

REVIEW: '07 YAMAHA YZF-R1

REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

Compared with my 2006 model, this new R1 slots in as the heaviest. Yamaha's literbike has a generous 51.8% of its weight on the front wheel, a 0.5% increase over last year and the most forward-biased in this class.

As for how the new four-valve engine compares with the old five-valve mill, that's mostly a big upside. We're happy to report that midrange power, one of the few aspects lacking in the previous edition, has received a healthy boost.

A comparison of power curves exposes the '07 bike's advantage, as it makes more power nearly everywhere. The improvement is especially noticeable in the 6800-10,000 rpm range, where the new bike cranks out a perceptible boost. Impressively, the 2007 R1 cranked out a bodacious 156.4 hp peak, quite a step up from the 148.5 from 2006, with torque is similarly affected at a higher 10,000 rpm.

Sadly, it's not perfect in the engine room, and this becomes evident each time you have to get going after a stop. Power below 4000 rpm is scant, despite what the dyno chart shows. It's as if the air-box swallowed a sock while the bike tries to clear its throat, a frustrating situation when sitting atop a 156-hp missile and having to slip the clutch like a 125 GP bike when pulling off.

Aside from this tuning anomaly, the new R1 carries over most of the admirable traits from the old bike plus a few new treats. Although there's not much call for the back-torque-limiting clutch on the street, it's a handy card to have up your sleeve when riding in the upper register of the tach. It's a good unit, no doubt, but it's a bit harsher during engagement than the buttery Cinderella slipper in, say, Kawasaki's ZX series.

Style-wise, the '07 R1 doesn't break any new ground over the successful lineage already established. Keen eyes will notice some R6 elements in the side fairings and a more prominent beak. The seat/tank junction feels really good, like a body is supposed to naturally fit in there. Visually, the R1 is punched up with snazzy red pinstripes around its black wheels. Instruments are bathed in an attractive and soothing blue glow that shows off a revised tachometer that features a new font and a chromed internal bezel.

The Yammie's new six-piston calliper brakes are a big improvement in feel over the old four-piston clampers, less lever travel is required before they begin to do their work. While the brake lever is adjustable, the clutch lever on the left clip-on isn't. As previous, it's a long reach for short hands and actuates only near the end of its travel. The rearward views offered by the mirrors are better than most sportbikes.

Also new for 2007 is a revised suspension and chassis. While the R1's stiffer springs seem to be an improvement for track work, they may not be an upgrade for pure street riders, as the damping action can be a bit harsh for lightweight riders at times; those of you pushing the 100kg mark should have no such issue. The new frame and swing-arm are difficult to judge, as their ultimate value is difficult to ascertain on the street, but Kenny came back from Laguna raving about the bike's improved manners. On the street, the R1's steering manners proved to be precise. The OEM Pirelli Diablo Corsas offer plenty of stick for street use and warm up relatively quick.

It should be noted that the R1 emanates a lot of heat, even with ambient temps in the mid-60s, and the undertail pipes undoubtedly contribute to the warmth reaching the rider. That exhaust system provides aural enjoyment with a sporty burble during compression braking.

So, the question everyone wants to know: How does this thoroughly tweaked YZF rank against the rest of the literbike field? Well, it's a thrilling bike, possessing a much meatier powerband, enhanced handling, pleasing looks that might still be the class of the field, and the addition of a slipper clutch. But in the vacuum of testing just one bike on its own, it's difficult to say how it will stack up against the Kawasaki ZX-10R, Honda CBR1000RR Superbike Showdown underway just and Suzuki GSX-R1000. We'll get a as soon as we can round up all the contenders.



PRICE: R122,000 incl. VAT

Perry
YAMAHA

Tel: (031) 312 6310 • 801 Umgeni Road, Durban