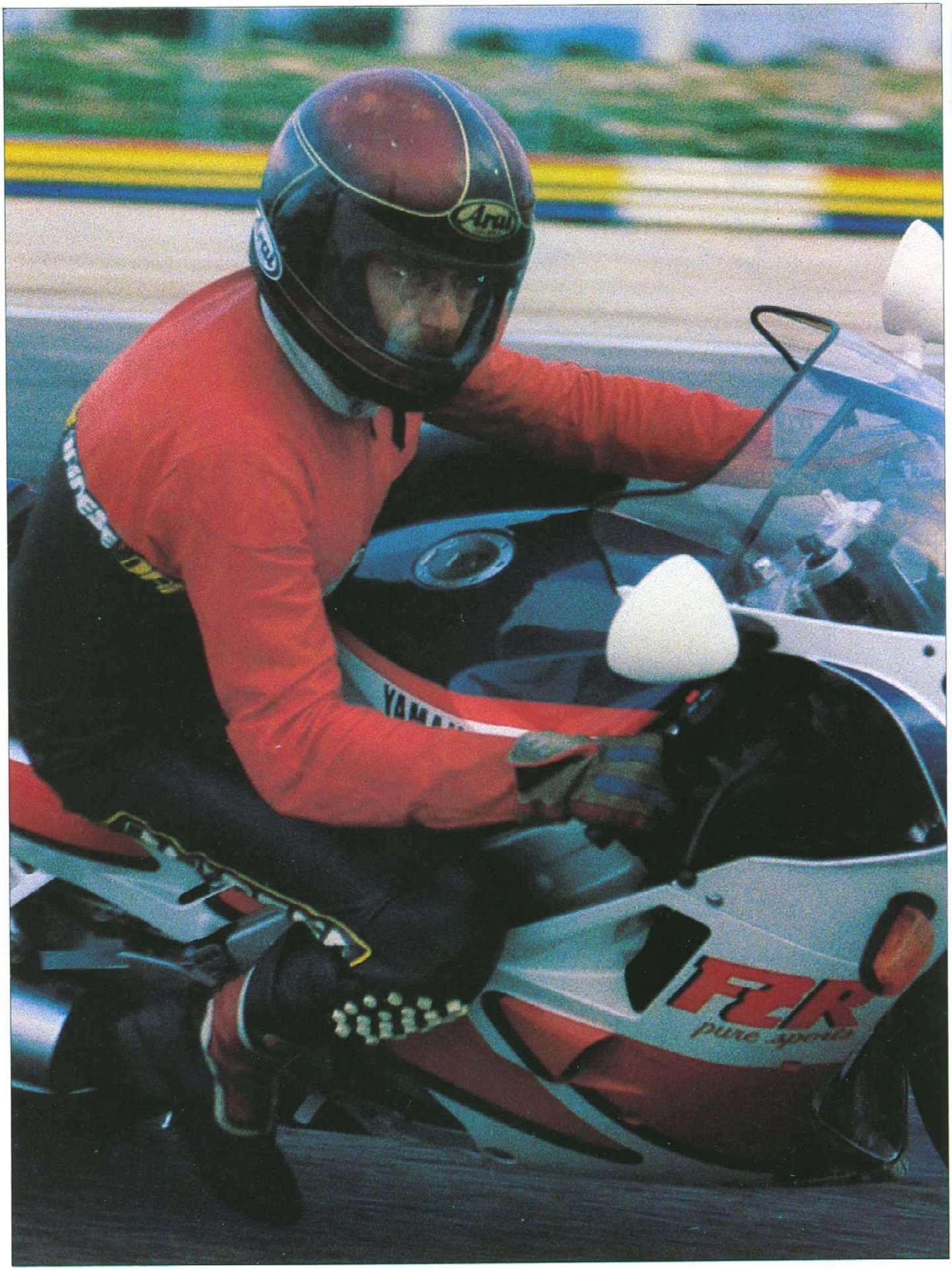

Arai
FZR

SHOGUN SHOTGUNS

"But there went up a mist from the earth, which watered the whole face of the ground."

Genesis 2:6

Genesis: Chapter One

In the beginning there was the FZ750. Now, there's an FZR1000 and a whole range of five-valvers. John Cutts gets rained on

Out of season seaside towns have a curious appeal. Especially in the South of France. It was a warm and pleasant, blue sky, mid-December day with a gentle breeze blowing and there was nothing much left to do except wander around the numerous empty shops and cafes of Bandol. It was quiet and peaceful, completely unlike when the late-September biker crowds teem and congregate here for their annual fix of Bol d'Or sand, sea and sunshine.

