

Buying 6-10 year-old bikes

You'll need an eye for a good 'un and the cash to give it a new life

YOU'RE unlikely to get a mint bike and virtually all of them will have seen a fistful of drops. But think on this - early R1s, ally-framed CBRs, pre-restriction Hayabusas, the last VFR750 and non-VTEC 800s are all out there for not that much money.

All you need is the eye for a good 'un and a few hundred quid to bring it right back up to scratch and you're away.

Dealers are less inclined to deal with the really old, budget stuff, since buyer-friendly consumer law means sellers take a financial risk whenever they sell older bikes. But most have a selection of quality older stuff because

the relatively low prices bring more of us into their showroom.

Dealer and private prices don't vary that much at this end of the market, because private sellers tend to overvalue their bikes and dealers need to maintain a healthy difference to their newer stock.

Be on the lookout for ringers - bikes that've been nicked and given a new identity. Check the frame and engine numbers against the log book. Run your fingers along the numbers and feel for characters of differing depths, irregular typefaces and shadows where the old numbers have been ground off.

* Engine

■ Make sure the engine's cold. Check the coolant bottle (on liquid-cooled bikes) for oil in the water - a sign the head gasket's blown. Run it until the fan comes on. Put a rag over the end of the exhaust briefly and listen for any rattles or excessive

engine noise. Next open the throttle fully with a blip to the redline - puffs of blue/grey smoke means wear. Do another blip, this time with a piece of paper behind the exhaust. If it's spattered with oil the wear is serious. Check for oil leaks.

* Seat

■ Take it off and have a look for rot under the sub-frame, battery and the underside of the seat. Scruffy, faded or ripped seats can be re-covered for about £50.

Alarm
■ Has it got one? Does it work? Has the bloke got the blipper? Why not? Is it nicked? £50.

* Exhaust

■ Unlikely to be the original. Examine carefully for rust/welds. Non-standard cans will be a bugger to MoT without a BS or E-mark.

* Chain

■ This shouldn't lift off the rear sprocket. Lift the rear wheel and turn it so the chain goes through a full turn. Check for seized links and any tight spots. Scottoliers get brownie points.



* Straightness

■ Ask a mate to hold the bars straight, get on your knees and peer along the length of the bike. If the wheels are out of line it'll cost you about £100 to have the frame pulled straight. Check steel sub-frames for heat or stress-marks where they've been straightened.

* Paperwork

■ Make sure mileages and MoT dates add up. Scour the MoT for 'advisory' notes - the things that'll cost you in the future. If the owner does his own servicing make sure he's got receipts for oil and filters etc.

* Plastics

■ Watch out for any plastic welds, missing soundproofing, re-sprays, broken lugs - and discount them appropriately.

* Wheels & tyres

■ Discolourations could be cracks that have been filled and re-sprayed. It's also worth checking under the balancing weights as splits can often be hidden behind them.

Make sure the tyres match, have sufficient tread, are undamaged and are the correct fitment (180-section tyres on 160-section wheels are a definite no-no, for instance).

* Forks & brakes

■ Lift the fork dust caps - weeping fork seals can be disguised with rag or tissue jammed in here. Bounce them - listen for clonks or bangs. Check the discs for trueness and wear - is the disc lipped? Is it blued and spotted? Can the wheel spin freely without being pinched? Look at the pads for wear.

"I buy and sell golden oldies"

■ Nigel Butler is the managing director of Couplands Motorcycles, Boston, Lincs. They deal mostly in bikes in the £1000-£3000 bracket and sell around 200 a year.

"Most of the bikes we deal in are 600s - all the popular ones like CBRs, Bandits and Fazers. They're reliable, not crazy.

"They all get a full service before they go into the showroom, even the bikes priced at just a grand. It costs us a small fortune, but I'd rather sell bikes that way than have loads of complaints.

"We won't touch grey imports like Bandit 400s - they cost too much if we need to order spares. If I was going to recommend a bike to a friend I'd tell him to buy a Honda. As long as it's tidy and comes with some history he won't lose out.

"But as a rule you should always buy a cheap bike on its condition, not because of its model or reputation."

* Useful websites

- Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) - www.vosa.gov.uk
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) - www.dvla.gov.uk
- Universal Salvage (auctions) - www.universal-salvage.com
- MCN (on-line auctions/community) - www.motorcyclenews.com
- HPI (on-line vehicle checks) - www.hpichack.com
- Breakersweb (spares locator) - www.breakersweb.co.uk
- Office of Fair Trading (consumer rights champions) - www.offt.gov.uk
- Citizens Advice Bureau (free legal advice) - www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Trading Standards (consumers' site) - www.tradingstandards.gov.uk
- How To Complain (and win the day) - www.howtocomplain.com

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