

SOMETHING WICKEDLY QUICK THIS WAY COMES...

bike

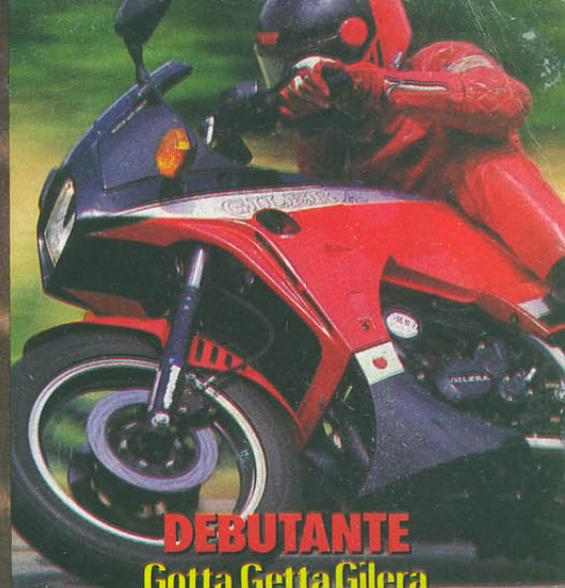
SEPTEMBER 1986
£1 US\$2.75



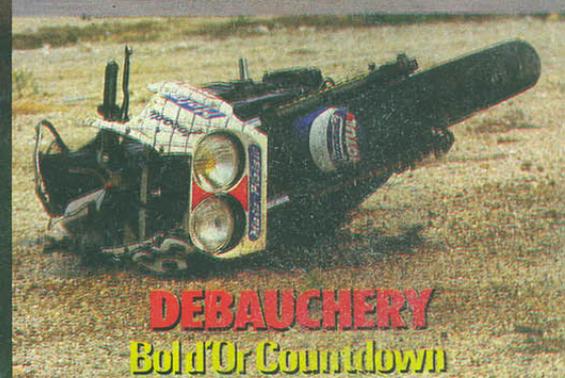
**SMALL IS
BEAUTIFUL**

Brit GP Winner
McConnachie:

