

# HOW DO YOU LIKE 'YOURS'?

There's more than one way to skin a cat, and to prove it we have taken two very different, but equally blinged-up sportsbikes for a blast round the beautiful Peak District.

WORDS: BOOTHY IMAGES: CHAPPO





**W**hen you buy yourself a bike you have to ask yourself an important question: do you keep everything bog standard, or do you go down the bling-bling route? If you do decide to kit your bike up to the high heavens there are literally thousands of parts on the shelves (and the internet pages) that'll bolt straight on to your bike. Easy peasy, right? Well, we all know that the decision-making process doesn't end there. Do you go for budget or top spec parts? Do you spend your lunch-break scrolling through the aftermarket in search of go faster parts, or is a trip to the dealer on the cards, and a thumb through the official parts catalogue? These are hugely important life choices.

And once you've decided who you are going to give all your money to, it's time to

make the most important decision of all – exactly what do you want from your bike? Does it need to be faster, be comfier, or better looking? Do you want better brakes, better handling, or maybe you want to strap some luggage to the old girl and ride it bare-arsed to Banbury Cross?

It has to be said that most modern bikes come with plenty of saucy bits and bobs that would have necessitated a big chunk of extra spending in years gone by. Showroom spec bikes with quickshifters and fancy adjustable power modes are relatively modern phenomena, so if your bike is from the Naughtyies or before, as standard it's not going to have much to show off about.

And anyway, regardless of your bikes age, regardless of which mod-cons it came with as standard, there is nothing like turning it into 'your' bike. Ok, I know it's your bike as

soon as you sign on the dotted line and/or hand over the reddie's, but really until you make it 'yours' it's the bloke's that had it before you, or the love-child of a team of designers, engineers and factory test riders.

These two bikes are cracking examples of how to make your bike 'yours'. Giles has spent the last 15 years loving all that his 2003 '954' FireBlade has to offer, and has thrown plenty at it over the years to get it to do exactly what he wants it to do. And Ian has done the same with his 2012 MV Agusta F3 800, but with vastly different results.

Two brilliant sportsbikes, specced up with a load of brilliant parts can't possibly be that different though, can they? Well to find out just how different they were, Frodo and I headed over to the Peak District to speak to the owners, check out their bikes, and take them for a blast. ➤





# 2003 HONDA 954 FIREBLADE

**A**s far as sportsbikes go the FireBlade is an iconic brand. And as far as FireBlades go, the 954 is an iconic model. In fact, some would say the 954 'Blade was the best Blade yet. And when Giles Harwood clapped his eyes on the 2003 CBR, he simply had to have one. But despite being ever so fond of his Honda, it wasn't long before he was pulling bits off it and replacing them with some of the nicest aftermarket parts available. He has gone to town in an effort not only to improve the bike's performance, but also to improve its comfort, practicality, safety and security. In fact, there's a list as long as my longest arm of all the mods that Giles has made to his bike, so we couldn't wait to take it for a spin to see which ones were worth the money and which ones, if any, weren't.

During your very first glance of the bike, you'll notice the Akrapovic exhaust system. It was certainly the first thing I noticed, so I was keen to get the thing fired up to feast my ears on its sound. But I wasn't able to. Disappointingly, my patience was needed as when I sat astride the bike, the thing started angrily beeping at me as the Datatool alarm hadn't been disarmed properly. I had been given a tutorial on its operation by owner, Giles, but unfortunately 'this button

turns it on and this button turns it off' must have been far too complicated for me to follow. I eventually managed to shut the thing up and turn the key. But the next noise wasn't the Akra singing the Blade's sweet inline four song, it was a buzzing from the front of the bike – Giles had fitted a neon headlight, which likes to be warmed up before you draw power away from it by pressing the starter button. So you don't steal any power from it whilst it is doing its thing, it emits a buzzing sound for about 10 seconds. Once the buzzing stops, the fun starts and the 'Blade is ready to rock.

The Honda fired up and purred into life. Running on its relatively early fuel injection system, you might expect less than smooth tick over, but this wasn't the case. It was delightful. In fact, everything was pretty nice on the 'Blade up to this point. The Sargent Cycle comfort touring seat cosseted my derriere deliciously and the Gilles adjustable rearsets held the footpegs in just the right place to support a sporty, but still reasonably comfortable riding position.

