

ZXR400 V ZXR750 V ZZR1100 V CBR900 V CBR600 V VFR750 V 888 V 900SS  
900SL V DB2 V TESI V FURANO V GUZZI DAYTONA V TRIUMPH DAYTONA V TRIUMPH SPRINT V GTS1000  
TURBO NUTTER NORTHERN BIKES 177BHP GSXR1100 V 161BHP EXUP

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# Fast

## Bikes

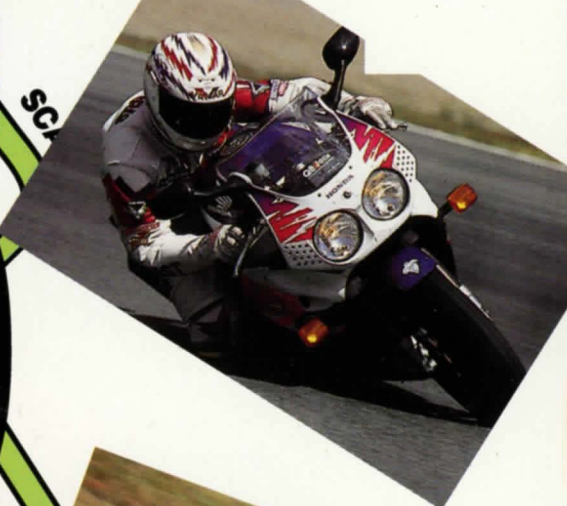
### THE WORLDS

# TOP 20

### SPORTSBIKES

# THRASHED TO DEATH AT MUGELLO

Fast  
Bikes



+ VEE TWOS DOUBLE DESMO DELITES BIM'S DB2 V DUC'S 900SL  
+ BANGEMANN BATTERING 177BHP GSX-R7/11 V 161BHP EXUP





**The idea was brilliantly simple: to ride round the best, grippiest track in Europe for 24 hours and collate the results.**



**I**t's a common, internationally shared joke on press launches that if you get to the test bikes after the Italians, you'd better have a good set of spanners and a broom. So it was something of an irony to be at the

briefing of the Motosprint organised 24-Ore di Mugello, a gathering of the fastest testers in Europe assembled to continuously ride the world's top twenty sports bikes around the illustrious Florentine circuit and watch Editor, Claudio Braglia,

waving his finger defiantly and threatening anybody who crashed with a new career holding up motorway bridges... Actually, obvious as it may seem, he had a point; though by definition as sportsters the bikes had to be ridden to their limits to get any



# di Mugello



le; thrash the top 20 sports  
k in Europe in the middle of  
e results. And then it rained...



idea of their comparative abilities, riding over the limits and crashing would drastically reduce the editorial validity of the exercise as not every tester would get to ride every bike, thus making it difficult to relate the bikes back to back on a truly

comparative and aggregate basis. "...Particularly, you, Emmett", Braglia gestured as he continued his tirade against recklessness, lawlessness and out-of-control competitiveness, while Jason tried to gaze angelically down at the carpet, though the

smart money, mine included and frankly anybody who's read Fast Bikes regularly over the last six months, must have been on Dan to be the first in the kitty litter...

Well the idea of the test was eminently simple; for the premier score or so of



# Top 20 di Mugello

Europe's roadtesters to continuously ride the top 24 or so sports bikes round Europe's most demanding and exciting racetrack, each tester completing a stint on each bike so that aggregate data on speed, reliability, economy etc., would be truly comparable. Thus we weren't just looking for what was

go anywhere without air cover were already beginning to surface. Oh dear....the test looked about as likely to hold together as the Soviet Union.

## THE CIRCUIT

One thing you've got to hand to the Italians, though, is that theirs is a blessed country and they know how to enjoy it. The great thing about the Deigs is that they make loads of rules that everyone ignores so that their real standard of living is twice as high and twice as pleasurable as ours in Britain for half the work. They make laws about paying income tax and nobody does; they frame speed limits they rigorously don't police;



Ever seen an Italian telling other people off about crashing before..? Note that by this time the Brits have retired to the free cakes and wine...

the fastest bike per se, or the best handling bike outright or even a combination of both, but what was the quickest in and out of different types of corners, the best braked, the most economical, the most durable and even the most resistant to the, it has to be said, inevitable crash damage. I mean, taking the hottest two-wheelers in the world and two motorcycling representatives of each of the very protagonists who fought to the death over ownership of that queer concept we now call 'Europe' and the Battle of the Bulge was likely to look like a CSM course by comparison. I was trying to keep my troops in control, but theories that the Italian testers might have to ride the opposite way round to everybody else or that the German representatives wouldn't

they have helmet regs even old dears on Vespas don't take a blind bit of notice of. Instead of frowning on motorsport and the cult of rebelliousness and exuberance that inspires its champions, they respect and hallow it so that the Mugello circuit where the test took place is one of, if not the finest track in the whole of Europe, because they're proud of it, not ashamed of it. It's setting, in a leafy spot about 20 miles North of Florence situated in a rural valley surrounded by deciduous trees, gothic villas, vineyards and farmland, is idyllic. Its facilities with pits the size of said villas and a shower and a toilet and full mains power about every six feet, is ideal. Its

**Michelin came prepared. In the event, most bikes got through a whole day without replacements and the incredibly grippy track helped the Hi-sports perform to their absolute peak**

topography, with swooping third and

fourth gear banked turns, short straights linking the three to five chicanes and a couple of terrifying hairpins at the end of the straights is irresistible. The 3.2 miles of this circuit, more than any other track I can think of, has

all the necessary ingredients to stretch a bike's performance to the limit. The start-finish straight is three quarters of a mile long and is entered off a 90mph left hander so top speeds even on the most powerful bikes are reached well before the braking point. At the end of the main straight and following the heaviest braking on the track is a right-hand hairpin which dives sharply up-hill on the exit. This tests the bike's ability to turn on the brakes, to scrub off speed mid corner, and to maintain momentum on the exit. Immediately following the hairpin is the first of five chicanes, this one a left-right combination, so a tight line has to be held on the hairpin before chucking the bike in hard and late.



Those that sent the most professional teams stayed the longest, the DB2 never missed a beat and they, stayed upright all day and next



Quick steering's essential here to apex late as you need to exit as straight as possible. Ditto the second chicane, approached off a 300 metre straight, almost a mirror image of the first save for the fact that the track's slightly wider so entry and exit speeds are higher. The track then gradually falls away for another 300 metres before diving to the right, sharply down-hill into the third chicane. This particular combination, the exit of which is a 90mph left-hander really pushes the front end suspension to the very limit, particularly as the bike has to be dragged over to the left to get it on the cor-



rect approach for the long double apex uphill right-hander that follows. It's important to clip the curbs exactly on the way up the hill as the exit is blind and the track narrows. Power is hard-on for the off-camber drag up the hill, causing the back end to protest as the rear suspension is loaded with the full repertoire of gradient, power and bumps. Over the brow and off the throttle the suspension's suddenly off-loaded and front and rear balance is essential as the kerb approaches fast with the bike still fully cranked over. Get it right and you'll be doing about 90mph with enough momentum to stay in the middle of the power-band and thus bikes with a lot of torque are at an advantage on this section.

rear end judders and squirms until the bike's upright and driving flat-out down the second-longest straight. At the entry to the last left-hander the track opens out very wide, it's positively cambered and in terms of circumference it's a bit like Mallory's Gerrards. Braking is hard and deep, and it's essential to get on the throttle early for good drive back onto the main straight.

