

ROAD TEST

WHICH USED 600 IS FOR YOU?

New models and some keen deals make this a great time to buy. But make sure you read this first

ENTER any bike showroom and you'll see a staggering choice of used 600s from supersports to super commuters.

It's the most popular class in the UK and recent new versions such as Honda's CBR600RR and Suzuki's fine SV650, have led many owners to trade in, so the choice is now wider than ever.

Whatever your demands – sports bike, all-rounder, or comfy commuter – there is a 600 to suit your needs and, if you

know what to look out for, there are real bargains to be had, too.

To help you make that choice, we tested 11 used examples to find the ultimate sportster, best novice bike, supreme long-distance machine, most useful urban tool, best budget bike, and best all-rounder.

Buying used is very different to purchasing new. It's rare to find standard bikes as most owners personalise them in some way.

Then there's condition to consider and

whether it's been raced, stolen, crashed or even written-off.

Just as importantly, few secondhand bikes perform as well as new ones – even after they've been serviced. Wear and tear takes its toll on suspension linkages and head bearings, brake pistons can fur

and corrode, and engines wear out even if treated to the very best oil.

MCN swooped on D&K Motorcycles in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs, to find the 11 600s on our shopping list. Yamaha's R6, Fazer and Thundercat, Suzuki's GSX-R, Bandit, GSX and SV650S,

Honda's CBR and Hornet, Triumph's TT600 and Kawasaki's ZX-6R.

Most were a year or two old and official UK bikes. But all are representative of what's available.

We inspected them, tested them and rated them according to their age, condition, performance (compared to both an original example and the very latest machines), availability and value. Over the next six pages are the results. Don't buy without reading this first.

SUZUKI GSX600F

YAMAHA R6

YAMAHA THUNDERCAT

SUZUKI BANDIT 600

HONDA CBR600F

TRIUMPH TT600

SUZUKI SV650S

HONDA HORNET 600

YAMAHA FAZER 600

KAWASAKI ZX-6R

SUZUKI GSX-R600

HONDA CBR600F-1**92%****AWARD**
BEST BUY

THERE may have been two updates since, but the CBR600F is still a superb buy

THE FACTS**First on sale:** 2000**Updates:** None, model replaced 2001**Insurance group:** 14**Known faults:** Some noisy top-ends on early bikes sorted under warranty.**Common mods:** Performance end can, braided brake hoses, race pads, aftermarket screen, racing fork springs**Price when new:** £6199-£6550**Used guide price:** £4000-£5095**Engine:** 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, fuel injection**Chassis:** Aluminium twin-spar frame, fully adjustable front and rear suspension**Our example:** U.S.-registered in 2000, U.S. parallel import, 26,800 miles, Vance & Hines race can, visually very good condition**Likely price for this bike:** £4000

HERE'S a bike that's never seen road salt. This U.S.-spec CBR600 – dubbed the F4, Stateside – was in surprisingly fresh condition considering its unusually high mileage (which accounts for the low price). There was next to no evidence of corrosion and all bearings, hoses and seals were perfect.

So it is a pity to see fairing scuffs and subsequent touch-ups which, though minor, immediately knock down the value.

On the up side, our example had a new pair of Dunlop D207 Sportmax tyres and a recent chain removing some of the worry about the need to change consumables in the near future.

It also came with a tankpad and a clean, recent, Vance & Hines titanium race can.

As expected, considering the bike's mileage, the discs were slightly worn – though nowhere near their service limit. The bike was also still to get a UK age-

related registration plate. But we all fell in love.

As MCN test rider and national 250cc club champion Bruce Dunn put it: "I'd buy it on sound alone, this pipe's wicked, very throaty."

"The handling is absolutely spot-on. There's no evidence of tired springs even though the standard ones are still fitted."

"The engine is also good and the pipe matches it well. There are no flat spots,

though the throttle is a touch hesitant suggesting it needs a service.

"The brakes feel a little tired but that's just fluid and maybe a change of pads. They don't bind and there's little corrosion."

Just as Honda's new CBR600RR takes top accolades against its peers, so does its forerunner – the UK-spec CBR600F and the U.S.-spec CBR600F4 – against its rivals, the previous generation of R6s and ZX-6Rs.

