

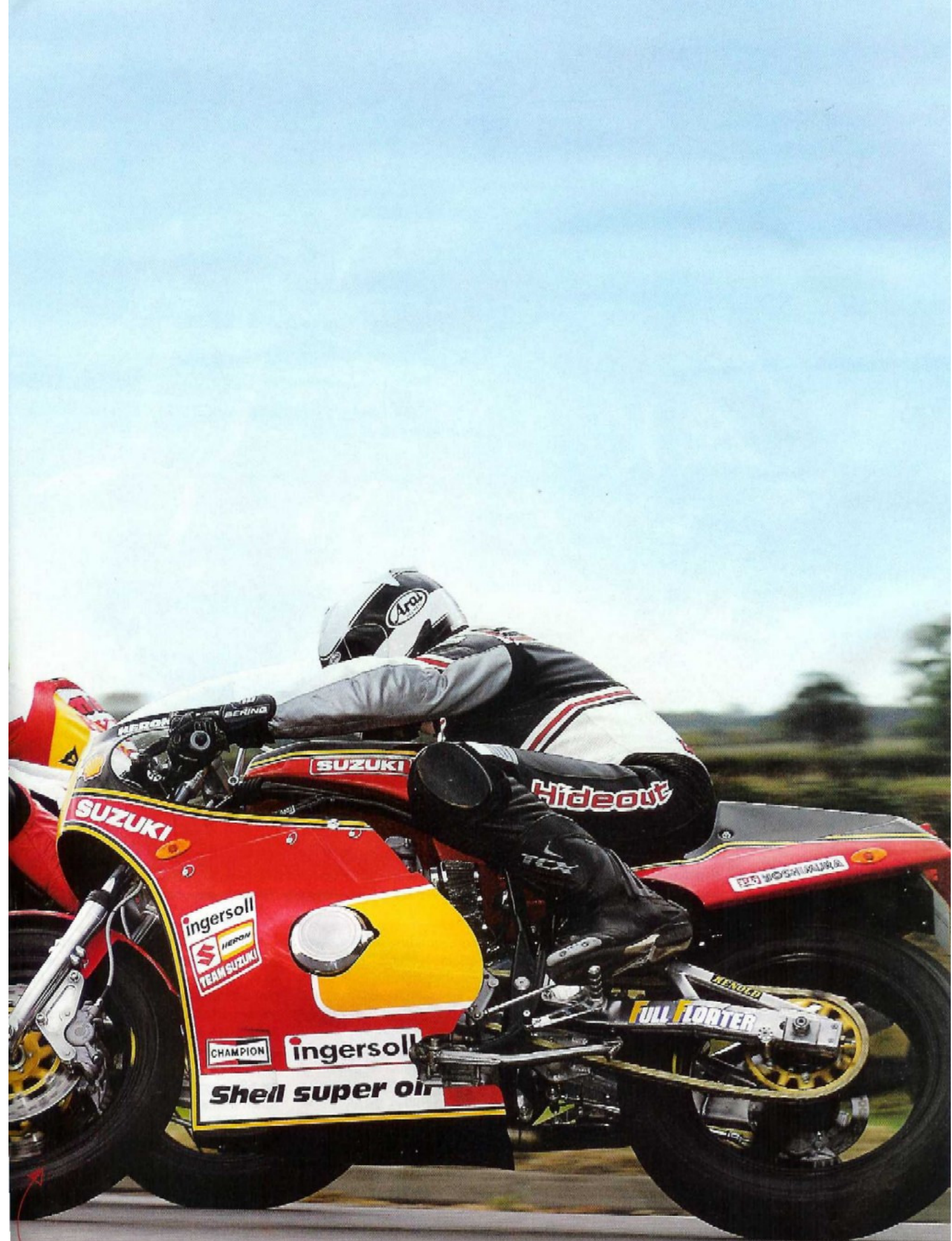
THE REAL DEAL

THIS YEAR'S POST CLASSIC RACE AT THE MANX GP WAS BLITZED BY A PAIR OF SUZUKI XR69 REPLICAS. NOW THERE'S A STREET LEGAL VERSION - AND IT'S TRULY BREATHTAKING

Words Jim Moore Photography John Noble



TT hero Guy Martin on the Suzuki XR69 replica on which he finished 2nd in the 2009 Post-Classic Manx GP



CB Deputy Editor Jim Moore on the Suzuki XR69 replica that he borrowed from the owner this morning

