RESURRECTION

TEN YEARS AGO BIMOTA CREATED THIS KB3; SOON THEREAFTER IT WAS CRASHED, BURIED AND FORGOTTEN. HERE'S HOW IT WAS EXHUMED AND RETURNED TO LIFE

BY NICK IENATSCH

HEAVY ARTILLERY '92

Buyer's remorse spread through me like a flood hitting a small town; my stomach felt queasy as I loaded the three cardboard boxes into my truck, fitting them around the red Bimota frame next to the black Kawasaki KZ1000 engine. I had just traded a sizable cashier's check for what at one time was a 1982 Bimota KB3 and now was an array of dirty parts. I had waited a decade to own a Bimota; I just never pictured taking it home in boxes.

If you're new to motorcycling, Bimota might be Italian for "bikes for the rich," but in the early '80s, the small Italian firm stood head-and-shoulders above the Japanese in the sport-bike race. Borrowing popular Japanese (and later Italian) engines, Bimota produced stunning machines, small, serious and uncompromising. You could buy the complete bike from Rimini, Italy, or purchase just the chassis kit and build the machine yourself. A finished bike might have cost $10,000 to $15,000 a copy, depending upon the engine and detailing the customer desired. A decade ago the closest I got to a Bimota was the pages of magazines and the glossy Cosmopolitan Motors brochures I still keep next to my bed. If I'd met a magic genie in 1982, my first wish would have been for a big-bore Bimota. >

PHOTO: LYNNE McCREADY

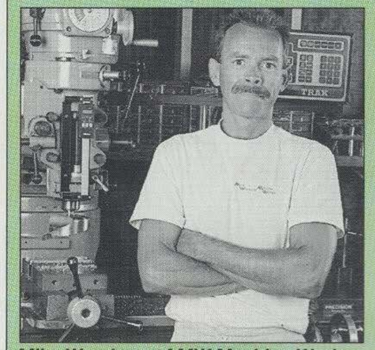
BIMOTA 107: A SAD HISTORY

This Bimota KB3, frame number 107, was sold by The Performance Works in 1982 to a part-time rider who promptly crashed within 200 miles. The bike then went back to The Performance Works (since closed) and sat in the corner, tweaked and injured, gathering dust and losing parts steadily. By the time Hypercycle acquired it for a potential endurance racer, it looked as sad as a kitten in a thunderstorm. Hypercycle never assembled the racer, and 107 fell into private hands, hands that sold it to me for $6800 with the claim that the bike was 95 percent complete. "Just bolt it together," the man said. That statement still makes me laugh—or cry.

MIKE THE MACHINIST

Optically correct imagineering

I drove directly to Mike Worshum Machine Works and unloaded my new "bike" while Worshum tried not to laugh. I'd met Worshum at the racetrack months earlier, but he didn't know me well enough yet to tell me what an idiot I was. Our acquaintance would grow into a strong friendship as we spent every free night in his shop, planning and producing the parts while getting to know the Domino's delivery man on a first-name basis.

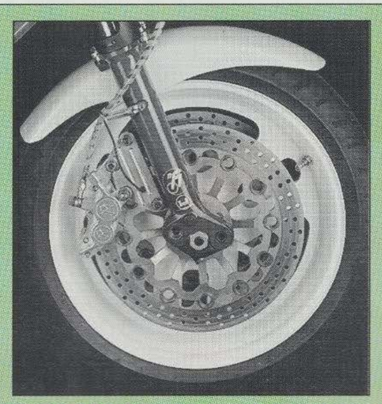


Mike Worshum of MW Machine Works

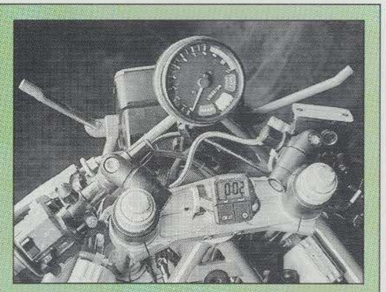
Remember high-school trigonometry, the class you took and never knew why? Well, Worshum took trig and used it to figure out the length of the missing rear-suspension linkages. Then he manufactured all the missing swingarm-bearing races, bought the bearings and shimmed the whole rear end while I did little more than provide purchase money and sweep the ever-accumulating aluminum chips off the floor. My checkbook bought some wonderful pieces those first few months, and I'll never forget the day I arrived with a pair of Performance Machine wheels and all the brakes to go with them and a blue-and-silver Works Performance Ultrasport shock. Two days later, we had a roller.

