



POCKET ROCKET

Words & Pics: Glen Williams

Foxton's diminutive Jason Easton (aka Gimpy) grows spuds for a crust and rides a pretty trick race bike for fun. He holds a National title in the Formula 3 class and is planning a comeback for 2010 to repeat that performance with an all-new and fully developed V-twin machine. Glen Williams gives us the low-down on the man and his machine.

Jason's choice of machine is a hybrid and is built around a Tigcraft steel trellis frame. The Tigcraft Company is essentially a one-man band based in England who has been in the business of making specialist motorcycle frames

for more than 20 years. Tigcraft owner (Dave Pearce) received a phone call from Jason back in 2003 after he had read an article in a bike magazine about how Dave was fitting single cylinder four-stroke engines into specialist lightweight

frames and racing them in the European Supermono series.

Jason was growing tired of racing production bikes and didn't want to go back to racing 125GP bikes. The concept of a trick lightweight single cylinder machine tickled his fancy and it should



QUICK SPECS:
 Make: Tigcraft Aprilia
 Engine Capacity: 550cc V-Twin, ported heads,
 Lightened crank, optimised compression
 Fuelling: Fuel injected, Tuneboy mapping tool, runs on 100% Avgas
 Weight: 110kg with oil and water
 Wheelbase: 1320mm
 Wheels PVM 17" with interchangeable hubs
 Cooling: Twin alloy vertical pipe
 Suspension: Front: Ohlins fork (RS125 type), Billet Alloy aftermarket RS125 triple clamps
 Rear: Ohlins TTX36, with RS125 linkage to a modified and braced alloy swingarm
 Brakes: Front single 330mm, braking wave disc with Monoblock Brembo 4-piston caliper
 Rear: Fully floating 200mm wave disc
 Drive: Chain 520 pitch, TZ250 rear cush drive
 Tyres: "D" compound Dunlop slicks
 Front 95/70/17, Rear 115/70/17

suit his 65kg / 5' 9" stature. The bonus being that it would qualify to race in the New Zealand's Formula 3 race class as well. An order was placed and the bike was built in time to compete in the second half of the 2004 National Road Race season. This first Tigcraft machine was powered by a single cylinder 'stroked' YZ426cc Yamaha engine. He had immediate success and won two rounds on that machine that very year which had the then front runners of the class pretty worried. Engine problems in 2005 counted him out of the championship – but in 2006 Jason achieved his goal of winning the NZ Formula Three title on his Tigcraft single. In 2007 the bike was modified to run an 'underslung' rear shock (a-la John Britten's V1000) but this proved to be a bit of a disaster handling-wise and along with some engine problems it was a forgetful year (other than winning the GP title at Ruapuna).

The Cunning Plan

2008 was a year for getting married to wife (Anna) and having their first child (Thomas) but early in 2009 a cunning new plan was hatched which yet again involved a Tigcraft frame, but this time it involved squeezing one of Aprilia's new 550 V-twin motard engines into it



Jason with son Thomas & wife Anna

and giving the luxury of an extra 20hp over the single cylinder racer yet only carry an extra 10kg in weight overall.

The machine took a bit longer than expected to come together as it was only No2 off the Tigcraft UK production line – however with the help of Jason Denton from Levin Motorcycles they managed to get the first version of it together in early December 2008 allowing just one test day before the North Island's Tri-Series kicked off. Jason comments, "It ran really well on its first shakedown run, the handling needed some fine tuning – but overall we were happy to take it to the Wanganui street races and confirm our entry for the South Island rounds of the Nationals." I can personally attest to the speed of the bike as I witnessed it first hand on the track. In retrospect this short testing period only has proven to be a problem with the un-sorted Aprilia engine suffering on-going issues with overheating this national's season. "At Teretonga we were pulling our hair out trying to figure out why the bike was overheating, and that along with a crash after an exhaust bracket failed pretty much ruined the first round. We went better at Timaru where we won one race (the first race win in the world for the V-twin Aprilia powered Tigcraft machine). Then at the third round at Ruapuna (which was a particularly hot day) the overheating problem resurfaced. We fitted a twin radiator setup and made some coolant ducting modifications for the fourth round at Manfeld but to no avail – it just kept blowing head gaskets!"

The team skipped the last round at Pukekohe preferring instead to put the time into making effective repairs. "We eventually traced the fault to the head gaskets itself and the way it seals which we have since modified



The Tigcraft next to Glen's SV650

with the addition of copper ring in the top of the barrel."

So ironically with the 2009 season over – Jason then went on to complete three straight test days without a problem, and it was at one of these I got the chance to catch up with man and machine for their story so far and also grab a test ride of the bike itself.

Rubber Man

Standing beside the Tigcraft machine on a peerless autumn day at Manfeld, I figured that I had better do some serious stretching before attempting to fold myself onto this tiny machine – being almost as small as a 125GP bike (of which it shares many components).

Parked beside my own Suzuki SV650 it was obvious what the theory behind this bike was all about - smaller and lighter is better than bigger and heavier with a bit more horsepower.

Add to that the difference in rider sizes with myself being some 130mm taller and 15kg heavier than Gimpy and it was becoming obvious that I may just end up with a bit of cramp at the end of the day.....!

Interestingly though upon measuring from the rear of the tank to the handlebars the lengthways fit is almost identical to my own, however the seat to footpeg measurement was a good 60mm shorter on the minuscule Tigcraft. Jason was pretty keen to run the bike as much as possible on the day, so I wasn't about to get away with just doing a couple of laps on it either and would need to last a good deal longer in a tight position.

Track time!

This is a pretty trick bare-boned race bike and it was a pleasant surprise to find the engine still fitted with the original starter motor, Jason was pretty keen to keep this on the bike as it makes things much easier if the bike were to stall on the start-line etc. Also the Suter brand slipper clutch that it runs eliminates the option of 'bump starting' the machine. There is a lightweight 'race spec' charging system fitted which supplies just enough voltage to keep the on-board battery charged up and the bike's fuel pump and ignition happy.

When first riding out down pit lane the bike actually wasn't an overly tight fit at all and after two warm up laps to acclimatise to things such as lever positions and the reverse pattern race gear-shift being used, it was time to get on with the job.

First impressions were that the bike's power delivery is pretty linear and makes what feels like good power and straight-line speed right through