Exhausted? So was I after 500 laps....

## EQUIPMENT

Every lap, every conceivable facet of the different bike's performance was tested from the response of the suspension and brakes, to the reaction of chassis geometry and frame rigidity to outright speed to power out of corners, and while most bikes had strong points, few were well balanced enough not to also have glaring weaknesses. Monitoring was accomplished by a sophisticated system of thirty pick-up points dotted around the circuit at the most interesting points, designed to automatically measure not only lap times but the elapsed time of bikes through whole specific sections. Individual speeds through corners were taken and top speeds logged. To get the information a transponder was fitted to each machine which

simply indicated which bike was passing what point at any given time. The circuit computer would then analyse the information and spew-out more facts and figures than you could ever need. In fact the system is so stunningly simple and effective, I don't know why every British circuit doesn't have it. Well actually I do, but that's a different story...



The equipment being fitted to this ill fated ZXR is part of Mugello's advanced digital timing system. Around the circuit there are 30 ish pick up points that register every time a bike fitted with a transponder passes...

The only major upset to our plans was the refusal of Suzuki to provide any of the bikes requested, including the RGV250, the GSX-R1100 and the GSX-R750 and



stance. The Furano got binned three times, but it still finished. The Tesi, the one that everyone thought might get way from

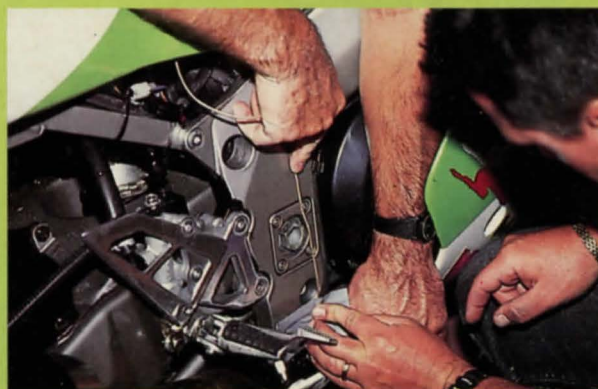


...the digital transponders were fitted to each bike, in this case under the seat...

RF600. Whilst the non-appearance of the company's big four strokes probably wouldn't have invalidated the results of the top runners too much, we were obviously very disappointed not to have been able to compare the company's precocious little 250 against some of the far weightier opposition. Apparently, the order came on high from Japan. Make of that what you will.

And so the bikes. They come in no particular order other than the one that Jason and I rode them in.

... and the antennae taped to the chassis.



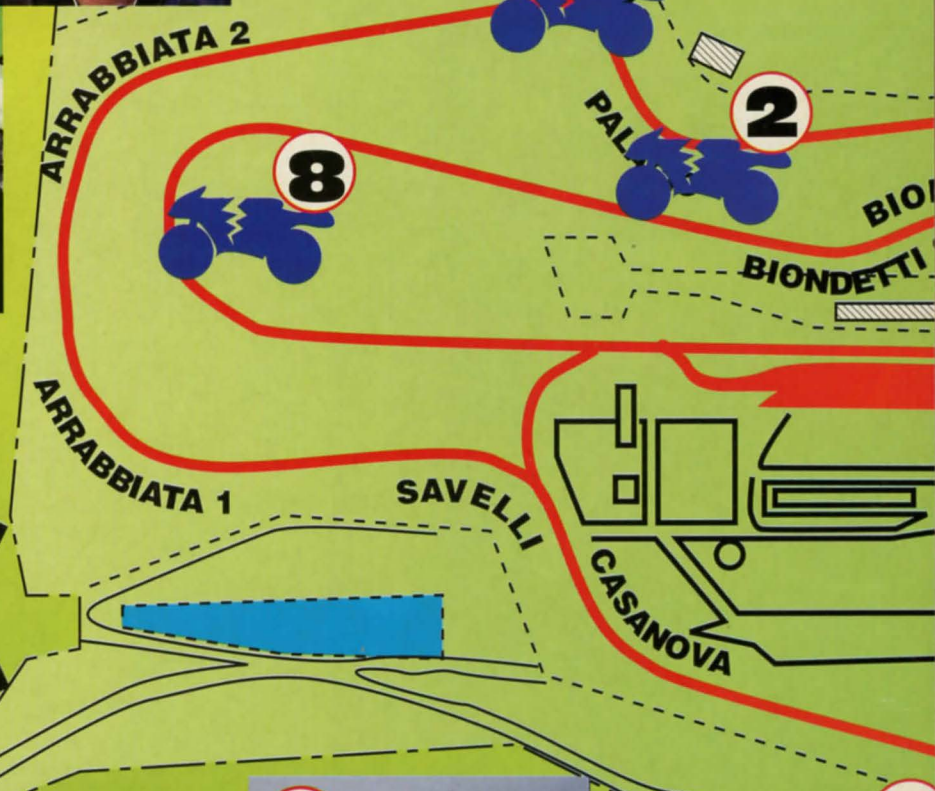
The 100 metre board that approaches almost immediately signifies the entry to the forth chicane, a nondescript right-left affair which more than anything else is cambered on the entry to test for ground clearance. Three hundred metres later, and the track dives down and to the right in a hard-on-the-front hairpin where the greatest angles of lean for the longest period of time are generated. The bike has to be kept fully cranked to the right and then thrown hard left into the last chicane, very late and hard on the power all the way through as the bends are open and fast. The



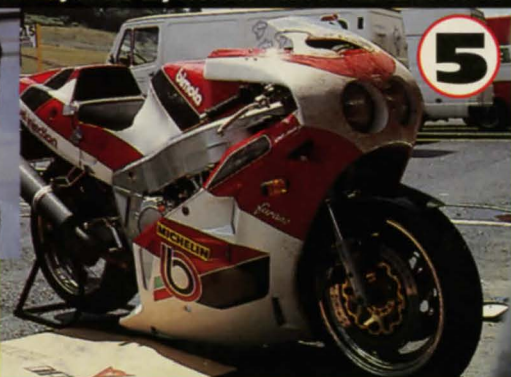
# Top 20 d MUGELLO CIR



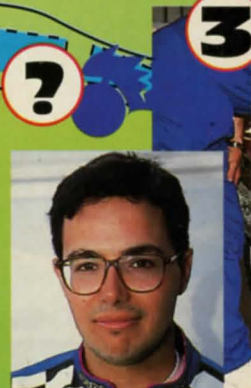
**Culprit:** Raf de Mot (Moto Ryder Belgium)  
**Victim:** ZXR750R  
After 5-6 laps locked the front in the wet on the right hand section of the upper chicane. Not pretty, Raf, second worst crash of the proceedings