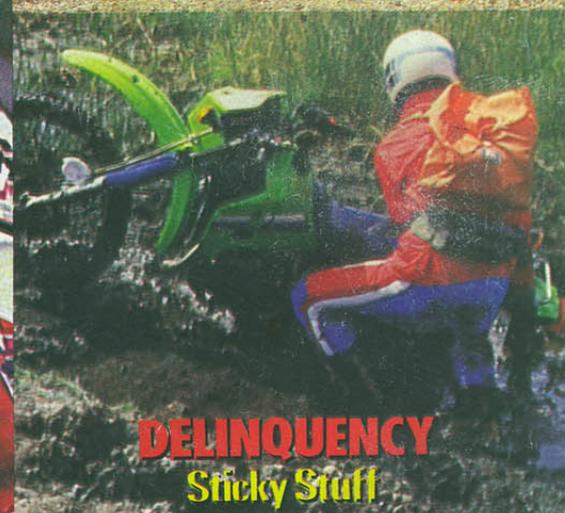
THE INTERVIEW



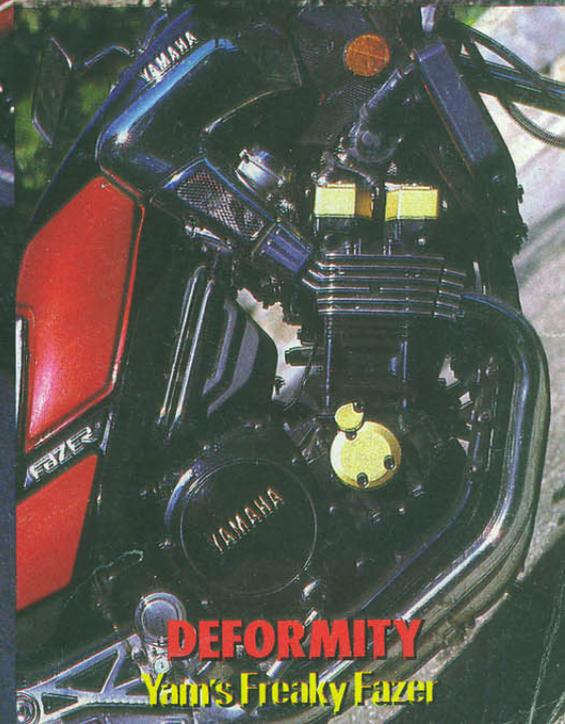
DEBUTANTE
Gotta Getta Gilera



DEBAUCHERY
Bold Or Countdown



DELINQUENCY
Sticky Stuff



DEFORMITY
Yam's Freaky Fazer

**Peter Nielsen exercises his vices and the
Yamaha FZ700 Fazer's virtues on
California backroads**

Maybe I could have designed a bike like the Fazer myself, given a couple of months' worth of free hallucinogens, amphetamines and the odd omelette laced with the kind of mushrooms you'll never find canned on a Sainsbury's shelf. Then again, it'd be kind of hard to sit yourself at a drawing board with muscles twitching, teeth grinding and eyes like boiled eggs dipped in ketchup, so the J-model responsible for the Yamaha FZX700 must have played it straight all down the line since spending his days locked in an art school bog with the collected works of Salvador Dali clamped between his knees, maybe a sheaf of Mad Max stills in one hand, his pen in the other and the nucleus of a radical idea bouncing to and fro between his ears.

Okay, okay, it sounds like bullshit to me, too, but ain't it a

beautiful thought? Much better than envisaging the coalition of small earnest jaundiced chaps playing with computer graphics in some technological Disneyland not too far from the Sea of Japan.

And, if you've got any sense of the ridiculous at all, it's the kind of thought engendered by the crazy environment that spawned this bike in the first place. I'd spent three hours waiting for and riding four different buses to go 25 miles from my fleapit in one part of Los Angeles to the Yamaha Motor Corporation in another part of this massive conurbation, during which time I'd both inwardly and outwardly fumed at the inadequacies of the transport system, given away three quarters to unwashed gentlemen of the gutter, worked up a hell of a sweat inside boots, jacket and jeans and perused a gruesome four-colour textbook detailing the ▶

Photography Jack Burnicle

CARRY ON UP THE CANYON

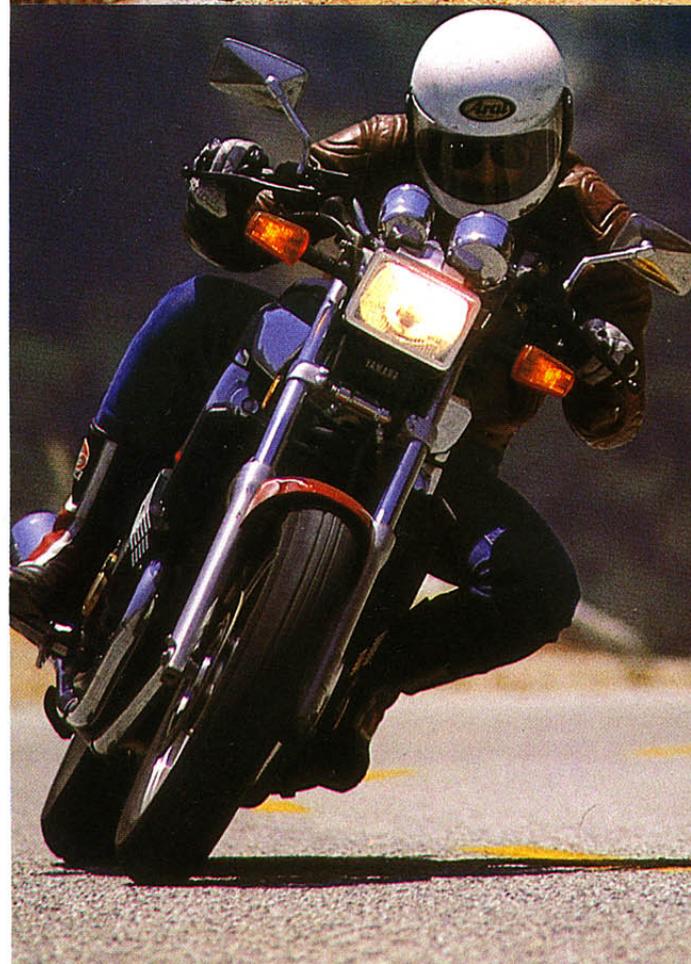
dissection of rats, the latter at the insistence of a glassy-eyed individual at the bus stop outside the Veterans' Administration hospital. I'd seen pickup trucks with six-foot-tall wheels, I'd seen dogs towing skateboarders and I'd been asked if I was from New York. Yamaha could have given me a musk ox to ride and I'd just have hopped on, stuck the key in its ear, twisted its right horn and galloped off down the road without batting an eyelid.