Exhaust system

Spring-mounted stainless steel 4-2-1, made specifically for the bike

Swingarm

Harris-built box-section aluminium alloy replica of 1981 works XR69 arm

Ignition

Racer: self-generating 12v total-loss
Roadbike: Dynatech Dyna-S 12v

Race engine

997cc, JE (11.5:1) forged pistons, ported head, Yoshi-spec cams, balanced/welded crank, close-ratio straight-cut gears, 33mm Keihin CRs, Setrab oil-cooler

Frame

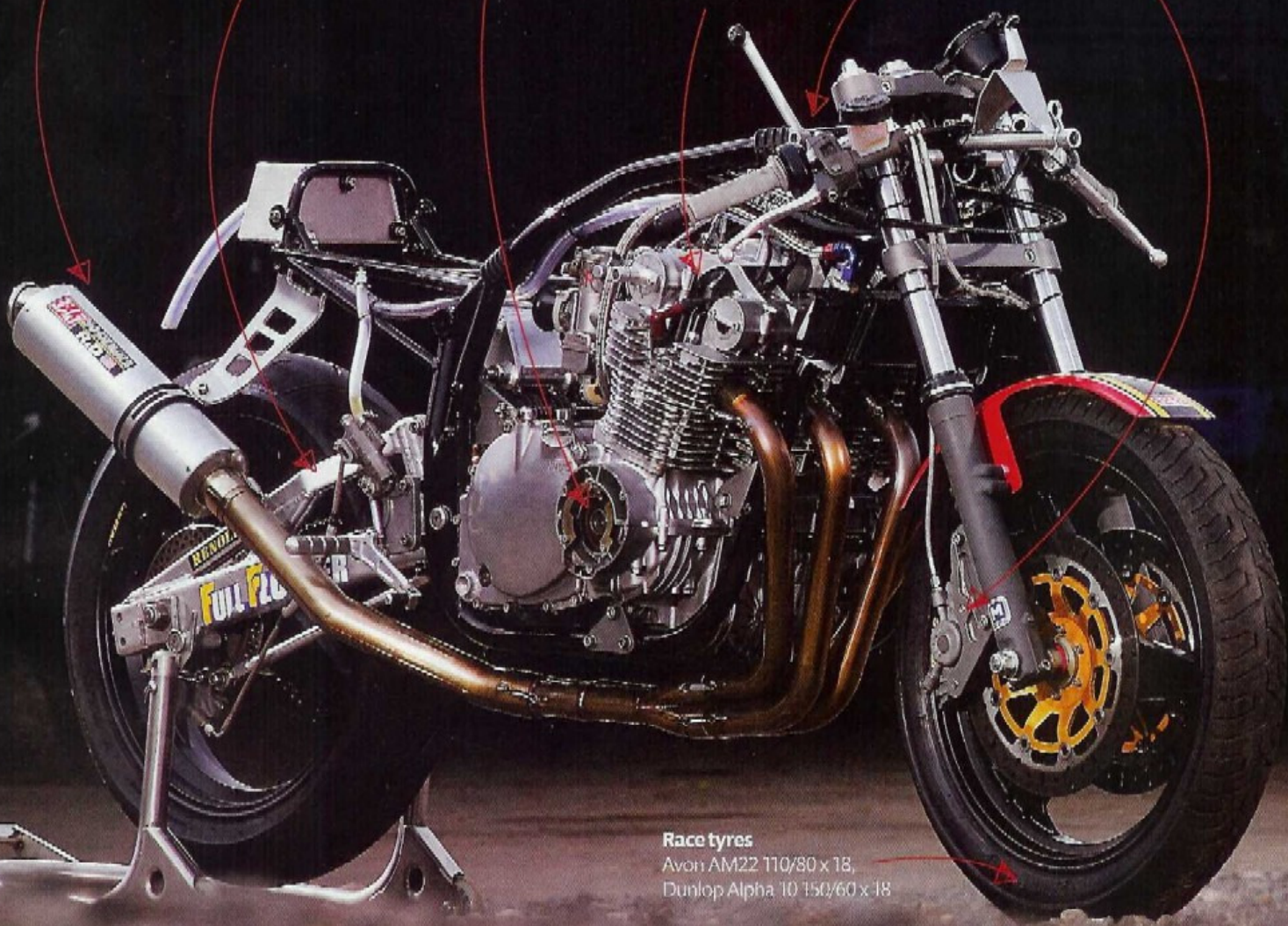
Harris TT-F1, T45 chromoly tubing, nickel-bronze welded

