

ROAD TEST

SUZUKI BANDIT 650 ★ YAMAHA FZ6
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★ **FIRST HEAD-TO-HEAD TEST**

Bandit ambushed!

THEY'RE now separated
by only £400... looks
like Suzuki has got
trouble on its hands

Suzuki's new bored-out, cut-price Bandit 650 looked like a dead cert for the budget 600 crown - until Yamaha slashed the cost of its R6-engined FZ6... So what divides them now?

BY ADAM CHILD & MICHAEL NEEVES PICTURES BY MARK MANNING

NOT that long ago, choosing between these two bikes was easy. With well over a grand separating them, you'd go for the once-bonkers-but-now-quite-civilised Bandit 600 if you were on a budget, and the thoroughly modern FZ6 if you wanted something sportier - and had the extra cash.

But things have changed. 2005's new Bandit 650 promises more torque than before. And with the FZ6 now reduced in price to within £400 of the Suzuki, surely you'd go for the Yamaha with its R6 motor, chunky cast alloy frame and fat tyres?

It's time to ask some serious questions...

SO WHAT'S NEW?

The fuel-injected, R6-engined FZ6 is unchanged for this year, other than a

major trim (£700) in the price department. The still-carbed Bandit gets a big-bore job, taking capacity out from 599 to 656cc. There are cosmetic tweaks, like new side panels, rear light, headlight, indicators and instrument cowl. The seat's narrower, and adjustable, the tank is shorter (but still 20 litres) and the speedo has gone digital.

WHICH IS THE MOST PRACTICAL?

Both will make mincemeat of the daily city commute. With comfy upright riding positions and slim dimensions they're easy to get through gaps in traffic, but both would benefit from wider bars.

With a seat which can be adjusted to give a height anywhere between 770mm and 790mm, the Bandit should be easier to

handle for shorter riders (the FZ6's seat height is a static 790mm), but the FZ6's extra leg room is a godsend for taller riders.

The Suzuki's Big Ben-sized clocks are easier to read than the Fazer's flashy, but hard-to-see-in-the-sun LCD display. There's a centrestand as standard on the Bandit too, making maintenance easier. And for an extra £200, you can have it equipped with ABS. Its forks and rear shock are pre-load adjustable, too (the FZ6 is adjustable at the rear only).

What neither bike is good at though is long distances. If you plan on a lot of motorway work you'll need the faired versions: the Bandit 650S or FZ6 Fazer.

During our town riding and back roads test, we got 34mpg from the FZ6 and

30mpg from the Bandit. But the Suzuki's 20-litre tank is one litre larger than the Yamaha's.

WHICH IS THE MOST USER-FRIENDLY?

The FZ6 is really easy to get on with. It's 21kg lighter than the Bandit, making it as easy to ride in town as paddle round on your drive. At low speeds the Yamaha's de-tuned, fuel-injected R6 engine is smooth and the throttle response is linear and exact.

But again, it's the Bandit which will be the most appealing for new riders or those who just want to get from A to B with minimal fuss. OK, it's heavier, but the Bandit is physically smaller, thinner and has a lower seat, so you don't really notice the extra weight most of the time. A narrower, 160-section rear tyre makes the Bandit more agile to turn at any speed too.

When Suzuki added 57cc to the Bandit's old 599cc engine, it gained a load more midrange power. So for normal riding it's easy to keep in one of the higher gears and rely on the torque to push you along. You

need to stir the gearbox of the peaky FZ6 more to get going.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE OUT OF TOWN THEN?

Just when you thought the Bandit was going to walk this test, blindfolded and on its hands, we're now in Yamaha territory. Having fun is what the FZ6 is all about. It may not be quite as practical or user-friendly as the Bandit but it's the only choice for open road fun.

Although you have to rev the engine to get at it, the Yamaha makes tons more power, as well as being lighter. So in a head to head, use-all-the-gears drag race, there's no contest; like a Ferrari in a race with a milk float.

The Bandit does get there eventually. If you keep your head tucked down behind those clocks for long enough you'll tease out almost 140mph on the clock - the Yamaha has only got another 5mph on it.