I was reflecting on what a shame it was that I'd be flying back to Blighty in a few hours and that this was the last day. We'd arrived on a warm if cloudy Monday. A storm had brewed overnight. All day Tuesday at the Paul Ricard circuit it had rained heavily and everybody got soaked. Wednesday was dry if cold and indifferent, and we had to cancel the day's scheduled road riding and go back to the circuit. Now it was Thursday, perfect weather. The Americans had arrived and the British were going home. These are the breaks. *La même chose.*

While the Yamaha NV and Japan personnel stayed on the mainland in central Bandol, the British press contingent, accompanied by the ever-cheerful Mitsui promo man, Andy Smith, were shipped out to the *Ile de Bendor*, a tiny island across the bay with an old fort for a hotel and some distinctly ancient plumbing. Getting there and back involved a dozen, ten minute ferry trips in four days. We'd leave the hotel to go to the track, come back to change, then eat with everyone else on the mainland before a final midnight special back to the strange Hotel Delos. The whole place became affectionately known as Devil's Island. Escape from. Return to.

The hotel was downright weird. Bedecked with beautiful antiques but only basic amentities, the place was always deserted and the guests left to it *au naturel* as it were. The occasional confused porter would appear but he was never the same one you'd spoken to earlier. At breakfast, a dwarf would fleetingly appear to serve coffee and croissants. Nightly there was a race off the boat to seize some of the limited supply of hot water. On the last night, predictably enough, there were no bar staff, so the assorted hacks were forced to help themselves. Glasses and bottles were broken in the darkness but nobody came and not a word was said the next day. The mess on the floor had been completely cleaned up overnight.

You want to hear about Yamaha's wonderful 1987 motorcycles now? Well, first a word about Paul Ricard. Though I've been to the Bol a lot of times, I'd never really quite appreciated how difficult a track its 3½ miles and dozen or so bends adds up to. Endurance racers' tales of falling asleep down the Mistral are brave nonsense. *All* of the circuit demands your full wide-awake attention. The top end after the mile-long straight in particular is well-Mickey Mouse what with long, long double apex right-handers, flat out chicanes and 90-degree lefts, all flowing into each other. The racers and experts slammed through these tricky sections while I cruised around wondering where on earth I was supposed to be, lost as usual.

Riding in the sheeting rain of the first day was good fun. Fully prepared and armed with an almighty red wine hangover and a state of flux Delhi Belly thanks to the previous night's ingestion, I rode out into the rain figuring that at least the fresh air would work wonders for my fragile condition.

This was a lamentably optimistic assumption. My fog-free Arai visor steamed up immediately due more to my panting fear than condensation. If I raised it a fraction to clear the mist, rain ran down the inside and onto my specs. By the end of the day my boots were full of water and I was shivering. But it *was* fun. I rode all the bikes and the only dodgy moments were down to rider stupidity rather than the wet, river of a track or the excellent Pirelli radial tyres. It proved much the same the next day in the dry. Although it would've been good to indulge in some extended road riding as well, all of the bikes — from the mighty, super sports FZ1000R through the known FZ750, the new FZX750 power-cruiser and the gorgeous TZR250 — were capable, enjoyable, exciting motorcycles.

The Yamaha range of FZ inclined fours carry an appropriate name — Genesis, a new generation that's developing and multiplying fast. A breed that despite different sizes, all tend to look a bit the same (1000, 750s, and the not available 400) since the capacity is never displayed, only the legend — "5 valve. Genesis." Yamaha can even conveniently explain how a name that first appeared on the factory endurance racebike of '86 was originally inspired by the FZ750 launched a year earlier in '85. Their development of new technology, they say, was faster than their legal registration of the name . . . "Genesis". You must admit that in an acronym-riddled world, it does have a nice ring to it. The FZ750 was the turning point in Yamaha's previously iffy

FZR1000 through the puddles

START
YAMAHA
TZR

YAMAHA
TZR
250
YAMAHA

four-stroke career. The new '87 Genesis range re-emphasises the successful, proven formula. Let's roll . . .

FZR1000

God, so this is what 160mph feels like? I figured I'd have to use the brakes a bit harder this time since the nice, safe point where I'd previously been shutting off and cruising around the top bend was already long gone. The puzzling thing was that it was *still* accelerating.