**Culprits:** Jason Emmett (Fast Bikes), Fernando Martins (Moto Journal, Portugal)  
**Victim:** Bimota Furano  
Jason: Locked the front going into Correntaio in the wet. Well, we had to pay £5,000 for the one we binned in England so we were determined to get our money's worth  
Fernando: Second day in the dry lost the front at the same corner



**Culprit:** Alberto Pirez (Moto Journal, Portugal)  
**Victim:** YZF750  
Crashed on his second lap in the wet on the first corner (after the start finish straight)



**Culprit:** Carlos Montes  
**Victim:** Moto Guzzi Day  
Braked too hard in the he disappeared before



# Mugello

**CUIT**

## ENTRANCE 4

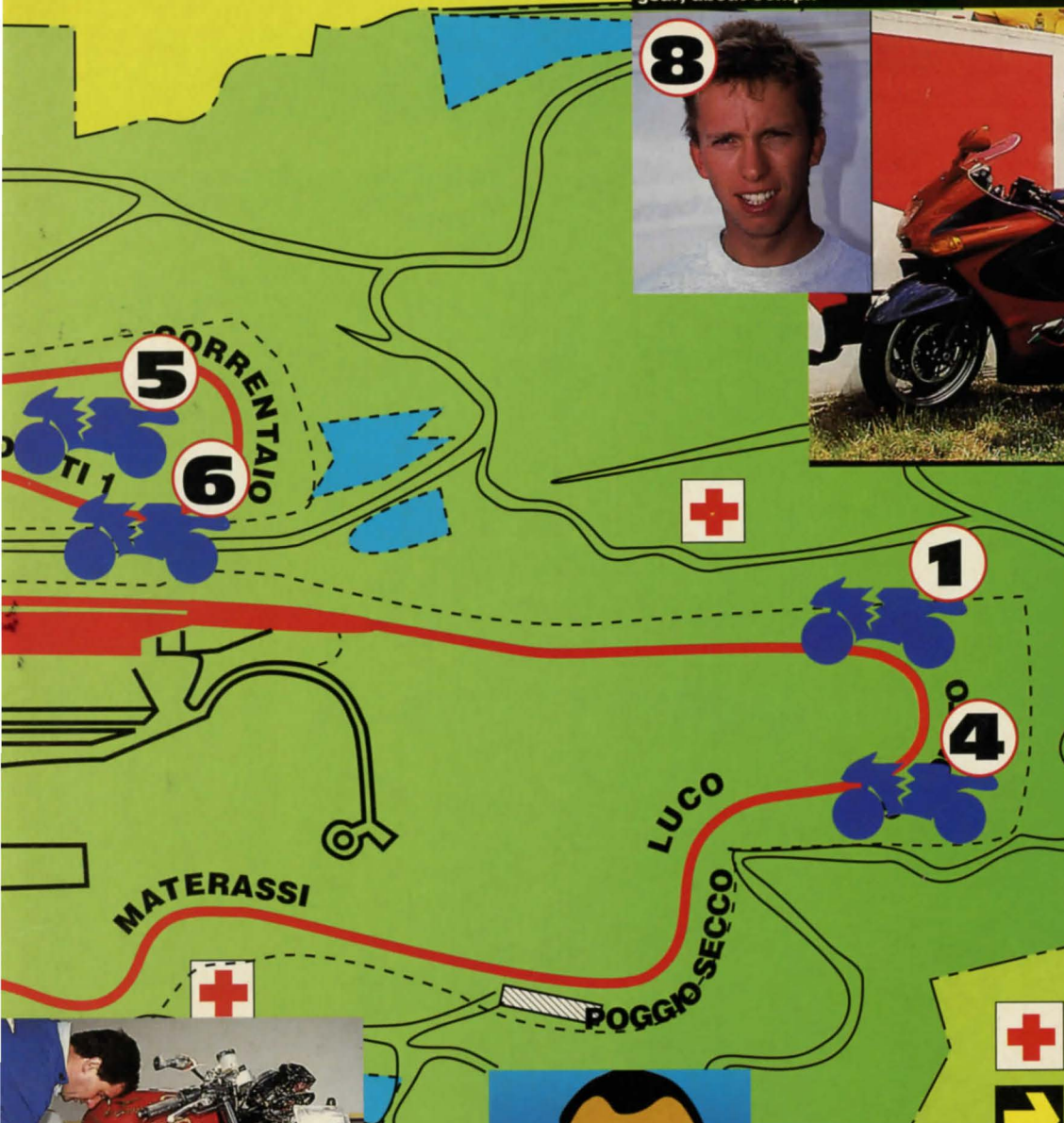
**CARS, BIKES**

**PEDESTRIANS**

**Culprit:** Jason Emmett (Fast Bikes, Great Britain)

**Victim:** ZZR1100R

Blew up the engine out of the last corner to the start finish straight in third gear, about 90mph



**Culprit:** Aldo Ballerini (Italian free-lance roadtester)

**Victim:** ZZR600

Lost the front end on the first bend of the first lap as the road was drying out. Not surprising; he should try opening his eyes...

**ENTRANCES**



**Culprit:** Signore Faieta (Test rider for Honda Italy, Rumi team)



**Victim:** Triumph Daytona

Locked the front in the wet on the upper chicane. Too embarrassed to be photographed, Faieta left the circuit in tears...Not surprised; he totally wrote the Triumph off





# Top 20 di Mugello

## BIMOTA TESI

I dunno what Tesi means in Italian but if it's something like 'styling as sharp as a bed of hypodermic's' then that's not that far off the mark. Whilst the Japanese traditionally conceive the most superb designer sketches and then dilute the formula down and down until their 'machine of the future' looks just like any other jelly mould from the past, the advantage that Bimota's stylists have is that they're less answerable to big company corporate pressures and so their inspirational ideas have much more of a chance of developing into road-going realities.

What's impressive so far as the Tesi's



**Bimota's Tesi wasn't even unbalanced by stumpy's recent amputation. Where's the parrot, Dan..?**

concerned is that the styling in no way interferes with the bike's usability or performance, so not only is the bike incredibly innovative and breathtakingly futuristic, it's also practical.

It goes without saying that the quality of manufacture and high level of finish is second to none, and the front swinger on the '93 model is a case in point as it's actually machined from solid billet. Previously the complex shape was achieved by pressing cutting and welding sheet aluminium but the high failure rate made it more economical to build them from solid. The fact that the machined ones are lighter is an added bonus.

