

## So What's It Like to Ride YamaMonster?

By Steve Liberatore

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**"So what's it like?"** That's the question I immediately get as I pull off my helmet after having the privilege to do laps around the frightening fast Road Atlanta race circuit on the legendary YamaMonster.

YamaMonster is an amalgamation of a mid-ninety's YZF Superbike chassis with a fire-breathing FZR engine of unknown displacement and modification. The motorcycle in the hands of riders like Fritz Kling and Michael Barnes, won multiple championships in the "original" Formula USA Series. The Formula USA "run-what-ya-brung - anything goes" format allowed unlimited displacements, GP 500 two-strokes, and even turbo charging, if you dared! To win this series a motorcycle had to be stout and YamaMonster is "that" if nothing else. A test article in "Sport Rider Magazine" from June 1995, documented 180+ rear wheel h.p. To which you add all the "good stuff": Generous helpings of carbon fiber, titanium bits, Yamaha Factory kit parts, Brembos, Ohlins, Marchesini's etc., etc. Well you get the point...prodigious power, light weight...single-of-purpose! In fact ex-Yamaha Factory Rider Jamie James rode it from the back of the grid to 7th place in a WERA National in 2007 blasting past most of the current crop of "modern" Superbikes in the field.

**"So what's it like"?** You first notice that there is a modicum of vintage with YamaMonster, no slick LCD Meters, EFI or Fly-By-Wire throttles found here. Just an old fashioned analog tach, a temp gauge and throttle cables yanking open a quartet of rattling, big ass flat-side carbs; with some effort required I might add. You also notice that this is not some pristine, well-restored replica of a vintage championship race bike. YamaMonster is the real thing, ridden hard, put a way wet and wearing its battle scars from its many successful campaigns, like badges of honor. And it's a physically large motorcycle, at least for my 5'8" frame. The seat height is tall, the reach across the large (carbon fiber) tank to the clip-ons, is long and it is wide between the legs. Big, but light! You notice immediately that its weight belies its monster size!

But size is not where the "Monster" moniker comes from. It's when you first "pop start" it, (no power-robbing, electric-start motors here, ladies) and twist that heavy throttle and first feel and hear the engine snarl beneath you, that you know you are about to experience something monstrous. It doesn't quick rev as you blip the throttle but has a heavy, torquey, tight throttle response. Completely unlike any modern day liter bike....and the sound, well more on that later!

**“So what’s it like?”** The bike itself is light but all the controls have a heavy feel. Pulling up for 1st gear, with the GP shift pattern and you can feel the abruptness of undercut gears. The gearbox has obviously been modified with an intent directed more toward “power-handling” than light, slick shifting action. The clutch pull is reasonable but certainly heavier than the modern super sports I’ve been accustomed to riding lately. Throttle the revs up just off idle, let the clutch out and you immediately feel the engine’s torque and low end grunt.

**So what’s it like?”** After a necessary warm-up lap, I found myself coming through Turn 7 for real. Ready now, to pull the trigger and let YamaMonster “eat” for the first time, down Road Atlanta’s infamous back straight! The engine, as mentioned, is a big torquer and not a revver, so it begins to pull hard at as low as 5,000 RPM’s in third gear, by 7/K the front end is light and I’ve been pushed back against the hard plastic tail section. I had not anticipated such strong acceleration at such comparatively low revs. I short shift it into 4th, reposition myself, open it up again and get another dose of the same rude treatment! I click into 5th and then 6th trying to catch-up with YamaMonster and find the acceleration at 6,000 RPM in top gear is still amazingly abundant. Around this time, deep down the back straight, I negotiate the downhill bend of Turn 9 at over 150 mph and find this Monster, not only likes this; it wants more!

I promise to myself, not to be caught off-guard and give it more of what it wants, on the next lap! Through Turn 1 YamaMonster tourques up the hill toward turn 2 spinning the rear tire all the way. I flirt with the acceleration, shifting and braking as I negotiate the esses, small straights and bends that lead back to Turn 7 and that back “straight-away”...which I hereto refer to as, “YamaMonster’s playground!”

