

TWO WHEELED WONDERS

The best looking classic bikes ever

It doesn't matter if you're a fan of two-wheelers or not—the thumping warble of a classic café racer and the sleek style of older motorbikes is appealing to almost anyone, even the staunchest anti-motorcycle crowd. Something about these following bikes manage to stir something deep inside everyone, and we suspect the way they look has a lot to do with it. So here's our list of the best looking motorbikes from yesteryears.



BMW R32

Forget your Nissan Skyline, this sleek pre-WWII motorcycle was BMW's first, featuring a shaft-drive gearbox in place of the more common chain-drive one, a 8.5 HP 500cc air-cooled flat-twin motor, and was capable of 60 MPH. Not bad for 1923. It was also impossibly sleek, almost bicycle-like in construction.

TRIUMPH SPEED TWIN

The original 1937 Speed Twin was a 500cc parallel-twin motor powered bike that nearly single-handedly saved the Triumph brand in post-WWII Britain. It would serve as the basis for the resurgence of European motorcycle manufacturing in the day.



VINCENT BLACK SHADOW

The Black Shadow was launched in 1948 amidst much fanfare that claimed it to be the “fastest motorbike in the world”—the air-cooled 4-stroke V-twin 1000cc motor gave the Black Shadow a top speed of 125 MPH, faster than most sports cars of the day. The craftsmanship, attention to detail and engineering excellence makes it a collector's item today.

MOTO GUZZI V7 SPECIAL

The V7 was originally designed by Moto Guzzi in consultation with the Italian police as a motorbike for VIP escorts and high speed pursuit. The 700cc civilian model was introduced in 1967, with the V7 Special adding more power and features in 1969. It was a mix of subtle curves and sharp edges, a beauty to look at in profile.



DUCATI 750 SPORT

The concept of the café racer caught on in the 70s through custom homebuilt bikes, and Italian powerhouse Ducati was quick to catch on and offer a factory option. The 750 Sport offered robust performance and build quality, and established Ducati's now-stratospheric reputation.

YAMAHA TZR250

Race bikes generally looked nearly the same as their roadgoing counterparts in the early days—other than cowlings and extended fairings, it wasn't necessary to change a lot of the bike for racing. Yamaha's TZR250, based on the racing TZ250, changed all that with a full fairing that would be more at home today than in 1986. If you ever had a toy motorbike, this was it.



BENELLI 750 SEI

Benelli's 750 was a uniquely Italian prospect—a café racer style bike with a big inline 6 (the world's first) and triple exhausts made it astoundingly heavy to operate, but you'd still want to, because look at it. A two wheeled Lamborghini Countach if you will.

HONDA CB750F

The CB750 was Honda's first superbike, and was recognised by Discovery Channel to be one of “Greatest Motorbikes Ever”. Built from 1969 all the way to 2007, the 750F was one of the most important models in Honda's extensively impressive portfolio. We have a few in Bangladesh, too.



SUZUKI BANDIT GSF400

While other manufacturers had stuck with blocky, wedge styling for their bikes well into the 90s, Suzuki bucked the trend with their curvy, almost sensual styling for the Bandit. The GSF400 was a strong performer too.

NORTON COMMANDO 961

It doesn't matter how much you know about bikes, you will have heard the name Norton at some point or the other. The Commando is one of the most recognisable classic bikes, with good reason—it was a formula that everyone tried to copy, but couldn't quite capture the charm.



INDIAN CHIEF

Harley Davidson might be the bike manufacturer that everyone associates with America and the open road and biker culture, but those who want to explore the open road and go on an epic adventure will know to opt for Indian. The Chief came with saddles and a rock-solid reputation, with looks to match—with a huge range of customisation options, you can make it yours.

PIAGGIO VESPA

Absolutely simple, unerringly reliable and a style icon for decades—the two wheeled counterpart to the Volkswagen Beetle became a pop-culture icon that rose above trivial things like gender identity and social cues. You could be a hairy chested bear wrestler, men among sheep, and you'd still love the “effeminate” Vespa to bits.



TEST RIDE

Kawasaki KLX150

In the late 90s, dirt bikes could cause instant palpitations of desire in pretty-much every kid about to finish school or just get into college. Only the coolest dance-pop fans had one. The top of the class was Honda's XL 185. The sensation you had doing a sudden first gear pull was the most fun thing you could do, legally. Or with pants on. The XLs have long disappeared from view and the popularity of dirt bikes seems to have waned, although the motorcycle market expanded and saturated with new inventories over the years.

It is not surprising that Kawasaki has launched in Bangladesh with just four bikes and two of them are for off-roading. With tyres made for dirt, the more serious, no-nonsense one is the KLX 150.