The first riding impression comes before the bike's even turned a wheel. The seat is high and wide which for my ideal racer five foot six frame makes it a bit of a stretch to the ground and yards more than the same company's DB2; moreover there's more seat padding on a park bench and the suspension front and rear 'feels' unpliant. Much of the impression of hard-

ness comes from the fact that the front end is designed not to dive, and certainly around the ultra smooth surface of Mugello the Tesi never felt over-sprung. In fact the handling, particularly in the wet was superb, sliding the rear predictably under power while the front was as solidly planted as a palm tree. If the Tesi has a handling deficiency it's that it doesn't change direction that fast, although there again, there are plenty of conventionally suspended bikes that don't do either. There's no question

that a hub-centre

steered bike offers less feedback than a conventionally sprung one, whether it's a deficiency that's off-set by the virtues of the hub-centre ethos (like the ability of the bike to stop - particularly in the wet) is a question that's still open to debate. What you can't argue with though is the fact that it's getting closer all the time.

The big Ducati engine was again perfect for the wet conditions, thumping the Tesi out of corners fast and controllably. At its wettest the whole circuit could be taken in one gear, save for the main straight, and although the Bimota was faster than the EXUP around the back of the circuit (quick enough to pull ahead) the



**Despite a third less horsepower than the 888, the Superlight could stay with it in the wet due to its brilliant centre of gravity and low-down torque**

latter passed the former down the start/finish, going at least 15mph faster.

## DUCATI SUPERLIGHT

For such a low-tech mill the 900cc powerplant is exceptionally good, putting out



**Even in the wet, the 888 was ideally suited to the circuit and this was only the cooker. Can't imagine how good an SP5 would feel.**

smooth immediate power through a light-weight throttle. The only time that the engine bites back is when you select too low a gear; then the engine braking is so harsh that it has a habit of shocking the back end of the bike off-line as you release the clutch, although after a couple of laps it became clear that at least half the circuit could be negotiated in one ratio.

If I was asked to single out one feature of Ducati's Superlight that was outstanding it'd be the handling, and if I was asked to specify one element that made the handling so good it'd be the light-weight. The drought of kilos allows the SL to turn fast, allows it to maintain high cornering speeds, and when the bike slides it ensures that the movement's slow and controllable. So good was the Superlight in the wet that in three laps it made up a twenty-five second deficit on the 888, and every subsequent lap while it lost out thirty yards on the straight it made up the difference within the following third of the track. Weight is also one of the most important factors in respect of stopping and predictably it's possible to wipe off speed



**Almost the boys' favourite mount, the factory's only half an hour down the**



fast and controllably. Moreover, the front brake's quite noisy which actually helps you judge how far into the corners you're hanging onto the anchs

In general terms the finish is pretty crap but really the whole ethos of the Superlight is the traditional one of minimalism and those who opt for it certainly won't be disappointed.

## DUCATI 888

I've got to say that the 888 felt so good that you'd be forgiven for thinking that it'd been specifically set-up for Mugello; the gearing's absolutely spot-on and the stomp out of corners, massive (and this was only the 100bhp Strada). Large sections of the circuit can be negotiated in one gear on the GP 500s, so the tractable desmo four-stroke had no problems whatsoever cov-

can be generated out of road tyres and power can be laid down in the assurance that when the back end goes, it'll go slowly and predictably.

To get some idea of how far the bike'll lean, next time you get the opportunity have a look at how good the ground clearance is on an 888 and note the recessed position of the side stand. Although it's well tucked away, after only a couple of hours the bike at Mugello had lost half the stand lengthways from repeated grinding, which is a remarkable testimony to the Duke's stability on the limit.

Although the 888 makes up ground on the brakes it doesn't have anywhere near the sheer stopping power of the Japanese equivalents. The strength of the system, by contrast, is in the way that they afford such tremendous feedback, and can be held on, when necessary, right up to the apex while almost fully cranked over.

What makes the 888 so special though isn't any single element, it's the way that everything combines to make such an effective whole. It's the secret of the success of most Ducatis and the reason that they're able to compete so effectively with such an apparent technological deficit. Bimota's Tesi, or any other funny front end, would have a lot of explaining to do after a short ride on the Strada.

## HONDA CBR600

While the engine on the Ducati's forgiving because you can boost speed instantly mid-corner, the CBR's works well because its smooth tractability means it doesn't penalise the rider too much for being in the wrong gear. After a couple of laps on the racetrack this isn't a problem, anyway, because by then you've sorted out your gearchanges. But on the road, particularly ones that you don't know, the benefit is far greater. Being able to minimise gearchanges is important, particularly when, like



Jay on the 888, Dan on the Superlight. If you think it looks so close their wheels were touching, that's because they were. It was at this point that I got myself a large broom and a long lens....

the CBR's, your box would be better off holding oranges than ratios. At Mugello there were no such problems, although oddly on the track there often aren't. The CBR could have actually gone faster down the straight were it not for the fact that the standard gearing made it top out two-thirds of the way along.

After riding a bike like the 888 that has one of the most natural balances in the business, the limitations of the CBRs handling become apparent. The front end of the Honda was far too soft for the track and in relative terms (relative to the 888) the feedback was poor, although certainly no worse than other bikes in its own class. What this meant was that it was important to ride so that the weight was off the front end, which entailed finishing braking early, and getting on the power as quickly as possible. It's a trait you can even feel on the road and it's why fast as they are, the CBR never feels or felt as 'natural' as the FZR600.

The brakes themselves were fine on the CBR were fine, save for the limitations of the soft forks which negated much of the good work of the calipers.

Jason racing what he knows best. In the hands of one rider, the 600 turned in a time that would have almost qualified it for the following weeked's 250 GP...



at Mugello. Not surprising really when you consider the

ering the majority of the track on the throttle alone.

While the 888 lost-out to the large capacity Japanese multis on the power front, it could get on the gas five yards earlier thus making up some of the deficit it would lose on the start/finish straight on the entry to it and, more to the point, every time the big Duke blasted out of one of the numerous corners the big bang (esque) motor would lay the power down far more effectively.

Like the Superlight the 888's strong point is the handling which is characterised by rock solid stability and nigh-on perfect balance. What this means in practical terms is that unfeasably acute angles of lean



# Top 20 di Mugello

## HONDA VFR750

Although Honda's evergreen VFR750 is now getting a bit long in the tooth, the bike's strongest feature, the motor, is still up their with the best of them. While it may struggle to produce outright top end power, even against Honda's own CBR600, the engine's still tremendously tractable. On the track, particularly one with such a long straight, the mid-range tuning bias is exaggerated, unfortunately to the bike's detriment, making it feel totally breathless when revved. You're forced to ride to the bike's strength both on the track and the road, and while on the former the compensation for using the bottom-end power is reward enough, on the track it's simply not enough to match the free revving delivery of the modern transverse multis. Having said that, Honda deliberately engineered the bike's power to 100ps anyway, so it's difficult to criticise it on its own terms.

