"

Steve Boore owns an '87 Genesis "I was going to buy a CBR600, but when I saw a Genesis I had to give it a go. After a test ride I was hooked and bought it straightaway.

"The power is so strong and easy to use – above 8000rpm it goes ballistic. Only the law prevents me from using it to the max.

"It's much more comfortable than I'd expected, too. I've got a bit of a dodgy back but the Yam doesn't bother it."

Steph Barnett-Potts owns a '97 Thunderace "I love it. The Yamaha's my only form of transport and I use it every day. The handling, brakes, power and looks are all excellent. I just can't help grinning every time I take it out for a spin.

"Earlier this year I went on a 3000-mile round trip to France for my honeymoon. It's absolutely perfect for that sort of stuff.

"I've made a few mods to improve it a bit. A front mudguard extender and rear hugger keep it clean. A rack and a Scottolier make it a bit more practical, while the 55/60W headlight bulbs make night riding easier."

Robert Green owns a '95 EXUP "I'm a born-again. I wanted a sportsbike but it had to be fairly well-mannered to suit my inexperience.

"I bought a Triumph Trident 900 when I came back to bikes, but this is so much better. The handling is very predictable and the power delivery is very fluid with no glitches.

"It's starting to look a bit dated now and I find some bikers are a bit snobby with their attitude to it, treating it like a bit of a has-been. But it doesn't worry me."

Buying an FZR or Thunderace

Have a good look round the Yamaha you're interested in buying. The earlier the model, the closer the scrutiny needs to be.

There aren't many good Genesis models around so choice is very limited. And the FZR is now an old bike so it will have done plenty of miles whatever the clock says. Bear in mind the FZR (all versions) was one of the best sportsbikes of its day attracting fast riders and racers so look for signs of a hard life. Look also for signs of a dodgy past. Loads were nicked and many ended up with new identities. Engine and frame numbers should match on bikes up to 1996. An MOT HPI check will give you peace of mind, call: 01722 435555.

You're on safer ground with the Thunderace; it attracted more mature owners and there are plenty about.

Servicing

Home servicing isn't difficult and regular oil level checks are essential (they all burn a bit). But there is a lot of fiddly bodywork to remove and getting to an EXUP's spark plugs requires a semi-stripdown (carbs and/or radiator off) or a GCSE in keyhole surgery. Sadly, the Thunderace is no better.

Valve clearances are best left to the professionals but only required every 28,000 miles. Basic service intervals are:

- 4000 miles: change oil and filter, balance carbs, lube and check EXUP valve (except Genesis) and general checkover. Cost: £120-£150.

- 16,000 miles: 4K service plus strip and lube rear suspension linkages and swing-arm pivot. Check and regrease headstamps. Change fork oil, coolant, clutch and brake fluids. Replace fuel filter. Cost: £200-£250.
- 28,000 miles: check valve clearances. Cost: £100-£150.

Tyres

There's an excellent choice of tyres for the later bikes. They cost between £175-350 a set. Life of the rears is 2-5000 miles and fronts 4-8000 miles.

Recommended tyres for the Genesis are: Bridgestone BT-020 rear and BT-010 front; Dunlop Sportmax 0207; Michelin Macadam 100; Avon Azaro; Metzler ME24 rear and ME23 front. Sizes: 120/70 x 17 front, and 160/90 x 18 rear.

Recommended tyres for the EXUP and Thunderace models are for sports/sports-touring riding are: Bridgestone BT-010/ BT-020; Dunlop Sportmax 0207R/0207; Michelin Pilot Race/Pilot; Avon Azaro Sport/Azaro; Metzler ME23 Racing/ME23; Pirelli Dragon Evo/Dragon. Sizes: 120/70 x 17 front and 180/55 x 17 rear.

Thanks to

Dorvil Young, Watling Tyres (0181 690 3366); Neil Young at Len Manchester (01664 582302); On Yer Bike (01296 655999); DK (01792 861103) and Granby Motors, Mansfield (01623 420014).

Nigel Brealey owns a 1990 EXUP "I've had my EXUP for three years and done over 20,000 happy miles. It's a bit old now, but it's still a bike to be reckoned with; if you've got the balls it can still play hard.

"I've been to Europe on it a few times. It's a great place to use its performance to the full. The handling can feel a bit heavy, but considering its age, I can't complain."