

THE FIRST THOUSAND KM



My new bike has just ticked over its first 1,000km. (I planned where I'd be when the "1000" came up, so I could stop and take a photo). This happened in May 2020, exactly 6 months after I picked it up, with zero km showing, from On Two Wheels Motorcycles in south-western Sydney. That's quite a long time to do 1,000km really, but there are reasons why it took that long.

So, how has it been? **Well, in a word, frustrating!** But better times are ahead.

But first, for the benefit of those who came in late, or forget, I'll briefly summarise the background to all this.

SOME BACKGROUND

My previous bike was a **2007 Yamaha XJR1300**, which I bought when it was just over a year old



and had a mere 1,200km showing on the clock – not even run-in. Over the next 11 years I put up 60,000km. Perhaps not a lot by some people's standards, but my riding is mostly weekend day-rides. During that time the bike was supremely reliable; as had been all but one of the previous Yamahas I'd owned over my 40+ years of riding. And while a big naked muscle-bike was perhaps not my ideal style of bike, I loved it!

I chose it mainly because of its comfort. (Click [here](#) to read how I came to choose this over bikes like the Triumph Sprint, and Yamaha FZ1). The fully-adjustable suspension front and back allowed me to dial in a comfortable compliant ride. Of course the performance was great too. It wasn't sportsbike

powerful, but riding it was like driving a V8, with that big old-style engine putting out huge amounts of low-down grunt, which I absolutely loved!

The downside was weight: at just over 240kg fully fuelled, there was a substantial amount of motorbike. And by the beginning of 2019 it was beginning to be a problem: wheeling it in and out of the garage was more of an effort, and even on-road –especially doing U-turns etc – I was feeling it more. Friends of similar age who had big bikes had down-sized, and I was thinking I should do the same. But I was limited by lack of finance. So I decided to keep it, and just work around the weight issue as best I could. **But then I won a bike.**

Winning the bike in the Snowy Ride raffle was – and still is! – a surreal experience. You don't just walk past the stand on the last day of the raffle, buy a ticket purely as a donation, and a couple of hours later get a phone call saying you've won a brand new motorbike. That just doesn't happen! And yet it did! One ticket, out of almost 8,000.



The bike I won was a **Honda Africa Twin**. They are a great motorbike, but there was no way I was going to keep it. Firstly, it is big, heavy, and very tall. If I needed to downsize, this was not the bike to have! Secondly, I couldn't justify, for the amount of riding I do, having a bike worth \$23,000. So the plan was to sell the Honda, and my own bike, and downsize to something suitable putting the remaining money in the bank, to help when we needed to replace our 15-year old car, or similar necessary expense. (Click [here](#) for the story of winning and then selling, the Honda I won).

You can read the subsequent story of how I came to buy the

Yamaha MT-07 Tracer by clicking [here](#).

BUYING MY NEW BIKE



As described in that story, **on the 22nd November 2019 I picked up the new bike.** The ride home, and the first few days of ownership, are covered in that story of buying it too. (The photo here is of the bike, ready to pick up).

As I described there, the thing I was concerned about before buying it – the performance – was fine. Yamaha, foolishly I think, only supply the LAMS version of the 700 twin: the full-power version is not an option, as it is with the naked bike. But when I rode the test bike I felt it was okay; I reckoned I could live with it. But the thing I felt would be fine – the comfort – wasn't!

LET THE FRUSTRATIONS BEGIN!



The first thing was that **the \$300 optional “Comfort Seat” wasn't a comfort seat: it was almost as bad as the standard one!** I ended up using the standard seat and my AirHawk. But that wasn't comfortable either. It cushioned the bumps okay, but it somehow upset the riding-position and I felt all out-of-place on it. I had adjusted the preload to the softest setting as soon as I got it home, but that didn't achieve much. Of course the suspension being new was going to be more stiff than the test-bike, which had just under 1,000km on it, but even so, I couldn't understand how both 07 bikes I'd ridden – the Tracer and the XSR – had impressed me with their ride, but

this was quite harsh. ***Frustrating!!***

There were **two factors to consider though**. The first was that when I test-ride a bike for the website, I try to be objective; saying how I like it, sure, but also assessing it from a more objective point of view too. But of course when it is your own bike, you're much more critical of how it works for you personally. No objectivity now, it is all subjective!

