



'The first session was rubbish. I was rusty, aching and struggling to get it to change direction'

Trackday zero to hero

Our aged R1 no longer feels its age on track. Now it's just feelin' it

Photography Simon Lee



Carl sets up another nuts-out entry to the Mountain



Change in riding position helped at the Chicane



▲ Bibendum, or 'The Michelin Man' to his mates, helps Carl wave goodbye to more cash. His rear Power RS (below) isn't long for this world



2005 YAMAHA YZF-R1 CARL NEWBIGGING



ONE OF THE FIRST rides on my R1 last year was PB's Rockingham trackday. Apart from a set of part-worn Racetecs to replace some rock-hard touring tyres the bike was just as I bought it: 20,000 miles old and a bit unloved.

It didn't stop, hold a line or fuel correctly, and wheeled everywhere because the shock had way too much rebound, and stayed compressed. You could condense that all into one word: crap.

But it's essentially good underneath, and I've been chipping away at the issues over winter. The last change was a set of Michelin Pilot Power RS tyres: a strong scorer in PB's tyre test, so they sounded like a good option for the quick road/occasional track use the R1 gets. Another bonus is they qualified me for one of the rubber firm's (£50) trackdays. Bargain. Take a little bit more of my money, Monsieur Bibendum...



STORY SO FAR

Editor's brother is talked into buying an R1. Then talked into loads of mods. Now talked into a trackday. Suggestable, isn't he?

I chose Cadwell – an old favourite of mine, but not visited for three years. The first session was rubbish. I was rusty, aching, struggling to get it to change direction through the Gooseneck and Hall Bend as the forks fired back up, and not feeling comfortable. The handlebar angle isn't ideal, and it stops the master cylinder rotating low enough for my hands. I didn't have much confidence in the front to ride how I'm used to. But then, my circuit experience is mostly based on a 250, MiniTwin and a 600 – not really the style for a litre bike. The first change I made was... me.

Instead of really putting my weight forward and riding the front tyre, I sat a little further back, giving myself a bit more leverage but also loading the forks differently. It made a huge difference – not just through the direction changes, but everywhere. I had better feel for the bike, it responded more smoothly, held a line better and I could get on the gas better. Not ideal: but I've not got around to the suspension overhaul it really needs, so riding around it was good enough for now.

The brake overhaul, new Black Widow half-system with matching reflash, Cordona quickshifter and the just-fitted Sigma slipper clutch all came to the fore once I'd got my act together. The throttle response was much better, and the baffless cans went through noise testing at 102dB. The quickshifter and slipper clutch made the biggest difference, though.

The quickshifter felt natural instantly, making it easier to hang on along the straights and not slide back along the slippery seat. No missed gears, just slick shifts and good lever action.

I almost forgot the Sigma clutch was there, because it feels like that's how a bike should behave. No backing in no matter how hard or early I went back through the gears, the revs only rising slightly as I went down the gears. There is the option of adjusting it to slip more, but as it's supplied it retains a useful little bit of engine braking while cancelling out negative effects. Before, it snaked around on the brakes and needed earlier, more gradual stopping to enter corners in control. It really

helped at corners like the downhill left of Mansfield; it'd be a nightmare without it.

I've never tried Michelins before, but I was impressed. They did start getting chewed up on the right shoulder towards the end of the day, but despite the racy-looking tread pattern they're biased towards road riding, and aren't intended for the sort of intense hammer I was giving them. They weren't letting go or snapping sideways, just spinning and moving a bit. I liked the confidence they gave through Hall Bends, and I could really get that little squirt of throttle on through the second right, over the crest. Without being too big-headed, I barely got passed, and was putting a torquey 160bhp through the rear tyre. If you or your bike ask a little less, they're a perfectly good road tyre that will handle moderate track use.

Michelin put on a good event, with not-too-full groups, so I got quality track time. The only problem is my rear tyre is a bit toasted, so they'll be selling me another before long. Crafty old Bibendum... 🍪