The Fazer was squatting near the tradesman's entrance to the giant building, sun gleaming off its chrome flanks and plated back, segmented like some mechanical insect. The only part of the plot to twang a responsive chord was the familiar shape of the FZ powerplant. The rest of it could have been drawn up by Andy Warhol.

Or maybe that's flattering the good Warhol, seeing as how the Fazer's a little more original than a baked bean can or a ripoff of an Edward Munch painting. At first glance it looks a little like a half-grown V-Max, but aside from the chrome air-scoops asserting the relationship like a familial birthmark there's not a lot in common between the two. The mighty V-Max is a one-dimensional testicle shriveller, an awesome missile that makes its statement with 140 straight-line horsepower. The Fazer isn't that easy to define, which is kind of novel.

You can look at most bikes and know, roughly, just what they're going to be like to ride. A GSX-R750's low bars, long tank and high footrests tells you you'd better not doss around in town too much on pain of strained wrists and neck, a Goldwing's barn-door screen, high bars and plush saddle lets you know you're about to be pampered, if not bored. I looked at the Fazer and pondered the nature of pain. It just looked uncomfortable. But a day later I was leaping off the thing at the end of a 350-mile ride feeling relatively healthy, uncramped and even ready for more. I was also well on the way to forming a very flattering opinion of this weird but engaging machine.

As any fule kno, the US government brought down protective legislation to help Harley-Davidson ride out some rough times a few years ago. What they did was to impose a tariff on imported bikes above 700cc, which is why American showrooms are rife with bikes that'd be 750s



Although styled like a yank standing-quarter-miler straightline tool, the Fazer is amazing through canyon twists

Top/Fazer's profile is somewhat kinky. Centre/Arty white-faced clocks tell it like it is. Bottom/Slotted discs provide plenty of bottling-out effect

anywhere else in the world. The Fazer displaces 698cc, but its engine is no narrow-bored FZ750 donk.

Sure, it's basically the same lovely five-valve unit that makes the 750 a joy to ride but with more than a few significant changes. The top ends are identical, save for some go-faster polished fins added to the Fazer's attic. So are the 45 degree-inclined

cylinders; bore is actually the same as the 750's at 68mm, but longer rods and modified crank with a shorter throw drop the capacity. Pistons are from another Stateside-only Yam, the Maxim 700, along with the camshafts. While cam timing is the same as the 750's, intake lift has been reduced. All this is fed by the same 34mm downdraft CV Mikunis.

Inside the FZ750 crankcases

lurks a beefed-up clutch and the same drive train that gets the 750's power to the ground. Mechanically, this unit should be sound as a nut, whatever that means.

Given the FZ engine's established reputation as a sweet and torquey unit, we can henceforth ignore boring technical specs and get onto the Fazer's real attraction — its outrageous appearance.