Brakes

310mm RG500 replica discs, AP Racing 2-pot calipers and master cylinder, ATEC composite hoses

Race tyres

Avon AM22 110/80 x 18,
Dunlop Alpha 10 150/60 x 18



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he phrase 'Race Replica' is an overused cliché in the modern biking world, but the bike that I'm howling along the A1084 between Brigg and Caistor on North Lincolnshire's rolling Wolds definitely deserves the title. True, it's not a genuine works Suzuki XR69

Formula One bike from the early Eighties, but it is almost identical to the bikes Ryan Farquhar and Guy Martin took to a one-two in the Post Classic race at this year's Manx Grand Prix. This one just happens to have a speedo, indicators and an MoT.

Which is how I find myself tucked behind its semi-circular screen, blasting through Lincolnshire. I'm off to meet Guy Martin and John Sim, the man who built this bike and the Manx GP racers too.

John made his name building BSA Rocket 3s and Triumph Tridents with his Trident Engineering business. He still tinkers with the Brit triples, but his focus switched to these big Suzukis two years ago when the interest in classic Japanese race bikes took off and Harris Performance began remaking the F1 frames which form the basis of these XR replicas.

This XR feels at home on the twists, turns and undulations of the A1084 – hardly surprising given the road's TT-esque feel. The tree-lined uphill left-right from Bigby is uncannily like the climb out of Ramsey Hairpin, while further on towards Grasby I'm reminded of mad blasts between the hedges from Cronk y Voddy and Kirk Michael.

Comfort doesn't get a look in on this road-going racer. The clip-on bars force me into a non-negotiable chest-on-tank position, head tilted back 45 degrees from near-horizontal spine. The only respite from attack mode comes in 30 and 40mph limits when I can take my left hand off the bar and lean back.

Leg room is equally uncompromising. Ground clearance is essential on a race bike, so the pegs are high and rear set. At first it's a struggle to get both feet on at the same time, particularly in full leathers; I have to warm the muscles and tendons in my legs to compress myself into position. Perhaps this says more about my physical condition than the 69's ergonomics but, once I'm aboard and tuned into a ton-up blast along a traffic-free A-road, the XR's acute focus makes complete sense. This bike was built to despatch straights and corners very quickly indeed.

A Sim-built XR starts life as a Harris F1

"I HAVE TO WARM THE MUSCLES IN MY LEGS TO COMPRESS MYSELF INTO POSITION"

Forks

38mm Marzocchi, Maxton cartridge internals, adjustable for preload, compression and rebound