JUST A FEW DETAILS

Worshum kept his mill and lathe running full-time, spinning out aluminum and stainless steel pieces such as fairing mounts and the small buttons that center the fairing bolts, the shift linkage and brake stay arm. Not all the parts were new, however. I spent a good deal of time with Sean Davis at Johnson & Wood motorcycle salvage. Davis has a sixth sense of what parts interchange, even when they're manufactured years apart. Several trips to North Hollywood netted a headlight and shell, GSXR750 front fender, turn-signal flasher, Suzuki front master cylinder, battery ground strap and a few pounds of nuts and bolts needed to make a running Bimota.



The KB3's 16-inch front wheel was swapped for a 17-inch, powder-coated Performance Machine hoop. The GSXR fender mounts to an MW Machine Works fork brace, and the wire reads wheel rotation for the electronic speedo.

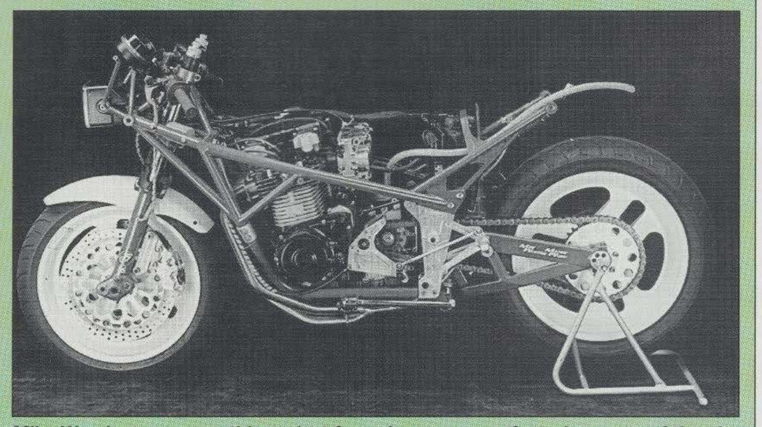


A hodgepodge of parts, some Kawasaki, some Suzuki, fit on the Telefix adjustable clip-ons, with a stock KZ1000 electronic tachometer center stage. A 100-mph Cyclomaster bicycle speedometer-odometer tops the stock Bimota triple clamp.

Mike Worshum never lost faith that this project would succeed, even when foraging in unknown territory. Many solutions leaned heavily on Worshum's ability to turn chunks of aluminum into fasteners, linkages, rods, races and mounts. But the most important contribution Mike Worshum Machine Works added was an enthusiasm for motorcycles that carried this project through 20 difficult months.

PHOTO: MIKE WORSHUM

Henry Eckles shortened this project by months when he adopted the wiring as his own. Working with a European wiring harness and a U.S.-spec diagram, he wired in turn signals, replaced every fastener and reduced the bundle by half.



Mike Worshum oversaw this project from day one, manufacturing many of the aluminum pieces, such as the shifter and shift linkage. A piece of steel rebar once supported the rear end. Now a Works Performance shock does the job.

ITALIAN HOT ROD

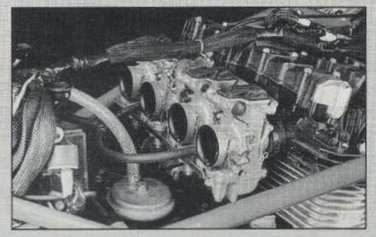
Jesse Gatlin builds a gun

Why have a good-handling bike when you can have a fast, good-handling bike? Good question. The two-valve Kawi mill is still a staple of the dragracing circuit and can be massaged into something incredible to behold. The man I wanted behind the wrenches was Jesse Gatlin of Gatlin Racing, cocreator of some of the most impressive-running bikes this magazine has ever seen. Gatlin isn't in the business of building complete engines, instead concentrating on cylinder heads, but he found time to help us out—though we waited an agonizing eight months for the completed engine.

Jesse Gatlin of Gatlin Racing

The Kawasaki jugs can't be safely bored to 1260cc, so an MTC Big Block cylinder and Wiseco pistons were chosen. The job entails boring the cases for the bigger slugs and O-ringing the cylinders to gain the necessary seal. Gatlin installed Web-Cams with 108-degree intake lobe center and 106-degree exhaust, biasing most of the power in the midrange but leaving plenty on top.

