

EXCLUSIVE! \$40,000 Bimota Furano: Fast, Fancy, Fuel-Injected
Anti-Lock Sport-Tourers: BMW K100RS • Honda ST1100 • Yamaha FJ1200

CYCLE WORLD

600 SHOOTOUT!

Seven-Bike Comparison



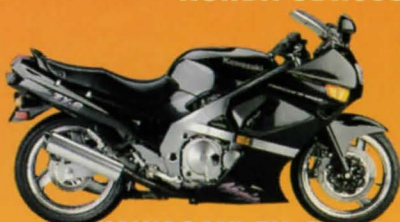
SUZUKI GSX-R600



HONDA CBR600



YAMAHA SECA II



KAWASAKI ZX-6



KAWASAKI NINJA 600



SUZUKI KATANA 600



YAMAHA FZR600

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BIMOTA

R I D I N G T

CW RIDING IMPRESSION

BY JON F. THOMPSON

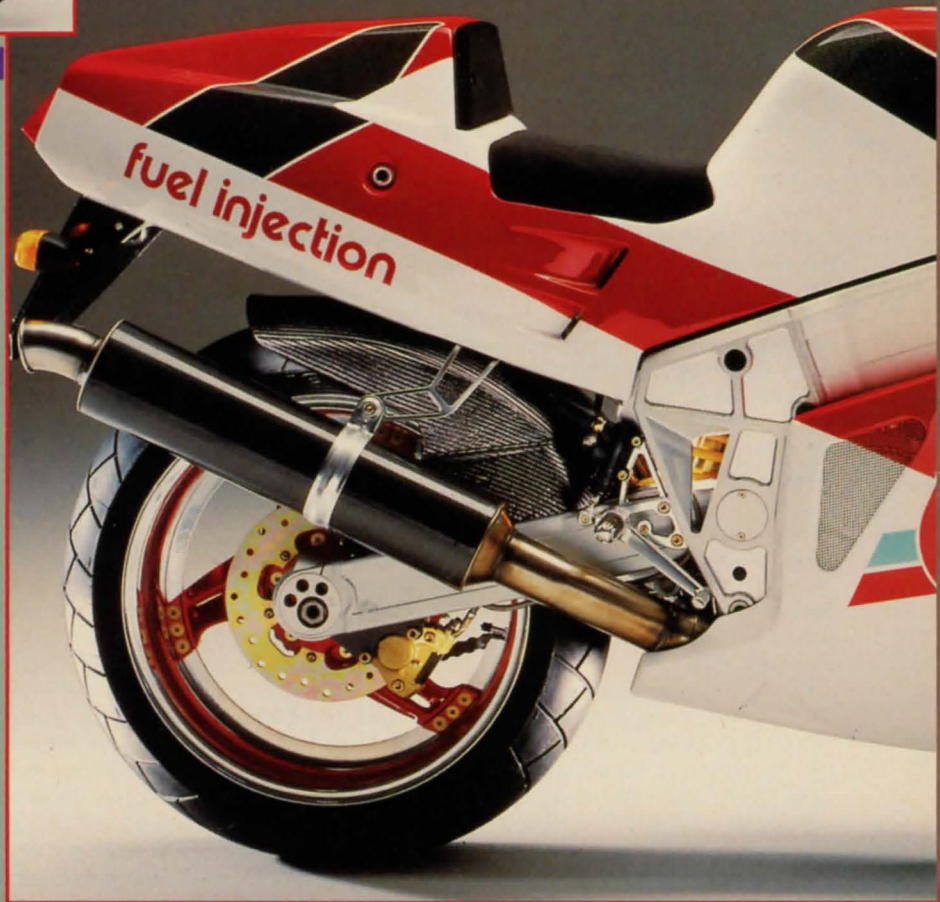
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IMOTAS ARE KNOWN FOR being exclusive, expensive, and maybe just a little controversial. That's a reputation the marque is sure to maintain, if the company's latest offering is any sort of example.

That offering is a lightweight, elegant confection called the YB8EI Furano. Furano, in the dialect used by fisherfolk around Rimini, Italy, where Bimotas are built, denotes a strong wind. Certainly that name has more romantic appeal than the YB8EI designation, but under its technoid surface, that designation carries its own sort of romance: The "EI" means that the bike, the latest addition to the well-regarded YB8 family, is fuel-injected.

