



**Yamaha's New FZ8**  
Available in any color you want,  
as long as it's black

by Dave Searle

**T**OPANGA, MULHOLLAND, LATIGO, Kanan Dume, Las Flores and Decker are familiar names to any sportbiker in LA as canyon roads in the Malibu mountains, some of the most radical twisties in the United States. Some have corners that are steep, tight and bumpy, others that are smooth, fast and sweeping, but gathered together, they make for one of the best locations on the planet to discover the sporting abilities of a motorcycle.

At a press conference held the night before at a trendy Venice Beach hotel, Yamaha's marketing men shared what they see as a growing "sport" segment—up 5% since 2006 while other categories have slumped. This is a group that appears to place a higher value on physical size and maneuverability than sheer horsepower. Slotted neatly between its FZ brothers, the FZ8 should have significant appeal to this crowd. Priced at \$8490, it's \$1000 more than the FZ6R and \$2000 below the bigger FZ1.

## Similarities & Differences

Despite the big cost differential, the FZ8 has more in common with the FZ1 than the FZ6R. Both the FZ1 and FZ8 share the same cast aluminum chassis, die-cast alloy swingarm and are powered by motors that share similar physical dimensions.

In fact, both motors use the same engine cases, crankshaft and 53.6mm stroke as the 2008, pre-crossplane, 5-valve per cylinder YZF-R1 engine. However, the FZ1 still uses the same 77mm bore as the old R1, while the FZ8 uses 68mm cylinders to displace a true 779cc. To bias its powerband much more toward the mid-range, the FZ8's cylinder head is all-new, with four valves in each combustion chamber to the FZ1's five, operated by shorter duration cams with less lift on the exhaust side, smaller ports, valves and much smaller 35mm throttle bodies (vs. 45mm on the FZ1). These changes allow the motor to pull smoothly from as little as 1500 rpm all the way to redline at 11,500, with a strong hit at around 7000 rpm where the power jumps noticeably. Although Yamaha was not quoting power figures, we'd have to guess the engine makes about 80-85 hp, certainly more than enough to hustle its claimed wet weight of 470 lbs. rapidly between corners.

Its transmission uses the same internal ratios as the FZ1 matched with slightly steeper final drive sprockets (16/46 vs. the FZ1's 17/45) to trade improved acceleration for less top speed. The clutch is cable-controlled like its predecessors' and the lever

effort is a little lighter, as it uses a slightly softer spring pack and one less pair of plates to deal with its reduced torque. Shifting effort is light and upshifts are very slick, however, downshifting through the box at stops can be a bit clunky.

The FZ8's electronic fuel injection is a Mikuni double-butterfly system with manually operated primary throttles and electronically controlled secondaries that maintain high velocity for stumble-free performance. While the pull from this setup was, indeed, smooth, strong and glitch free, the on/off throttle abruptness that's so common on fuel injection systems was readily apparent, too. Slight decreases to the throttle setting result in fully closed injectors, with a resulting abrupt cut in power. Reopening the injectors results in another lurch as power resumes. It wasn't exactly out of the ordinary, but it's never desirable, and the harder we rode, the more noticeable the lurching became.

With the same chassis as the FZ1, it naturally shares all the same geometry: 25° of rake and 4.29" of trail, on a 57.48" wheelbase that allows a low 31.1" seat height. The FZ8's weight distribution is 51%/49% front/rear (unladen), just like a pure-bred sportbike's, as well.

However, in place of fully adjustable suspension on the FZ1, the FZ8's suspension is more like the FZ6R's; only its rear preload is adjustable. And while we'd have to give the standard setup high marks for compliance and comfort, at least when ridden solo, when additional preload is needed to carry the weight of a passenger, more rebound damping should really be added to control it properly, so the minimal tuning possibilities left us a bit disappointed. We'd strongly suggest buying a superior multi-adjustable shock when the stock unit wears out.

However, fully in keeping with its YZF-R1 DNA, a pair of Sumitomo's brilliant monobloc four-piston calipers are standard equipment on the FZ8's front end, as opposed to the cheaper Akebono 2-piston sliding units on the FZ6R. These excellent calipers grip big 310mm x 4.5mm front discs for maximum leverage, and we noted that the FZ8's rear disc is actually larger than the FZ1's as well; 267mm vs. 245mm. Until Brembo's latest monobloc, radial-mount calipers arrived on the scene, we'd long considered Yamaha's Sumitomo units the best available, and we were delighted to have such great braking control at our fingertips.

Seat comfort and wind protection were not significant issues during our testing as the challenge of the constant curves kept us preoccupied with things other than our posteriors, and we didn't reach sustained high speeds. Although we heard a few complaints about the rider's seat from other attendees, we didn't have any problems, and the control relationships are excellent; the bars are wide enough and high enough for comfort with good leverage, and the footpegs are high enough for good cornering clearance and not too close to the seat. Although Yamaha was pleased with the narrow junction of the seat and 4.5 gal. gas tank, the width of the four-cylinder motor does splay the rider's legs more than a parallel- or V-twin motor of the same displacement would.

## Bottom Line

Did it measure up to the demands of Malibu's finest? Absolutely. We had a ball! The new FZ8 is a truly fun ride that's versatile enough to serve as an enthusiast's only bike; both an able commuter and a real back-road terror whenever its rider needs a jolt of speed to see through the fog of humdrum existence.

Look for a full-length evaluation very soon. 