The main reason I went to Gatlin Racing was for the exemplary head work. Gatlin took into account the street-based nature of the engine, at what rpm it would spend most of its life, what the piston and valve combination would be, and ported the head accordingly. He's understandably tight-lipped about his work, but he spent over 40 hours on the Pro 1 head and port modifications. Gatlin added a full-radius valve job and slipped in a set of oversize stainless valves with updated springs and retainers. Gatlin installed KZ650 shims under the buckets, a common practice with a high-performance shim-type head; it necessitates cam removal for valve adjustment, but the frame layout provides plenty of room to work. The Kawasaki cam chain is kept tight with a billet-aluminum A.P.E. tensioner.

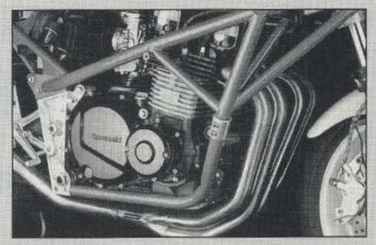


The 38mm Mikuni smoothbores are exceptionally streetable on the KZ engine, and we added K&N individual air filters to protect the engine. A handmade Kerker stainless steel exhaust system bolts to the loud side of the head.

Wiseco pistons received extensive massaging before installation, another GR secret. Gatlin aimed the package not at ultimate horsepower, but at long-term reliability and stalwart drivability. He hit the target squarely. The Wiseco piston kit measures out at 10.9:1 compression, and Gatlin purposely left the compression relatively low to keep the KB3 streetable on pump gas, though PJ1 octane booster is added in small doses to fight detonation.

KZ owners looking to run more compression can drill and tap the head for four additional spark plugs. And we found out the hard way that the 1260 combination works best with Cometic graphite head and base gaskets; I replaced both gaskets with the help of a friend in a few hours to cure the weeping paper base gasket and copper head gasket Gatlin installed.

To keep temperature in check, Radioactive Racing's Jeff Pepiot added a four-row GSXR cooler (installed after the studio photography). The customized Suzuki cooler does a good job of dropping oil temperatures on an engine with almost double the stock horsepower.

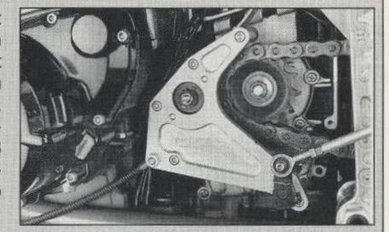


Gatlin Racing totally disassembled the '82 KZ1000 engine, then sent the crank to Falicon and undercut the five-speed tranny. Gatlin's Pro 1 port job helps the KB3 produce nearly 140 horsepower.

It takes a good spark to burn a tightly compressed mixture, so I chose powerful Dyna coils from KV Products, along with KV's red plug wires and boots. A Dyna electronic ignition now resides in the right-side cover, a technical step ahead of the 10-year-old Kawasaki parts. A Dyna ignition is an excellent replacement for a points-type ignition (you can't believe the difference in acceleration, detonation control and maintenance), but even engines that come from the factory with electronic ignition, like this KZ engine, benefit from the hotter spark, especially when breathed on.

IN AND OUT

It's tempting to stay with stock CV carburetors for drivability, but well-dialed smoothbore carburetors can be smooth and pleasant and provide a tremendous horsepower increase over stock mixers. A rack of 38mm smoothbores came from Mikuni of America prejetted on Mikuni's carburetor flow bench. When combined with the hand-built Kerker stainless pipe, Gatlin's gun was complete. A visit to Los Angeles County Raceway's quarter-mile saw the 440-yard dash completed in 10.34 seconds at 134.6 mph, with first gear practically useless due to the 53-inch wheelbase and the bike's penchant for wheelies. The KB3's 50-mph, top-gear roll-on produced a stunning 92.7-mph terminal speed (with stock KZ1000J gearing), almost 4 mph faster than the current production-bike-record holder, the Suzuki Katana 1100. Dropped down a gear to fourth, the Bimota rocketed from 50 mph to 99.3 mph in 200 yards. That's called midrange.



A Precision Metal Fab Racing clutch-release kit and countershaft sprocket cover complement Mike Worshum's extensive fabrication. The billet-aluminum piece came with spacers and hardware and fit perfectly.

Missing parts included seat and tail section; left footpeg pieces; shift linkage; rear-suspension linkage and damper; rear wheel; chain; battery; exhaust; coils; front fender; clip-ons; windscreen; fairing brackets; headlight; throttle assembly; and a bucketload of nuts, bolts, washers, brackets and the like. The engine and carburetors were complete and almost brand-new but had been sitting so long they needed a full overhaul.