The Mistral at Ricard is over a mile long and you can treat both ends with caution and still hit a reasonable top speed on a bike like Yamaha's new Mr Big. It was stable, smooth and fast. The tyres were good, the brakes were better. This is a supersports, luxury machine. A flagship designed to take on all-comers, primed and poised for the challenge and the chase. It won its world debut race in the hands of Michael Dowson in an Australian proddie race and its chances in the Proddie TT this year in the more than capable hands of Geoff Johnson and Trevor Nation, are better than good. Yamaha freely admit that it's aimed at the GSX-R rather than the RX or CBR1000s. Narrow the focus and its obvious target is sports competition and performance. Wherever big bikes are raced, Yamaha will be out there to win.

Which in itself is kinda strange cos the FZR1000 isn't an excessively pared-down, leaned-out or fractionally fragile racebike. It's comfortable and equipped for the road rider as much as the weekend warrior — dual headlights, a comfy saddle, a full fairing and a full complement of torque and speed.

The only spartan thing about it is its weight. What had me puzzled before riding the FZR was whether it really was lighter than the FZ750 as claimed, and indeed exactly how this had been achieved. One weekly hack wit suggested that since the motor had been bored and stroked, the bigger holes in the block obviously accounted for the miracle of weight-saving. Sadly, this attractive theory was defeated by the stark reality of the 1000 being equipped with a Deltabox alloy beam frame weighing but 27lb while the FZ750 still carries the steel cradle of yesteryear.

The 1000 *is* light — 450lb dry, 504lb wet are the claimed figures though I wish I'd had a weighbridge in my luggage to verify this poundage. Certainly the FZR *isn't* as light as a GSX-R but *is* considerably lighter than the other current heavyweight contenders.

It's really a big endurance racer, a full scale version of the Genesis factory bike. The Deltabox beam frame originates from the 82/83 works 500cc GP machines of Kenny Roberts. That really is where all the frame development comes from. Back then, the beam frame was but another new component in a new unsorted vee-four racebike that was having all manner of teething problems. By '84 it was sorted enough for Lawson to win the WC. In '85 Yamaha wanted a strong frame for their Genesis endurance racer and by 85/86, the product is proven worldwide (250 and 500 WCs last year) and you can have one on your road machine. Progress? I should cocoa.

Colour page left: mainpic, the Deltabox beam frame and 37mm carbs of the FZR1000. The FZX is the weird one, the TZR250, the jewel

Yamaha make lots of interesting claims for the Deltabox concept, perhaps the most telling of which is that rival manufacturers (ie Honda) use aluminium extrusions for their road bike beam frames while the same company's endurance racebike chassis are constructed in sheet aluminium. Yamaha use stamped ali sheeting for both.

Although the bike looks and feels pretty big, once it's stripped down it actually looks no bigger than a 750. The 989cc engine has been hogged out to 75 × 56mm from 68 × 51.6mm with bigger, more narrowly-inclined valves all round, huge 37mm downdraft Mikunis and lighter pistons and rods. The pistons off the 1000 are strange, no meat, no skirt to speak of at all. They're cooled by new underside jets and the circulating oil gets a wider radiator and a bigger fan. There's a four-into-one, a bigger clutch, a beefed five-speed transmission and a stronger drivechain, naturally enough.

The motor seems perfectly tractable (extensively tested in the wet), acceptably smooth (one model was distinctly harsher in the mid-range than the others but they were all new and tight) and churns out effortless reserves of torque and power. It's rev happy though not particularly peaky — power seems available everywhere including beyond the 10,500rpm redline. Five speeds to 160mph-plus. And three steps to heaven.

The motor is supposed to be restricted from its natural 135hp habitat to a mere 125hp, in accordance with the voluntary British importer/manufacturer's agreement. How this has been done, nobody knew. Whether it's been done at all, nobody's telling. Yah, boo, sucks to Whitehall and a *Hari-Kiri* toast to the rest of us.

Much more considered detail work has gone into the rolling chassis and the handling performance of the beast. It all seems to work admirably. The Deltabox frame/inclined engine combination gives a nice and neutral 50/50 weight distribution split. The bars are wide and slightly dropped, the pegs just right for a six-footer and the whole rolling plot *feels* comfortable. The front wheel is loaded, the cycle feels balanced and poised. The steering is good if not downright quick and the suspension is excellent — Monocross rear with but a spring pre-load adjustment (increasingly the norm) and 41mm forks, fairly steeply inclined at 25.3°, no anti-dive but some outstanding brakes. The anchors are fully-floating 12.6in stainless drilled discs squeezed by four-puck, opposed piston calipers. There's a 10.5in rear but I didn't dare touch it. The front pair have feel *and* force. Probably the best brakes ever fitted to a real, full-size superbike.