While the engine's good for its age, the real disappointment (if a somewhat predictable one) came in the handling department which left you feeling that there was much room for improvement. The ability of the VFR to get around corners is limited by two specific factors. In the first place, the ground clearance is woefully inadequate and the footpegs in particular dig in hard long before the bike reaches its limit. This causes two problems; if you enter a corner too fast the only recourse you have is to throttle hard-off. The heavy engine braking of the vee-four combined with the fact that the bike simply won't lean over any further without snapping the pegs off or grounding-out so heavily that

**Whilst well of the pace of the sports 750s, the VFR availed itself admirably, but there's no doubt you've got to be prepared to ride the wriggles if you're going to circulate quickly**



the wheels are lifted off the floor means that the poor old beastie tends to run wide. Secondly, combine this with soggy suspension and as the bike touches down the chassis hinges and weaves. The touring oriented soft rear-end in particular causes problems on the exit because even if you manage to avoid metal meeting tarmac, as you apply the power the rear end sinks and rises repeatedly wallowing as the lack of com-

on the road it's still one of the most complete all rounders available.

## HONDA FIREBLADE

After all the other bikes, the lightness and flickability, in fact the overall completeness of the of the 'Blade was a revelation. Without doubt at the centre of the bike's competence is the fact that it weighs a mere 185kgs, has a tiny wheelbase and throws out up to 125bhp at the crank.



**No doubt about it, this is the tool if you wanna qualify for a 500GP. Just whack on a set of slicks and you'll be easily within the 10% time - frightening, isn't it...**

pression damping exacts its inevitable toll.

What did come as a bit of a surprise was how good the brakes were, not just in their own right but even compared with the CBR the old bike could decelerate faster and under more control and watching Jason

squash the suspension into submission at the first hairpin turn under the application of the anchors made you realise just how effective they could be.

While the track performance of the VFR left much to criticise, it's important to remember that for the sports/tourer Mugello is an alien environment, and

With almost every individual vital statistic being superior to any other bike, and certainly the sum of the figures exceeding those of everything else, I 'spose I shouldn't have been that surprised that it was able to dive in later, turn tighter and drive out faster than anything else bar the YZF. Of course the thing that gives the Blade a unique edge is the power to weight ratio, and the first part of the equation is supplied by an incredibly compact in-line-four watercooled unit that generates clean, smooth power throughout the range. Moreover the Honda also has a clear, wide power band three quarters of the way around the tacho' dial which is handy on the track because it gives you a specific area of power to look for and use.

While the engine's fairly impressive, the chassis and suspension, considering its budget specification, is even more so, making it one of the easiest bikes in the world to ride fast. On the track it's almost uncanny the way that corners can be strung



together. The brakes can be held on late, mid corner speed is only hindered by the pegs grounding out and the power can be banded in early. If, by chance, there's a bike in the way as you close on the entry then it's possible to throttle off, tuck the bike inside and drive out straighter while the 'obstruction' is still cranked over on the exit. To give you some sort of idea of how quick the Honda is on a racetrack, one of the quicker bikes was the CBR600 and that was lapping in high 2min 20 secs while the Fireblade would circulate comfortably six seconds a lap less. On one flying lap, the Blade went round in a remarkable 2min 10.4! By comparison, the fastest times on the 500GP bikes (much lighter, 45 horsepower more, slick tyres, massive budgets, trick suspension and the best riders in the world) on the same circuit only three days later were 1min 53-58 secs. To lap to within 15 seconds (almost ten percent) on a budget sportster with road tyres is incredible when you think it would almost qualify you for a 500 GP.

## KAWASAKI ZXR750

It's no co-incidence that Kawasaki's ZXR750 has won so many National-Superbike and World-Superbike races in the past few years, and no quirk of fate that their road-bikes have benefitted from the experience of the racetrack. From the first days of competition, though, rear suspension linkage modifications have been necessary to reduce the speed that the rising rate linkage...er... rises. Although the rear end of the '93 bike has been greatly improved the continued success of the ZXR's handling is still largely attributable to the front. There isn't a single bike in production with a more solidly planted set of forks nor one that generates quite as much feedback from them. Tip the bike into a turn and you can load the front harder and harder without penalty, then screw on the throttle progressively and wait for the rear end to move. Incredible angles of lean can be generated and lines changed mid-corner more or less at will.

While the engine produces good power for a 750 (and don't forget, we were riding this year's R version) it has to be kept very distinctly on the boil. On the track this means getting your gearing right, both in terms of selection and ratios, and then basically thrashing the shit out of the thing. It's the sort of set-up that'd need to be re-gearred differently for the wet than the dry, and the penalty for getting it wrong would be far greater, than say, for their arch rivals, the Ducatis. The gearbox on the Mugello

test bike wasn't particularly good, suffering from notchiness and imprecision, although in fairness this is a fault that we've never encountered before on any of the numerous ZXRs we've tested so it'd be reasonable to assume that

this was a rogue one. The brakes were progressive and fairly sharp, as one of the Belgian testers found out to his cost in the wet, although once used to, for the weight of the bike they're superb (having said that, I also binned a ZXR in exactly the same fashion in the dry at Goodwood last year so there's no doubt that their effect is fairly sudden).

## KAWASAKI ZXR400

At 65 bhp the little ZXR was by far the least powerful bike on test, and on a two and a half mile circuit with a long straight it was frankly dwarfed. To keep any semblance of forward motion it was necessary to thrash it like Linda St Clair on ecstasy, and even then conservation of momentum was essential for respectable lap times and was primarily achieved by screwing the chin piece of your helmet to the tank before starting. Unfortunately, even caning an untuned 400 four stroke, things happen very slowly and this tends to encourage the rider to make up ground on the brakes, mid corner and on the exit. Fortunately, cornering speeds on ZXRs are compatible with this kind of antic and without reservation the little Kawasaki is among the top ten best handling mass produced road bikes in the world. There's still a question-mark over the way that the front end of the bike gets loaded mid-corner, and although there



The ZXR got buried in the sand a little early for the two erstwhile Fast Bikes scribes to give it some serious gyp but it managed a 2min 13secs circuit which was enough to give it about fourth fastest overall

wasn't one in Italy, our experience in the past has been that the FZR400 is better balanced.

As with the vast majority of bikes the limiting factor in terms of fast cornering is ground-clearance, although to be fair the little Kawasaki was far better than most in this respect. The competence of the handling is best illustrated by the fact that despite giving away two hundred CCs and fifteen horses lap times (overall) were comparable with the CBR600.

Where much of the deficit to bigger bikes is made up is on the brakes and the tiny Kawasaki was capable of gaining up to fifteen metres on the anchors at the end of the main straight alone, and at least a couple going into every other corner. Where most other bikes were braking the 400 was still full on the power, and where others were releasing the brakes, the ZXR could keep hold of them deeper and longer.