I've got to admit I thought the FZX was as ugly as a hatful of arseholes at first. In fact I couldn't wait to leap aboard and ride it just so's I wouldn't have to assail my sensitive orbs with its jumble of styling hooks. Melt Sigue Sigue Sputnik down (please) and put them on two wheels and you'd have something as visually rude, though the Fazer's definitely easier on the ear. The more I considered this bike, though, the more I liked it. It's full of little contradictions, like the fat, almost solid, aluminium 15-inch rear wheel and its ventilated discs and shrouded shocks, which owe their design to the drag bike/V-Max/Magna/Eliminator street cruiser stock so popular in the US, and a front end that could have come straight off any Euro-style sports bike. Then there's the basic instrumentation, tiny headlight and polished alloy triple clamps — straight custom stuff, along with the tube handlebars bolted onto the steering assembly. The engine is obviously at home in a sports bike like the FZ750 and the box-section steel chassis is as rigid as the back row at Raymond's Revue Bar, while the sectioned bodywork reminded me of an insect's thorax or a swaybacked armadillo, depending on what I'd been drinking or smoking. Of course, ugly is as ugly does and the Fazer's tasteless charm would avail it nowt if the thing were a pig to ride. As it was, I thought it was bloody marvellous, and after a week and 1300 miles I was nearly, goddamit, in love — so nearly that I wouldn't have minded riding it for another week, anyway.

For something that looks so compact the Fazer's a comfortable ride. The bars are wide and with enough of a downturn at the ends to pull you forward from the waist up, without putting any weight on the wrists. At first I thought the footrests were too far forward, but within the day I'd adapted myself perfectly. At 29½ inches the seat's lower than Ronald Reagan's forehead, but it also slopes just as radically from rear to front, ensuring drastically lowered sperm count and raised voice when the brakes are slammed on with a pillion aboard.

En route to Monterey, 100 or so miles south of San Francisco, to cock up yet another *Bike* assignment, the Fazer lurched drunkenly through early morning (well, it was before noon) city traffic.

Even more so than the FZ750, the Fazer is contemptuous of a clumsy hand on the throttle with an engine that virtually dies as soon as you roll the throttle off at low speed, thanks to a featherweight flywheel and fat carbs. Anyway, so what?

I've never been much of a fan of American freeways. Quite aside from the snail-like rate at which the Yanks like to drive, paying far too much respect to the ridiculous 55 mph 'double nickel' speed limit, the massive land-yachts infesting these eight-lane concrete strips often seem devoid of an intelligent hand at the tiller, drifting from lane to lane completely unpredictably. Drivers who are the soul of courtesy in the cities compared with their British counterparts also turn into motorcycle-haters once they're cruisin' on that freeway; my progress between the long lines of traffic, as is every motorcyclist's right, was often as not saluted by outraged blasts on horns. Nor did the Fazer like the freeway much. While its suspension had seemed competent enough around town, neither the forks nor the shocks wanted to know about the rain grooving or the expansion joints, transmitting every one of these irregularities through the firm seat. After an hour I was pissed off, but then the road surface improved noticeably and so did the bike.

The first 250 miles of that trip were pleasant enough, but unremarkable. Slow, too. I'd passed a handful of Erik Estrada lookalikes parked on Kawasakis and Harleys at various points, fingering the creases in their shirts, adjusting the tilt of their CHP-issue shades in their mirrors and generally looking content with their lot, so a cruising speed of 70-75 seemed prudent. Not that I wouldn't have welcomed an excuse to hose off a cop on a Harley, mind you, but the bastards carry guns. At that speed the Fazer was delivering just over 55 miles to an American gallon, hitting reserve at around 150 miles.

A fellow can only take so much of 70mph cruising, and it was positive relief when the highway curved back towards the Pacific Ocean and stayed there, following the rugged contours of the cliffs for the last 75 miles to Monterey. It's a scenic route famed throughout the US, and a biker's road second to none. Within a very few miles I was going for it like a maniac, using the five-valver's boundless supply of ►