The CBR's not as sporty as those bikes but it is more versatile, offering better comfort, build quality, and less radical engine manners. It also has quite good weather protection considering its small size, making it the best long-distance 600.

On the track it's a touch limited by its ground clearance – pegs, boots and fairing lowers can grind away – but that won't matter to the 90% of owners who will never venture on to a circuit.

SUZUKI GSX-R600R-K**90%****THE FACTS****First on sale:** 2000**Updates:** None**Insurance group:** 14**Known faults:** Riding position too extreme for some, front disc wears rapidly**Common mods:** End can, screen, Dynojet kit, braided hoses, race brake pads.**Price when new:** £6899-£6999**Used guide price:** £4550-£5395**Engine:** 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, fuel injection**Chassis:** Aluminium twin-spar frame, fully adjustable front and rear suspension**Our example:** Y-plate (2001), UK bike, 10,767 miles, visually excellent**Likely price for this bike:** £4600

THE GSX-R has been overtaken on the road, but on the track is still supreme

**AWARD**
BEST SPORTS

THE GSX-R is many times winner of MCN's 600cc Sport bike of the Year award and continues to rule the 600-class roost – at least as far as lap times are concerned.

Buy a GSX-R600 and you own a machine that is capable of shadowing both the GSX-R750 and old GSX-R1000 around almost any circuit you can think of thanks to its exceptional cornering ability, strong (though wooden) brakes and a mad-for-it engine.

The Suzuki is reliable, robust and good value for money – and can rack up big miles without fuss.

Ours was a typical example with mint paint and good mechanics. It needed a good clean and the

discs were showing signs of wear. Many owners change discs.

Ours had aftermarket 'GSX-R'-embossed footpeg hangers, crash mushrooms and a pair of recent Michelin Pilot Sports with no evidence of hard riding. Unmarked hero blobs were another good sign.

The only mechanical blemish was to the rear shock, which had begun to corrode because the bike lacks a hugger to protect the suspension.

Our test ride showed it needed a service – the gearbox was stiff and the brakes extra wooden, but it's nothing the dealer wouldn't put right, with perhaps softer pads, before purchase time.

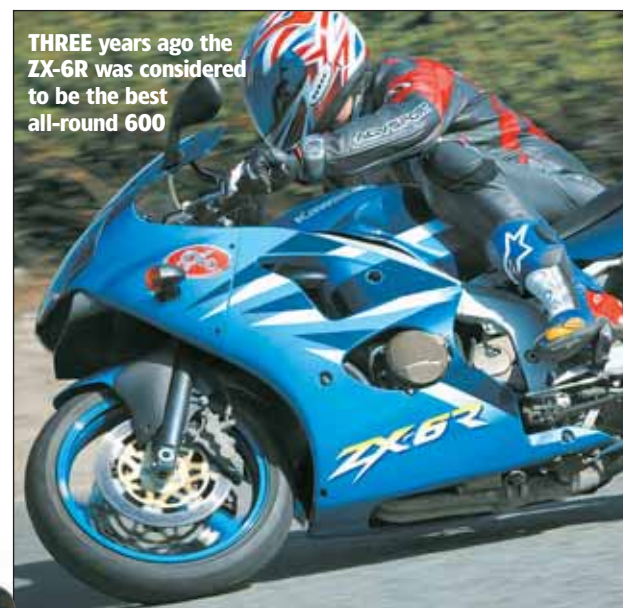
The faults end there. Although the junior GSX-R is a brain-out hooligan's bike, crucially (for those who value their licence) it can also be ridden at more sedate speeds with ease.

Aside from the very first GSX-R600s, which were a touch peaky, it has excellent road manners – and is predictable and easy to ride as a result.

With all that performance available for an increasingly moderate price, the GSX-R scoops our Best Sports award.

KAWASAKI ZX-6R-J**88%****THE FACTS****First on sale:** 2000**Updates:** None, replaced by 636 in 2002**Insurance group:** 14**Known faults:** None**Common mods:** Double-bubble screen, performance end can, braided steel brake hoses**Price when new:** £6495-£6595**Used guide price:** £3650-£4295**Engine:** 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 36mm Mikuni carbs**Chassis:** Aluminium twin-spar frame, fully adjustable front and rear suspension**Our example:** 51-plate (2001), UK bike, 7624 miles, visually excellent condition**Likely price for this bike:** £4200

THREE years ago the ZX-6R was considered to be the best all-round 600



THE Kawasaki ZX-6R sits midway between the long distance capabilities of a Honda CBR600F and the more sporting nature of a Yamaha R6, making it a viable alternative to both but not better than either.

