

ROAD TEST

★ YAMAHA FZ6 89%

Dropping everything, including the price

Yamaha's unfaired Fazer promises more attitude, more fun and all for £100 less than its clothed, sensible brother. Our exclusive first ride puts it to the test

YAMAHA'S new FZ6 is simply this: A naked Fazer 600, a fairing-less version of the very bike that recently wiped the floor with all opposition in the middleweight all-rounder class. And the reason Yamaha has created it is equally simple: In recent years, in Europe in particular, naked middleweights such as the Honda Hornet and Suzuki Bandit have become just as popular as their half-faired brethren. They are often perceived to be slightly more sports-oriented and fun than the faired versions, yet with little of the cost or commitment demanded of a full-on supersports bike.

So, intent on grabbing their own slice of this burgeoning market, Yamaha has come up with the FZ6 – a Fazer minus half-fairing, centre-stand – and, at £5399, £100 off the price.

There are cosmetic differences, too – the most obvious being the FZ6's lower handlebars and single MV Agusta-alike headlight. The lower bars cant the rider forward for a slightly sportier stance, but that's all there is to give it a sportier ride.

Even the engine tune and how it delivers is identical to the Fazer, which is no bad thing in MCN's book.

The FZ6 runs with the same engine and chassis spec as the Fazer 600 – a low powered YZF-R6 derived motor – to give the same 88bhp at the back wheel and a healthy smattering of midrange torque. OK, so the FZ6 doesn't leap forward at 2000rpm like a gundog after the kill, which makes queue and lane jumping hard work around town, but life gets more interesting from 3500rpm. From there it pulls strongly until 6000rpm where you can feel the motor relax and take a breath before kicking off again in a rush of responsive and screaming horsepower.

Chasing the setting sun on A-roads became even more of a blast when we came across a Honda CBR600F. The highly-rated supersport machine couldn't lose the FZ6 although there were times when the Honda pulled out gaps, mainly at very high speeds.

The Yamaha's bars are lower to drop the rider's head further down but 10 miles of high-speed fun eventually leads to

stretched arm and neck muscles from gripping the bars too tightly. At 120mph the FZ6 starts to slow. The lack of fairing means it won't cut through the air as easily as the faired Fazer 600 and the tall gearing (it's unchanged from the Fazer 600) plays hell with the FZ6's top speed – sixth acts as an overdrive but fifth is the last cog to give it any decent speed gains.

With only 500 miles under its belt our FZ6's gearbox was tight to say the least. First to second was particularly notchy and noisy although adjusting the lever downwards did improve things noticeably. But be warned: There's not much available adjustment on the threaded shift rod so any significant change can only be achieved on the splined shift shaft. But because the FZ6 has a stacked gearbox, the rod runs through the frame so it has to be undone from the knuckle attached to the shaft first. In short – a hassle. But worth it in the end as swaps becomes easier and less audible.

There aren't many bikes that fit "just so" and feel so right from the first moment you drop the clutch lever, but the FZ6 manages to make its rider feel at home in seconds thanks to a sublime combination of riding position and ride quality.

Footpegs, handlebars, controls and seat all play a part in making riding the little Yamaha as natural as sitting on the sofa. Everything is perfectly placed: Legs aren't cramped because bum and feet share the task of supporting upper bodyweight and the FZ6 has a comfy seat, too – but why, oh why is the covering fabric dimpled like a golf ball? Each indent holds one good-sized raindrop so when you roll out of work after a hard day's graft in jeans the earlier shower haunts you with a soggy rump.

Ride quality comes courtesy of the same extremely stable and neutral steering chassis as the Fazer. Yamaha must have taken a leaf from Honda's book on 'mass-centralisation' because the weight feels as if it's concentrated directly below the rider. To accomplish that, Yamaha has moved things around, like the battery which lives behind



BY TREVOR FRANKLIN PICTURES HOWARD BOYLAN

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

FZ6 has a great deal in common with its Fazer stablemate



IT'S not the quickest steering 600 but the FZ6 is a peachy handler

Continues over



RIDERS will feel immediately at home on Yamaha's new roadster



FIRST there was the half-faired Fazer and now there's the FZ6 – a bike that, at first glance, is identical save the fairing. But there are other differences, too.