A project of this magnitude would be impossible for me alone, but motorcycle enthusiasts are rarely alone. The aftermarket-performance world is full of knowledge, and I turned to that world to get this basket case running. I opted to pursue performance with the most up-to-date technology available within the confines of the Bimota

PHOTOS: LYNNE McCREADY

chassis and KZ engine. Bimota number 107 is actually a story of the skill of the men who returned this motorcycle from the brink of a landfill.

DONE TO RUN

After 20 months' work resurrecting the KB3, the day finally came to ride it. To say I was shocked by the final product's abilities is a drastic understatement. This machine really works. And I will give it plenty of opportunity to do so, believing that motorcycles are meant to be ridden and sculpture is meant for display. When one onlooker commented that "it's too pretty to ride," I answered, "It's most beautiful when it's moving."

The combination of the incredible Italian chassis and modern American updates created an awesome sport motorcycle. Fitting Performance Machine wheels and brakes along with a Works Performance shock complements the rigid chrome-moly chassis; add the horsepower of a Gatlin engine, and the machine takes on world-class performance. The best technology of 1992 blends wonderfully with the best sport bike of 1982.

This Bimota KB3 is the result of one enthusiast's pursuit of a decade-long dream. At times it was a nightmare, a project that cubic money couldn't save, a project that couldn't be handed off to someone who had done it before. Mike Worshum, Jim Tatone and Jesse Gatlin poured their hearts into the work, creating something much more than the sum of its parts. This bike stands as testimony to American motorcycle enthusiasm, with its deep well of talent, intelligence and dedication. It also serves as encouragement for others eyeing some semiexotic, semiclassic pile of parts that was once a motorcycle. Wishes come true; junk becomes jewelry. M

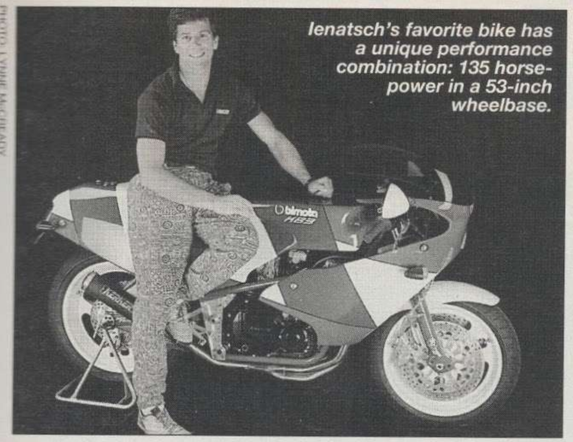


PHOTO: LYNN McCREADY

Ienatsch's favorite bike has a unique performance combination: 135 horsepower in a 53-inch wheelbase.

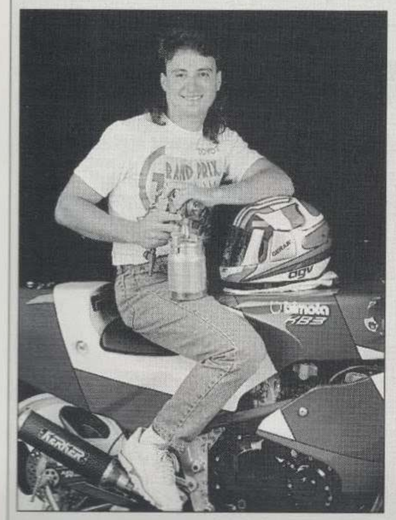
BEAUTIFUL BODY

Gerard Design adds the finishing touches

Ordering a replacement tail section–tank cover from Rimini was prohibitively expensive, so I contacted the best fiberglass man I knew, Mark Henry of Fibersystems, to create the piece. Bruce Zigler loaned me his SB4 tail section, and Henry took a "flash" off the stock piece.

The flash was understandably rough, and that's where Jim Tatone of Gerard Design entered the picture. Tatone and assistant Shawn James spent 30 hours preparing the Fibersystems tail section for paint. The top of the tank cover (Bimota uses a 4.5-gallon steel tank under the fiberglass cover) is as broad and flat as a coffee table, and a shiny paint job would show the slightest imperfections. The secret lies in the preparation.

