

FOR ALL KINDS OF RIDERS ON ALL KINDS OF BIKES

# SUPERBIKE<sup>TM</sup> MAGAZINE

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# 50

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## OLD VERSUS NEW HONDA FIREBLADES

IS THE 2006 'BLADE REALLY £3,000  
 BETTER THAN A MINT 2002 MODEL?



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► REAL WORLD



# OLD vs NEW

Words: Rob Hoyles Pics: John Noble

## Honda Fireblade CBR954RR vs CBR1000RR

An object of desire for many years, the 2006 model is Honda's best Fireblade yet. But is it worth three grand more than a mint 2002 machine? *SuperBike* headed north to find out



£5,500

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The Fireblade moniker is arguably the most famous in sportsbikes. The original headbanger's delight in 1992, the 'Blade's sharpness was blunted a little towards the end of the '90s by a more conservative, rider-friendly nature. Then came the first fuel-injected model in 2000 which wasn't the revelation the world was waiting for either. The bike suffered from snatchy fuel injection, indifferent handling and was outclassed by Yamaha's R1 for the third year running. The big H needed to do something.

Enter the CBR954RRR. Launched at the end of 2001, this new bike boasted an all-new chassis, uprated brakes and an engine that had been taken as far it could go in terms of its then capacity. This was ultimately its downfall in the world of racing though, as it lost out to the 'proper' 1,000cc bikes on the racetrack, set back even

further by the launch of Suzuki's new machine – the awesome but potentially intimidating GSX-R1000.

But that's on the track and back in the real world, what Honda had achieved was to create a fantastic motorcycle that managed to combine sensible *and* exciting in an accessible, easy-to-use package. Honda has promoted the 'easy speed' concept rather than going for world superbike race glory ever since. With small changes in gearing, slight weight loss and adjustments to the top end, the 2006 CBR1000RR got its edge back and damn nearly won our litre bike group test.

### Back to back

While similar in name, the riding position differs greatly between the two models; the 954 feels more focused with more weight on your wrists though it's still just the right side of comfortable



Funny how things change. The new bike (above) makes the 954 (right) look like a bit of a lard arse, which, of course, it most emphatically isn't

over a distance. The suspension set-up on the smoother roads feels similarly neutral on both bikes – neither too hard nor too soft with plenty of feel making both difficult to fault for normal road use.





"For most road riders the old model has performance and an abundance of that indefinable, grin-inducing Fireblade spirit that made the bike so famous in the first place."

The geometry does feel different though and if anything it's the older machine that steers faster and feels a little more accurate in the slower turns. It's only when we got to some of Derbyshire's more poorly-surfaced roads that the 954 starts to struggle. Much of this is down to the previous owner's choice of antique mahogany Dunlop 207 tyres being pitched against the new bike's excellent Pirelli Diablo Corsa rubber, but there's also no doubt

that Honda has made significant improvements to the 'blade's chassis and suspension over the last four years.

Where the older bike kicks off the bumps, gets unsettled and tries to run wide, the new machine feels composed mid-corner and takes the bumps in its stride, allowing its more confident rider to hold a constant throttle and line all the way through the corner.

Despite what the dyno figures suggest, the 954 feels freer-revving with more urgency lower down the rev range, despite giving away 20bhp at the top end (*SuperBike* tested figures are 145bhp@11,000rpm for the 954 and 157bhp@11,332rpm for the

2006 bike). Some of this, despite progress in almost every area including the lowered gearing, is because the 2002 bike is some 8kgs lighter. It's certainly a better stunter than the new bike too, with far more enthusiasm when it comes to wheelies.

Composure is something that the new bike has in spades however, almost to the point of being too good. The clever HESD (Honda Electronic Steering Damper) keeps the new bike stable however heavy-handed the rider is while the same approach has the older bike shaking its head furiously – if you're buying a used 2002 machine be sure to budget for a steering damper. ●



## ► REAL WORLD



### The final analysis?

Depending on your point of view, bank balance and what you want from a bike, making the choice between these two is like trying to decide whether to go for a Chinese or get stuck into a plate of fish and chips – they're both completely different experiences but both will do the job.

If you simply have to have the latest bike or need to be the fastest of the fast group on a trackday then the 2006 machine is the one to go for. It's got better brakes and suspension, it's faster, basically it's a better bike

in most respects – just not in every respect.

