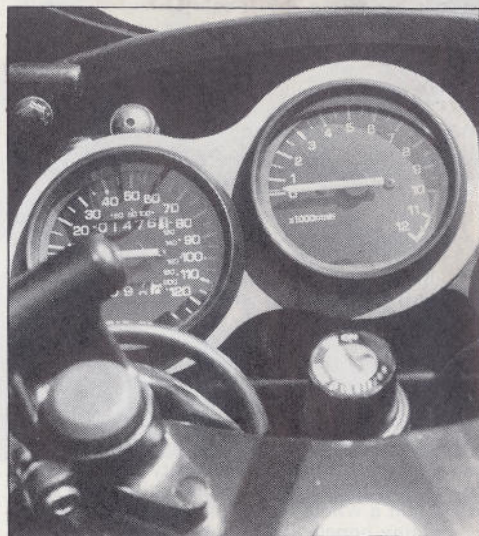


# Yamaha RD350F

have to carry spare spark plugs under the seat any more. The bike we had also seemed to vibrate less than the last 350 we tried, and what's more it was perfectly happy to potter around for long periods at 2-3000rpm without oiling up or generally misbehaving. Fuel consumption was also superior to the bikini-faired '83 model, with high 40's and even low 50's regularly attainable. Even when it was carrying me up to Heysham in record time (less than 2½ hours from the start of the M1 in London, including two fuel stops) consumption never dipped below 40mpg. A pressing ferry-catching schedule and the chaos of TT week led to less than accurate measuring of two-stroke oil consumption (guess who was going to do it on the way back?) but the RD is less abstemious in this respect. I seemed to be lobbing litre bottles into the underseat tank every 200 miles or so, and even then the tank wasn't brimming. Still, at least you can use the cheap stuff with impunity — that's a trick new ingredient they put in the oil these days, hum.

Trying to think of ways to improve the RD's mechanical parts is a slightly frustrating exercise. Of course, a Stan Stephens fast road tune would up the ultimate performance, but possibly at the expense of some of the RD's surprisingly good bottom-end tractability. A more obvious case for treatment would be the transmission, methinks. Although there is not much driveline slop, the gearchange action is curiously slow and slappy for such a razoredge sportster. I had no problems with the clutch, despite mercilessly slipping it not just from standstill but also within the gears for instant overtaking power, but if I were an owner I'd try and look after this component, since Yamaha clutches are not the best under pressure.

Another area for improvement is the suspension, particularly the rear. Everything is relative, especially so on a machine like the RD which is without question one sharp-handling



bike, but it's because the handling is so good that you tend to notice these relatively minor imperfections. The linkages controlling the movement of the single Monocross shock are designed to impart a degree of rising rate to the suspension. A good idea; all the more regrettable therefore that the spring itself is too soft for the job. Two-up, with zero luggage, even maximum preload isn't enough to prevent excessive dip at the back, and badly compromised ground clearance as a natural consequence of that. Worse still, the problem is compounded by a total absence of any form of damping control. On less than perfect roads it's all too easy to get the bike locked into a yumping sine-wave motion and the suspension in severe difficulties. Ridden solo, the problem's not so obvious, with the second of the five preload settings seeming about right (although of course there wasn't that much difference between "hard" and "soft" anyway). Adjustment is effected by a hex wrench and extension bar squeezed onto a remote nut behind the right-hand sidepanel. From there the torque goes via a belt to the shock. There's a new belt for '85 following a spate of breakages on the earlier models.

As a solo bike though there's nothing finer for a good burn. New lower profile tyres stick faster than JC's wallet hand, and the RD still sets the standards for flickability. You kind of get used to its supreme tautness and manoeuvrability, almost to the point of taking it