The stock front fairing took considerably less prep work, but it also needed sanding. The paint and graphics were clean and fresh, but stock paint just wouldn't sit right over the trick chassis and engine. After about a dozen colored drawings, I hit on the red-and-white paint with two overlapping green belts. Tatone liked it, added the lower red stripe, widened the belts and we both agreed it looked good: on paper. Two weeks later, Tatone produced one of the most stunning paint jobs on two wheels.



Jim Tatone of Gerard Design

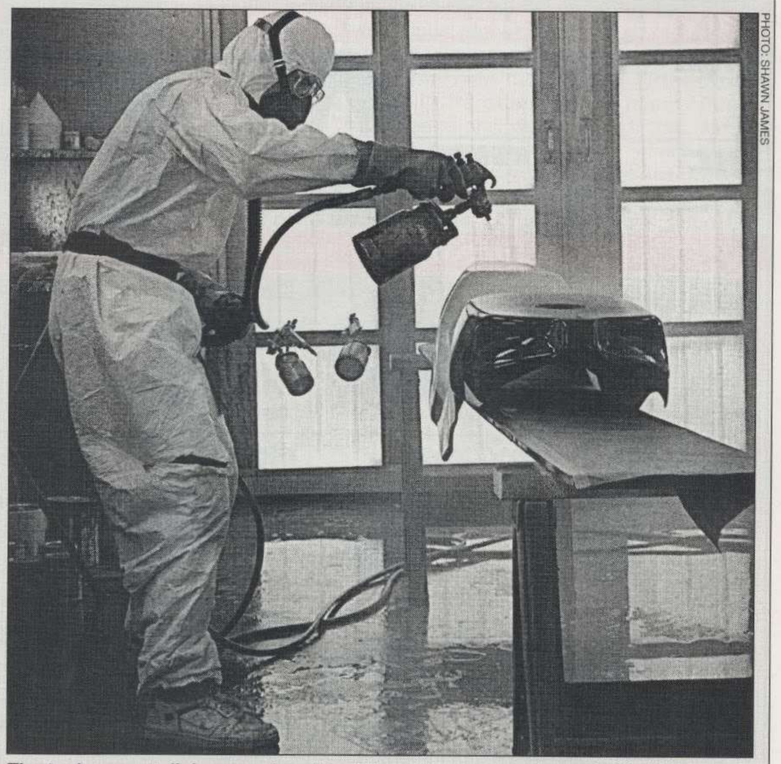


PHOTO: SHAWN JAMES

The tank cover–tailpiece produced by Fibersystems was covered with Du Pont Lucite base colors and urethane clear coat after extensive filling and sanding to smooth and flatten the hand-laid fiberglass. Gerard's booth was thoroughly cleaned and moistened to eliminate dust during final painting.

The frame's original red had faded orange over the years, and splotches of primer had been added by someone attempting to fix the crash damage. Since all Bimotas should have red frames, Tatone went in search of "the killer red," and found it: Glasurite 21-Line Roso Corso for $240 per gallon. Tatone wasn't too happy with its durability, but we touched up the dings unavoidable during an engine installation and came away with a frame worthy of the bodywork.

Since Tatone's an enthusiastic motorcyclist himself, he puts extra effort into his work. The inside of the fairing and tail section are blacked out. The top of the fairing, under the lip of the windscreen, is gloss black, and the frame retains its glossy luster even underneath the lower frame rails. Each layer of paint on the bodywork was color-sanded to perfection, and the clear coats (10 layers) received enormous attention: the paint is so smooth you can't feel the pinstripe between the colors, a Gerard Design trademark.

BODY DETAILS

I've come to expect miracles from Gustafsson Plastics, but when I called Leif Gustafsson to inquire about a Bimota KB3 screen, I thought I would finally have him stumped. "You want clear or smoked?" he asked. Gustafsson had the screen in stock. The firm warehouses over 800 models of screens, even for race bikes and old Bimotas. I bought a smoked one, and it fit perfectly.

The bodywork exudes the muscular look of Doohan's NSR or a lowered, flaired race car. It's wide, squat and angular. The slab-sided tank and fairing stop short of full-coverage bodywork, giving you a good look at Gatlin's gun and Worshum's creativity. Jim Tatone improved on the original Rimini tail section with an artist's ingenuity and a craftsman's pride. Tatone's final contribution took the form of a Gerard Design custom AGV helmet adorned with U.S., Italian and Japanese flags.

