

# Buying 3-5-year-old bikes

Still expensive, but potentially the most difficult to buy

**B**E realistic - most bikes of this age will be on their third owner, will have been dropped more than once and will have been 'personalised' with aftermarket bits.

There are thousands to choose from, so take your time, be selective, slightly cynical and very uncharitable. Don't be afraid to drive the hardest bargain, otherwise you could end up paying only slightly less for a four-year-old bike than you would have spent on a pre-registered brand new one.

At this age, private sales are best, but you need to know what you're doing. Be prepared to haggle and budget to spend more cash to get

the bike back to its best. Dealers look to make the most profit from bikes this age, so private sale prices can be £1000 cheaper.

That leaves you some cash to sort the clutch, suspension and brakes which could all need overhauling by now.

Expect to find a tidy looking bike, with a few scuffs and scrapes and around 15,000 miles on the clock. Be suspicious of very low miles, unless backed up with an annual service.

And don't overlook the HPI check, you're about to spend lots of money and these are the bikes where the cost-of-bike to likelihood-of-it having-a-record ratio is highest.

## \* Electrics

■ Ask when the battery was replaced (£30-60). At this age it might need a new one soon. Check the condition of the regulator/rectifier with a multimeter if you've got one (you can rev the motor and watch to see if the lights brighten... but it's not foolproof).

## \* Motor

■ Check the oil for level, condition and content. Hopefully it's a nice golden colour, not thin and black or, worse, milky and emulsified - a sure sign of neglect.

## \* Exhaust

■ If an aftermarket can's fitted, ask if the bike has been dyno'd to sort the fuelling. It could have been running wrongly for ages, damaging the motor.

## \* Chain/sprockets

■ Hooked, dirty sprockets spinning a slack and rusty chain? Lazy, inept owner.

## \* Suspension

■ Unless it's been replaced or refreshed recently it'll be knackered. You'll need at least £250 to replace the rear and about £75 for new fork springs and oil. Changing a shock is relatively easy, but still reckon on about £100 in labour alone.



## \* Steering

■ Push the bars from lock-to-lock. Does your thumb get trapped against the tank? This could mean bent bars or twisted yokes. Is there notchiness as you turn the handlebars or a 'clunk' if you hold on the front brake and compress the forks? That'll be knackered head bearings. Check the lock stops for damage, too.

## \* Hidden horrors

■ Remove the side panels on any faired bike. Apart from damage to the motor, check the condition of the downpipes and collector box (that'll set you back £300-

£500, or even more on Honda V4s). Check the coolant hoses for condition and bulges. Remove stickers and frame guards to look for damage. Inspect the radiator carefully.

## \* Wheels

■ Lift the wheels off the ground one at a time. Rock them side-to-side and the rear up and down. Freeplay here means you'll need new bearings and possibly bushes - reckon on £100 to sort that out.

Don't forget to make sure the rims are a match for the bike's OE colours. Check the tyres match and are not scalloped, cut, punctured and repaired, unevenly worn or excessively scratched/chipped.

## \* Brakes

■ OE rubber hoses are past their best by now. Budget on about £75 to replace them with braided hoses. Check the discs for warp and wear.

## "I buy and sell older bikes."

■ Phil Willcox is a sales executive at Taz Motorcycles in Peterborough. They sell around 1800 bikes a year, from £1500 commuters to mega-money Harleys.

"We look for clean, standard bikes, with normal mileage and in good condition. We go by the book (CAP price guide) but for bikes like Harleys we'll make allowances for any tasteful customising.