To position the rider slightly lower to compensate for the lack of fairing, the FZ6 has slightly lower handlebars than the faired Fazer. These pull the rider slightly forward into a more aggressive stance which also lets the rider mould to the shape of the tank when all out speed is paramount. And because the bars are of the old school dual-clamp fixing type, there's some room for adjustment (fore and aft) to suit long or short arms.

Bar mounted chromed mirrors (fairing mounted on the Fazer) offer plenty of adjustment between an all-shoulder and partial elbow rearward view.

A few faired Fazer owners have complained about the difficulty in getting a good foothold on the sidestand to kick it into the down position. The FZ6 shares the same sidestand although MCN testers

have never found it a problem. But what is disappointing is the disappearance of the Fazer's mainstand. Yamaha can only have done it on grounds of cost because, as the FZ6 is no full-on supersports bike, it certainly cannot be justified for reasons of ground clearance. But the fact that it is missing does make cleaning the bike or lubing the chain properly much more difficult than it is with its Fazer brother.

But that, and price aside – the FZ6 is a useful £100 cheaper than the Fazer – is the end of the differences.

Sadly most of the faults of the Fazer remain. Because of the underseat exhausts, again there's little room under the seat so anything as precious as a chain and lock won't travel with you (maybe a small U-lock – to replace the large one already in your possession!). And then there's the irritant of no purpose-made bungee points to prevent slingers getting trapped between tailpiece and rear tyre, or a tailbag wobbling about.

THE COMPETITION

THE FZ6 is by no means alone in the world of naked middleweights. All the major manufacturers are currently offering something to rival the new Yamaha in a class which, in recent years, has become one of the most competitive of all...

TRIUMPH SPEED FOUR

Price: £5349 otr
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, fuel injected
Power: 83bhp
Top speed: 135mph
Weight: 170kg
ESSENTIALLY a stripped-down TT600, which was always a competent sports 600 until superseded by the Daytona 600. The engine is a real screamer with all the action happening above 6000rpm and the chassis boasts race bike geometry and fully adjustable suspension. The one to go for in the twisties.



SUZUKI GSF600 BANDIT

Price: £4149 otr
Engine: Air/oil-cooled, 600cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 34mm carbs
Power: 68bhp
Top speed: 135mph
Weight: 205kg
THE original modern naked 600 dates back to 1995 but, sadly, its age is telling: It's heavy, with a low power output, and the carburation has asthmatic-like throttle response. But it is cheap, has no handling foibles and makes for a good, reliable workhorse. Now if it had a GSX-R6 motor...



DUCATI 620 MONSTER

Price: £4995
Engine: Air-cooled, 618cc, 4v dohc V-twin, six gears, fuel injected
Power: 56bhp
Top speed: 120mph
Weight: 177kg
STYLING and the name aside, the Monster hasn't much going for it. Even though it had a cosmetic make-over last year and a few cc wrung from the air-cooled engine it is still hopelessly under-powered. Still, if you're looking for a stylish, safe plodder that's competent around town this could be the bike.



SUZUKI SV650

Price: £4849
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 645cc, 8v dohc V-twin, six gears, fuel injected
Power: 69bhp
Top speed: 131mph
Weight: 167kg
THE SV1000 sibling carries its big-bike looks well, although the sharp styling isn't to everybody's taste. The older, softer-styled SV was a massive hit for ladies and newly-licensed alike. Impeccable handling and a reliable motor make it an ideal intro to the world of modern V-twins – and a front runner in the MiniTwins race series.



CAGIVA 650 RAPTOR

Price: £4799 (est)
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 645cc, 8v dohc V-twin, six gears, fuel injected
Power: 70bhp
Top speed: 130mph
Weight: 169kg
THE SV650-powered Cagiva with its bizarre styling makes the Raptor stand out more than the bug-eyed Triumph. Its suspension is noticeably better than the SV's, and the motor is tuned for punchier acceleration. Poor supply and spares back-up from the factory means there aren't many about, which there should be.



HONDA CB600F HORNET

Price: £5199
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 600cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 34mm carbs
Power: 79bhp
Top Speed: 133mph
Weight: 178kg
UNTIL the FZ6, the Hornet was the naked 600 to have. Power delivery is creamy smooth from the off, building to an exhilarating top end combined with a screaming engine note. It is also comfortable and easy to fling around – although soft forks spoil high-speed fun. It looks the business, too.