The other factor was that ever since my back trouble flared up in 2017 / 2018, I had been riding with the AirHawk on full-time. So my backside was used to riding on a cushion of air. Anything less (even the XJR without the AirHawk) felt uncomfortable by comparison.

But it wasn't just me: I heard of at least two other owners who had only managed about 400km before giving up and selling their bike, saying they just couldn't get comfortable on it. How could this be, when I'd found the test-bike suitably comfortable? ***Frustrating!!***

One minor irritation was that when I went to buy a bottle of **coolant** – just so that I had some to top-up with if necessary – I found that the standard Yamaha coolant is blue; but what I had in mine was orange. The explanation I was given was that sometimes if they run out at the factory, they just grab whatever they have on-hand and use that. It worked okay (the engine was running at a good temperature), but it was no good if I couldn't top it up! I contacted On Two Wheels, and they said for me to bring the bike back to them. But I didn't fancy a 150km round trip to get the coolant changed – especially as I considered their standard of pre-delivery pretty poor (the tyres were down by about 10psi when I picked it up). I took it to a local dealer (**MotoCity Motorcycles**, in Albion Park) and they changed the coolant to the proper Yamaha stuff, and also checked the rest of the bike over. On Two Wheels wouldn't cover the cost of that, because they had told me to bring it back to them; and Yamaha wouldn't cover the cost because they said there was nothing wrong with the coolant that was in it. MotoCity said they didn't think I should have to pay for it, so they didn't charge me. Very kind of them. (*So guess who I took it to for the first service?!).*

But back to the comfort issue. **Part of the problem with the AirHawk was that it was a bit big for the size of the seat;** so it reduced the actual rider area; in effect, moving the step to the pillion section further forward. I was partly sitting on that rising-up section, which made me feel like the seat was sloping up and tipping me forward. I then found that there was a model of AirHawk specifically listed for the Tracer 07; and similar size adventure bikes. It was smaller than the one I had. So I bought that. **But that brought more frustration!** I fiddled with the amount of air but no matter what I did, I couldn't get it to feel right. I think the problem was that it was too small, so that I always felt like I was sitting on a bubble of air. Reducing the air inside just reduced the size of the bubble, it didn't stop the sensation of rolling-around that the smaller size induced. And the riding-position still felt wrong! **Once again I was frustrated at how the test-bike had seemed good ergonomically, but my bike felt all wrong!** On more than one occasion I found myself wishing I'd kept the XJR!

The furthest I'd ridden the new bike was to a favourite lunch spot about 55km away. A short ride on the old XJR, but a frustratingly uncomfortable one on this bike. *Frustrating!*

Countering this, to some extent, was the fact that **I still liked the semi-faired style and the look of the bike.** And I kept reminding myself why I had it – the need to down-size from that 240kg of motorcycle that I'd started to struggle a bit with.

Then one day when I took it for a short ride, fiddling with the amount of air in the AirHawk, but just couldn't get comfortable, it just got too much: I stopped, took the AirHawk off and threw it in the top-box and headed for home. *Maybe I'd sell it, but at that moment I just wanted to get home and get off the thing!*

But then a funny thing happened. The seat felt awful (as had the test-bike), but **the riding-position felt right – as it had done with the test-bike.** Now it might sound obvious to say that having the AirHawk on changed the riding-position, and that's why I felt it was wrong, but I was used to the different feel with the XJR in having it on and not having it on; and both were okay. But with this, the difference was obviously more substantial. By the time I got close to home, my bum was feeling sore, but I was feeling happy with the way the bike felt. **Fix the seat and it might be okay!**

THERE'S HOPE AHEAD

An option I had considered was having a **custom seat** made. I had spoken to a couple of places, but decided to go with **MJM, in Goulburn.** They certainly have the reputation, and Mick, the owner / operator, seemed to really know what he was talking about with solving the problems with seats. It was almost \$500, but if it fixed the problem it would be worth it. So I called up and ordered one. He wanted photos of me sitting on the bike, which I duly provided, and took the seat to him.

