

A New Bike To Build

In the initial article published in this fine newspaper about the UCC Motorcycle Club it was explained that the club uses its workshop to rebuild old (and new) motorbikes back to working condition. Ever since that statement was made, there has been almost no documentation of any of our work due to the club being busy on ride-outs and karting.

Finally however it seems that Santa has arrived and left his sleigh in the workshop in the form of a Kawasaki GPZ 750. It's longer than your average Santa sled, just about as red, about as old hat by today's technological standards and exudes almost the same level of character. There is only one Santa's sled and indeed there could only ever be one GPZ 750 superbike. Tom Cruise proved this when he rode this exact same bike in that iconic movies of the 1980s, Top Gun. Leather jacket, wind in hair, a fist clinched and raised aloft as his GPZ chased the wake of a just-airborne fighter plane. While we don't have any access to a fighter plane on campus, we do have plenty of tools and plenty of will in order to get this sled back on the road.

The bike currently lies as a jigsaw puzzle in the motorbike club's workshop with various parts in crates. Last week Martin, our mechanic and the documented owner of this bike, began the task of airbrushing dust from the frame of the bike. Martin had bought the bike in 1997 when it was already 13 years old but with a bike like this age doesn't matter, after all, who last complained that Santa was too old to do his job? Maintenance of his sled however does matter. Having been left out in the rain as a jigsaw puzzle and unused for years, seals have given way, the engine internals have pitted, bearings need greasing and every little bit needs every little bit of attention we can give it. In short, while this may be a big job, it might well be one made up of small tasks.

Having talked with Martin at length about this GPZ, it seems that prior to the years in which it lay unused, the bike had some of the best aftermarket parts fitted in order to improve what was already a well regarded motorbike. The suspension, both front and rear had been improved with a Hagon shock fitted to the rear and a Telefix fork brake fitted to the front to improve handling. This bike wasn't known as the "flexi-flyer" for no reason! Generally a long motorbike tends to be more stable in a straight line at high speed than a shorter one but the trade off is that a shorter bike is more agile. With the Kawasaki being longer than most Harley Davidson's (and they're the longest bikes you're likely to see) its frame had a tendency to flex when ridden at speed through turns. This flex makes the bike feel reluctant to change direction – the addition of the suspension upgrades went some way to solving this problem but it was when Martin was in the process of following a Suzuki Hayabusa some years ago that the bike decided it had had enough.

The Suzuki Hayabusa however was the fastest production motorcycle of the 20th century, able to reach 200mph the moment you rode it out of the dealership. In this context the fact that Martin blew a piston within the GPZ's venerable motor is excusable. Martin remembers that the engine power dropped away very quickly before hearing a bang – it didn't leave him stranded though for the engine still had three working pistons which allowed him to limp home from Fermoy. No tow truck was called for it but on a separate occasion the bike was simply too long to fit in the tow truck.

Thankfully the bike isn't too long for the workshop and work began tentatively last Wednesday night as the cylinder walls were polished smooth with fine sandpaper. These walls need to be ultra smooth to prevent oil seeping into where the petrol explodes but having been left in the rain for so

long they'd developed small spots of rust. Smoothing out those cylinder walls wasn't exciting work but with bikes one has to look at the longer view. In months to come pistons would again slide up and down these walls, fuel exploding and pushing them down, exhaust valves opening and the piston reciprocating to push those exhaust gases out so the cycle can repeat to a maximum of about 13,000 per minute. 216 times every second. That's why they scream. And that's why working on every little task to get this GPZ back on the road is more than worth it. We have seen an eighties revival in films, in fashion and even in music to an extent – perhaps now UCC Motorcycle Club can continue this with an icon of 1980s motorbikes.

Nevin Power.