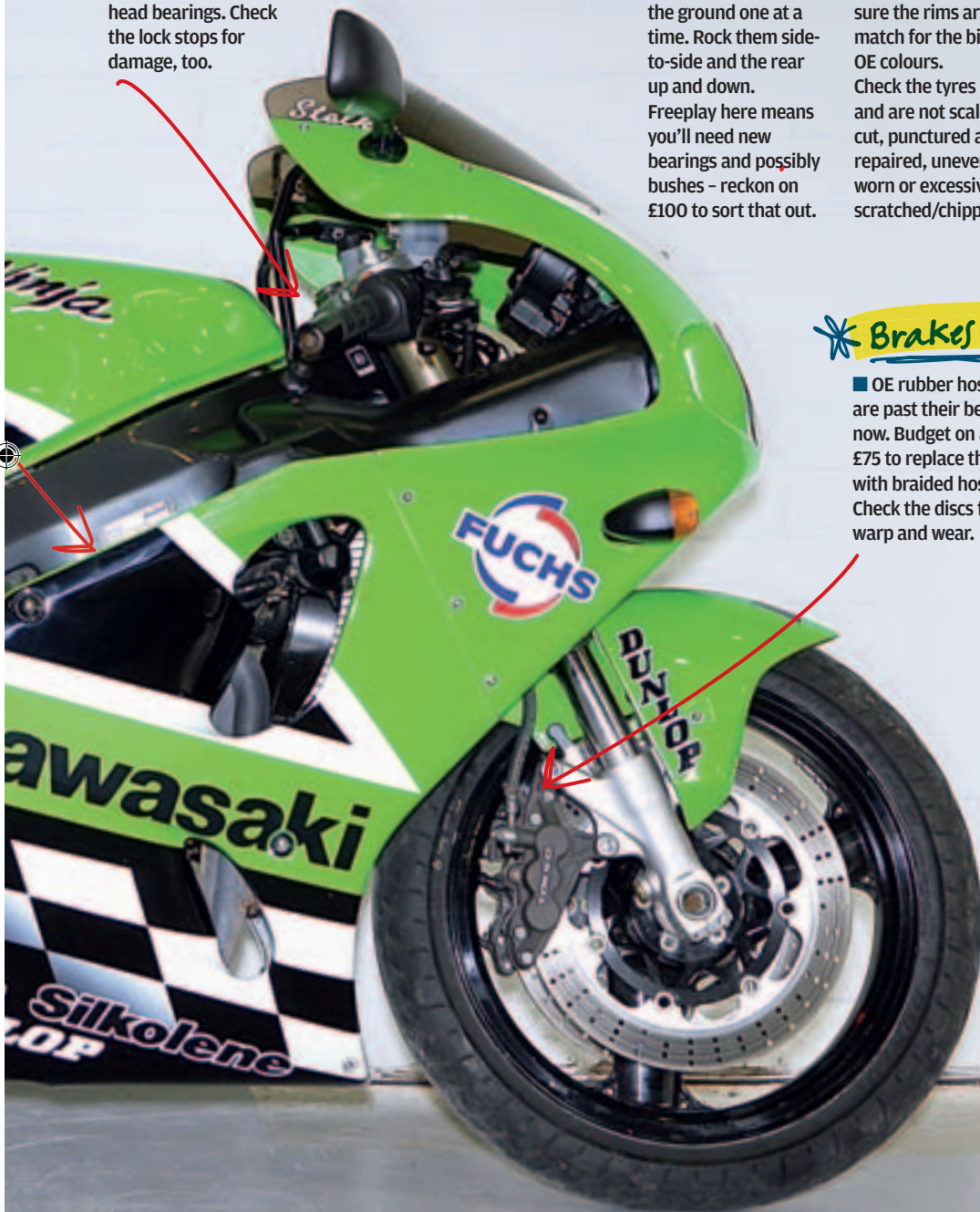
"If a customer wants to part-exchange his bike we'll give him a guide price over the phone, then when he gets here we hand it over to our workshop for a top-to-toe inspection and a brief test ride. And we do an HPI check on every bike. We can assess one in 15-20 minutes.

"We start with the top trade-in price then start shaving money off for anything that needs replacing. Mainstream Japanese stuff sells best, as that's what the market wants.

"If someone comes in here and wants our advice we'll always ask them what riding experience they've got, what they want their bike to do for them and their budget. Pretty simple really, but it works."

## \* RIDE's golden rules of buying used

- 1 Do your research
- 2 Always view a bike in daylight
- 3 Bring a mechanically savvy mate
- 4 Don't be hurried
- 5 Check the paperwork / HPI
- 6 Chat to the owner
- 7 Don't buy without a test ride
- 8 Go with your gut instinct
- 9 Go away and think
- 10 Never buy the first one you see (unless it's perfect)



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