

Season Of Changes

IT'S A GREAT time to be a motojournalist. The motorcycle industry has enjoyed 10 years of significant growth and the manufacturers are all introducing exciting new models to fuel our collective feeding frenzy. Bikes that didn't even have a category before, now have competition. Our choices have never been better. And this is the season when the biggest news breaks.

I like to think of our job as much to be entertaining as thought-provoking, and what could be more entertaining than all-new models to be revealed, ridden, analyzed and written about.

And we're getting the news to you very quickly now. If you hadn't actually noticed, the timeliness of our issues has significantly increased. We've shortened the time between the "ship" (when the editors finish an issue) and delivery to your home by nearly a month in the last year, and the latest issue is now in your hands for over a week on average while we're still working on the next issue.

A full riding impression on the brand new rubber-mounted Harley-Davidson Sportsters is in this issue, and that's really big news. A full performance test of both sizes will naturally follow later so you can quantify the performance differences the changes have made.

Aprilia has made available details of its new Mille models—another big change. You'll find this information in our World Motorcycling section, along with details on the new Victories from Polaris.

Next month's issue will be full of more new motorcycles. Yamaha is adding a brand new 600cc streetbike, known as the Fazer 600 in Europe, to its US line. A comfortably upright, partially faired model like the FZ1, these "naked" 600s have been a big hit overseas. You'll read our riding First Impression of it next month.

And that's not all from Yamaha. Rumors of an all-new R1 are rampant, and most likely true. The tuning fork guys are too competitive to let the GSX-R1000 own the class laurels for much longer.

But the Yamaha may have to hit a moving target. Honda also will have an all-new liter-class supersport. We've seen photos, and it looks very much like the beautiful CBR600RR. This one will be the company's new Superbike contender, supplanting the RC51 and CBR900 series on the racetracks of the world. It will certainly not have an engine smaller than its competition.

Kawasaki, too, is said to be ready to launch a new ZX-10. Some say this will be the lightest yet, even lighter than their 600.

And Ducati, whose 749 is legal to race



against the 600s in European competition, may be ready to showcase innovative new technology to keep their V-twin competitive. Their patent submissions indicate that variable-length intake tracts may be the next wave in engineering sophistication.

Next month, we will also have details on the new Triumph super-cruiser, a monster 2300cc three-cylinder machine with the engine mounted inline with the frame. It should make the most torque ever, this side of a Boss Hoss, at approximately 140 lb./ft.

Also, the huge Milan motorcycle show, which is held every other year, alternating with Intermot in Germany, is the place where many other all-new models are expected to appear. Our man Doug Jackson, based in England, will be ready and waiting for the doors to open.

But after the flurry of new model previews, the winter can sometimes be a slow period for a magazine, because there's often a long delay between the introduction of a new bike and when production models are first made available to the press in January, February or even March. I don't see that problem this year. New machines should be showing up at our doors non-stop.

We are forbidden to reveal other machines that we know are coming. What is called an "embargo" agreement, a statement that you will honor the confidentiality of information you are given until a certain date, must typically be signed and faxed back before you receive a press kit of photos and details. Some publications (we won't name them) have violated these agreements to scoop their competition, and a manufacturer's paranoia about really earthshaking news can be strong. We have,

of course, always kept our word on these matters. But when schedules are close, we have sometimes delayed the delivery of an issue by a day or two to make sure we have the big news in your hands ASAP.

To help demystify how the system works, you should know that we typically have a bike in our hands for a month. Some of the smaller manufacturers don't seem to know that. This gives time for several testers to spend significant time on the bike. Each is given what we call an Evaluation Check List, which calls out various details of all the bike's systems, so that we get thorough feedback. The bike is weighed on our own scales (accurate to ½ lb.) with its gastank filled (the *real* wet weight). And, it's not uncommon to find the manufacturer's given weight too light by 60–80 lbs. (That's another story.) It is also dyno tested, and charts are usually made so that the horsepower curves are overlaid with the previous model (where you might find the alleged hp increase doesn't exist, or went backwards instead). Finally, it is performance tested for top speed, the quarter-mile and for braking from 60 mph to zero.

With all this in hand, together with the manufacturer's own information on what they have changed and why, whoever writes the test can really give you an authoritative review. The four pages that make up the typical bike evaluation are the result of enormous effort, and we're very proud of the way we do them.

Occasionally, a bike will be arranged for a long-term evaluation. This is typically done so that we can test the usefulness of a number of factory and aftermarket improvements, and 10,000 miles will be our minimum long-term test.

But sometimes, like with the new Rune this month, we have to really hustle. Because Honda didn't want to subject a fleet of such expensive machines to the abuse of the press, but still wanted to get the word out quickly, we had it for just eight days, and the scheduling was intense.

But the feedback you give us tells us you're pleased with our efforts. And when the workdays are long, and the hours of focused concentration leave our heads buzzing, that's all we have to hear to keep going with a big smile on our faces.

Thanks!

DAVE SEARLE

—Dave Searle
Editor-In-Chief