

effortlessly and as sharply as you like, while stability is uncompromised at any speed. You can throw the Hornet around like the nimblest of nimble things - cog down a couple of gears, throw the plot in, and come screaming out the other side all goose bumpy. That four-piston Nissin caliper grabs the big (300mm) single disc predictably, with plenty of stopping power and a nice, easy action, controllable enough to gently scrub off speed or get the front end hopping against the tarmac, you suit yourself.

The rear end is an apparent step backwards as well, with the single rear shock mounted directly to that gorgeous piece of milled billet alloy which makes up the front of the swingarm - no rising rate linkages here. But don't be fooled that this is simply a low-tech solution. Shock technology has come a long way in recent years, and rising rate can be built directly into the shock itself. The very latest off-road bikes are utilising similar technology, and if it's good enough for motocross, the little Hornet shouldn't go amiss. And it also means of course that there's none of those nasty (and expensive) little bearings and bushes to maintain and replace. The shocker itself has only pre-load adjustment, seven positions in all. It was set at number 2 originally, and although handling wasn't the least bit affected, psychologically I couldn't get my head around the fact it would corner so well with so much movement. So I jacked up to number 4 to tighten it all up a tad. Yeh, I know, after 20 years of

meditation I should be more Zen-like in my motorcycle maintenance, but old habits die hard, and I just felt like I could push it harder with it all set a bit tauter. And speaking of pushing it, the Hornet is one of those bikes that always makes you feel you could have gone round that corner just a little bit faster... Despite the mega-wide rubber at both ends, the bike refuses to 'white-line' or track down the overbanding in the wet or dry, and simply sticks to the road no matter where you put it.

And now I sit back from the computer screen and think, have I over-hyped the Hornet? Nope, can't honestly say that I have. I don't think you could over-hype it, actually, it really is that good. It looks the business, pulling an appreciative crowd wherever you park it. The finish quality on the whole is pretty good - the headstock welding on the steel box section frame could be prettier, but with so little frame showing, and what there is painted in a gunmetal grey which makes it pretty much invisible, it's hardly noticeable. And you do get neat red colour-coded plug leads... It performs equally as well as it looks, being beautifully effortless to ride, and yet way bloody enjoyable at the same time. It's practical for day to day commuting or fast scratching, yet comfortable enough on longer runs (at least, on the sixty-odd miles of the longest trip I was going to make on the few freezing cold January days I had the bike). You ain't going to bungee much luggage onto it, not with the high level pipe, anyway, but it'll take a magnetic tank bag okay. It might be a

bit of a bugger to keep clean, but it isn't January all year round, and when it rains you do get wet (which applies to even the most fully faired bike if you ride it far enough), but the Hornet's ultimate appeal is that it's just so damn whizzy - something you do actually have to experience to fully understand. Alright, if you're into low revving sluggers, or mega-grunty torque monsters, this maybe isn't the bike for you - unless, perhaps, you're open minded enough to sample a new experience (and then, of course, the Hornet has you, whizz addiction being a seductive pleasure...).

And if all that seems too much, well, hang onto your hats, 'cos I've saved the best bit till last. With the exchange rates prevailing at the time of writing, West Coast will order you a Hornet, brand new, direct from Japan, for just £3995. Er, is that right? Yep, less than four grand. Exotica has never been as affordable. Form an orderly queue, boys and girls...

## Odgie

PS. Yeh, and I managed to get right through the write up without once mentioning the back tyre is the same size as a Fireblade. Oh, bugger...

PPS. Oh, and what if Honda do build that 400 Super Six we see a tantalising glimpse of this issue? The Hornet has already set the style, just add two extra cylinders and you're out to 375cc, a slight overbore would give you a full 400. And Honda haven't spent much on R&D for years now. Someone has to break new (old?) ground soon. Mmmmm, the prospect's so yummy I'm about to burst...

...so much fun to ride it  
makes you wonder why  
150bhp bikes exist