The Furano possesses all the attributes that have made the YB8 Dieci (*Cycle World*, May, 1991) a favorite among well-heeled enthusiasts. Just like the Dieci, it is light, stiff and powerful, and it stops and handles. But the Dieci's focus has been broadened this year. It now is available as a single-seater or with a passenger seat. The Furano, meanwhile, is Bimota's ultimate expression of the conventional hard-core, take-no-prisoners sportbike, complete with low-mount clip-ons, fully adjustable suspension, carbon-fiber everything, modular wheels and an electronic engine-management system.

The Furano is faster than the Dieci. At a claimed 397 pounds dry, and with its claimed 164 horsepower, it smokes away from the 149-horsepower, 408-pound Dieci in roll-ons. Its combination of lightness, power and excellent



suspension makes the bike feel more like a Superbike that has been tamed for street use than a purpose-built luxury-performance item. In reality, the Furano is a little of both those things.

First, its claimed weight is, for a liter-class bike, very low. This is made possible by very careful attention to detail, by design and manufacture that make parts such as exhaust hangers and engine headstays look as delicate and as strong as the wing of a dragonfly. The use of very light wheels, composed of Akront aluminum rims bolted to three-spoke magnesium hubs, helps. And so does use of carbon-fiber—in the exhaust system, shift linkage, fenders and in

the bike's unusual two-piece bodywork. Two pieces? Right: The 9.9-pound tanktop, seat and rear section lifts off as a single unit with the removal of three small bolts, and the 10.5-pound fairing is built in one piece to eliminate the heavy sections necessary where fairing panels overlap. It's a good system, even if it does make fairing removal a bit of a chore. Bimota spokesmen note that carbon-fiber isn't particularly easy to work with. The company is forced to discard one out of every three fairing sections because of manufacturing or finish defects.

The Furano is the only Bimota whose fairing gets the carbon-fiber

FURANO

THE WIND



What to do with the money you've been saving for a house: The Bimota Furano blends traditional hands-on craftsmanship with electronic fuel injection, a race-bred chassis, all-world brakes and lightweight carbon-fiber bodywork into what just might be the ultimate expression of the hard-core sportbike.

treatment, but it shares some components with other bikes in its family. It is based upon the same carefully welded and beautifully constructed alloy perimeter frame used by the other members of the YB8 clan. And just as the rest of the YB8s do, it uses a Yamaha FZR1000 engine. But its engine's management system, suspension, bodywork and wheels all are specific to the YB8EI.

That engine-management system is built by Weber-Marelli, and uses essentially the same CPU as do the Ducati 851/888, the Moto Guzzi Daytona 1000 and Bimota's own Ducati-engined Tesi 1Dsr (see accompanying story). Through a system of remote sensors,

that tail-mounted unit reads air temperature, atmospheric pressure, rpm, throttle position, coolant temperature and injection-and-ignition timing. The system constantly adapts to changes in these parameters, with the result that ignition timing and fuel mixture are managed over the engine's entire load and rpm ranges with much greater accuracy than is possible with carburetors and conventional ignition systems.

For the most part, the system works very well. The bike starts easily from cold, and burning the leaded fuel still widely used in Italy, where we went to sample the bike, left a tell-tale medium-gray deposit inside the exhaust exit to signify that the air-fuel mixture

was near the stoichiometrically correct 14:1. You don't really need to examine exhaust deposits to verify that, however. All you've got to do is ride the bike and sample its instant, clean throttle response at any speed or engine load. Well, almost: Under heavy loads in high gears at low rpm, the engine will buck and snatch. But it soon clears itself out. From 3000 to 7500 rpm, it pulls very hard—much harder than the carbureted FZR engine in the Dieci, which we rode for comparison. And from 7500 rpm on to its 11,500-rpm redline, the bike accelerates as though launched from one of the large-bore *lupara* scatterguns Italian farmers once used to slaughter wolves. Power peak arrives at 10,500 rpm, which calculates to 165 mph in top gear. That's the maximum at which the Furano would pull my 6-foot-4-inch, 225-pound frame on a near-empty *autostrada* just outside Rome. But my riding partner for this trip, 5-foot-7 Bimota test rider and 1990 Italian 600 and 750 champion Gianluca Galasso, can tuck down inside the bike's windscreen much more easily than I. Galasso says he's seen 11,500 top-gear rpm on the Furano's clock. That calculates to 182 miles per hour—plenty fast for a streetbike by anybody's standards, even if a bit of rear-tire slippage at top speeds almost certainly makes that figure optimistic by at least a few miles per hour.