Engine finish

Vapour-blasted crankcases, block and head. Engines rebuilt from the ground up

Road engine

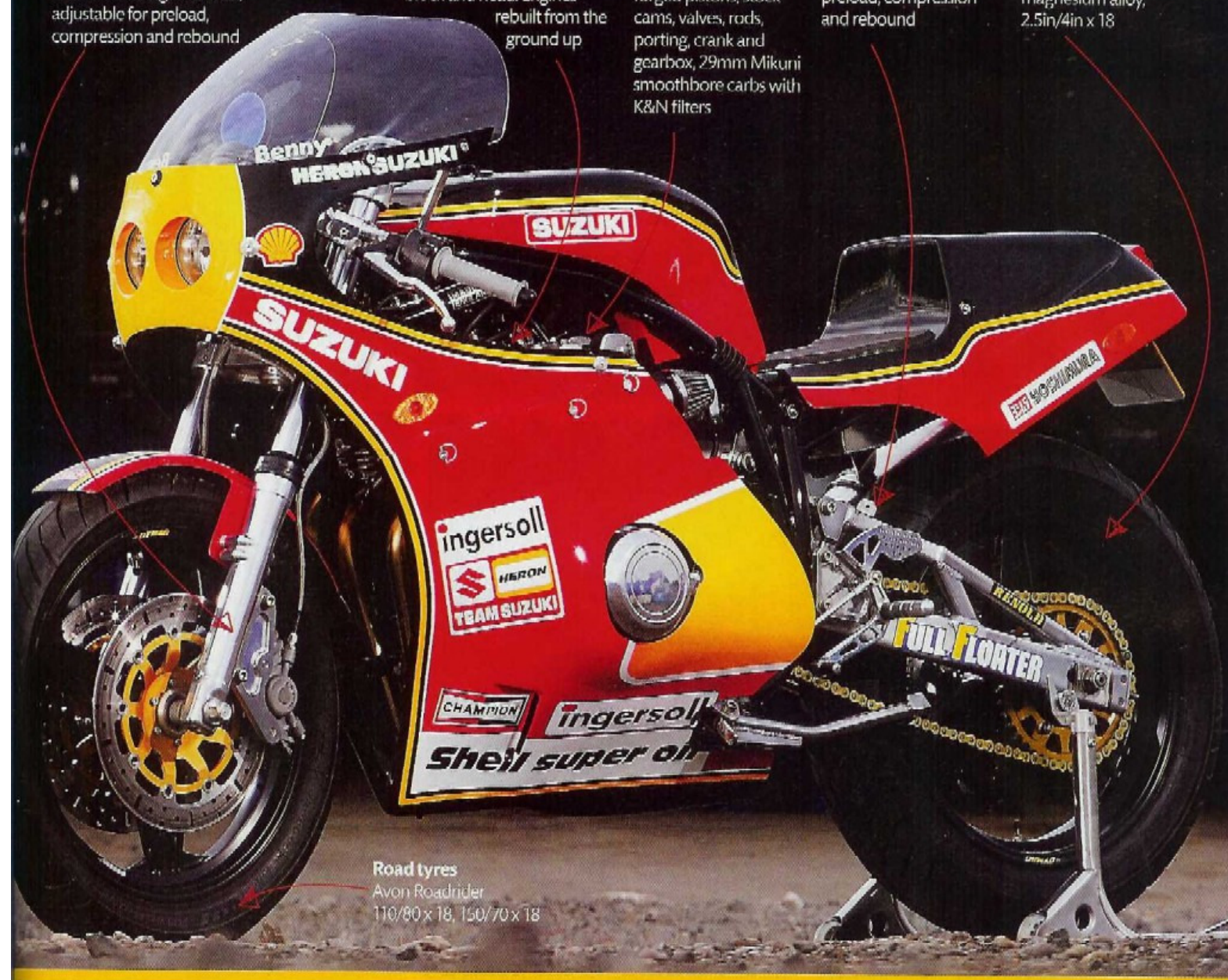
1085cc, 10.251 Wiseco forged pistons, stock cams, valves, rods, porting, crank and gearbox, 29mm Mikuni smoothbore carbs with K&N filters

Rear shock

Öhlins, adjustable for preload, compression and rebound

Wheels

Dymag H-section magnesium alloy, 2.5in/4in x 18

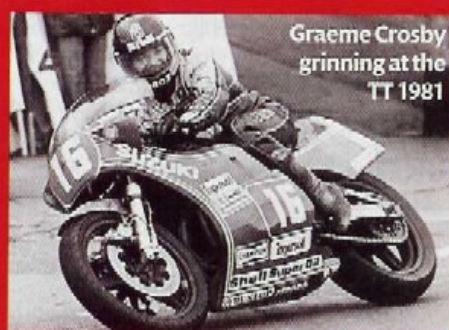
**Road tyres**

Avon Roadrider
110/80 x 18, 150/70 x 18

frame kit, which includes the handmade aluminium alloy swingarm, tank and ancillaries. Just like the works bikes it's powered by a GS1000 motor – rebuilt from scratch and tuned to spec. This roadgoing version (the only one of its kind and owned by a North Lines collector who wants to remain anonymous, though it says 'Benny' on the screen) is fitted with a 1085cc Wiseco big bore kit for extra grunt and 29mm Mikuni smoothbore carbs which, unlike CVs, are mechanically operated for instant response.

Everything else in the motor is standard but it's still indecently quick – around 22bhp more healthy than a standard GS. It's also a whopping 53 kilos lighter.

I meet up with John and Guy in Caistor, and John wheels the race XR out of his van. It's the bike Guy raced at the Manx, and at the final CRMC round at Cadwell in October. But Guy's eyeing up the road bike. "It's proper, is that," he grins, tea in hand, eager to take in every detail. "A real bit of kit."



Graeme Crosby
grinning at the
TT 1981

XR69: SUZUKI'S F1 WEAPON

The original XR69s (also known as GS1000Rs) were factory race bikes built by Suzuki between 1980 and 1982 to compete in TT-Formula One events.

F1 rules allowed four-strokes to run pure racing chassis with road-based engines. The XR used forks, wheels, brakes and suspension borrowed from the RG500 GP racer.