Our test example clearly had a race can before it was put up for sale – the silencer adorning it looked too new compared with the rest of the machine – and there were some small scratches on the fairing.

But it was in excellent condition in every other respect, with a clean engine bay and suspension linkages, and a noticeable absence of corrosion

except on some very minor fasteners.

The hero blobs on the footpegs had yet to be touched down and a pair of new Michelin Pilot Sport tyres had been fitted.

Surprisingly, the rear brake lever was bent, though no other damage could be found. Minor scratches on its tip suggest it was trapped against a wall while reversing out of a garage, or similar.

A test ride showed that it rode like new, too. And that, allied to the bike's low secondhand price, makes it a very tempting buy.

That low price is due largely to the ZX-6R being twice updated since this model – once with the ZX636, and now with the race-focused 2003 ZX-6R.

That has led to confusion among buyers reflected in poorer sales in recent years compared to bikes like the CBR and R6. Consequently, there aren't as many around as you might think, making haggling more difficult.

ZX-6Rs don't stay in showrooms long despite their age, because they are good value, well-engineered and appeal to a wide audience.

Continues over

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ROAD TEST

TRIUMPH TT600 80%

THE FACTS

First on sale: 2000
Updates: Colours, top-end, fuel mapping (2001)
Insurance group: 14
Known faults: Early bikes suffered from poor fuel-injection mapping
Common mods: End can
Price when new: £5999-£6649
Used guide price: £3625-£4475
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, fuel injection
Chassis: Aluminium beam frame, fully adjustable front and rear suspension
Our example: Y-plate (2001), UK bike, 2456 miles, visually average condition
Likely price for this bike: £4200



A BIT old hat, maybe, but it has its merits



range fuel glitch characteristic of early TTs, suggesting that Triumph's later and improved remap hadn't yet been downloaded to the electronic brain of this example.

That poor throttle response was compounded by some slack in the drivetrain and the gearbox felt worn and vague, too.

The motor was also rumbly at low speed and the rear suspension linkage needed regreasing. And all of this was despite the bike's low mileage and shows clearly that where and when a bike is ridden is often more important than the overall distance it has covered.

All of that adds up to a bike in desperate need of a service and something of a disappointment to a prospective buyer. Simply, try the CBR, R6 or GSX-R for size before you part with your dough.

OUR example had a disappointingly large scratch on the tank and top yoke and there were scuffs on the fairing stickers, too.

But otherwise the Triumph was clean and in good condition mechanically. It also had a recent pair of matching Bridgestone BT010 tyres, a new chain, unscuffed hero blobs on the footpegs and good condition discs, pads and head bearings.

Our test ride showed it still had the low rev

YAMAHA R6 89%

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1999
Updates: Colours, gearbox and styling (2001), all-new fuel-injected version (2003)
Insurance group: 15
Known faults: Grabby clutch, clunky gearbox
Common mods: Dynojet kit, end can, braided hoses, race pads
Price when new: £6299-£6799
Used guide price: £3825-£5195
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 37mm carbs
Chassis: Aluminium twin-spar, fully adjustable front and rear suspension
Our example: X-plate, UK bike, 14,753 miles, visually excellent
Likely price for this bike: £4100



MOST R6s have a hard life



dealers can get their hands on them, so you're never going to be in a strong bargaining position. No matter, finding a mint used one at the right money should be reward enough – if you like track-bred sports bikes, the R6 is one of the best available.

The engine feels stronger in the upper midrange than rivals of its time, and it's beautifully unstressed too. But the clutch springs are weak and are best changed and the gearbox is notchy.

Our test bike behaved faultlessly, with great engine manners, precise handling, and strong brakes despite worn pads.

But it isn't enough to earn the R6 the accolade of Best Sports Bike. Its suspension is built down to a price and simply isn't as good as the GSX-R600's.

It's a close call, though.

