

RAm Blings

WINTER BLUES

By: Ted Cais, Califon, New Jersey

It is 38 degrees in the basement and the 900SS sits quietly up on blocks under wrap. I notice a trickle of oil seeping on the concrete slab and hope my wife is not so attentive to trivial details. You see the crankcase is bloated with three gallons of storage oil and some finds its way down the clutch pushrod tunnel in the mainshaft. Plastic zip-lok bags keep the mise out of the 40mm carbs and Contis, and they balloon and hiss as I ease the engine over a couple of turns to move the oil around. The gas tank sits on a table and the battery is upstairs keeping warm and trickle charged. I am only allowed one bike bit in the living quarters these days since my 500 single fell down the stairs when coming out of hibernation several springs ago and took a bite out of the parquet floor (never mind my leg which was underneath, but that's another story).

Winter is the pits. The Duke runs flawlessly so there is no excuse to while away the dark hours pampering its internal mechanisms, and outside salt dust lurks to corrode those beautiful alloy cases and cold waits to corrode my claws. Nobody digs Ducks in my neighborhood so I am easy prey for the glossy cycle mags crowing about the latest crop of wallowing wurlitzers from the big four (HYSK for short) in the Orient. Let's see, here's a GPZ1100 red rocket, looks OK. A Katana 1000 that tries to mimic the Duck but somehow misses the mark. And a Yammie Vision V; quick, flip past that page before I recycle my breakfast! I'm getting old and soft and have doubts about enduring another season in the solo saddle with the potholes hammering through the taut suspension and my back aching to reach the clipons. Perhaps I need a Luxocruiser. Say this XJ650 seems nice, they tell me it's cushy and handles too. Let's 4-wheel on down to the dealer and check it out if I can find one between the wood stoves and snowmobiles. Some of these new bikes even look like a woodstove with wheels too.

But in the flesh these fantasy machines that glow on paper lose something. I dunno, they just seem boring. Efficient appliances, no soul, nothing. Homogenized products from an army of design freaks and computer analyses. So complicated. Winking lights telling me I have a sidestand, and three days worth of reading in stickers with fine print on just about every subassembly telling me not to drink battery acid or eat the rear tire. Well, at least 105 horses shredding the same rear tire is far from boring. Yet there is a question of balance too. Imagine twitching your throttle hand banked over in a damp corner and unleashing those ponies to frag yourself and 600 pounds of mechanical behemoth in a convenient oak tree. That's not boring either. Top heavy and so damn w-i-d-e. Enough engine fins for a replacement set of dentures for a baleen whale.



I leave the monsters that no doubt will blow me in the weeds this summer out on the interstate (funny they never try that in the esses) and eyeball the middleweights. Turbo CX500, hope your wrench has a Ph.D. and B.Eng. Jeez all these GX's and XJ's and XL's and CB's look so uniformly dull. Sure they're reliable and hum or buzz along forever. Yawn. Just like my Olds family wagon cruiser, except that has factory air. Then again maybe the Honda Interstate will have canned air next model year too.

So, back to the chilly basement to remove the tarp and just stare. Aaahh...that's better. Clean, simple, an elegant thoroughbred. So what if vehicle inspection is a hassle each year trying to explain there never were turn signals (the fairing notches catch the lie). Just him 'em at 5 to 5 when they are already itching for the first sting from a six pack. Then the exhaust pulses which rattle the windows during a dumb accelerate and brake test (sorry rear Phantom) get overlooked too. So what if I get paranoid over tiresome magazine articles that tell me my valve guides will self ream to +1.0 o.s., my rings flutter and break, and my source of winkler caps will vanish next month.

I just ease up in the solo saddle once more, coil up on the rearsets and drop forward onto the clipons. Yep, I can still take it. The familiar Veglias stare back, their needles limp but I can already visualize them springing to life, hear the rich mellow boom-da-boom out back, the chuff chuff intake gasp through the K&N's, and the exciting whirr from those exquisitely shimmed spiral bevel gears. Ah yes, that off-camber right hander that sent my honorable flexiflyer from the Orient shimmying after the bump on the apex, and was then carved at 20+ mph faster on this baby like running on rails, these memories flood back to banish the blues. Yep, and this here throttle that dials in a linear engine response and is not merely an on-off switch to be synchronized with a tap dance on the gearshift. Fool, you would even think of parting with this. Caution says premium leaded is dead and you'll detonate the big end into loose rollers on that bunker oil that passes for hi-test these days. But any enthusiast worth his weight in Brembo cast iron rotors can make the occasional drive in a car stocked with gas cans to my secret supply of Cam 2 107 octane purple elixer. The Duke is worth that and more. Away foul voices of doubt and despair! There are friends out there in the D.I.O.C. Think I'll write them this letter. Hi guys, I'm still with you. Keep the faith.



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