Chatting to people on the **Tracer 700 Owners Facebook page** – which is based in UK – brought another realisation: **the rear shock was over-sprung, especially for my weight.** One owner, who was the same weight as me, commented that with the standard shock there was almost no rider-sag. I should've noticed this myself; but it hadn't really registered. Of course! Same with mine! When I sat on it there was hardly any movement at all. Several owners in the UK-based group had replaced the rear unit with **an after-market shock;** with **Hagon** being the one recommended. Hagon are a UK company based in Essex, England. They do have an Australian agent, but the guys at Hagon in UK were so friendly and helpful every time I contacted them (by email and also by phone), that I ordered direct from them. Not only do they supply a spring suited to your weight (I needed one grade lighter than standard), but **the shock is adjustable for preload, and compression and rebound damping.** The compression and rebound aren't separate though, it is one adjustment that alters both in proportion; but that's okay, they are both being adjusted. At a bit over \$600 (at the time) it was pretty cheap for what you get.

Now, while all this was going on, **the East coast of Australia was on fire.** While there weren't any fires in our immediate vicinity, the smoke blanketed the entire coast. This began in about October last year, but got worse in December and January. So that, together with summer heat, kept the bike in the shed. **So while riding it was frustrating, not being able to ride it was frustrating too!**

I said that the performance was fine, and in general it was, but it got a bit frustrating sometimes; although that was due to my care in running it in. The manual said to "Avoid prolonged operation above 5,000rpm". In the early days to me that meant don't take it over 5,000rpm at all. An important aspect of running-in is not to let the engine labour; light throttle at reasonable revs is where it should be (while varying

the revs, not just letting it sit continuously at the same speed). The trouble was, in top gear on the highway it wasn't really happy under about 4,000rpm. It will pull away from 2,000-3,000 without any fuss, but is happier at 4,000; especially if it has to work a bit, like going uphill on the highway into a head-wind – a situation I encountered a few times during those early stages. That made for a fairly narrow band of operational revs. To keep it in that happy spot, without using much throttle (another prerequisite for careful running-in) meant changing down, sometimes 2 gears, and slowing accordingly. That happened on one particular hill on that ride to a lunch spot I mentioned. It's a 100kph speed limit, but I was down a couple of gears and doing about 80kph. A bit embarrassing and frustrating when I recalled how the XJR would go up there, even into a headwind, almost like it was flat ground. But I consoled myself with the knowledge that it would be better when I could use more throttle and more revs.

IT'S GETTING BETTER!

First thing to arrive was **the new suspension**; posted from Hagon in UK.



I took that to my favourite mechanic to fit. Even he noticed the difference just riding it in and out of the workshop: with the original shock it felt quite solid, but with the Hagon on, the ride was much smoother, and it gave a plush ride. He was impressed!

I had softened the damping by one step before having it fitted, and subsequently wound off one turn of preload, and then later another turn, to get to around the recommended 30mm of rider-sag. I also backed the damping off by another couple of steps.

Those adjustments made it better again; **it really was well worth the money!** And I was grateful for the recommendation from the members of the Facebook group.

Next to arrive was **the custom-seat**, delivered from Goulburn.



It feels firm, but it works. There are areas of softer foam where the points of the pelvis are (which is where I have a lot of trouble), so it cushions those areas while giving greater support to the rest of the backside. I put my sheepskin cover on. (On previous bikes if I didn't have the AirHawk on, I had a sheepskin cover with a 12mm layer of high-density foam under it). But I found that, as Mick had suggested, it was actually better without the sheepskin, as it allowed the seat to work as intended. It still feels a bit odd, because I am so used to sitting on sheepskin (or the AirHawk), but I'm getting used to it –

slowly. (I'm carrying the sheepskin pad in the top-box to put on if I feel like using it).

By the time the seat had arrived **there was another problem – the coronavirus!** We were put in lockdown, with only essential travel allowed (work, getting food etc). So **I just got the bike all sorted and ... I couldn't ride it! That was frustrating!** Especially as logic said that if I went for a short ride, and didn't even get off the bike, there was absolutely no chance of getting the virus. And yet we could exercise, we



could ride a pushbike, go to the shops etc – all of which carried a far greater risk of becoming infected. Yes, I get the argument that were I to have an accident, well, hospital is one place one wouldn't want to be while this pandemic was going on! I did a couple of very short rides – to do some of those essential things. It took almost as long to put all the gear on as I took to ride to the shop / bank etc, but at least it was blowing the cobwebs of it – and me. (And I was able to go the long way – as shown in the photo here) – which made it a bit more interesting.

