

Interview Dale Lomas Photography Paul Bryant

The FZ1 we'd kill for

Miffed German dealer builds the naked Yamaha we really wanted

Despite its fresh styling and claims of R1 fraternity, the standard Yamaha FZ1 doesn't cut it in today's high-performance world. Too bouncy, too soft. The brakes and suspension may look good and conjure up imagined superbike performance, but in truth the upside-down forks hide Diversion 900 spring rates and while the YZF-R1 motor is similar to the original, somehow it's had all the fun taken out of it. Oh, and about 30bhp as well.

This irked German Yamaha dealer Dominik Klein. He eats, sleeps and drinks Yamaha speedblocks. To accept the latest Yamaha as a failure would be akin to swapping the Yamaha signs outside his shop for Hong-Sing.

'We have produced a few special Yamahas over the years,' he admits. 'But our new FZ1 really is something amazing.' This is close to the longest sentence I got out of the guy all day, so I'll reiterate: he thinks his FZ1 is something really goddamn special.

I find it hard to disagree. Glints of gold and swatches of dull titanium peek out from lustrous poster-red bodywork. The formula's pretty simple, but it's effective. 'Just replace all the weak points with the best we can find,' says Klein.

First to go were the front forks. Replacing them with off-the-shelf Öhlins cartridge units removes any doubts about the size of Dominik's commitment (or his wallet). The rear shock is the same: full Öhlins rebuild to suit the bike and its forks. Holding those more-money-than-my-whole-bike's-worth forks are a set of similarly mega-bucks triple clamps by German firm BKG. But instead of de-rigueur Brembo monoblocks, the brake calipers are the stock Sumitomo items.

'More than good enough,' says Klein. 'Even considering the 184bhp motor.' 184bhp? He can't be serious. He is. The dyno sheet from this morning's run is thrust under my nose. It's a rear-wheel figure, too, on a hot day. That's not just the Over Racing exhaust system producing that, though – is it?

'The engine is a normal R1 motor bolted straight in,' explains Klein. 'Then it is ported and compression is raised to make more than a superstock machine. It's closer to a WSB motor, but there's only so much power you can use on a naked machine, so we won't get too excited. Ride it and tell me what you think.'

There's a small thunderclap as the air rushes into the shape left by my standing body. There's no time to

FORKS

Held by massive BKG yokes and blessed with several other bolt-ons like the Pazzo levers, braided brake hoses and Renthal bars. Tiny LED indicators keep the Yamaha road-legal, too.

WHEELS

Lightweight Marchesinis help lower the unsprung weight and add to the already blistering speed with which the FZ1R can flick into a corner.

REAR END

Gone is the small standard rear sprocket, replaced by one with two fewer teeth. The resulting increase in acceleration is amazing, but with 184bhp that was never a problem. Now it hits the rev-limiter in top in less than 25 seconds. Rearsets are by Gilles.

ENGINE

Ported and higher compression 2006-model Yamaha YZF-R1 motor bolts straight in. Over Racing exhaust loses weight and gains power. And cost a lot of money. For more info see www.yamaha-klein.de

Why couldn't Yamaha just build a bike like this?



wonder over Dominik's longest ever uttering, I'm scurrying towards my leathers with a promise to myself, 'I shall not ride a bike just one month after breaking my back.' It's no good. I can't keep a promise like that, not right now. I must have been pretty stupid to make it, actually. A promise like that deserves to be broken.

Within minutes the leathers are on and I return to find Dominik blipping the throttle on a rapidly warming FZ1R. The race tyres and hand-made alloy radiator and oil cooler are totally at odds with the LED indicators and numberplate bracket. The headlight screams, 'Monday morning commute'. The titanium Over can just screams 20-valve murder.

'Remember,' he warns, 'there is only one of these and it cost a lot of money to make. I am watching.' It's a serious warning and a reminder that I have to strike a difficult balance between riding the thing properly and not risking anything. But with broken bones and helicopter flights fresh in my memory, it's not a problem today.

So I slip down the pitlane as unobtrusively as possible and one lap later I'm flying past the Hockenheim pit wall in a third-gear wheelie. I can't help myself. The power on tap is phenomenal but, combined with proper bars and no fairing, it's hard work. But only on the straights. Flicking into the

hairpins of the new-style GP circuit, Dominik's FZ1R is scarily fast to turn. Twice I have to pick up the bike as it lunges for apexes that are still five metres further around the corner. It's the big bars and lightweight wheels, I'm sure. I can't even compare a single part of this riding experience with the standard bike. It's so fluid and accurate. Instead of bouncing and scraping towards a vague area of apexing, the Klein Yamaha just tips over and dives straight in.

The Öhlins kit is totally unflustered as it takes the worst myself and Hockenheim can throw at it. The constant loads of a smooth F1 racetrack might not be the best place to look for bad behaviour, but can you imagine this bike being any less confident on the roads? I can't.

It's not as if Dominik's had to change much to totally eclipse the standard machine. He used the standard swingarm and frame. Standard calipers, too. And they all cope with the extra power and grip. Sure, the tuned engine and

gold Öhlins have the wow factor, but if you replaced those with stock R1 parts you'd still have a bike at least twice as good as the original and it probably wouldn't cost any more to build. Yamaha's massive team of designers and researchers may have given us this soft and uninspiring FZ1, but just one upset German has shown us what could and should be done. ■

'The power on tap is phenomenal'



An upset German has shown what could and should be done

1 With 184bhp at the back wheel, it was inevitable that the tyres would get a good workout. Swingarm is the original item, as is the frame.

2 Front end benefits from Öhlins forks and Galfer discs. Calipers are standard.

3 Never doubt which WSB star the Klein boys are cheering for this year. High-end Öhlins and tuned motor are close to superbike spec.

4 Classy titanium Over system is anything but quiet.

5 Controls as art: multi-adjustable rearsets come in slick black.