Conservation of momentum was the key to the ZXR400's meritorious performance and mid-corner speeds were mind-blowing even if the bike did sound like it was being destruction bench tested





# Top 20 di Mugello

## BIMOTA DB2

At £13,750 the DB2 is Bimota's idea of 'affordable' exoticà, and certainly at £5,000 more than Ducati's Superlight and considering that they use



**Dan claims this the best handling bike at the circuit - that just means he didn't fall off it.**

exactly the same two valves per cylinder powerplant the Bim' needed to deliver something a bit more special than a Quattro Stagioni pizza to justify its monster price tag

Although Bimota claim a couple of extra horses courtesy of exhaust and jetting modifications, in practical terms the differences over the Bologna original are negligible and would only be noticable by literally running the bikes alongside each other. Nonetheless, the Ducati sourced powerplant generates a healthy 74-ish horses, producing much of it in the mid-range, excellent for getting out of corners fast. While there's little evidence of those five huge ones having being spent on the motor, it's clear that a small fortune has been invested in quality. In typical Rimini fashion the attention to detail and the engineering is impressive but nowhere near as stunning as the riding experience itself (sounds like a brochure, Dan) and specifically the handling. The DB2 was undoubtedly the best handling bike on the track with the highest cornering speeds, using exactly the same braking points as the 400, in spite of the fact that the Bimota was travelling faster. Snap off the throttle and dive into a corner and the front discs can be held on incredibly late, although if you find you're travelling too fast it's just a case of leaning the bike further, turning it tighter and letting the rear wheel shudder as speed's scrubbed off. Go in too slow and a hit of the throttle'll have it up to speed instantly. Either way it's easy to string corners together fast, and although the DB2 gives way in excess of 30 horses to the Fireblade, the Bim could still lap to within three seconds of the 900RR.

## MOTO GUZZI DAYTONA

I've got to admit that out of all the bikes that we were scheduled to test, the one that I was least looking forward to on the track was the Guzzi Daytona. Both versions of the bike that I'd ridden on the road, standard and stage 11 kit, including this year's modified White Power model, actually handled rather disappointingly. Hit a bump and the bike would buck and twist, and on the twisty hilly sections of the track I was sure that the Guzzler would get completely out of shape. I'd watched Jason ride the '93 spec model around Mallory park a few weeks prior to this and he'd come back in pronouncing it 'toiler'. Emmett senior was out on the bike before me

and again he returned with the confirmation that it handled like a brown, slippery object from the bottom of said latrine. But I should have realised that to Jay, having been brought up on an exclusive diet of Jap multi's, any alternative be it good or bad, whether it had potential or not would be ridiculed as lavatorial.

In reality, Guzzi have produced a remarkably functional bike whose only real vice on the track is the amount of effort required to flick the bike through chicanes. Otherwise, the chassis was incredibly stable and the suspension remarkably effective. The only time I actually ran into any problems with the otherwise totally solid handling was when the exhausts touched down hard while cornering at about 90mph, lifting the rear wheel off the floor. Again, it's not a problem that'd surface on the road, and neither is it really that much of a problem on the track, particularly when you consider that at 2min 21 secs the Mandello mountain bike was circulating as fast as some of the Hamamatsu high revvers.

The power comes in low down, and while the spread is good, it's still a little breathless at the top-end. Perhaps the full-power tuned kit model would release more top end grunt, although to be fair the lap times, and the way that the bike was being ridden confidently surprised quite a few, so while the big Guzzi may feel a little out of its element on the



**Biggest surprise of the whole test was the Guzzi Daytona. It was actually in the lead after the first wet session ridden by the Italian motocross champion**

road, as a track bike it was well at home. The days of massive Guzzi shaft-launch are happily over, too, and no longer do you live in fear of headbutting pedestrians should you throttle-off mid-corner. The new, in-house, parallelogram linkage works so well that you don't even think of the shaft, and frankly if you didn't know it wasn't chain-driven before getting on the bike, you wouldn't know until you got off it again. Not only has the John Wittner bike brought the Guzzi marque into the twentieth century in terms of handling but his multi valve powerplant arguably represents the biggest technological leap forwards for the factory in a decade. In classic Moto Guzzi fashion it's odds-on that it's physically strong, and certainly in spite of it being crashed twice, it lasted the distance without incident.

## KAWASAKI ZZR1100

Long before the test even started there was little doubt that the Zed would be one of the fastest down the straight, and as it turned out, it was the fastest, encouraging braking as early as the three

hundred metre board. As well as having quite simply the most powerful powerplant, the horses arrived early and stayed late, producing tremendous thrust where-ever and whenever required. What Mugello did show up, though, was that the rest of the bike, though vastly improved this year, wasn't really up to the demands of the racetrack. Part of the reason that the first corner braking point was one of the earliest was that, not only was the bike travelling the fastest, but the brakes weren't that good. They needed a full hand to get the most out of them and these days using this amount of force means that feel is invariably compromised. In their defence, they did stop you, they didn't fade and much of the criticism for their lacklustre performance has to be levelled at the forks. Now different racetracks show up different weaknesses and in the past when we've had the 1100 at Goodwood the over-riding handling deficiency was the front end which reacted slowly to bumps causing the front wheel to travel. On the smooth Mugello surface this wasn't a problem, but what did limit the bike drastically was the lack of ground-clearance. In all fairness the ZZR is a sports tourer, and as such it's not really applicable to judge it on its sporting prowess alone, but the bike was on a racetrack and in this particular environment the positioning of the exhausts and pegs was such that the bike would grind all the way around the corners. This limited how tight the bike could turn and when it decked-out hard, it'd upset the suspension and travelled several metres sideways. While the big Zed may have felt terminally compromised, the stopwatch told a different story. At 2 min 20 seconds the ZZR was circulating fast enough to beat off challenges from a whole range of bikes from the VFR to the Triumph Sprint. But admittedly, it didn't really live up to expectations.

Incidentally, the eleven-hundred was surprisingly the only bike to suffer from a mechanical failure, fortuitously while Jason was riding it onto the straight, but nevertheless at 85mph or so in third which can still make a nasty hole in your knackers. The total destruction of the engine, we think because a con-rod let go, was blamed by Kawasaki on over-revving. But it seems unlikely that the rev limiter would have failed to operate, even if Jason had been over-enthusiastic with the throttle. More likely, with no Kawasaki mechanics on hand throughout the test, it probably lacked the care and attention the other marques got and you certainly couldn't draw any conclusions from its premature demise.

**Less than two seconds quicker round Mugello than the Guzzi Daytona - oooch, that does tell a story...**





# Top 20 di Mugello

## TRIUMPH SPRINT

Of all the bikes on test the Triumph Sprint<sup>2</sup> was arguably, ergonomically the least suited to the track. The bars are high and the pegs low, and after riding a multitude of race replicas it felt like a bath. It also took a couple of laps to get used to the riding position but once assimilated the virtues and vices of the triple at the limit



**Mock ye not - it surprised every foreign journalist who rode it...**

were apparent. For a start, it's only fair to categorise the Sprint as a sports tourer and as a dual purpster you wouldn't expect the sporting role to excell. While you'd be largely correct in that assumption it's difficult to ignore the healthy performance of the lusty Triumph three, developing power throughout the range. What's most impressive, though, isn't the power per sé, its how effortlessly and smoothly the thrust is generated, testimony to the engineers that set the carbs up in the first place. The other thing that's difficult to ignore is the rough, rapid staccato roar of the unique triple exhaust note positively encouraging you to haul the throttle open.

