

□ STEVE ROSE

Anti-tampering laws: Not much wrong so far

Hmmmm, MSL was heading out of the door to the printers when the vote results came through from the European Parliament about anti-tampering. And you know what? It doesn't seem to be all that bad...

How fast is your microwave? Five minutes to bake a potato? Pah. Loser. I've had mine chipped and fitted a carbon fibre race-dish so it'll frazzle a spud in less than 90 seconds. Eat my charcoal etc... okay, I'm joking, but there's a point here. As human beings, both blessed and cursed with the Y chromosome, we can't help but want our stuff to be better and faster. Some of us are obsessed with having the biggest telly, the fastest bike and the most necks on our guitars.

It doesn't make a difference. Adding a turbo to my VFR won't make me a faster rider, it just means I go quicker down some bits of the road and then have to brake earlier and harder to make the corner. Which usually means I end up slowing down too much, which then means I have to accelerate even harder to get back up to speed. Good job I fitted that turbo then.

No, no, no. And I know this, but it doesn't stop me wanting to discover more about that bloke at the bike meet's 450bhp super-tuned Harris Magnum because that's how I'm programmed.

Just as *MSL* went to press we got the result of the European Parliament's vote on anti-tampering measures. And to be honest, I think it's pretty positive. Mostly because the first paragraph in it acknowledges that motorcycles are a solution to Europe's congestion problems. But it goes on to say that many people who would otherwise want to ride one are put off by the perceived danger, backed up by the well-voiced statistic that we make up 2% of traffic but account for 16% of deaths.

So, the committee members' aim is apparently to get more people on to two

wheels and in order to do that they want to make motorcycling safer. So they are recommending that ABS be fitted to every bike or scooter over 51cc and that it becomes impossible (and illegal) to tamper with a power train (engine, injection and exhaust) in such a way as to increase the speed.

By which I think they are really targeting small bikes for learner riders. But the truth is that most of the tinkering that goes on here is to get around legal licence restrictions – fitting 180cc big bore kits to 125cc machines etc – which is already illegal anyway. Most people who want a faster Honda CBF600 will just go and buy a Kawasaki Z750. Those who still fit race exhausts might say they do it for the performance, but truth is that most of them do it for the noise or increased midrange, not top speed.

And they'll be disappointed anyway because the latest emissions legislation means most modern bikes have exhausts where replacing the end can liberates no more power, because all the restriction is before the silencer. Replacing the full system with a race pipe will make your bike faster, but that's already illegal.

Those of us old enough to remember the first wave of Japanese tuning products (especially those Alfa and Piper four-into-one exhausts) will also remember that most of them actually made our bikes slower. What they really did was throttle the gas flow and add an unwelcome flat spot in the midrange which then gave a false feeling of a power band as your motor spluttered through the flat spot and came out gasping the other side. I still remember going along to a magazine-sponsored tuned-bike shoot out in 1988 when the fastest bikes were mostly the closest to standard while the tuned ones made lots of noise and then blew up.

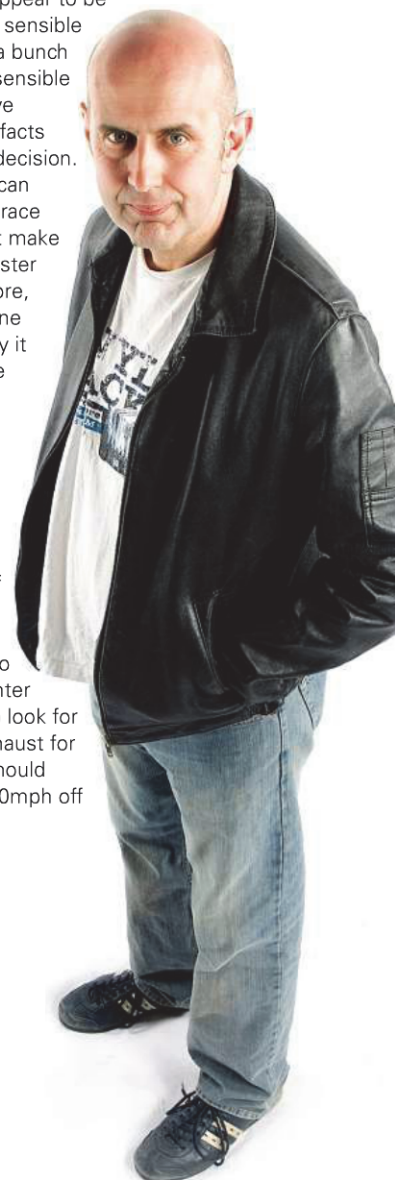
So, exhausts aside what this new law does is outlaw the mega-tuning; the big bore kits, the reprofiled cams and gas flowed cylinder heads, but all of this is impossible to police unless you're caught doing 250mph on a bike that everyone knows will only do 180mph (and if that happens then, believe me, the least of your worries is going to be your gas flowed head).

And the other interesting thing about the European vote is a clear statement that it is only powertrain tampering that makes a bike

faster that they are targeting. Other kinds of cosmetic or chassis tampering are still legal. And, in addition, manufacturers will now have to make all service data available to anyone so your local mechanic will now be able to fix the traction control on your Ducati Diavel.

So should we be worried? No, probably. At least not now. These new laws make no mention of power or speed restrictions and no mention of compulsory high visibility clothing. They appear to be the rational and sensible conclusions of a bunch of rational and sensible people who have considered the facts and come to a decision. So long as you can prove that your race exhaust doesn't make your bike any faster than it was before, then you'll be fine (and presumably it will be up to the authorities to prove this – innocent until proven... etc).

Europe, it seems may be braced for a second wave of go-slower accessories. Me, I'm going to the Newark Winter Classic show to look for an old Piper exhaust for the VFR. That should knock at least 10mph off the top speed.



□ WHO IS STEVE ROSE?

Steve Rose is a high mileage road rider. A former editor of *Bike and RiDE* magazine and one time back street bike dealer. He's also one of the UK's most experienced and trusted road testers