THIS R6 was totally standard and, if the front Avon Azaro hadn't been worn out, would have been perfect. A Datatool alarm and crash mushrooms are fitted and the discs, calipers, forks and paint are all spot-on. But a closer inspection showed the silencer had been recently refitted, suggesting an aftermarket end can had been in use before. However, the bike ran perfectly.

R6s fly out of showrooms as quickly as

YAMAHA FAZER 600

89%

THE Fazer has always scored highly against its Bandit and Hornet rivals because it is more powerful and has better handling and a decent fairing.

It still looks fresh, build quality is high and you even get the same brakes as the R6.

Our example was standard, apart from a tankpad and half-used BTO10 tyres. Pads and discs were unworn, it had good chain and sprockets and perfect paint.

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1998
Updates: Colours, fuel tank & seat (2000), new fairing and clocks (2002)
Insurance group: 12
Known faults: None
Common mods: End can, braided hoses
Price when new: £4699-£4999
Used guide price: £2525-£3775

Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 33mm Mikuni carbs
Chassis: Steel double cradle, preload adjustment on forks, preload and rebound damping on rear shock
Our example: R-plate (1998), UK bike, 17,387 miles, visually good
Likely price for this bike: £2550

The only marks were a scuffed bar end and scratched torque arm and caliper.

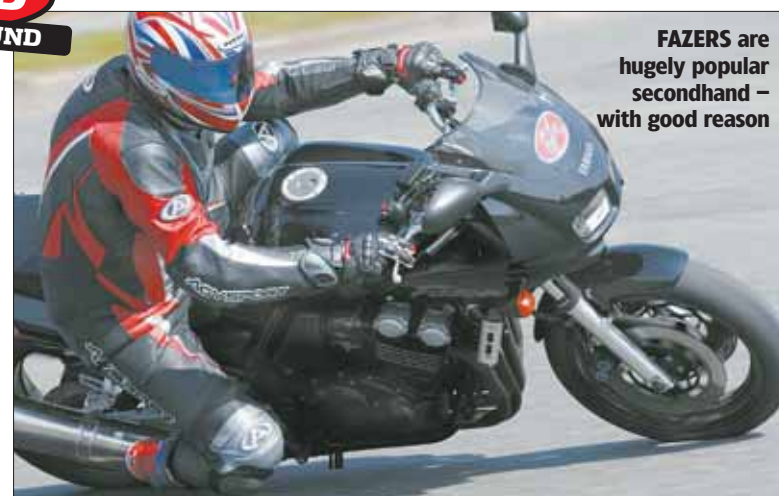
It proved our Best All-round 600 during our test, doing its best to keep with the Hornet through town, the CBR on the motorway and the GSX-R on twistier roads.

The engine was smooth, the brakes sharp

and the handling taut and precise.

Fazers have sold in huge numbers, so there are loads around but don't expect much of a deal as there is still big demand.

Plenty will come with aftermarket parts, though a loud race can isn't always what you want on a true all-rounder.

AWARD
BEST ALL-ROUND

FAZERS are hugely popular secondhand – with good reason

SUZUKI BANDIT 600

86%

ASIDE from a small blemish on the silencer and scuffed right-hand bar end, the Bandit's finish was perfect.

The chrome and paint were pristine and highly polished. The whole machine had been carefully and continuously cleaned.

Aside from mini carbon indicators and a tankpad, it was completely standard, too.

And best of all, it's cheap. Look at the

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1995
Updates: Colours, centre-stand added (1997), adjustable rebound damping added (1999), new model (2000).
Insurance group: 11 (unfaired, group 10)
Known faults: Leaking fork seals.
Common mods: End can, Renthal bars.
Price when new: £3749-£4799

Used guide price: £1775-£3550
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 32mm Keihin carbs.
Chassis: Steel double cradle, non-adjustable forks, preload adjustable shock.
Our example: Y-reg (2001), UK bike, 1955 miles.
Likely price for this bike: £3100

price and be impressed – used Bandit 600s offer excellent value for money.

The road test proved even more inspiring. Tester Dunn quipped: "It's that good you could sell it to your mum and not feel guilty."

Here is a perfect example of a good used Bandit, with as-new handling, engine

manners, power and brakes.

They're also a popular choice among new full-licence holders because they're so easy to live with. Though everyone from commuters to stunt aces use them, too.

Parts are cheap, reliability is exceptional and servicing costs are low, making a used Bandit the Best Budget 600.