The Yamaha's in-line-four is housed by a modern cast aluminium frame (the Bandit uses an old steel cradle design) so the FZ6 handles precisely and predictably; its rear



BANDIT & FZ6 UP CLOSE



BANDIT is still carbureted in 2005



FZ6 gets revvy, R6-derived, fuel injected motor



BANDIT clocks are simple and easy to read on the go



THE slightest ray of sun and LCD display becomes useless



DISTINCTIVE Bandit rear end gets a new rear light design



UNDERSEAT cans make FZ6 rear a much tidier affair

'Having fun is what the FZ6 is all about... it's the only choice for the open road'

SUZUKI BANDIT 650	YAMAHA FZ6
★★★★☆	★★★★☆
COST £4299	COST £4699
POWER (claimed): 78bhp	POWER (claimed): 98bhp
WEIGHT (claimed): 201kg	WEIGHT (claimed): 180kg
TORQUE (claimed): 43ftlb	TORQUE (claimed): 46ftlb
Available: Now	Available: Now
Colours: Black, blue, red, silver	Colours: Silver, red, black
Insurance group: 12 (of 17)	Insurance group: 12 (of 17)
Info: Suzuki UK, 0500-011959	Info: Yamaha UK, 01932-358121
FUEL: 20 litres	FUEL: 19 litres
SEAT HEIGHT: 770/90mm	SEAT HEIGHT: 795mm
RAKE: 26°	RAKE: 25°
TRAIL: 106mm	TRAIL: 91.5mm
WHEELBASE: 1440mm	WHEELBASE: 1440mm
TECHNICAL SPEC Engine: Air-cooled 656cc (65.5mm x 48.7mm) 16v, four-stroke in-line four	TECHNICAL SPEC Engine: Liquid-cooled 599cc (65.5 x 44.5mm), 16v, four-stroke in-line four
Chassis: Steel double cradle frame. 41mm forks and single rear shock, both adjustable for pre-load. 2 x 290mm front discs with twin-piston calipers, 240mm rear disc with single-piston caliper. Tyres: 120/70 x 17 front 160/60x17 rear. Optional ABS: £200	Chassis: Aluminium twin beam frame. Non-adjustable 43mm forks, single rear shock adjustable for pre-load. 2 x 298mm front discs with twin-piston calipers, 245mm rear disc with twin-piston caliper. Tyres 120/70 x 17 front 180/55 x 17 rear

180-section tyre making sure that power never overtakes grip. The Suzuki's handling is vague by comparison and has poor ground clearance.

Although many knock the Fazer's brakes now they've been 'downgraded' from R1-style four-pots to a twin-piston set-up, they're still superb. The Bandit's stoppers have a nice, progressive feel around town, but at speed they're simply not as good.

SO WHICH IS THE BEST VALUE?

This time last year the FZ6 cost £5399, over a grand more than the Suzuki. But this year the FZ6 will cost you just £4699; that's remarkable value for money.

For the extra £400 the FZ6 will cost you over the Bandit, you get a lot more bike. It's bigger, with that fat rear tyre, beefy frame and chunkier bodywork, so you get the impression you're getting more metal for your money.

The FZ6 is faster, better handling and more modern-looking too. Aside from the big-bore job and bodywork tweaks, the Bandit is essentially the same as it was ten years ago.

VERDICT

WITH both bikes costing well below five grand, they're both top value for money, but now the Bandit has lost its massive price advantage over the FZ6 your choice is going to be simply based on what you're getting for your hard-earned cash.

For new riders, the Bandit is an incredibly accomplished machine. It's easy to live with, practical and still fast enough to have fun on. If you need a dependable, reliable machine the Suzuki has got to be a great choice. And the extra £400 you save over the Yamaha can go towards riding kit.

But the Fazer has got to win this test. It's almost as cheap, practical and user-friendly as the Bandit, but it has an extra string to its bow. It will happily do the daily grind in comfort, but on those sunny evenings after a hard day at work you can take the long route home, and go absolutely bananas.

NAKED RIVALS



HONDA CBF600 ★★★★★

THE CBF is the Suzuki's closest competition for new riders. Like the Bandit and FZ6 it comes either naked or with a fairing. It's got an adjustable seat and ABS. The Honda engine is smaller than the Suzuki's, but has more power and torque. But the Suzuki is cheaper than the CBF's £4899, and has pre-load adjustment up front. Some prefer the retro looks of the Bandit over the modern looking Honda. Although the Honda has more power than the Bandit, it's still not a match for the Fazer in the fun stakes.

★ FIRST TEST NEXT WEEK



NEW HONDA HORNET 600

JUST when you were struggling with a choice of bike, Honda launches its new Hornet 600, which MCN tests exclusively next week. It costs £5199 - that's £300 more than the CBF600 (left). But for that extra cash you get upside-down forks, tweaked styling and slight modifications to the engine. Like the Bandit you'll get pre-load adjustment on the forks and rear shock and Honda's sporty middleweight continues to rely on good old-fashioned carbs.