As we set off on our tour of the Peak District, it didn't take long for me to feel completely and utterly at home on the FireBlade. The first section of our ride was through town and the squishy seat, the

*The alarm was a bit of a nuisance.*



*Slightly scratched but still sounded sexy.*

*From a superbike to a sports-tourer.*







Autobahn anyone?



K-Tech fork conversion and Nitron R3 shocker made wafting through the quaint towns and villages of the Peaks a dream.

But it wasn't long before we got chance to stretch the Blade's legs and that's when the going got really good. The first time I opened the CBR's throttle in earnest, I was nothing short of shocked, as it was a lot faster than I expected it to be, but not only that, the front wheel lifted quite suddenly.

Giles has put a pair of BST Carbon Fibre wheels on the bike and they didn't half make the thing feel light – in fact, until I got used to it I'd go as far as to say it was a little unpredictable and flighty, such is the difference that the wheels made. But that's not a bad thing. Once I'd got used to it, that flightiness soon translated into nimbleness that really helped the thing dance.

That said, dancing through the twisty turns of the 'Cat and Fiddle' (the A537) wasn't where the FireBade was most at home. The super-lightweight wheels certainly helped the job, but the set up of the suspension, although comfortable, wasn't conducive to smashing apexes and dragging elbows on the floor.

But it didn't embarrass itself and I found myself riding the thing quicker and quicker in an attempt to see just what the old Blade was capable of. It didn't take too long before there was a little blue light flashing at me from underneath the windscreen, which I'd been reliably informed was part of the Bazzaz traction control system; a flashing blue light meant that the TC was activating and momentarily curtailing the power in an attempt to regain grip. It was a pretty good system and with nine settings, easily adjustable via a dial on the left-hand switch gear, there was sure to be a setting to match your needs. It's not a smooth or precise an operation as the types of TC which come on the very best, most modern sportsbikes, »»

### Highlights

- ▷ Carbon fibre wheels
- ▷ K-Tech fork conversion
- ▷ Nitron R3 Shock
- ▷ Hardwired satnav
- ▷ Bazzaz Traction Control

→ <b>BRAKING</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Brilliant stoppers</i>	
→ <b>STABILITY</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Comfy, but wallowy</i>	
→ <b>AGILITY</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Dem wheels</i>	
→ <b>DRIVE</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Decent at the top</i>	
→ <b>FUN</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>A bit sedate</i>	



## TECH DATA

### 2003 Honda 954 FireBlade

#### ENGINE

Type:	954cc, inline four cylinder, DOHC
Bore x Stroke:	75 x 54mm
Compression:	11.5:1
Fuelling:	Fuel injection
Claimed power:	154bhp @ 11,250rpm
Claimed torque:	101Nm @ 9,000rpm

#### ELECTRONICS

RBW/Riding Modes:	Yes/ 2 modes
Traction Control:	Yes
ABS:	No
Quickshifter:	Yes
Wheelie Control:	No
Launch Control:	No
Autoblipper:	No

#### CHASSIS

Frame:	Aluminium twin-spar
Front suspension:	43mm fully adjustable K-tech forks
Rear suspension:	Fully adjustable Nitron shock
Front brakes:	2 x 4-piston Tokiki callipers, 330mm Brembo discs
Rear brakes:	Single piston Nissin calliper, 220mm disc

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	1,400mm
Seat height:	851mm
Kerb weight:	192kg
Fuel capacity:	18 litres

#### INFO

Price:	£10,000
From:	<a href="http://www.bikehps.com">www.bikehps.com</a>



TomTom Rider 5 satnav

Sargent Cycle 'World Sport' touring seat

Bazzaz Z-Fi TC fuel injection management module with handlebar mounted dual-map



BST carbon fibre wheels

Akrapovic full exhaust system

Gilles chain adjusters with integrated paddock-stand hooks

Talon rear sprocket

Sigma Slipper Clutch

Bazzaz Z-Fi TC quickshifter



## GILES SAYS...

I remember seeing a picture of a 2003 'Blade on the front cover of a magazine and thinking 'wow that looks great'. I'd read about how light and compact they were, and how fast they were, and thought I just had to have one. I'm not the biggest bloke in the world and I have struggled to find anything that fits me quite like this Blade – it's just perfect. I've thought about getting something more modern, but I sometimes do trips to Europe on it and it is so much more practical than a really modern sportsbike, especially now I've put an extra-comfy seat on. I've been known to drop the odd bike before so the storage under the seat is really helpful. I always carry round a spare set of levers and a little tool kit just in case. This is actually my second one. The gearbox broke in my first one so I got rid of it, but couldn't find anything I liked as much, so I just bought another one.