AWARD
BEST BUDGET

USED Bandits are plentiful, cheap and reliable

SUZUKI SV650S

83%

BUILD quality on the SV is moderate to good. In winter they do suffer some salt corrosion, but generally, they pass the test – especially when you consider how little they cost to begin with.

This example is a typical clean, used SV and is standard, apart from some recent Bridgestone BTO10s and some aftermarket fairing lowers which don't quite match the lustrous red from the factory.

There was evidence of corrosion on the

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1999
Updates: Colours, new model (2003)
Insurance group: 10 (unfaired group 9)
Known faults: Rear shock seals have been known to fail
Common mods: Aftermarket fairing lowers, end cans, rear shock
Price when new: £4299-£4799

Used guide price: £2850-£3875
Engine: 645cc, 8v 90-degree V-twin, dohc, six gears, 39mm Mikuni carbs
Chassis: Aluminium trellis, pre-load adjustment on forks and rear shock
Our example: T-plate (1999), UK bike, 8205 miles, visually clean
Likely price for this bike: £3100

downpipe and a small dent in the tank.

But unmarked hero blobs suggest that it has had a fairly easy life.

It still felt new, despite four years service under its belt. That confirmed the low mileage reading was likely to be genuine.

The engine responded cleanly and the brakes behaved impeccably.

Suzuki has had the middleweight sport twin market largely to itself over the last few years – Ducati's lower-powered M600 excepted – and the SV has sold well.

They are a popular choice and there are plenty about. But it misses out on the Best Novice Choice accolade as the Thundercat simply fulfils the criteria better.



FIND a good used SV650 and there are few better first big bike buys

HONDA HORNET 600

87%

THIS is not an example of a good, clean Hornet. With mismatched tyres – a worn-out BT57 on the rear and a BTO10 on the front – as well as pitted forks, bottom yoke and downpipe, missing mirror, scratch on the rear bodywork and a scored shock damper rod, it had clearly been ridden hard in all weathers.

Yet it surprised us on the test ride. It

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1998
Updates: Colours, new 17-in front wheel (2000), new model (2003)
Insurance group: 12
Known faults: None
Common mods: Race brake pads, braided steel brake hoses
Price when new: £4195-£4995

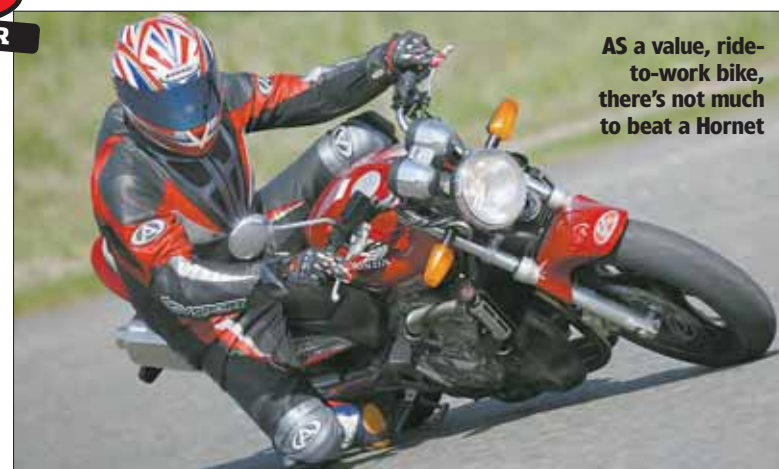
Used guide price: £2375-£3495
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 42mm Mikuni carbs
Chassis: Steel spine frame, pre-load adjustment on rear shock
Our example: T-plate (1999), UK bike, 13,612 miles, visually average
Likely price for this bike: £2400

handled well considering the shock wear and worn out rear tyre. And the engine proved strong, excelling through town and in Newcastle-under-Lyme's urban outreaches.

The brakes were good, too, despite

needing new pads. It felt like it had been serviced regularly but used hard in-between.

As a ride-to-work bike the Hornet is hard to beat, with more midrange than a sports 600, and a livelier feel and more nimble handling than earlier alternatives.

