

LET THERE BE LIGHT...

While half the fleet was swanning round the Yorkshire Dales, the rest stayed home and concentrated on doing something useful: improving night vision

BEFORE



Feeble illumination. And this is from an 'uprated' 55W bulb

AFTER



That's better. Off-road 130W bulb beats the grille and illuminates the road

CCM FT35, PETE BOAST

It's cool, but useless in the dark. Boastie needs to improve the flat-tracker's lights or he won't get home



Last month I moaned about my CCM's headlight. Installing a slightly higher wattage bulb (from 45W to 55W) barely helps. Then I found a 130W bulb. It says 'off road use only' on the box but if it doesn't improve, I'll be going 'off road' anyway...

After a spin to remind myself how bad the headlight is, I set about changing the bulb. The FT35 has a number board with a slotted grill, held on by four bolts. With that off, the headlight bracket, buried in the wiring loom, is just about accessible. A small screwdriver undoes the screw that secures the bulb. It takes about ten minutes to change.

What a difference! I wait to make sure the wiring loom isn't about to frazzle up into a ball, then head off into the dark. The new bulb is fantastic, lighting up catseyes like a landing strip and letting me go flat-out round corners I couldn't see before.

If your lights are a problem at night, it's worth having a look at your bulb wattage. Boosting it definitely works on the CCM and the new bulb was only a tenner.

CCM FT35 by numbers

» £5495 » 398cc » 4v single » 45bhp » 105mph » 420 miles this month » 1759 miles total » £99 accessories this month » £0 running costs » 50 mpg



Cool van, cool bike, rubbish lights... ah, this'll fix it

KAWASAKI ZZR1400, TOM BEDFORD

With good lights as stock (and difficult bulbs to replace) maybe fine-tuning the set-up is all it takes



I've been fiddling with the ZZR with Mark Brewin at bike engineers BSD. We've fitted a Micron exhaust system and removed the ECU-controlled secondary fuel injection butterflies, losing the 5000rpm power step, filling in the bottom end and releasing 183bhp. Yes, 183bhp – good enough for a tested 194mph in a crosswind at a Straightliners' event in Suffolk. So I need to see where I'm going.

But with six lights as standard, improving on the ZZR's night vision will be pretty hard. The standard set-up is the best I've used, with lamps plastered across the front of the fairing that light up the road as well as a car. Similarities with a car don't end there: the bulbs fitment is H11, widely used on cars but not on bikes, which makes it difficult to track down alternatives. Hence the uprated bulbs I want to try don't arrive in time for the test. Which, I have to confess, is a bit of a relief as they're a complete arse-ache to access under all that plastic.

Tweaking the adjusters to try to fine-tune the spread of light is no easier as there is



The ZZR is good as standard. Which is handy, because it's a job to adjust

hardly any room, but to be honest it doesn't make much difference. Any bike is going to move under braking and acceleration as it dips and rises, but the ZZR's arrangement keeps it to a minimum. It's a bit like a BMW with their Telelever front end, where dive is minimal and keeps the beam in the right place at the right time. Well, almost...

Kawasaki ZZR1400 by numbers

» £8995 » 1352cc » 16v dohc in-line four » 183bhp » 194mph » 551 miles this month » 3512 miles total » £720 accessories (Micron exhaust; replace £800 Zorstec cans) » £410 running costs (Avon ST Storm tyres, Metzeler M4 tyres) » 41mpg

YAMAHA YZF-R6, MIKE ARMITAGE

Already a handy night-time proposition, brighter bulbs should put the R6 at the top of the candlepower league



Given the tightly focused nature of the R6, I didn't expect the headlights to be all that impressive – especially having been spoilt last year by the searchlights fitted to BMW's R1200RT. But they're good. One light supplies dip with the second purely the main beam, giving a healthy spread and good projection that's better than John's Fireblade and Tom's ZZR.

But good as they are, I'm not going to turn down extra illumination now my

cross-country commute is conducted in darkness. Not wanting to spoil the Yamaha's delectable styling with bolt-ons, I opt for a bulb upgrade from Nippy Normans (01626 830458, www.nippynormans.com). I get a pair of PIAA Extreme White Plus bulbs to replace the standard H7 fitments, going from 55W to 110W promises an 'extreme cool blue white light'. They're £32 each or £55 a pair and fitment is easy – unscrew the large cover, unclip the bulb, fit the new one.

And there's a clear difference. Cleaner,

more natural, brighter light that makes standard headlights seem yellow. The main beam is filled out more at the edges too, picking out road signs even further into the distance. It's a worthwhile modification.

Yamaha R6 by numbers

» £7499 » 599cc » 16v dohc in-line four » 112bhp » 160mph » 1166 miles this month » 7158 miles total » £412 accessories (LSL clip-ons £205; Ventura rack £152; PIAA bulbs £55) » £0 running costs » 39 mpg



Stock bulbs are pretty good and show plenty of the road ahead



PIAA bulbs are brighter and whiter with a slightly wider spread

BEFORE



Stock Blade bulbs slice through the darkness (groan) but not very far

AFTER



Spotlights on, the Blade rips the darkness assunder ready to rocket forwards

HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE, JOHN WESTLAKE

Can the Blade cut it after dark? With the addition of some spotlights (honestly), it can



I've fitted spotlights. Yes really. I'd hoped they'd be good, but wasn't expecting this - it's my first night ride with them and I'm flying. With the verges drenched in bright white light and the road itself lit by the Blade's jaundiced dipped beam, I'm relaxed and easily able to see the verges swoop left or right - I'm not peering into the gloom like a myopic pensioner. I can't believe it's taken me 20 years to see what half-decent lights can do to a night ride.

Fitting the pair of PIAA spotlights (£203, 01934 818430) took me 90 minutes. The lamps bolt onto the mudguard mounting points and are easy to wire in. The spotlight switch fits neatly on to the top yoke. The spotlights look too low to do any good - like having a torch attached to your knees - but there's one key advantage: they don't point down under hard braking. And they work.

I am now the world's biggest fan of bright lights. Where can I get some high intensity gas discharge (HID) bulbs to fit a Blade?

Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade by numbers

» £8899 » 998cc » 16v dohc in-line four » 152bhp » 170mph (est) » 1138 miles this month » 4602 miles total » £233 accessories (Stomp grip pads £30; PIAA spotlights £203) » £170 running costs (tyres) » 41mpg



Spotlights may be small and odd-looking but they're bloomin' effective

The spotlights look too low to do any good - like having a torch strapped to your knees - but they work