SUPPLIERS LIST

BIMOTA USA
ROSCETTI CORP.
105 W. Somerdale Rd.
Somerdale, NJ 08083
(609)346-2111
Available: owners registry, parts and information

CALIFORNIA DESIGN
85 El Campo Dr.
San Jose, CA 95127
(408)272-6844
Supplied: Japanese-market turn signals, $180

CYCLE TUNE SERVICES
2466 W. Sepulveda Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90501
(310)530-0314
Supplied: Dunlop Sportmax radials—120/70VR17 front, $120.95; 160/60VR18 rear, $161.95

FIBERSYSTEMS
830 Foothill Rd.
Gardenerville, NV 89410
(702)265-7828
Supplied: rear tail section, $1000

FOURS N' MORE
21623 Devonshire
Chatsworth, CA 91311
(818)341-6292
Supplied: Cometic graphite base gasket, $24.95; graphite head gasket, $36.95

GATLIN RACING
1525 Endeavour, Unit K
Anaheim, CA 92801
(714)563-0747
Supplied: cylinder-head parts and preparation (Pro 1 port and polish, oversize Ferrea valves, shim-under-bucket conversion, heavy-duty valve springs, valve-stem seals, cylinder-head surfacing, Web-Cam No. 119, Falicon slotted cam gears, bench head-shimming), $2025; engine parts and preparation (cylinder boring, honing and O-ringing, upper crankcase boring, MTC Big Block and sleeves, Wiseco 1260cc pistons, Falicon-modified crankshaft, heavy-duty cylinder studs, Dyna S ignition, heavy-duty clutch springs, transmission undercutting, A.P.E. cam-chain adjuster, Mikuni 38mm flat-slide smoothbore carburetors), $3661

GERARD DESIGN
7103 Owensmouth, Unit B
Canoga Park, CA 91303
(818)703-6589
Supplied: frame preparation and paint, $250; body preparation and paint, $1200; helmet preparation and paint, $250

GUSTAFSSON PLASTICS
U.S. 1 North
P.O. Box 3567
St. Augustine, FL 32085-3567
(904)824-3443
Supplied: smoked windscreen, $69.95

JOHNSON & WOOD MOTORCYCLE SALVAGE
5740 Lankershim Blvd.
North Hollywood, CA 91601
(818)765-0355
Supplied: Suzuki master cylinder, headlight and shell, GSXR fender, various fasteners, approx. $200

KERKER
3910 Seaport Blvd.
West Sacramento, CA 95691
(916)372-5000
Supplied: Kerker custom stainless exhaust, $750

KV PRODUCTS
810 N. Cummings Rd.
Covina, CA 91724
(818)967-3786
Supplied: Dyna coils, $99.95

MW MACHINE WORKS
(310)679-4354
Supplied: wheel and brake fitment, $400; billet-aluminum fork brace, $75; billet-aluminum shift lever and shift linkage, $175; multifarious fabrication, multitudinous machining, superlative welding, fantastic fasteners, innumerable extras, plentiful pizza, $uncountable

PERFORMANCE MACHINE
15535 Garfield Ave.
P.O. Box 1739
Paramount, CA 90723
(310)634-6532
Supplied: 3.5-by-17-inch front wheel, $475; 4.5-by-18-inch rear wheel, $525; front-brake kit (13-inch rotors, four-piston calipers, caliper brackets), $1350; rear-brake kit (8.5-inch rotor, two-piston caliper), $356

PRECISION METAL FAB RACING
100 N. Scott St.
Shakopee, MN 55379
(612)445-3530
Supplied: countershaft sprocket cover and clutch-release kit, $55

RADIOACTIVE RACING
P.O. Box 143
Sun Valley, CA 91352
(818)360-6296
Supplied: modified GSXR oil cooler, $125 with exchange

SPEC II
9812 Glenoaks Blvd.
Sun Valley, CA 91352
(818)504-6364, (800)235-1236
Supplied: Telefix adjustable clip-ons, $110

STORZ PERFORMANCE
1445 Donlon St., No. 18
Ventura, CA 93003
(805)654-8816
Supplied: fork seals, $11.25 each; Ceriani fork-rebuild kit, $49

TSUBAKI CHAIN
18031 Cortney Ct.
City of Industry, CA 91744
(818)913-1344
Supplied: 110-link No. 630 Omega chain, $131

WORKS PERFORMANCE
8730 Shirley Ave.
Northridge, CA 91324
(818)701-1010
Supplied: Ultrasport rear shock, $539.95