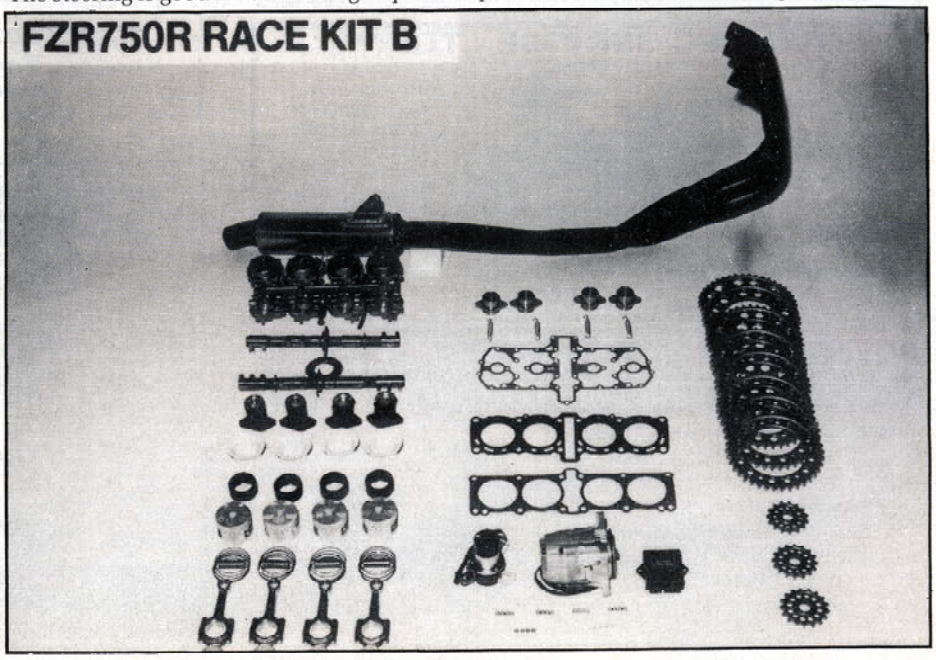
Add some trick hollow spoke, alloy wheels (17in front, 18in rear) and some very impressive wide and low profile Pirelli MP7 radial tyres (120/70 and 160/60) as OE and you have a machine capable of taking on and beating the world's finest in its debut race. Price around £4900. Delivery expected in February.

FZ750/FZR750/FZX750

It's the middle one, the FZR, that's of least interest to UK buyers cos it's a limited edition racebike aimed primarily at the F-One/Endurance crowd. Sure, it'd make a prestige road tool (and it's a lot cheaper than a Bimota) but it's essentially a competition machine. As is, the FZR750 features the new, improved '87-spec FZ750 engine and the complete FZR1000 Deltabox rolling chassis but then it also includes a number of racing parts aimed at ensuring high rpm durability rather than increased power *and* there are two optional race kits. The kits which vary in spec considerably are available in 'sprint' or 'endurance' form. They're also available for the standard FZ750. Confused? You won't be when you ride one. Anyway, for the sake of simplicity, let's forget the FZR750 special and the racing kits and concentrate instead on what's new about the '87-spec, stock FZ750.

Last year they gave it some fancy colours and a belly pan. This year it's getting more colours, a full fairing, a four-into-one pipe and a number of engine detail changes (that give a 5hp increase). It's still housed in a steel box-section frame and not the wonders of Deltabox but it does get new lighter brakes, more rear wheel travel and different forks.

The engine benefits from lightened piston/rod assemblies, so it's got snappier



The beautiful TZR250 in repose

response at the end of the live throttle cables though in practise, it felt agreeably as before motoring down the straight. It felt less happy through some of the quick-steering turns though I put this down to rider ineptness and the tyres. The test bikes were wearing Pirelli radials instead of standard issue Dunlops and through the chicane the front wheel seemed to want to tuck in *too* sharply.

The new full fairing is an obvious boon to all-weather riders and it's a smart suit for a tasty bike. New side panels and trim all add to its appeal. Despite the all-enveloping bodywork, it weighs slightly less than the '85 model, a difference you can just about account for by the omission of a centrestand (the 1000 doesn't have one either). Yamaha boast that lean angles have become so great that the provision of a mainstand has become something of a liability. As befits Genesis, this kind of thinking is strictly Old Testament.

