

WORLD FIRST TEST

YAMAHA MT-01

Thunder road

V-twin street bikes have never looked as wild as the MT-01. But how does it go?

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YAMAHA is hoping this stunning MT-01 is going to tempt plenty of sports bike riders on to this very different type of bike – and first signs are that it could do just that. A day spent caning the 1670cc V-twin on its launch near Cape Town, South Africa, showed that this crazy looking concept-bike-turned-production-machine is a real star.

FUN... MORE OF THE TIME

On twisty South African roads the Yamaha was faster and more fun than any 240kg big bruiser with a cruiser-derived motor had any right to be, thanks to a combination of rip-snorting midrange acceleration, improbably agile handling,

fierce braking and heaps of grip from the very fat radial rubber.

But the MT-01's performance on great biking roads isn't the only surprising aspect of this new Yamaha. What also impresses is how much fun it is on less spectacular terrain, when weaving through traffic or cruising down the highway at 80mph.

This is more like the riding most of us do much of the time. And on a super-sports bike, especially, the experience is often uncomfortable in town and boring after half an hour at steady speed.

But on the MT-01 even that sort of riding is a buzz. Its wild styling is enough to get the pulse racing, even before you throw a leg over the seat and admire the

big round tacho above the uniquely shaped headlamp. The riding position is fairly sporty, giving a slight lean forward to the near-flat one-piece handlebars. Footrests are reasonably high and rear set, but the fairly tall seat (825mm) means there's plenty of leg room.

THAT ENGINE IS A MONSTER

From the moment the air-cooled, pushrod-operated motor fires up with a fruity bellow from the high-level titanium silencers, the Yamaha prowls the streets with enough presence to put a massive grin on your face.

As it rumbles along with an engagingly lazy feel, with the gigantic cylinders firing at every other side-turning, the MT feels

and sounds more like a cruiser. The 48° V-twin is based on the Road Star Warrior unit, and it shows.

But that engine feel and sound makes the MT much more involving than most bikes. The constant slight vibration was a pleasure not a pain.

Yamaha insists the MT initials don't stand for anything in particular, but 'Massive Torque' certainly fits the bill, because this bike grunts out heaps of the stuff almost before the tacho needle has moved from its stop.

Throttle response is snatch-free from as low as 1500rpm, or 40mph in top gear. Peak torque – a hefty 111ftlb – arrives at 3750rpm, and most of the time riders will stay in the sweet zone between 2500 and

4500rpm.

Crack the throttle open between those two figures and the MT leaps forward with enough force to test the grip of its 190-section rear Metzeler.

The red line is at 5500rpm but there's little point in revving the eight-valve motor high. Instead it's best to short-shift through the five-speed box to take advantage of that meaty midrange.

AND IT HANDLES, TOO

With a modest 90bhp on tap the MT doesn't have the horsepower or aerodynamics for top-speed thrills. It showed 130mph on its digital speedo at the end of a gentle downhill straight and that's fine, because the windblown riding

THE MT-01:
Yamaha's attempt
to woo the sports
bike rider



position means that cruising on motorways much above 85mph soon becomes tiring.

Despite its aluminium twin-spar frame this Yamaha is heavier than say an R1 by almost 70kg – or the weight of a typical pillion passenger – so it was never going to match a top sports machine for agility.

But it does feel respectably light, and it steers easily and precisely with the help of the leverage provided by those fairly wide bars.

Good suspension helps, too. The R1-style 43mm upside-down front forks are set up slightly soft so dive a bit under braking. But they're multi-adjustable, so can be firmed up.

By contrast the horizontally-mounted

shock has to be quite stiff to cope with all that torque trying to compress it under acceleration. It jolts a little over bumps, but the ride is still comfortable and controlled most of the time, and again there's plenty of scope for fine-tuning.

The MT also scores highly with its R1-spec front brake blend of 320mm discs and four-pot radial calipers.

They faded slightly after repeated high-speed stops during our test but in normal use they slow the Yamaha extremely abruptly.

There is also more than enough ground clearance to exploit the knee-down cornering potential of the Metzeler MEZ4 rubber, with only the footrest feelers scraping.

IT COULD BE A STAR

It would be stretching the truth to say the MT-01 will keep up with most sports machines – but it won't be left far behind.

It carves through turns and bellows on to straights, and when the twisty road turns into a motorway or a traffic-filled city street, the MT-01 rider will still be lovin' it long after super-sports pilots have got tired or bored.

And it's that versatility and all-round entertainment value which could make the MT-01 the surprise star of 2005.



IT'S equally at home
on twisty roads and
city streets