But now, in May, we are allowed out, so **I can venture out on the new bike with its new suspension and new seat.** However, my back and neck are giving me trouble, and I am so out of riding-fitness, that short rides are all that I can manage. But it will get better as I get better.

RUNNING-IN



I have been very happy with the way I have been running-in the bike, and the way it has responded to that.

Now, you'll get all sorts of arguments on the best way to run-in bikes today; with the most common one being that you don't have to: "Ride it normally, just don't thrash it". That was pretty much what the dealer said too. I don't agree. **A new motor is still a new motor.** Sure, the tolerances are much less, and the manufacturing process much more precise, than it was with engines in decades past, but the engine still has to "wear itself in", so that the components precisely match each other and bed-into each other. Rings bedding themselves in to the cylinder walls is perhaps the biggest thing these days, but it's the same with other

components too.

As I mentioned above, the manual says, "Avoid prolonged operation above 5,000rpm". That doesn't mean you can run it all day at 4,990rpm, and use as much throttle as you want. **Running-in, I believe, should be progressive.** This is how I did it.

From zero km on the clock, I allowed it sometimes to get to 5,000rpm, while gently accelerating, but didn't go over that. I used little throttle and made sure not to labour it, changing down when needed, to keep it running smooth and easy. It's also important to vary the speed, rather than hold it at a constant speed. I mentioned in the story of buying it, that I came home via a longer more varied route so that it would be varying speed and revs, rather than sitting on a constant speed on the highway.

As the numbers climbed on the odo, I allowed it to go above 5,000rpm, again mostly on acceleration; and I used more throttle, occasionally giving it a decent squirt up to around 6,000rpm. By the time the 1000km came up, 5,000rpm was common (although not holding it for long) and I often took it to about 6,000rpm when accelerating. On the highway I could use more throttle, or even change down a gear and use more revs, where necessary, although I still wasn't allowing it to cruise above 5,000rpm.

It has responded well to this. The engine is noticeably more responsive: even blipping the throttle at idle the engine is much more lively than it was. It is also more tractable: while it still prefers to be around 4,000rpm on the highway in top, it will happily toddle around the suburbs in the lower gears at 2 – 3,000rpm, and pull away with no trouble at all. Even top gear is okay from that, if you don't demand too much of it.

LIFE AFTER THE XJR1300

With so much torque down low, the XJR hardly ever went above 4,000rpm. Even on the highway, 4,000rpm equated to about 110kph, and I didn't often cruise above that. So how would I be adjusting to a bike that likes – even needs – higher revs? Well, that was actually okay. That's because, being a twin, it doesn't feel, or even sound, like it's revving hard. It's reasonably high-g geared for a mid-size bike, so even if a change-down is required for a big hill and a headwind, 5th will still cruise at 110kph with the tacho just creeping above 5,000rpm – the sort of gearing many mid-size 4-cylinder machines run in top. Sure, I miss that smooth, powerful surge and sound the XJR delivered when you gave the tacho a work-out; and I miss the low-down, V8-like grunt; but it's the price paid for getting a lighter bike. And this is still a very tractable engine, as I said, so it will still toddle along happily at those lower revs.

Comfort has been the main thing. But **the XJR was a hard act to follow.** Its new owner described it as riding "like a 2-wheeled Rolls Royce". The new bike is not that, but it would be getting closer to that ideal. With the new suspension and new seat **it is a very much improved bike!**

I'm not sure where the Tracer is built, but it seems to be well put together; however the quality of components is not quite to the same standard as the XJR. It feels a bit more "plasticky" than the XJR. That impression is not helped by a petrol tank that actually *is* plastic, not steel. **But I'm happy with it!**

So another 600km (actually about 550 as I write this) and it will be officially run-in. Red-line is 10,000rpm, but I won't be riding in those higher revs much – that's not how I ride. Sure, an occasional blast is always fun (and I've already had it to 7,000rpm on acceleration), but it will be pretty normal riding for me from now. And any thoughts of selling it are long, long gone!



Photo by John Keogh, on one of its first runs



At home having just ticked over the 1,000km