For most road riders the old model has performance and an abundance of that indefinable, grin-inducing Fireblade spirit that made the bike so famous in the first place. The 2002 bike has a crisper midrange, is almost as easy to ride yet has a slightly darker side when you crack open the throttle with its less refined power delivery and handling. It's not as close to perfection as the new model but, in the last analysis, is perfection always what we want? **EW**

## HONDA CBR954RR

### What to look out for

The peace of mind that a new Honda and a two-year unlimited mileage warranty create can be hard to resist for some, despite the extra cost. The older machine can cost up to four grand less making it harder to resist for everyone else. But what can go wrong, and what are the pitfalls in owning this older model?

#### Engine and gearbox

Although down a bit on top end power to the R1 and GSX-R1000, the Honda's motor has maintained the firm's reputation for reliability. The only known common problem is with the H-VIX exhaust valve (Honda's take on Yamaha's famous EXUP valve) which can come loose and rattle. Check for noises from the pipe on tickover – if it rattles get the dealer to fix it. If it's a private sale, get the owner to knock a few quid off – it's not expensive to put right, but definitely worth haggling over.

While the engine's sound enough, the CBR954RR suffered with gearbox problems. The biggest problem was jumping out of second gear under hard acceleration – at best you'd end up with bruised gonads as the bike jumped into a false neutral, at worst it would destroy the gearbox. Listen for noises during the road test, feel for a poor gear change and see what happens when you wind it on hard in second gear.

#### Chassis

Nothing other than usual wear and tear, though Honda has recently issued a recall on 2002 and 2003 models to check for cracking to the front fork lowers. Basically a safety check, there is a possibility that bikes used through the winter may suffer with salt ingress in between the fork tube and bottoms. Although there hasn't been a case reported in the UK, Honda UK's Motorcycle Marketing Manager, Scott Grimsdall told us: *"Engineers have discovered there's a remote possibility of a hairline crack caused by corrosion. As a precaution, we have sent letters out to all owners of this model offering them a free check at a Honda dealer of their choice. Anyone buying a CBR954RR that hasn't been checked can take their bike to any Honda dealer for this inspection, absolutely free of charge."*



## Honda CBR954RR Fireblade

**Price:** £5,500 **NU Ins group:** 17

**ENGINE Type:** I/c, 16v, four-cylinder, in-line DOHC **Displacement:** 954cc **Bore x Stroke:** 75 x 54mm **Compression:** 11.2:1 **Carburation:** PGM Fuel Injection, 42mm throttle bodies **Gearbox:** Six-speed, chain **Power:** 137bhp @ 11,000rpm **Torque:** 74lb ft @ 9,200rpm

**CYCLE PARTS Chassis:** Aluminium twin spar **Suspension:** (F) Showa 43mm fully adjustable USD fork (R) Showa fully adjustable monoshock **Brakes:** (F) Twin 330mm discs, four-piston Nissin calipers (R) 220mm disc, dual-piston caliper **Wheels/Tyres:** Cast Aluminium/ Dunlop 207, (F) 120/70 17, (R) 190/55 17 **Rake/Trail:** 23.4°/97mm **Wheelbase:** 1,400mm **Fuel Capacity:** 18 litres **Dry Weight:** 168kg



## Honda CBR1,000RR Fireblade

**Price:** £8,899 **NU Ins group:** 17

**ENGINE Type:** I/c, 16v, four-cylinder, in-line DOHC **Displacement:** 998cc **Bore x Stroke:** 75 x 56.5mm **Compression:** 12.2:1 **Carburation:** PGM-DSFI Fuel Injection, 44mm throttle bodies **Gearbox:** Six-speed, chain **Power:** 157.6bhp @ 11,332rpm **Torque:** 79.4lb ft @ 8,780rpm

**CYCLE PARTS Chassis:** Aluminium twin spar **Suspension:** (F) Showa 43mm fully adjustable USD fork (R) Showa fully adjustable monoshock **Brakes:** (F) Twin 320mm discs, radial four-piston Tokico calipers (R) 220mm disc, dual-piston caliper **Wheels/Tyres:** Cast Aluminium/ Pirelli Diablo Corsa, (F) 120/70 17, (R) 190/55 17 **Rake/Trail:** 23°/100mm **Wheelbase:** 1,400mm **Fuel Capacity:** 18 litres **Dry Weight:** 176kg



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