AWARD
BEST COMMUTER

AS a value, ride-to-work bike, there's not much to beat a Hornet

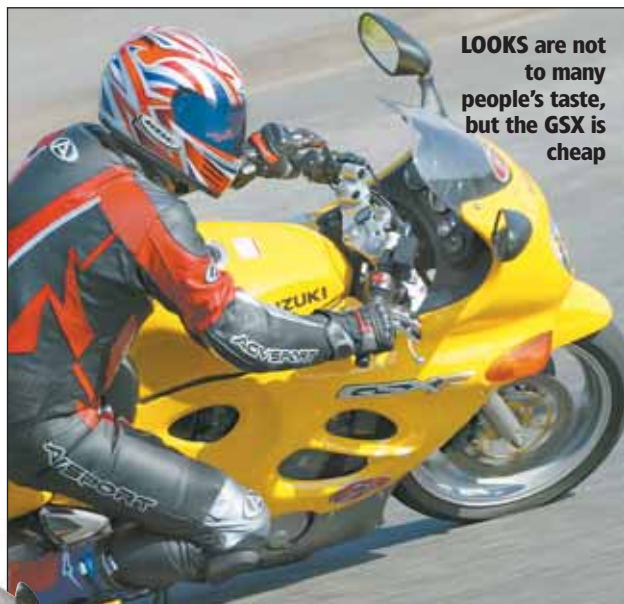
ROAD TEST

SUZUKI GSX600F

76%

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1998
Updates: Colours only
Insurance group: 11
Known faults: Poor build quality and durability
Common mods: Tankpad, stiffer fork springs
Price when new: £4239-£5499
Used guide price: £1495-£3295
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc in-line four, six gears, 4 x 32mm Keihin carbs
Chassis: Steel twin-spar frame, adjustment for preload and rebound damping on both the front forks and rear shock
Our example: T-plate (1999), UK bike, 5263 miles, visually average condition
Likely price for this bike: £2750



LOOKS are not to many people's taste, but the GSX is cheap



sold by dealers, the GSX usually takes longer to find a new home.

Our model is typical of its age with rust on the swingarm, brake torque arm, banjo bolts and downpipes – and furring on the rear brake lever, too.

Its Michelin Macadam's were part-worn, the fork stanchions pitted, the mirror scuffed and there were marks on the right-hand fairing.

At least the hero blobs were unmarked and the discs, chain and sprockets were in good condition.

The bike rode well for a used GSX but was typically uninspiring. It is reluctant to indulge in hard cornering and doesn't have good enough suspension to play with the other bikes. The engine is also down on power by comparison and delivery is bland at best.

But as cheap, everyday transport the GSX makes an OK commuter, though plenty of bikes are better.

THE budget GSX continues to sell, though not in great numbers. It has never matched the rival Thundercat or Kawasaki ZZ-R600 either for power, handling finesse, smoothness or braking ability. But it is cheap and getting a deal on a new one, or late secondhand model is easy.

Where the majority of the 600s here will be quickly

YAMAHA THUNDERCAT

THE FACTS

First on sale: 1996
Updates: Colours, silencer and alarm wiring (1998)
Insurance group: 14
Known faults: Grabby clutch
Common mods: Aftermarket rear shock, stiffer fork springs, heavier clutch springs, performance end-can
Price when new: £5799-£6995
Used guide price: £2775-£4725
Engine: 599cc, 16v dohc inline four, six gears, 4 x 36mm carbs
Chassis: Steel twin-spar, fully adjustable front and rear suspension
Our example: Y-plate (2001), U.S. parallel import, 7047 miles, visually mint condition
Likely price for this bike: £4150

AWARD
BEST NOVICE CHOICE



still on the standard settings – suggesting that this example hadn't been ridden hard. The footpegs' hero blobs were also unmarked which backs this up.

A scruffy tankpad and a mismatched pair of Bridgestone tyres – a BT020 on the rear and a BT57 up front – complete the picture.

Despite these criticisms, the Yamaha rode almost perfectly, without complaint or shortcomings from the handling, engine or clutch. It even fired up on the button first time.

We did detect a touch of brake judder, however, which we traced to loose head bearings. The brake discs themselves were fine.

Because the Thundercat's suspension is a little soggy, most average-weight riders need to dial in almost all of the compression and rebound damping available front and rear – though not the preload,

THE example we found at D&K Motorcycles was fairly typical of a used Thundercat, although it looks a little unusual because, being a U.S.-specification import, its silencer has a black finish.