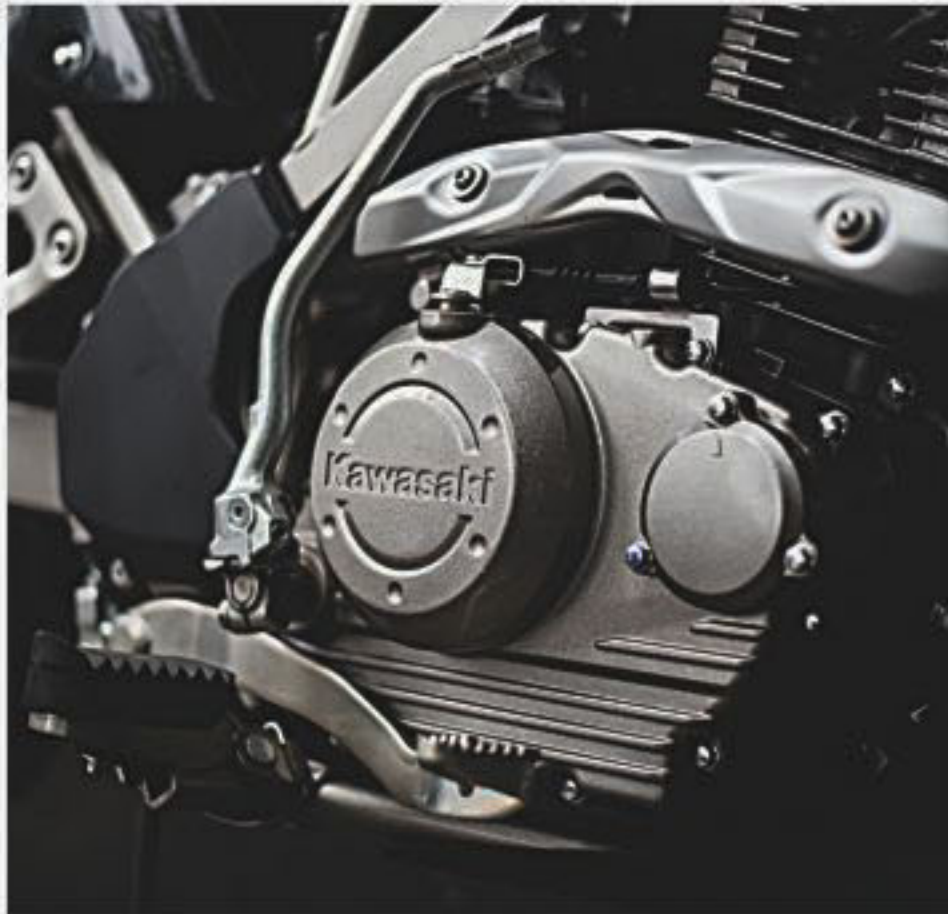
Although the wide fender and ground clearance may suggest otherwise, it's so light and manageable that anyone could step into the world of two-wheels with it. The carb-fed 144cc engine delivers 11.5 HP and 8.3 lb-ft torque, which may not seem particularly impressive when compared to other bikes of similar displacement. But with a wet weight of just 118kg it more than compensates for the couple of missing HP. It's not the lightest dirt bike in the world, but there is hardly anything that can come close in the local market.

The monstrous fender clearance and seat height partially disappears with the weight of an average person. Since we tested it on the potholed and bumpy streets of Dhaka, the rear mono shock was lowered. As the front wheel is



bigger than the rear by three inches, it looks astonishingly poised in that setup, not to mention the additional stability gained from the stiffer shocks.

You sit on it the way your grandma taught you to sit: upright, no crouching or leaning forward. When it comes to low speed maneuvering and turning within small spaces, the KLX is almost idiot-proof. If it falls, you can just pick it up effortlessly. Everything is within easy reach as well, from the 'bars, to the controls and foot controls, with both the gear change lever and rear brake in just the right spot for ease of use. One downside is that the dash only displays speed and fuel level— nothing to tell you which gear you are on, a feature you find quite useful once you get accustomed to it.



Although the price is close to the premium range, it'll enjoy a niche market created by both young riders and those looking for proper off-reading. There is nothing in the segment to compete with this in the market.

The KLX150 is available through Asian Motorbikes Ltd, starting from a price of TK 3,70,000.

This is a shortened version of a review that was originally published in Shift's 5 year special anniversary magazine, available at outlets near you. Check our Facebook page for details.

WORDS: AKRAM HOSEN
PHOTOS: RAHIN SADMAN ISLAM

COLLECTIBLES

Honda CB750 1:4 scale model by DeAgostini

What's better than getting a highly detailed scale model of a bike? One that you have to painstakingly assemble over 2 years, of course. Model Space UK will mail you individual components of the Honda CB750 so you can assemble it part by part, with each shipment costing around £36. The full kit is around £560.



Mercedes Benz Classic Car Owners Club are organising a “Mercedes Benz Heritage Meet”, in conjunction with Mercedes Benz Bangladesh. Head on over to 100 Feet Road at Purbachal on Friday, 11th January, to get your classic Three Pointed Star fix.