Furano buyers likely will acquire the bike for reasons other than its amazing ability to compress distance, however. This is a sportbike, after all, not a Bon-

BIMOTA FURANO

neville land-speed-record machine, and it's got the chassis, and the twisty-road performance, to prove it. The Öhlins shock is adjustable for spring preload and compression, as well as for rebound and compression damping, and

includes a ride-height adjustment. The triple-taper 42mm Öhlins inverted fork is three-way adjustable, as well, with preload adjusters and 25-click rebound adjusters at the top of each fork leg, and 25-click compression adjusters at

the bottom of each leg. Additionally, the top triple-clamp bearing is mounted in an eccentric that will add or subtract a half degree to the standard rake of 24.5 degrees. This aggressive geometry works in conjunction with the

TESI REVISITED

MORE MOTOR AND BETTER SUSPENSION FOR BIMOTA'S HUB- CENTER WONDER

FAITHFUL READERS WILL RECALL that when *Cycle World* tested the Bimota Tesi 1D last year, we found that the bike and its alternative front-suspension system worked really well. We've just sampled the 1992 Tesi, and it's even better than last year's bike.

The bike is known this year as the Tesi 1Dsr, and it contains some important changes. One of those involves Bimota's decision to make last year's optional 904cc engine, which is based on the Ducati 888 race motor, the only engine available. Another is a rethink of the bike's suspension componentry, resulting in revamped front and rear

hard braking can inflict on conventional forks. Additionally, because of the anti-dive characteristics of the Tesi's front suspension, it puts at the rider's disposal almost all of the bike's front-suspension travel all the time, even under braking. It therefore becomes possible, at least in theory, to brake deep and late into corners, even over bumps, without upsetting the bike's chassis, its attitude or the line the rider has chosen. The theory works.

We sampled the Tesi 1Dsr by chasing Bimota test rider Gianluca Galasso around Lake Bracciano, northwest of Rome, over roads that combined rough and potholed surfaces with the sorts of oddly radiused, surprise-per-heartbeat corners that are characteristic of many European backroads. We found the bike to be nothing less than magic, providing the sort of handling, braking and deep-corner stability and composure that riders of tele-forked bikes can only dream about, with a much smoother, more controlled ride than last year's bike.

Once aboard the bike, your only clue to its hub-center front suspension is the tiny top triple-clamp. Steering feels just like you'd expect motorcycle steering to feel, with the exception of a slight stiffness when the bike is barely rolling.

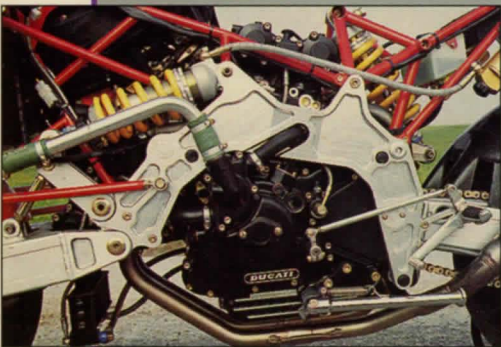
Once the clutch is fully engaged, though, there's nothing to tip you off to the bike's unusual front sus-

pension until you nail the brakes. Then, the one thing that lets you know you're on something unusual is the bike's refusal to nosedive. Though the front suspension has 3.9 inches of travel, it is designed to droop just eight-tenths of an inch under braking. This lack of dive seems odd at first, but you become used to it.

The Tesi 1Dsr's uprated V-Twin injects a welcome dose of excitement into the bike. With this engine, the Tesi is a bullet, a two-wheeled adrenalin pump that accelerates hard from right off idle, but with a strong rush at 7500 rpm that gains steam all the way to its 10,000-rpm rev limit.