I was looking forward to the FZX750, Mad Max-styled, power-cruiser because it actually looks The Business in a curious, hybrid/mutant fashion. The racetrack is not its obvious home and a lot of riders complained of the front end collapsing under weight transference if you were rash enough to shut the throttle in a turn. If you just cruised around placing no great demands on the long travel, spindly front end, it was fine.

As with the King of Brute Force, the V-Max, Yamaha have dared to be different with the FZX and I see no reason why this bike shouldn't win a lot of friends. The motor is a 96hp FZ750, rubber-mounted for smoothness with different carbs and gearing. It exhausts through a butch and balanced four-into-two and has a noticeably throatier note than its Genesis cousins.

The double cradle frame is in box-section steel with the top tubes running between the bank of carbs. The left hand down tube is cleverly used to route coolant from the engine to a scaled-down radiator. Suspension is conventional twin-shock and soft. Yamaha thought this was essential to the low line, sleek styling of the bike but I'm not so sure (they could have just shrouded it all in with yet more adventurous bodywork for instance).

The rear units look like air shox cos of their chunky alloy covers. the front end has 38mm braced and air-assisted telehydraulics pleasantly raked out with high, flat bars that were comfortable to use.

It nearly took my head off bombing down the Mistral but then apart from a small, rectangular headlight and a nicely large speedo, there's nothing much to deflect the windblast.

Both the 16in front and 15in rear wheels are of 'solid dish' design with slots machined into them to eliminate side-wind problems. They're highly-polished and all the cosmetic detail work is excellent — like the magnesium valve covers, the ample seat and the abundance of gleaming chrome and alloy components. The tyres are V-rated Pirellis and the rear's a whopping great 140/90 which should be good for burning out in your local pub car park, and hot rodding down the High Street. Top speed about 133mph. Price about £3700. Definitely, a well-serious cruiser.

TZR250

Yamaha guarantee you'll enjoy riding this one. Personally I'd been looking forward to it since last year's TT. I wasn't disappointed. It was more unadulterated fun and much more enjoyable to ride on the track than any of the others because it didn't matter if you wandered off line a bit, you could always pitch it in, it's just so light and controllable.

It's now 30 years since Yamaha made their first 250cc parallel twin stroker and as they rightly point out, in all those years, there has never been a time when such an engine configuration hasn't been in the forefront of motorcycling on road or track.

With production of the RD500LC discontinued (yep, the most feverishly anticipated motorcycle of the decade has had its lumps) and the 350LC deemed impossible to develop further, the TZR250 is Yamaha's sole sports stroker supreme.

It is a demonstrably impressive bike, a jewel of a 250. In Japan alone, they sold 20,000 TZRs in nine months last year. *Banzai*, cut-and-thrust street racers, every one of 'em. In the UK, Yamaha won't even have the competition of Honda's RS250 vee-twin. The field is theirs for the taking.

The TZR weighs but 282lb dry sitting on its 17/18in wheels. The motor puts out 50hp at 10,000 and through six close gears down the Mistral it was indicating over 120mph. The big difference between the RD series and the TZR is the use of direct, crankcase reed-induction. The gas is fed by two flat slide 28mm Mikunis straight in as on the TZ racers, thanks to crankcase pressure rather than piston-porting. Add YPVS, water-cooling, Autolube and CDI and you've got a motor that screams rpm from 7000 through 10, making fierce horsepower and acceleration all the way.

The Deltabox alloy beam frame is 40% lighter and 30% stronger than the steel cradles of the old RDs. Rear suspension is by Monocross. The front features Variable Damper 39mm forks that automatically stiffen the damping in rising rate to the wheel movement and fork stroke speed. The single front brake is straight off one side of the FZR1000. The full fairing has a drag co-efficient of .268 and the claimed maximum lean angle is 51-degrees from vertical. Phew!

It's wonderful to ride even in the wet. You have to tuck in a lot to get the best out of it but it's just so easy to ride on the boil and is wonderfully forgiving of rider error. You can whip it in and pick it up in a flash, run wide, brake while cranked over, no problem. It does *everything*. A lovely little motorcycle. Price about £2600 available in time for TT.

Oh yeah there's a racing kit too that'll pump it up into a 62hp, 300lb, 250, gassed and ready to race. A tiddler *par excellence*.

A gaggle of FSR 50cc racers. More fun than any moped