The first incarnation had twin-shock rear

suspension, like the RG, but from '81 the XR benefited from Suzuki's excellent Full Floater rising-rate set-up, as well as an updated frame.

The engine was based on the GS1000 but few components other than crankcases remained. Pops Yoshimura developed race cams, high compression pistons, close-ratio gears and dry clutches. Suzuki claimed 130-134bhp and 189mph.

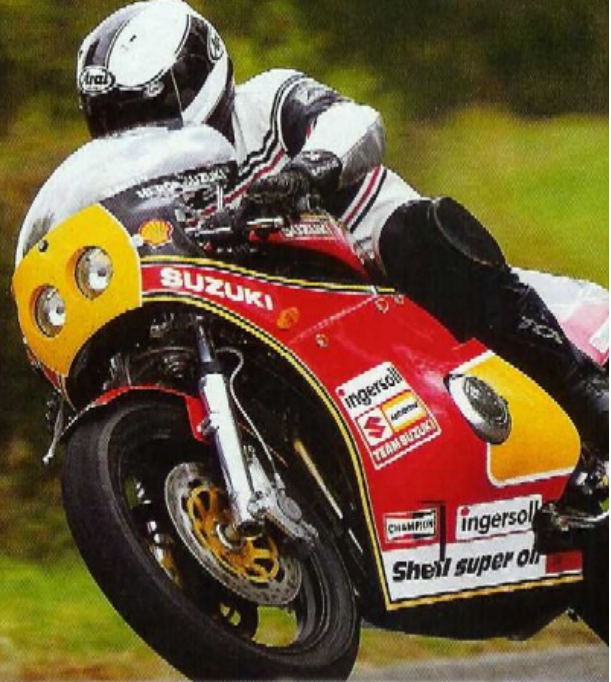
New Zealander Graeme Crosby was the XR's most successful rider, winning the Suzuka 8 Hour ('80),

Daytona ('80-'81), British TT-F1 Championship ('80-'81), and also back-to-back World TT-F1 titles ('80-'81), including TT wins.

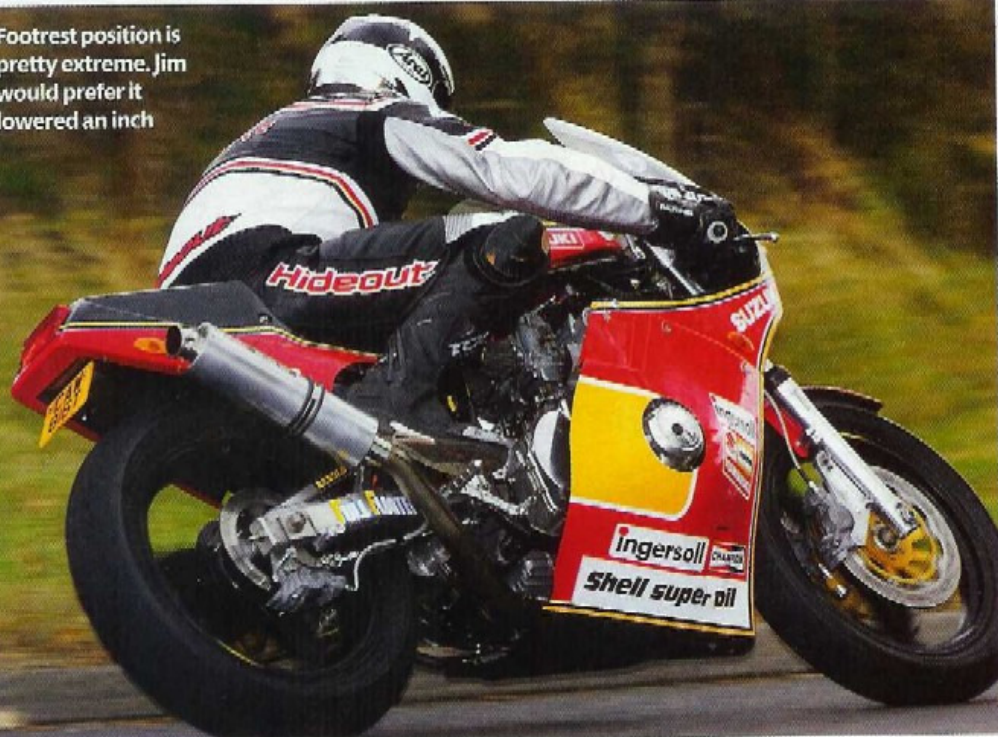
In 1983 the XR69 was replaced by the XR41. This had a box-section aluminium frame fitted with a highly tuned GS1000 engine. In 1984 new rules limited F1 engine capacity to 750cc and the GSX-R took over as the base for Suzuki's future Formula One racers.