The Tesi's diminutive, spidery nature certainly makes a contribution to its strong performance. Bimota claims a dry weight of 414 pounds for the Tesi, a figure that probably will grow to perhaps 440 pounds in the real world. Whatever the Tesi's real-world weight, it is not a big bike, at least not physically. In terms of the directions in which it points, however, the Tesi casts a very long shadow. It can be argued that bikes like Bimota's beautifully refined Furano represent the final pages of motorcycling's first chapter. If so, bikes like the Tesi 1Dsr, set to sell in Italy for about \$41,000, represent the opening pages of chapters to come. We can't wait to read on.

—Jon F. Thompson



It may look like last year's bike, but it isn't. This year's Tesi boasts a bigger engine and revised suspension.

shock linkages that provide more progressive action. And in place of the Marzocchi shocks found on the bike last year, suspension is now handled by Öhlins units.

The point of the Tesi's hub-center steering and its associated front swingarm is to isolate braking from suspension and steering. Doing so eliminates the binding and stiction

bike's very stiff fork and 3.7 inches of trail to give very quick, very direct steering.

The Furano has brakes that match the quality and performance of the rest of its hardware. These are gold-line Brembo staggered-piston calipers. They are not the machined-from-billet racing units, but the highest-spec cast production units, and they put the squeeze on full-floating 12.6-inch steel rotors. Bimota chooses to field its bikes with braided-steel brake lines, and the result of this mixture of components is the best stock streetbike brakes we've experienced, easily capable of fully controllable maximum-effort braking with no more than moderate pressure from two fingers on the brake lever.

This combination of stiff chassis, well-calibrated suspension, great brakes and wide Michelin Hi-Sport radials translates into the sort of impeccably crisp, secure handling a rider has every right to expect from a machine in the Furano's lofty price category. It changes direction right *now*, and it is ridiculously easy to flick from side to side in cornering transitions.

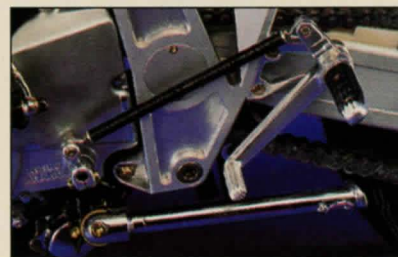
One important reason for the bike's sharp feel is its small size. It runs on a 55.9-inch wheelbase (about the same as a Honda CBR600), should prove lighter than the 432-pound CBR900RR, and is much narrower through its upper mid-section than that new Honda. Its short wheelbase also means that hard acceleration will loft the front in the first three gears, while hard braking easily levitates that fat rear Michelin. Because it is so narrow, none of the Furano's hard parts touch pavement even during very aggressive street riding—not even



The proof of the Furano is in the riding. And the verdict? Sensational. So far, Bimota is undecided about bringing the Furano to the U.S., citing the cost of certifying the bike and its limited market here.

the bike's tiny and beautifully made rearset footpegs.

The Furano may be small, but saddle time on it is no more physically demanding than time aboard any other repli-racer. Riders with long legs may find that their knees overlap the tank cover's knee indents by a bit, and as noted, tall pilots may not tuck under the bubble quite as efficiently as smaller riders. But they'll still find that the bike's seat, riding position and suspension calibration treat them very well. Enough airflow comes over the front of the bike to reduce the weight on a rider's wrists once he's at speed; the seat, while no touring throne, is comfortable by sportbike



A symphony of detail work? Check it out: Carbon-fiber-wrapped shift linkage, beautiful machine work on the frame member, covered swingarm pivot, cunningly crafted footpeg and shift lever all point out the attention to detail that makes Bimotas expensive and desirable.

standards; and the suspension, definitely firm, is at least not so unyielding as to be harsh.

What you do notice while you're aboard the Furano, in addition to its blistering performance and brilliant handling, is that the aura of sound from this bike is different from that of any other streetbike you're likely to have ridden. The jingle of the bike's floating brake rotors, noise from the tires, suspension and engine all reverberate through the bike's bodywork, which, because of its lightness and stiffness, works to transfer sound just the way the body of a fine acoustic guitar does. The noise levels never become objectionable, mind you; they're just an ever-present signal that you're aboard something special.