While I was between sessions, one of the French Moto Journal Journalists approached me and asked if I knew any of the individuals who set the bike up, because Triumph had succeeded where so many others had failed in making an incredibly intergrated and complete motorcycle. He's right; not only does the Sprint have all the ingredients necessary to make a good road bike, but they also all work well together. The demands of the road are different to those of the track, though, and certainly the Triumph's handling was limited by a lack of ground clearance and the soft suspension. Not only do the pegs go down but the track wore an amazing amount of metal off the pipes without holing them. In the process, the bike would be knocked off line and consequently it was often difficult to hold as tight a radius as was ideal for the fastest times. On a more positive note, the Sprint's new fairing worked really well, better than any other on the test and proof that the Hinckley factory are concerned as

much with practicality as styling.

## YAMAHA YZF750

Yamaha's YZF is perhaps the best suited bike of all to the twists and turns of the Mugello circuit. It has the handling and balance of a 400 with the power of a 750. While the engine doesn't spew out anywhere near the outright guts of the Fireblade, the utter neutrality and incredible weight distribution of the chassis more than makes up for it, and as a whole, it was able to register some of the lowest lap times of the day. Where the YZF was weak against the Honda was on the exits and straights, and where it was most competitive was on the twisty sections. If you came into the start/finish straight behind the Fireblade it was just possible to slipstream the Honda right to the end, at which time the superior balance and poise of the Yam, particularly on the higher speed turns would come into its own. The truth is, though, that to keep the YZF in the fight it was necessary to thrash the engine continually, and on the road and track the Blade's far more willing and inspiring engine still holds a clear advantage. The much vaunted six pot brakes are doubtless the best in the business, although



**For outright lean and cornering ability there was nothing to beat the YZF. More bollocks please...**

by the time Jason and I got to them they were suffering from the effects of continuous podgy-pasta-pinky abuse and it was impossible to employ the usual two fingered method of anchoring up, not because they weren't powerful enough, but because the rest of your hand would get trapped behind them.

## BIMOTA FURANO

Although the Furano has long since been billed as the world's fastest superbike, it's never been able to prove that claim as it's never been geared for top speed. Bimota allege 160 bhp from the FZR1000 engine, although again, the only Furano that we know to have been dynoed is the

one that we tested last month and sure enough that only put out 140 nags. Certainly the injected EXUP engine is far superior to standard, however, and the power exiting corners is tremendous. But after riding Ed Russell's normally aspirated tuned EXUP - featured elsewhere in this issue - there's still far more to come.

Thus, while the engine may be good it doesn't quite live up to the high expectations cultivated by the factory although thankfully the same can't be said of the chassis. The handling is among the very best in the business, combining absolute solidity with impeccable balance. The cornering speeds aren't quite as high as Bimota's own outstanding lightweight DB2, but then again the latter's chassis doesn't have to cope with the same high level of horsepower. Where the Furano is at its very best is on high speed corners like the last one leading onto the main straight, and in its ability to steer on the brakes. In Jason's words 'the Bimota felt brilliant in the wet and really predictable', although it couldn't have been that predictable because young Jasey-pooos overstepped the mark and ended up digging it out of the gravel trap on the entry to the second chicane in a successful bid to become the most expensive crasher in history.

## YAMAHA GTS 1000

In marketing 'speak' the GTS has always been billed as being something between a sports bike and a sports tourer, although to be honest it's never really fulfilled that promise and not surprisingly it was one of the few bikes on the test that all the journos tried desperately to avoid. The reality, though, was not as bad as the expectation and the hub-centred front end, while understeering slightly, tracked reasonably accurately and was fairly predictable. What you can't get away from, though, is that the GTS is a lard arse, and this is reflected in every facet of the Yam's performance from braking to acceleration. While the massive single disc and six piston calliper that's bolted to the front wheel of the GTS in concert with the min-

**Furano felt brilliant according to everyone who rode it, steering accurately even when on its, er, side. But it still got aced by the £7,000 Blade**





# Top 20 di Mugello

imal dive geometry may slow the bike effectively, the weight of it is still the single factor that inhibits stopping power at the limit causing the wheel to 'travel'. Unlike a conventionally suspended bike, though, the wheel is held far more rigidly which means that when it breaks away it tends not to 'tuck'.

Weight is also a factor in respect of straight line performance and on the big Yam this is a problem for getting it out of corners. Not all the blame rests with the glut of kilos, though, because the response of the FZR1000 unit to the throttle is frankly flaccid and limp. There's none of the eagerness of Yamaha's own FZR1000 and certainly none of the top-end thrust, which isn't that surprising I suppose considering that it's been de-tuned to a Euro-happy 100PS. In spite of the limitations, which are essentially touring oriented the GTS still managed to circulate reasonably fast, particularly when piloted by one or two of the do-or-die tac-



**Dual of the afternoon was between FZR and Tesi. Embarrassingly for Bimota, the production bike pipped that one too**

that the exhaust and footpegs ground-out, although this is fairly late in the proceedings. While the footpegs aren't that much of a problem, the exhaust is because it tends to lift the rear wheel off the floor which has a nasty habit of reducing the co-efficient of friction between the tyre and the track.

## TRIUMPH DAYTONA

Sadly Triumph's Daytona only lasted the morning of the first day before being completely written off. Up to that point it was circulating reasonably fast, largely because of the massively powerful 147PS engine. The carburation glitch so evident on the road wasn't noticeable around Mugello and thus the bike developed tremendous thrust throughout the range and regularly passed slower bikes down the main straight with a speed differential in excess of 15mph. Throttle response was instant and this allowed for a very fast entry into the main straight. The Nissin four pots were pretty effective, but without enough feel to hang on deep into the corners and though the Daytona steers sweetly, it never feels as though there's quite enough weight over the front wheel. Obviously there wasn't until it got parked underneath one of the concrete armcos...If it'd stayed upright long enough to have been run in the dry, the Daytona would have run out of ground clearance early on like the ZZR, but generally it performed a remarkably good job at Mugello, equal to that of its main rival, and it was only disappointing that it didn't stay in one piece long enough (it didn't even stay in a hundred pieces to be quite honest

**Like Rock Hudson, the Daytona may look pretty straight but it's as bent as they come, if you'll pardon the ol' expression - a write-off in fact.**



or anything like it) to prove itself in the dry against the Big Zed.

