



JAWA Motorcyclist

JAWA 660 SPORTARD *Reproduced with the generous permission of Paul Browne and Bike Buyers Guide.*

Guess who's back?

PAUL BROWNE RIDES THE NEW JAWA 660 SPORTARD TO SEE IF IT'S THE RECESSION BUSTING BIKE OF THE YEAR!

One of the surprise new bikes for this year is the Jawa 660 Sportard. Jawa, pronounced 'yava' is a brand that's been around for a long time but one wouldn't exactly associate it with new models. So it was a pleasant surprise to find that not only is the company still around, but they have a dealer based in Dublin and he even runs somewhat of a demo fleet.

The Jawa Company has a fascinating history. Starting in late 1920 as a result of a merger between two pre existing engineering firms the factory, which is based outside Prague in the Czech Republic, manufactured small bore motorcycles, then during world war two it was taken over by the Nazi's during which time it was used as a research facility for the development

of robot technology. After the war, it was run along a Soviet management system thanks to the fact that the Czech Republic was part of the eastern block. As well as motorcycles, Jawa also made a number of cars, but they are most famous for their speedway racing motorcycles. Speedway is a sport that they did so well at, they practically owned it.

By the 1950s they had exported a production line to India where their bikes remain hugely popular to this day, indeed they enjoy a cult following with the Indian motorcycling population, thanks not so much for their reliability, but for their ease of maintenance. By the mid sixties they had made one million motorcycles. In the early 90s when glasnost came along and the wall came down the Jawa business was split. There is no longer a car manufacturer and Jawa speed way racing is now a separate company from Jawa motorcycles.

The Sportard is Jawa's answer to the Supermotard. The bike uses an engine manufactured in Italy by a company called Minarelli. These

guys deserve a story of their own they have been manufacturing engines for smaller European motorcycle manufacturers for nearly as long as Jawa have been in existence. Their specialty in recent years has been two stroke engines for mopeds as well as smaller capacity 4 stroke engines for manufacturers such as MBK and Aprilia. In 2002, they were entirely bought over by Yamaha Motor Cooperation and the biggest engine they now make is the XT660, which is used in the Yamaha motorcycle of the same name. A similar version of the same engine is used in the Aprilia Pegaso and now it's used in the Jawa 660 Sportard. Initially the Sportard looks completely different to anything else, its triple headlight unit borrows more from Japanese mopeds than it does from Triumphs distinctive units. The frame that carries on around the headstock provokes comment. The steering lock is not what you'd expect from a straight bared bike and the ergonomics are different to anything it looks like with the footpegs being spaced a bit further apart than usual.



The wheel rims are absolutely gorgeous - beautifully shiny the spokes are laced in a way that they are easy to clean and polish, the switchgear on the handlebars is laid out in the same way as a Japanese bike. The end cans are a work of art, with the company logo etched into the end of each one. But the best thing about the

bike is the wonderful XT engine. The origins of this block are given away somewhat by the shape of the ignition key, which is straight off Yamaha's press.

The Layout of the bike still manages to be somewhat quirky and even a little basic - the clocks include a digital screen with a full fuel gauge off to the right hand side, but the centre clock, the biggest of the three is the speedo with the rev counter being the smallest of the lot and is somewhat out of the way on the left hand side. A periphery downward glance while riding along informs the rider of speed, but it is difficult to glance at the revs, which is a little unusual

The other thing that is strange is the side stand, which doesn't have a kill switch and retracts when the weight is removed from it. I believe some of our older readers would be familiar with this set up.

Riding the bike wasn't hugely different from an XT or a Pegaso. Riding around Dublin, the bikes narrow profile made it easy to commute and filter. What was really surprising was the amount of car drivers, and indeed one Dublin bus driver who seemed to know all about the brand. The bike prompted a hugely positive reaction from other road users, particular when stopped at the lights with some people being hugely nostalgic. One Mercedes driver was very happy to tell me that when he first started stepping out with his wife he would bring her out on the back of his Jawa 250. He was starting to look misty eyed when thankfully, the lights went green and I managed to get away before we both needed counseling.

There's a lot to compare this bike to in its class. Triumphs new 800 triple is fantastic, BMW's F800 parallel twin is still selling in solid numbers, Honda's new Transalp is

a fantastic bike, and even though Aprilia aren't officially represented in southern Ireland any more, you can still get a new Pegaso for very little money. Prices vary in this class, but none are as quirky as the Jawa and I've never seen a motorcycle make a Mercedes driver cry before.

Despite not manufacturing a new model of any significance for quite some time, Jawa is a much loved motorcycling brand and indeed, the Jawa owners club of Ireland is still going strong with a more than decent website, owners forum, ride outs and annual rally all being prominently featured on their site.

Jawa motorcycles is operated from Rosemount Business Park in Ballycoolin on Dublin's North side by the incredibly helpful and friendly Pavel. The Sportard is available from 7,790 - see www.jawa.ie for more details.