So the Furano is a very nicely developed and finished piece of equipment. The only rough edge we noticed during our brief introduction to the bike concerned some paint overspray on the inside of the fairing edges just below the windscreen—an unacceptable and highly visible quality-control lapse in a bike that costs, in Italy, the equiva-



The Furano is built around a beautifully crafted and extremely rigid aluminum frame carrying a Yamaha FZR1000 engine that's been fuel-injected to yield a claimed 164 horsepower. The engine-management system's CPU rides in a rubberized box at the tail of the rear subframe.

BIMOTA FURANO



lent of \$37,900.

What the Furano will cost in the U.S. has not been established. The Furano's future, as far as the United States market is concerned, remains undecided for the most basic of reasons.

According to Aurelio Lolli, Bimota's manager of sales and marketing,

European and American testing and homologation could total as much as \$70,000. Lolli muses, "Will the number of Furanos sold in the U.S. be enough to justify this investment? That's the question."

We rather suspect that one way or another, at least a few Furanos will

Backing up the Furano, the Dieci is available this year in the original single-seat "monoposto" version, and in this "biposto," or two-seat, form. The Biposto uses higher handlebars and softer suspension values than the other bikes in the YB8 family. Though the early-production Dieci Cycle World tested last year had some fit-and-finish problems, the 1992 examples we saw in Italy were finished as beautifully as their prices (about \$30,000) suggest they should be.

find their way stateside, if only to flesh out the holdings of well-heeled collectors. It would be a shame if that's all they do. This is a bike that's built to be ridden, the Ferrari F40 of the sportbike world. Its price and limited production—Lolli told *CW* that Bimota plans to build between 100 and 150 Furanos—will insure that it will be available to just a few riders. Those lucky few will get a taste of what it's like to ride an ultra-exotic streetbike that just happens to possess World Superbike performance. □

BIMOTA AND THE USA

THE ART OF SELLING \$40,000 MOTORCYCLES

MUCH HAS BEEN MADE ABOUT the sorry state of the United States motorcycle market. For the last two years it's sold 266,000 new bikes per year, down from a 1973 high of 1.5 million units.

The size of recent sales figures may alarm the brass at Japanese motorcycle companies. But at Bimota, which hand-builds just 650 bikes per year in its Rimini, Italy, factory, the sales potential in a market as large and as rich as the United States looks pretty good, according to Aurelio Lolli, Bimota's sales-and-marketing director. Of the U.S.'s soft economy, Lolli says, "It may be slow, but it's still stronger than many other Western economies." And that's why, he continues, Bimota is working hard to upgrade its U.S. parts and service through its American

importer, the Roscetti Corp. (105 W. Somerdale Road, Somerdale, NJ 08083; 609/346-2111.)

Lolli admits this has not been easy. "Riccardo Roscetti has been very enthusiastic. He's working not only with his brain, but with his heart. His disadvantage is that he is new at this. He doesn't have a lot of experience in managing a distributorship, and as a result, he sometimes is not 100 percent prepared."

"American riders are smart enough to tell a good bike from a bad one."

Still, Lolli adds, Bimota is committed to the Roscetti arrangement, and is committed to becoming viable here in the U.S. That has happened more slowly than at first expected, he says, because most of 1991 was required to get the bikes through federal testing. But now that process is complete, and with the first complete shipment of Diecis—Bimota's primary U.S. model—in the U.S. and with pre-sold shipments of Tesis about to arrive, he says things look bright enough to be fairly certain

that all 140 1992 Bimotas designated for these shores will be sold.

"Look," Lolli offers, "Roscetti has just hired a commercial manager to take care of the dealers. We think that's another sign of his willingness to grow and learn. Our brand is not well-known in the U.S., so we're starting from—well, maybe not quite zero," he says. But riders here, Lolli says, "are smart enough to tell a good bike from a bad one."

Also, Lolli believes that Bimotas, especially the Tesi, offer something many other motorcycles lack. He says, "To differentiate your product, you need something else besides performance. You need your own character and personality. This is why we believe in the Tesi. It is very much our own motorcycle."

How will Bimota overcome its reputation as a purveyor of overpriced boutique motorcycles? Lolli laughs, and says, "At 91 million lira, (about \$73,500) the Honda NR750 is much more expensive than a Tesi 1D. So what was the most expensive is no longer the most expensive." Adds Pier Paolo Catani, Bimota's press-relations officer, "Bikes like the NR make our product seem more affordable. We're glad for the competition." —Jon F. Thompson