### THE OTHER TRICK BITS:

- Z-AFM self-mapping module with Bosch wide-band Lambda/O2 exhaust gas sensor
- CRG span adjust folding brake and clutch levers
- SW Motech mirror widener mounts
- Z-Fi TC adjustable traction control (TC) system
- Giro X-Type gear position indicator
- Nitron shock absorber with remote preload adjuster
- Baglux tank cover with tank-bag mounts
- Hybrid ceramic wheel bearings
- Bike Design crash protectors
- Gilles adjustable rearset footrests



MRA Varo Touring Screen with adjustable spoiler

Klan 12v & USB (5v) option power output harness

Honda heated grips

Sprint SXC steering damper

High Intensity Discharge (HID) Xenon headlamp

HEL stainless steel full length braided front brake lines

CBR1000RR 06-07 Showa front forks with radial caliper mounts

Brembo 320mm front brake discs

EBC GPFAX brake pads

Servo Buddy H-VIX exhaust valve/air box flap servo motor eliminator

2006/2007 Fireblade O/E Tokico brake calipers

K-Tech 20-SSK front fork piston kit





but for an off-the-shelf system it's pretty good, and there were no scary high-sides to report of (despite our best efforts).

The Bazzaz system also allows two fuel and ignition maps, which can be toggled with a switch, again on the right-hand switch gear. Giles had the system set up so that he could have one map when he's running the exhaust baffle, and another for when he isn't. Sounds like a good plan, right? Well yes, in theory, but as it happened, he had forgotten which map was which! The bike seemed to run well in both maps for the most part, and the only niggle we found with the fuelling was that between tick over and about 5,000rpm, if you whacked the throttle open too quickly, the thing would just cough and splutter until you rolled off the gas a touch or wait for the motor to start spinning a bit faster. When the thing was singing, it was all gravy, but if you wanted to get a move on, it did help if you kept the needle towards the red.

Tight stuff was certainly aided by the super-sharp front brakes. And yep, you have

guessed it, almost everything about the front brakes was non-standard too, from the GRC adjustable brake lever to the Brembo discs, EBC GPFAX pads and Hel braided brake lines. Even the Tokico callipers were taken off a later (06/07) Blade. He's done all the right things to the front brakes and they were probably the best thing about the bike when hooning up and down the twisty A roads.

When the corners became fewer and further between and it was a case of simply munching some miles on the Honda, everything started to make more and more sense. After a full tank's worth of fuel in the saddle, there wasn't even a hint of arse ache. I had a go with the ingeniously mounted TomTom satnav and found it to be pretty helpful, if a little difficult to read, particularly in the midday sun.

The more I rode the 'Blade, the more I felt as though it was a bike for massacring miles on. And quickly. Whilst a lot of the mods were, in their own way, helping to improve the performance of the bike, all seemed to

be there to make the bike more practical, easier and safer to ride. The SW Motech mirror widener mounts gave a better view of what was going down behind, whilst the MRA adjustable touring windscreen helped deflect a bit more than the normal amount of air over my head. The Baglux tank cover, although not a perfect fit on the tank, meant Giles' tank bag would fit snugly and securely in place without the risk of anything getting scratched.

What Giles has done is take an already brilliant sportsbike and turn it into something a little bit more than just a brilliant sportsbike. It is now a brilliant sportsbike that, if you want it to be, will be a brilliant (and fast) touring bike, too. I'd be quite happy to set off on a tour round Europe on a bike like this, with no doubts about it keeping up with the latest and greatest, be it on the Autobahn or through the Swiss Alps. As for taking it on track? Well, it wouldn't be my first choice, but I'm sure it would hold its own.

## Verdict **7/10**

*A brilliant sportsbike to head to the South of France on; very decent performance and even decent-er practicality. And with them carbon wheels, don't think it would embarrass itself on track, either.*

- + MEGA PRACTICAL
- WEAK GEARBOX



*Frodo's legs have grown.*



*Boothy must have thought it was wet.*