I approach Turn 7 with some of my ability in reserve so that I can get the proper downshifts for my run down the straight. I throttle match into second, bend the bike into the right, knee on the ground and concentrate on smoothly opening those big flat-slides! Once mostly up on the fat of the tire, I position myself with chin to the top of the tank and knees clenched tight to its side. A quick glance of the tach says 6,000 and I roll it on. YamaMonster blasts forward, the bars twitch in my hand indicating that the front tire is merely skimming the tarmac and at 10 grand, I click down for third. The bike eerily seems to be accelerating even “harder” in the taller gear? We’re through third gear in an instant and by now I was wishing that the quick-shifter was enabled as I was having a hard time keeping up without electronic intervention. In fourth gear, the pull continues viciously hard but the sensation in the upper gears is that YamaMonster accelerates at a much faster rate than the tach needle climbs. It has an absolutely amazing “pull” through each gear. The powerband on this thing is linear, long and hell-bent strong! In fact, I’d venture to say that YamaMonster doesn’t have a power-band, per se! It’s more like, “If YamaMonster’s running its making power!”

**So what's it like?"** It was somewhere during the run up the tach in fourth that I heard "the sound"! I was using YamaMonster for all it had and it was singing a song of pure, unadulterated, "run-what-ya-brung" horsepower! A symphonic mixture of: big bore, hi-compression combustion; 20 valve, twin-cam mechanical music and a high velocity induction sound that was downright scary. Monster-like actually! YamaMonster hurdled me over the crest of Turn 9 approaching 170mph, still pulling and with nary a care! Wow! I thought. Wide-eyed but disappointed that I had to shut off with so much in it, still left to go. On this lap I had to test the brakes hard to scrub off a "mere" hundred-plus miles an hour in order to negotiate the Turn 10A left at the bottom of the hill. The Brembo's have a soft initial bite, which was a little disconcerting running downhill at over 170 mph but showed tremendous power as the lever continued to be pulled. The Ohlin's front end kept the bike amazingly planted throughout the entire "whoa" process! While all this was going on a sloppy downshift engaged the slipper clutch...who knew. Pretty trick for 1995!

For a half a dozen more laps, I got to play with not only YamaMonster's prodigious power but its handling prowess which can best be described as "freight-train" stable! While it is not exactly "flick able" due to its size and wheelbase, its light weight neutralizes those deficits and once you agree to plan your "turn-ins," it turns capably with absolutely no drama; on the brakes or off. On one particular lap, I was fooling around with body positioning and thought I'd try sticking my knee out at maximum velocity at the crest of turn 9. This maneuver settles my little R6 which gets a little nervous leaning in, on this part of the track. Not only didn't I have to, as YamaMonster was on rails, I shouldn't have...as the wind blast from the extra 30 mph's almost sent me off the back of the bike. Lesson learned when YamaMonster's doing its "thing", stay tucked in!

**"So what's it like?"** If my Yamaha YZF-R6 is a scalpel then YamaMonster is a nuclear powered, sledge hammer! It is "powerfully" fast, which is different than just "fast". It delivers real "steam" early in the rev range and never stops and the engine gives a powerful, tactile feel through the bars, unlike any other motorcycle, I've ever ridden. The chassis is amazingly "planted" which allows the rider to fully access all of that engine's amazing thrust. The suspension is top-shelf Ohlins and the brakes are Brembos, need I say more. But for me YamaMonster is all about the sound! It's a guttural low end growl that never turns shrill, like today's 14,000 RPM rev'ers. As the rpm's rise on YamaMonster, the growl just gets louder and is joined by a gale force sound of induction that has you questioning the safety of birds, children and slender women anywhere near the track's edge; for fear they may get sucked into those giant flat slides as YamaMonster blasts by.

**"So what's it like?"** Well in retrospect, it's actually quite easy to describe! Yamamonster is like a national championship winning, historic roadracing motorcycle that when you open up the throttle slides; feels and goes exactly as its name implies!

I'd like to thank Bill Brown, founder of HMGP and YamaMonster's owner and trustee, for allowing me to experience this historic-moto icon.

If you have a vintage racebike in your garage (or collection), I encourage you to throw on some fresh tires, contact Bill and come out and ride with the great guys at Historic Moto GP.