■ **Recommended reading:** The seminal *Team Suzuki*, by Ray Battersby. A fine book.

Curiously, Guy (leading) turned out to be very fast



Footrest position is pretty extreme. Jim would prefer it lowered an inch



BUILD YOUR OWN XR69

We reckon that a John Sim built XR69 is decent value at £12,500, but you could save money by building one yourself.

The biggest single expense will be the chassis; Harris do a new F1 frame and swingarm for £2990, with tank and fairing brackets extra. An Öhlins shock starts at £500 (though there are cheaper alternatives), and forks can be had from an autojumble. Modern cartridge internals will give the best damping control, but progressive springs are a budget option.

Period H-section Dymags from Harris Magnums and the like, often with discs, appear on eBay all the time. £400-£500 per pair isn't unusual.

Equally important is the motor. GS1000 Suzuki engines can be had for a couple of hundred quid.

Complete bikes (go for the HC model rather than S, they're less desirable and therefore cheaper) can be found for not much more. Keep the motor and break the rest, recouping the cost.

Of course, you'll also need a well-equipped workshop and the will power to finish the job.

Differences between the two bikes are subtle; most are hidden inside the engine. The racer is 997cc to meet racing regulations, and runs high compression JE pistons, race spec cams, a flowed and ported head, close-ratio straight-cut gears, an oil-cooler, self generating ignition and larger 33mm Keihin CR smoothbore carbs. Minus lights, a starter motor and generator Guy's bike is 10 kilos lighter than mine. And the extra engine work is worth an additional 20bhp at peak.

Several cups of tea later we bolt a trade plate to the race bike (never let it be said we don't take legality seriously at CB), don leathers and head out. This is Guy's stomping ground, so he leads the way on the racer.

He's not the only successful TT rider to grow up in this part of Lincolnshire; Roger Marshall, Roger Burnett, Steve Plater and Rob McElnea all thrashed bikes round here in their youth. So it feels like we're blasting off on a lap of the island as we leave Caistor and make for the twists and turns of the Wolds.

Like any proper race bikes, these XRs use a race-pattern gear shift – one up, four down. After 25 years on the road I sometimes struggle with that pattern, but not today. My brain clearly understands that this is a race bike. Clicking down for up just feels right.

Guy radiates enthusiasm on and off any bike and it's clear he's having a ball, popping the front wheel in the air at every opportunity. I'm equally intoxicated aboard the roadgoing XR. I have to keep reminding myself that the engine beneath me is 'just' a simple 30 year-old, two-valve per-cylinder, air-cooled dinosaur, because the throttle response is so instant and urgent.

The extra capacity of the big bore enables the motor to punch into action from as low as 2000rpm. It's a brilliant road engine that really mates well with the stock gearbox's five ratios. It'll surge right round to 10,000rpm if you want to imagine you're Gracme Crosby flat out over the Mountain – and jeez it builds speed quickly when the needle's knocking in

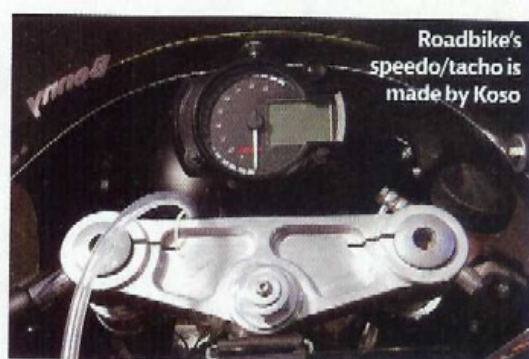
the tacho's higher reaches. But the extra stomp that comes with 1085cc means there's little need to work the motor over 8000rpm to melt your peripheral vision to a blur.

At 180kg this road XR weighs about the same as a modern supersport 600. Its featherlight magnesium Dymag wheels keep its unsprung weight minimal too. A standard GS1000 can be a handful when pushed hard; not so the XR. When Guy darts down a B-road that seems to consist of 90 degree bends, both XRs lap up the challenge. The steering is effortless and deliciously precise, while the lack of bulk makes turning in a joy.