Closer inspection revealed there was a touch of rust on the end of the swingarm and the shock was

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which usually only needs one more turn on the rear and a third to half of its travel at the front.

Once this is done, the Thundercat's handling is transformed, enabling it to hold even better lines and letting it turn-in with a lot less effort, too.

The engine is a strong point both in terms of outright power and in build-quality – although the clutch did get grabby when hot, which is typical of many Yamahas.

The steering geometry is relaxed compared to more focused sportsters like the R6, which aids stability and predictability, and ensures heart-stopping headshaking moments from the bars are almost non-existent.

If there's a bike that deserves to be called the Best Novice Choice, it's the Thundercat. It has the heart of a lion, the manners of a domestic moggy, and a nimble feel that belies its large proportions. It is both surprisingly fast on twisty roads and easy to get along with at the same time.

Golden rules when buying used

1 Never buy a bike that doesn't have a logbook, or give your cash to anyone with a name different to the one on the form. It's the bike's identity paper.

2 Engine and frame numbers must match those in the logbook – and don't forget to check the registration mark, too.

3 A check for outstanding finance, as well as previous accident history should be mandatory. MCN provides a Bike Check service on 01722-435555. It costs £33.95.

4 Buying from a dealer usually costs more but helps you sleep easier at night – there's more chance of getting your cash back if it's a lemon.

5 A full service history adds value. If it's missing, you'll need to scrutinise the vendor if it's a private sale, or insist on a full service and an inspection report if you're dealing with the trade. Unless the shop originally sold and serviced a bike with gaps in its history, the salesman can't know how well it's been looked after.

6 Cosmetics are vital. Don't persuade yourself that big scratch on the tank doesn't matter – it will when you come to selling the bike on again. Mint bodywork and paint are almost as important as the full service history.

7 The canniest vendors insist on a full asking price cash deposit before letting prospective purchasers take a test ride.

Check with them if that is the case before you set off to view a machine. Drop a private seller's machine during a test ride and you'll be buying it. Dealers usually demand a photo ID and a copy of your driving licence – both parts of it.

8 Cleanliness on its own does not necessarily mean a bike is in good condition. You should check beneath the polish by scrutinising bearings, discs, hoses, radiator fins, chain and sprockets, tyres, gear linkages, exhaust headers, fork seals, shock linkages, footpegs, fairing lowers and crankcase mating surfaces to check for wear, corrosion and leaks. Take your time and don't feel rushed just because the vendor is hovering over you.

9 Always ask if anything has gone wrong with the bike, if it has been dropped or crashed, whether the mileage is genuine and why the vendor is selling. It's an offence to lie to secure a sale and you have good comeback if problems that were there before you bought it subsequently show-up without being declared. For proof, the conversation needs to be witnessed by a third party.

10 Look unimpressed. Unless the vendor's been inundated with calls, he'll immediately realise he needs to work hard to secure the sale. That usually involves dropping the price.

11 Always haggle – it almost always works. Drop the initial bidding price by at least 10 per cent – it's not uncommon to get £350 off a £3500 bike.

12 When dealing privately, unless you're sure it's the bike for you and it's likely to be snapped up by someone else, tell the vendor you're off to look at another one a few miles away. Any reluctance to drop the price will wane as he sees the sale slip away.

13 Avoid high-mileage bikes unless they're cheap. Though they might be in as good condition, or even superior mechanically to low-mileage bikes only used for short start-stop journeys, they'll be a lot harder to sell on afterwards. Used price guides routinely drop values by 10 per cent or more if a bike exceeds an average annual mileage – around 6000 miles for a 600.

14 An independent inspection by a qualified engineer, or even an experienced mate in a bikeshop is almost certain to throw up faults you didn't see. Even a know-nothing mate will spot something you've missed. Take someone!

15 Shops are less likely to drop the asking price but getting something for nothing is quite easy – insist on a service and, if you're in the market for it, ask if there's any chance of getting a new lid or pair of boots thrown in. If the answer's still no, ask if he'll let you have them at trade price if you guarantee to buy the bike.

THANKS TO D&K Motorcycles, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs for the loan of all 11 bikes. D&K claims to be the biggest secondhand dealer in the country with over 2000 models in stock. Contact them on: 01782-861100.



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