

# THE BUZZZZZZ

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## » I WAS TALKING TO SOMEONE THE OTHER DAY WHO IS NOT RELATED TO BIKE RACING IN ANY WAY – HE’S A BANKER ACTUALLY...

He was struggling to understand why anyone would spend the kind of money we all do, or have done, in order to go round and round in circles on a motorcycle and why they’d bother to take time off work to do it again on a Wednesday afternoon at Mallory Park of all places. The only answer I could give was “Because it’s just so much fun riding a bike! Every time you do it, you come back feeling euphoric.”

He clearly didn’t get it so I related a story from back in early 1994 that I thought might be relevant. Back then I was a part-time racer, full-time tyre centre owner and occasional writer for various magazines. One of the publications that used me for race based stuff were the now defunct Motor Cycle International, who were at the Financial Times end of the scale rather than the Daily Star or Sun. They were always last minute merchants, so when I took the call one Monday afternoon, the “What are you doing on Wednesday?” question came as no real surprise.

“Why, what do you need?” I asked, knowing that it would be something to do with a race bike, as none of their staffers held a race bike licence otherwise they would have used them to do the job. Back then, track days weren’t as common and if you wanted to test an actual race bike, Mallory Park on a Wednesday afternoon was the usual choice and of course you needed a race licence.

“We’ve got a Suzuki GSXR1100 powered special that we want to do a feature on. The guy uses it for drag racing and for club racing on the airfields, he reckons it makes 180 horsepower!” This was my worst nightmare, as these readers specials were usually badly put together, ill-handling pieces of poo, that the owners could see no faults with. Then again a Wednesday afternoon spent riding a bike free of charge versus an afternoon doing paperwork and changing rusty exhausts or dirty tyres – no contest.

As usual with magazines, they’d forgotten to book me in and I had to sweet talk the girls into adding me to the busy list of riders. Consequently, I didn’t get out for the first session and had some time to chat to the owner of the GSXR1100 special. I introduced myself to him and he turned out to be a really nice bloke. He was a West Country lad and had built this bike with airfield racing in mind and it was unashamedly all about the engine. I looked it over to make sure nothing was likely to actually fall off it whilst I was riding it and noted it had upside down forks, 6 pot callipers up front and lots of bling scattered around the cycle parts (anodised blue sprockets anyone?). I looked

at the rear shock and saw it was an EMC unit also anodised, this time in red, with a bright yellow spring wrapped around it. “What’s that spring off of?” I asked, looking at the size of the item coiled around the EMC shock.

“Dunno, it was just one my mate had in the workshop that looked about right.” Came the reply. Judging from the size of it and the bright yellow colour, my best guess was probably a JCB digger! I was going to ask about the dodgy looking pair of badly flat spotted slick tyres it had on it, but I guessed the answer would be about the same, so I just shut up and got my riding gear on.

When I approached the bike again, he’d already warmed it up, although I noted that there were no tyre warmers in evidence and made a mental note to be really careful for 3 or 4 laps. Throwing a leg over it, I tried to blip the throttle and found it required the strength of Charles Atlas to twist it. Letting go resulted in it snapping shut like Ronnie Barkers cash register in Open All Hours. “Christ mate, why’s it that stiff?” I asked, shocked.

“Oh, I had a bit of an issue with the flatslides jamming open at full throttle openings, so I put an assist spring on to make sure they closed properly!” his look simply said, don’t be a pussy. So short of asking for a pair of Mole grips to make opening the throttle easier, I was just going to have to ride it as it was. I rode off down the pit lane muttering to myself that I was now riding something I’d started to think of as “Frankenstein’s monster”.

In worrying about the throttle action, I’d totally forgotten about the cold tyres and my ride nearly ended before it had really begun. As I checked over my shoulder exiting pit lane and simultaneously cracked the throttle open the cold tyres made their presence known in no uncertain terms. Now I’m not saying that I’d never approached Gerards with the wheels out of line before, but it had usually been with my head pointing roughly at the corner itself rather than hanging off the side of the bike inspecting the lower fork bridge! I did stay on board though, just - through no skill at all, just pure luck and I then set about potting around to get some heat into the tyres. During the course of the next 3 laps, I discovered that the 6 pot callipers were just window dressing as they were married to a master cylinder that wouldn’t have been out of place on a Honda C90 chicken chaser, the tyres were shot, the suspension travel non-existent and the gear change was set up as road shift. Getting it through the Bus Stop was like trying to pilot a Supertanker up Bow Creek. - In short, I hated it.

Then on the 4th lap coming out of the Bus

Stop, there was a loud “ping” from under the tank somewhere and the throttle suddenly became easy to open and surprisingly, its action was as smooth as silk. Once the relationship between the twist grip and the engine output was restored to some semblance of order, the bike actually became fun to ride. I discovered that it wouldn’t turn on a closed or neutral throttle, but it could be turned beautifully on the throttle provided you got all your braking done early. It turned out to be very fortunate that I’d adopted this method of riding some 3 laps later though.

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I’d been just enjoying exiting the Bus Stop and leaving black lines down the Devils Elbow, made easier by the shagged rear slick and I was working on doing the same on the exit of Gerards, thinking that it would make a good magazine photo. - It doesn’t matter what speed you’re actually going for that kind of shot, if the bike is clearly spinning the rear tyre, it looks fast and that’s what magazines pay for!

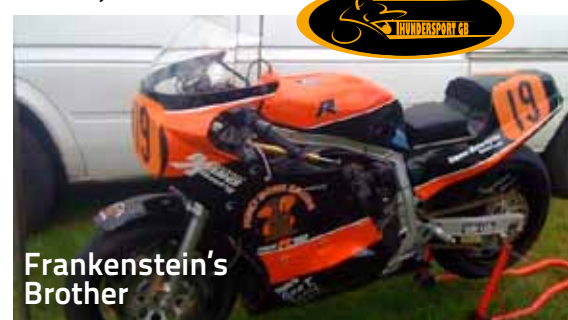
This bike didn’t stop, didn’t corner, didn’t give a very nice ride, but it was just totally all about the engine and that was VERY impressive. Sadly my ride came to an undignified end when the throttle jammed wide open approaching the Lake Esses “I had a bit of an issue with the flatslides jamming open at full throttle openings” was the snippet that came back to me as I grabbed the front brake, snatched in the clutch and eventually found the kill switch. It was all too little, too late to avoid running off track mid-corner and just clipping the last couple of straw bales on the exit of the Esses, before ending up in a heap with the “Frankenstein’s monster” laying uncomfortably across my recently pinned & healed left femur. The damage to myself and the bike was actually minimal and we were both deposited back in the paddock a few minutes later.

“What do you think?” asked my new found mate, seemingly totally untroubled that I’d just crashed his bike. It was only then that I realised that I was actually grinning and thinking about having a go on the other bike I was due to test that day (a ROC 500 as it happens) ..... “Yeah, it’s er..... very powerful”

At the end of all that, my banker guest still didn’t understand.

Just then, Phil Page walked into the office after an afternoon of thrashing his old Honda Hornet around the track – beaming from ear to ear. Phil had been mightily stressed that morning and as miserable as sin. A couple of sessions riding his bike had transformed him into a Cheshire Cat. I just pointed at him and said “That’s why we do it! It’s just such a BUZZZZZZ....”

The banker left, still not understanding, but I bet you do.



Frankenstein's Brother