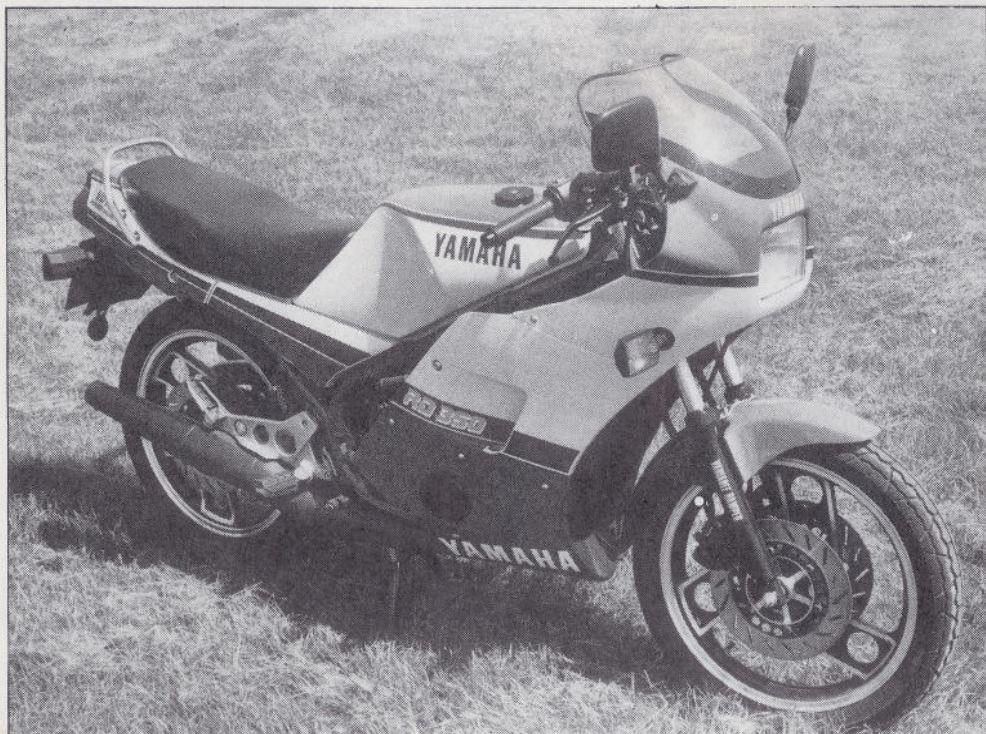
for granted — until you climb aboard the next test bike. In my case this was a rubber-framed, rubber-handlebarred Harley-Davidson police bike. To say the contrast was vivid is a bit like describing the TT Rock Night as a discreet soiree suitable for all the family, ie not really a mot just. Everything on an RD is hard and fast. The braking system was once described by JC as "fantastic" (that lad's definitely got a way with words) in the days when only the back disc had opposed pistons. Now all three discs have OP's, I suppose the only term I can use now is, umm, piggin' amazin', ah-hahaha. In practice though you end up needing all the stop you can get, mainly because the old horns tend to sprout forth from one's bonce when piloting raggedy-ars'd tearaways scoots like this around, and you always find yourself going along at fast speeds with no engine braking to help bale you out in times of trouble. The rear disc is only really safe to use as a steady influence or in dire emergencies. Riding position is excellent for quick riding, thanks to the racer-derived footpeg-bar relationship.

Instrumentation on the new RD350s is very good, using the central tach three-clock layout from the RD500. The headlamp is rather disappointing, having a somewhat dingy and ill-defined spread of light, but the thing I cursed about most on the Island was the absurdly short strap holding the toolkit in place inside the tail hump. Talk about skinned knuckles — my gloves ended up redder on the inside than the outside, and all for the want of half an inch of rubber. Tsk tsk.

At the time of writing we're still waiting for the detailed damage report on the bike, but my on-the-spot impression was that the fairing had saved the RD from expensive engine (and possibly frame) damage by absorbing most of the crash energy itself. Of course, it was well cracked itself, but apart from that the only other casualties were the usual sticking-out bits, my foot, his leg and the Worthless elbow (packing pillion at the time).

But let's not dwell on these depressing matters. Let us instead revel in the bubbling vivacity of this by now classic motorcycle, and the magic moments it is capable of providing.

There can be few greater pleasures in life than singing up through the gears on an RD from Quarter Bridge, hitting top halfway along the straight section before Braddan Bridge, then holding it open as long as you dare before cramming on the double discs, booting down three and feathering the clutch lever to keep 'er on the boil as you crank it hard left then hard right before pouring on the coals again for the flat-out bit to Union Mills. Ah yes . . . maybe next year. Ahem.



## YAMAHA RD350F £2089 including all taxes

### PERFORMANCE

Top Speed — 121mph  
Standing Quarter — 13.3 secs  
Fuel Consumption — Hard Riding — 41mpg  
— Cruising — 49mpg

### POWERTRAIN

Liquid-cooled two-stroke twin with YPVS, 347cc. Maximum power 59bhp at 9000rpm, maximum torque 34.7ft/lb at 8500rpm. Bore x stroke 64 x 54mm. Compression ratio 6:1. Induction by two Mikuni VM26 carbs with balance pipe between intake tracts. Autolube lubrication, standard 2str oil, 1.6litre capacity. CDI ignition. Wet multiplate clutch. Primary drive by gear, final drive by chain. Six-speed gearbox.

### CHASSIS

Tubular duplex cradle frame. Air-assisted tele forks with "anti-lift" Variable Damper. Full length box section swing arm, rising rate Monocross single shock rear suspension with remote belt five-way adjustment. Wheelbase 54.5in. Ground clearance 6.5in. Seat height 31.5in. Trail 3.8in, castor 26 deg. Dry weight 364lb. Fuel capacity 4.4 gallons. Triple disc brakes with opposed pistons. Tyres: 90/90H18 front, 110/80H18 rear.