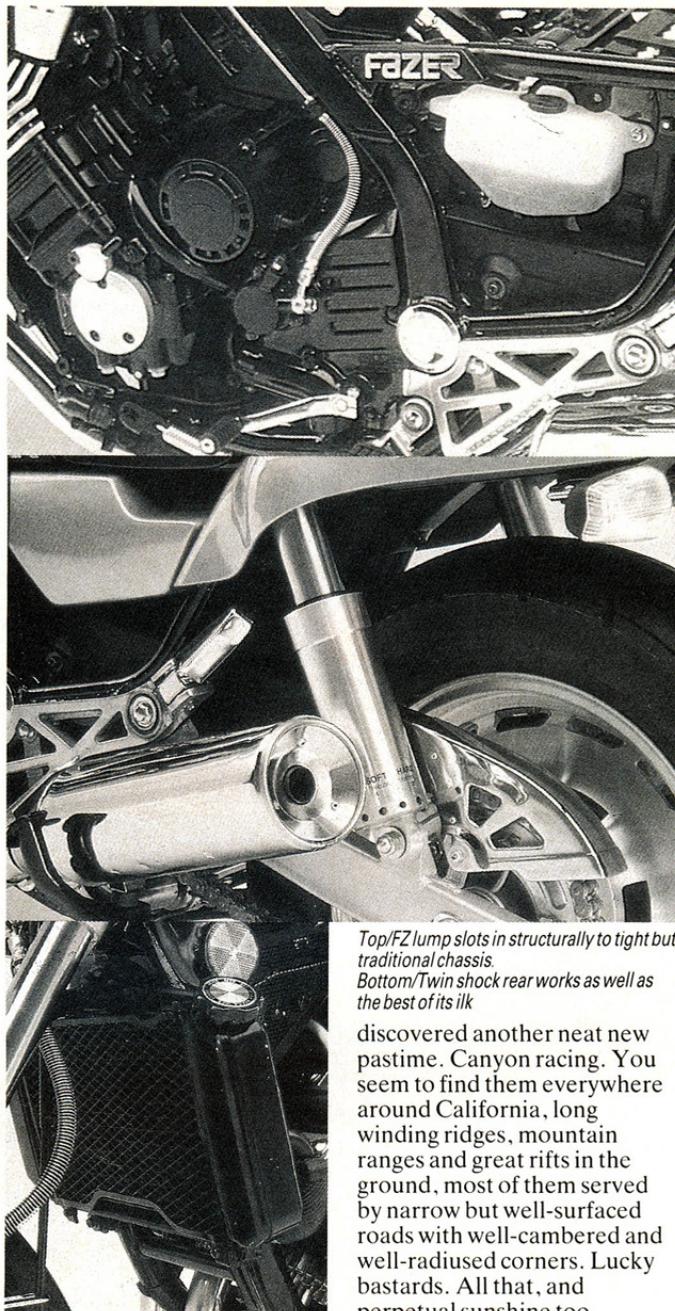
torque to slingshot from one hairpin to the next, braking later and deeper, getting into tune with the bike, and frightening myself severely once or thrice.

Using the standard Antipodean hooligan's yardstick of entering every corner at two to two and a half times the posted advisory limit, such being the common way of dealing with strange roads, I nearly buried myself in the back of a motorhome pootling along at half the limit; which is how I can vouch for the FZX's brakes, and its behaviour under mid-corner braking, and its willingness to change line at the crisis point with a slight shift in body weight and handlebar pressure. In short, it's a shit-hot boy-racer's toy.

Hurling past a Yamaha towing a deceased Harley as if they were going backwards, which indeed they may have been considering the gradient they were headed up, I leaned on the long grass bordering the inside of a blind right-hander at a good 50 and went straight between two back-packers who'd chosen that moment to cross the road for a piss or something. Deciding on the spot that eating airline grub was infinitely preferable to spending the flight home in a box in the hold, I stopped for a fag and spilt the matches over my feet, either from adrenalin or Parkinson's disease. Some road. Some bike.

Twenty miles later I was cruising through Carmel, looking for signs of Mister Eastwood's impact on the town as its new mayor. Apparently he lets people eat ice cream on the streets now, and fast-food chains are to be permitted to set up shop in this rich folk's playground. The man's obviously a true patriot and is bound to become President as soon as he's old enough, though at a juvenile 55 or whatever he'll have to wait another 15 years to become the next geriatric actor in the White House. C'mon punk, make my egg custard.