## KAWASAKI ZZR600

The ZZR's a bike of contrasts because there are some aspects of it that are very good, and others that are poor. By far the best feature is that engine producing what is almost certainly the highest and best spread of power in the class. The advantage this gives the ZZR is not only top-speed down the straights, but also getting on the power on the entry, where the 600 out-torques everything comparable - while other bikes are scrabbling for an extra gearchange, the ZZR simply drives away. The problem is that although the Kawasaki is quick while it's upright, it can't recover enough time on the straights to make up for the deficit it has to bear on the twisty parts of the track, and despite extremely sweet, neutral steering, it stands up fiercely under hard braking, has dangerously soft suspension and zero, and I mean zero ground clearance. We were also interested to see if we experienced the same high-speed steering oscillation on the Italian model that we'd encountered on the UK spec bike which of course, in typical Kawasaki corporate style, they denied existed. But the ZZR didn't hang together long enough for either Jason or I to get a ride.

## CONCLUSION

You can't argue with the fact that this was always a test that was going to favour the sports bikes and predictably the race-reps enjoyed the biggest accolades because quite simply, they made the job of circulating Mugello for more than five hundred miles (each person) that much more pleasurable. At the top of the pile was the Fireblade; any bike that can set a lap time to within five per cent of 500cc Grand Prix qualification, encumbered by road tyres, lights, indicators and 50 kilogrammes more to lug around) has got to be the best sports bike in the world (888 excepted which wasn't present). Second had to be Yamaha's YZF750, losing out to the Honda in terms of sheer straight line speed only and third Ducati's 888 which, though it couldn't turn as fast as the Jap' bikes and so struggled on the innumerable tight twisties, and

lacked overall power down the straight, was still one of the finest riding sensations round the track on a road bike either of us has ever experienced. The top three were very close but their group performance was undoubtedly superior to the others that deserve mention such as Bimota's Furano, (arguably joint third with the Ducati) Kawasaki's ZXR750, Honda's CBR600 and Bimota's Tesi, in that order. The others were largely curiosities as by today's standards none really belonged on a racetrack save for the DB2 that would have ranked far higher were it not for a distinct lack of horses. Frankly if the test was purely testing



**Only a very silly Italian who knows the circuit like the inside of his priest's cassock was able to do this on the GTS...**

ticians in the Italian camp who knew the circuit like the back of their mama's pasta cookbook.

## YAMAHA FZR1000EXUP

The EXUP, and its predecessor the FZR1000, spent four years undisputedly at the top of the Japanese sports bike league, and climbing on the Yam at Mugello it wasn't difficult to see why. Now while the EXUP is clearly out-classed in terms power to weight ratio, the unity of the package is enough to embarrass an awful lot of riders on ostensibly faster bikes. The engine produces ultra smooth power from as low as 2000 rpm, has a tremendous mid-range and revs out cleanly and powerfully. On the circuit generally this means that there's smooth acceleration to tap into mid-corner, and vast amounts to release on the exit.

The story of the Yam isn't the engine, though, because the superiority of the ZZR and GSXR1100 in this respect has been well documented; rather it's the way that every ounce of that power's usable via the precocious chassis.

The geometry and weight distribution is nigh on perfect which allows the bike to track effortlessly and accurately, and this, combined with a rigid chassis and rubber that's well suited to the bike, make for a very fast package. The only artificial limitation to the speed that the bike would corner at (other than weight) was the fact



# Top 20 di Mugello Results

## CONTINUED FROM Pg 60

the relative handling abilities of the bikes then the little Bim would have won by a considerable margin because the bike's ability to maintain cornering speeds was utterly uncanny.

While Yamaha's FZR1000 was wholly

competent it's weight penalty means that it's no longer as competitive as it used to be but perhaps the two real surprises of the test were the Guzzi Daytona and the Kawasaki ZZR1100 for completely different reasons. The former was far better on the track than was expected and the latter far worse.

One thing surprised us more than any other though, and it had nothing to do with the bikes but the riders - not one Italian crashed. But we have our own back when we invite them all to Donington next year. At least we might get some good weather

MAKE & MODEL	FASTEST LAP	TOP SPEED KPH	TOP SPEED MPH	(SECONDS) FASTEST CORNER	N.O OF LAPS	TOTAL MILEAGE	OIL CONSUMPTION CCs	GALLONS FUEL USED	FUEL (MPG) CONSUMPTION
HONDA CBR900RR	2'10.447	242.20	151.38	17.276	353	1157.18	NIL	47.55	24.34
BIMOTA FURANO	2'10.800	256.80	160.50	17.663	283*	927.71	NIL	39.21	23.66
KAWASAKI ZXR750	2'13.500	N/A	N/A	N/A	73*	239.30	NIL	8.8	27.19
HONDA CBR600	2'13.658	225.90	141.18	N/A	350	1147.34	200	43.96	26.10
YAMAHA YZF750	2'13.822	228.00	142.50	N/A	338*	1108.00	600	42.11	26.31
DUCATI 888	2'14.019	230.10	143.81	18.101	349	1144.07	100	40.38	28.33
BIMOTA TESI	2'16.275	225.60	141.00	18.066	331	1085.06	400	37.80	28.70
BIMOTA DB2	2'16.881	203.00	126.87	18.295	330	1081.78	500	38.0	28.46
YAMAHA FZR1000	2'17.403	244.70	152.93	18.270	344	1127.68	NIL	44.61	25.28
KAWASAKI ZR1100	2'19.216	250.50	156.56	18.257	288**	944.10	190	42.49	22.22
DUCATI S/L 900	2'20.014	210.10	131.31	18.648	337	1104.73	300	39.51	27.96
KAWASAKI ZXR400	2'20.514	213.00	133.12	18.637	329	1078.50	100	37.57	28.71
HONDA VFR750	2'22.617	214.80	134.25	N/A	345	1130.95	NIL	46.72	24.21
YAMAHA GTS	2'23.800	218.60	136.62	19.122	316	1035.89	400	38.07	27.21

## RESULTS ANALYSIS

The top fourteen bikes are listed in order of their best lap times, although what this signifies more than anything else is that the bikes at the top of the list are more suited to the particular characteristics of the Mugello circuit than the ones at the bottom of the list. There are also a number of factors to bear in mind. For a start although the ZXR750 set the third fastest lap time, it was crashed on the first day which means that it may or may not have had a fair crack of the whip, particularly as most of the fastest times were set on the last day. One of the most interesting things to note is that the bikes that set the fastest top speed, aren't necessarily the bikes that set the fastest lap times.

\* Denotes crashed. \*\* Denotes blown-u

Although the Furano was some ten miles an hour faster than the Fireblade down the straight it was still beaten. Similarly the DB2 was some 35mph slower down the straight than the Furano, (an absolute eternity on a race-track) yet still lapped to within four seconds of the bigger bike. Certainly nobody would have expected the 'gutless' DB2 to beat the ultra competent FZR1000 or indeed to thrash the almighty ZZR1100, let alone the revered 888 to have achieved only the sixth fastest speed in the hands of Italian riders on Italian soil. The star of the show? That's easy, more speed, more performance less money. Honda's CBR600