"I HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING MYSELF THIS ENGINE IS A 30 YEAR-OLD DINOSAUR"



Race bike runs open ignition rotor and stainless 4-2-1 fabricated by a Northants based F1 team



Roadbike's speedo/tacho is made by Koso



Hard to believe it's road legal



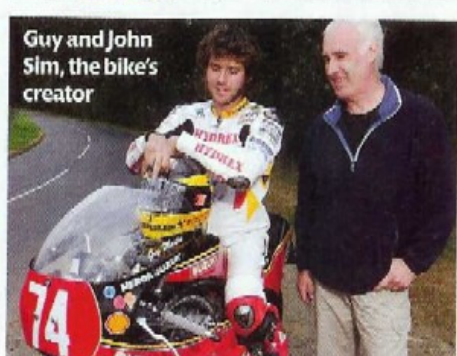
33mm race carbs, still petrol stained from the Manx



Full Floater linkage is art in metal



That casting is a replica factory generator mount



Guy and John Slim, the bike's creator

A couple of times riding for the pictures Guy and I touch mid corner, my elbow making contact with his knee slider, but both bikes are so instantly manoeuvrable – even at full lean – that we can reposition ourselves without drama.

I had expected the ride quality to be harsh, but the fully adjustable Öhlins shock and Maxton-sprung Marzocchis soak up every ripple before they get a chance to get through to the chassis.

The road bike's great, but I'm itching to get a go on the racer. Eventually I manage to prise Guy off its seat. There's no starter, so John fires it up with a roller wheel. "Keep it revving," he shouts over the exhaust noise.

On pull-away the racer's clutch feels harsher and grabbier, but I soon have the lever released and we're off.

The smaller, race tuned motor, with its lighter pistons and lack of a flywheel, is an entirely different kettle of rev-crazy frogs. Not much below 6000rpm, then BANG.

As soon as it comes on cam the front wheel lifts and all hell lets loose. The road XR is fast, but this is in another league. The tacho needle rushes round to ten grand so quickly my brain barely has time to clock what's going on. Snick the next gear in the close-ratio box and wham! It happens all over again.

The two bikes have identical brakes, but the road bike's are still bedding in. They're sharp, but not yet up to the epic power and feel of the racer's. The tyres, too, add yet another dimension to the ride. Grip and cornering confidence increases five-fold with an Avon AM22 front and Dunlop Alpha 10 rear.

I don't want to give it back, but as the tank drains dry my time is up. Already I'm plotting how to raise the money to commission John to build me an XR69. Starting from £12,500 they're a bargain. A hand-built F1 bike with genuine race-winning pedigree, and enough oomph to make you laugh out loud for less than the price of a mint Goldie? Deals don't get more real than that.

■ SPECIFICATION SUZUKI XR69 REPLICA (RACER IN BRACKETS) ENGINE/TRANSMISSION

Type	air-cooled, dohc, 8v, four-stroke, inline four
Capacity	1085cc (997cc)
Bore x stroke	73 x 64.8mm (70 x 64.8mm)
Compression ratio	10.25:1 (11.5:1)
Carburation	4 x VM29 Mikuni smoothbores (33mm Keihin CR smoothbores)
Clutch/gearbox	wet multiplate, five-speed (close-ratio, straight-cut gears)
Ignition	12V, Dyna-5 ignition (self-generating ignition)

CHASSIS

Frame	Harris F1, T45 chromoly steel tube, nickel-bronze welded
Front suspension	Marzocchi forks, Maxton cartridge internals
Rear suspension	Harris F1 aluminium swingarm, Öhlins fully adjustable shock
Brakes front/rear	2 x 310mm disc, 2-pot AP Racing calipers, 1 x 220mm disc, 2-pot AP Racing caliper
Wheels	Dymag, magnesium alloy H-section
Tyres	Avon Roadrunner 110/80 x 18, 150/70 x 18 (Avon AM23/Dunlop Alpha 10: 110/80 x 18, 150/60 x 18)

DIMENSIONS

Dry weight	180kg/397lbs (170kg/375lbs)
Wheelbase	56.5in (1435mm)
Seat height	29.5in (749mm)
Fuel capacity	23L/5 gal

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	160 mph (175 mph)
Max power	112bhp, est (132bhp @ 9400rpm)
Price	£12,500 with std GS engine, (£15,500)

Contact
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www.silverstonesuperbikes.co.uk