Next day I resolved to behave like a rational human being and take in some of the great natural beauty to be found along the road I'd just whipped along at stupid speeds, so it was off with helmet and jacket and a leisurely cruise at 40 for the first 50 miles. For about 15 miles of that I was caught behind the entire easy ridin' chapter of the Oakland Hell's Angels, who were putting along righteously on their hawgs, hair in the wind, beerguts quivering and biceps



Top/FZ lump slots in structurally to tight but traditional chassis. Bottom/Twin shock rear works as well as the best of its ilk

Well positioned and visually inoffensive rad gives the lie to fraudulent finning

bulging. I wanted to overtake, but wasn't sure whether I should stop and put a lid on first in case they took offence. In the event, they spotted a Budweiser sign and hauled off the road as one man. So did I, but with a great deal less noise. On with the lid, on with the road, and time to be impressed once again with the way the engine pulled strongly and clearly out of corners from 2500rpm in top gear.

During those first few days I hardly bothered exploring the bike's top-end power, because the grunt flooded in from such low engine speeds that it was more fun to short-shift at 4-5000 and feel the torque stretching my arms out. In fact I didn't begin to extend the bike at all until photographer Burnicle and I headed out to canyon country on the outskirts of LA, where I

discovered another neat new pastime. Canyon racing. You seem to find them everywhere around California, long winding ridges, mountain ranges and great rifts in the ground, most of them served by narrow but well-surfaced roads with well-cambered and well-radiused corners. Lucky bastards. All that, and perpetual sunshine too.

In company with Burnicle's mate Marshall, an affable bloke with a GPz1100, a cardboard box full of homegrown and a Smith & Wesson 38 which "Ah like to shoot 'cos it feel real good" we had a day's taste of biking nirvana spoilt only by some officious prick in a park ranger's suit and a redneck bar owner with a gun in his back pocket. This latter character took offence at Burnicle's northern outspokenness and threatened to 'shove a telegraph pole up his ass'. A laudable ambition, but one that boded ill for Jack's focus ring.

Anyway, that superb day spent hurtling around 60mph hairpins for Burnicle's benefit proved to be the only occasion the Yamaha's limits were approached, not to mention my own. After an hour or so the back tyre was sliding under power and the front was feeling

greasy too; the suspension heated to the extent that both wheels began pattering over ripples and the tyres were feathered right to the edges, though nothing had touched down except the toe of my boot. Using the top third of the rev scale for the first time also showed up a worrying lightness in the front end under full welly out of turns, something that could catch a guy out were he to let his enthusiasm get the better of him. Ahem.

Marshall informed me in all seriousness that two or three bikers lunched themselves on these roads every weekend, and a day later I read a full-page feature on 'Ninja racers' and others who used the public roads as racetracks. Apparently increased police presence is on the cards, though I dunno why they don't station a paramedic team on every corner like the Froggies do near the Bol and then charge people to come and watch.

I gave the Yamaha back with some reluctance. Every so often you get a bike that's a real surprise package and this was one. It reminds me of the great all-round bikes of a few years back like the GSX1100 and CB900F, bikes that could tour or scratch up to certain limits, did few things exceptionally but almost everything very well indeed. They didn't have fairings either, and they were affordable. A Fazer costs around 3400 US dollars, a full grand cheaper than the FZ750. That's bloody good value, because there'd be nothing between them in nine cases out of ten except rider ability. Go on, Mitsui, get us some. ■

**YAMAHA FZX700S
FAZER**

Engine.....	Watercooled dohc transverse four
Bore x stroke.....	68 x 48mm
Capacity.....	698cc
Comp. ratio.....	11.1:1
Carburation.....	4 x 34mm Mikuni CV
Gearbox.....	6-speed
Electrics.....	12V/14AH battery; 60/55W headlamp;

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres.....	Dunlop
Front.....	100/90V16
Rear.....	130/90V15
Brakes,	
Front.....	2 x 267mm (10½in) discs
Rear.....	267mm (10½in) disc
Suspension,	
Front.....	Telescopic, 38mm, air-assisted
Rear.....	Twin shocks, preload adjust

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....	1520mm (60in)
Seat height.....	750mm (29.5in)
Weight (inc 1 gallon fuel).....	208kg (462lbs)
Fuel capacity.....	13 litres (2.9gal)