



Jet-powered Y2K Superbike born from helicopter, flies on the road

BY JAMES HESKETH
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“You don’t want to go there,” Ted McIntyre said, pointing at the 58,000 mark on the tachometer. “You don’t want to go there,” he said again, waiting for assurance that the motorcycle would not be taken to its estimated top speed of 260 mph.

Then he began explaining the starting sequence: “Hold in the starter; at about 15,000 you’ll hear the igniter kick-in, and at 23 grand – that’s where it idles – it’ll be running and you can let off on it.”

Holding the red button below the left handgrip, the engine came to life with a soft, whistling whir only to be accompanied by a gentle roar as the revs increased and the gas mixture burning in the combustion chamber joined the air flow. At 23,000 rpm, McIntyre nodded, and I released the starter. He spoke but his words couldn’t be heard – they were drowned out by the howl of the Rolls Royce-Allison gas turbine engine.

This is a unique riding experience: The Y2K Turbine Superbike.

McIntyre’s company, Marine Turbine Technologies, of Franklin, LA, has been finding new uses for used turbine engines – mostly for marine and industrial purposes – for 18 years. MTT has done a few automotive conversions, and began developing the Y2K Turbine Superbike a couple of years ago. Only seven currently are on the streets; one is on display at the Smithsonian Museum and will be sold at auction when the exhibition ends. Three more are in production.

McIntyre plans on manufacturing no more than 15 bikes a year so that every motorcycle can be hand-built to each customer’s specifications.

At first word of a jet powered motorcycle, I was skeptical. It sounded gimmicky, like something for rich kids who might ride it once or twice a year just to show off. Although the rich-kid part may be accurate, the bike is well thought out, beautifully-built and street legal, and can be ridden anywhere there is pavement.

Fitting a 320-horsepower engine designed for a 10,000-pound Bell helicopter into a 460-pound motorcycle is no small feat. McIntyre’s first challenge was to alter the engine’s orientation and exhaust routing so it could lay horizontally in a motorcycle frame instead of sitting vertically on top of a helicopter.

The alchemy worked: It is a golden ride.

High-speed stability is maintained with a long 68-inch wheelbase. The rider stretches forward over the 8.5-gallon fuel tank (good for about an hour of riding) from the single seat to the low, narrow-set handlebars.

While tucked down behind the small fairing, feet on the rear-mounted pegs, knees held into cutouts in the tank and butt scrunched into the seatback, the rider's position is aggressive, but not uncomfortable.

A color monitor mounted on the dash holds all the usual digital gauges – speedometer, tachometer, temperature, odometer... as well negating the need for rear-view mirrors by displaying the view behind the bike through a tail-mounted camera.

Other than the 17-inch Dymag carbon fiber wheels, four-piston front and six-piston rear Brembo brakes, the Ohlins mono-shock, and the front fork tubes, all major components are manufactured by MTT. Both the frame and rear swing-arm are a hand-welded aluminum box-section.

Despite the turbine power and other innovations the Y2K is, basically, just another motorcycle, and anyone who knows how to ride can easily adapt to it. But, as a motorcycle, it is a dichotomy between high-tech and simple.

The bike starts gently. It feels a little like taxiing down a runway in an airplane. It's moving, but it is moving with more power than human senses can comprehend. As it picks up speed, the rider is pushed back like on a jet at takeoff.

Tonight Show host, Jay Leno, who owns the second Y2K built described it like this: "It feels as if the hand of God is reaching down and pushing you."

After preliminary tests on a runway at an airfield near MTT's headquarters in southern Louisiana, McIntyre had to bring experts from Pirelli Tire to develop rubber that can keep up with all that torque. The original Pirelli tire on the rear actually broke

loose and started smoking when it lost traction on a straight-line test at 170 mph. As much as I'd love to have one of these machines in my garage, it won't happen unless the Lottery gods smile down on me.

The current price is \$150,000 and will be increasing to \$180,000 soon. It does, at that price, come with a lifetime warranty and a set of custom leathers.

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