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**Laverda 650**  
Screech, crump, oops

**Perversion excursion**  
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# HOW TO MURDER

**Laverda 650 Sport: pathetic attempt to revive a dead company by repackaging a 20 year-old product, or a bloody good motorbike? Trial by Hargreaves is the ultimate test.**

It's a normal morning. Get up. Have a pee. Get dressed. Wash face. Clean teeth. Kiss Melanie goodbye. Put helmet on. Leave house. Ride shiny new red Laverda 650 Sport down the road. Get T-boned by dodderly old git in a pale blue Ford P100 pick-up. It isn't a normal morning any longer. The front locks as I try to steer round the car. No chance. Tense for impact, sickening crunch, fleeting silence, head thumps the road, lights go out.

Nothing...

Eyes open. The kerb is inches from my visor. Getting off the road seems like a good idea, so I try to stand. Doesn't work, so I crawl. That doesn't work either. I try to figure out which bits aren't working. Left fingers? OK. Right fingers? Uh-huh. Left toes? All here. Right toes? Yup. Well I'm not paralysed, so let's have another go.

With the effortless grace of a beach-bound four-ton elephant seal, I heave my semi-conscious carcass onto the pavement. Disembodied voices of concern say, 'Are you alright?' and 'Shall we call an ambulance?' Eventually my scrambled brain orientates itself enough to inspect the damage to the Laverda.

It's dead. The beautifully fake carbon fibre bodywork, encased in thick, lipstick-red paint which only yesterday glistened in the dull evening sun of North Devon, is shattered and torn. The dinky twin oil coolers are shredded and gashed and hang limply from braided hoses like torn limbs from tendons. Indicators, levers and footpegs are smashed off. Oily black lifeblood seeps, steaming, into the tarmac. The Laverda is a skinned, gutted corpse lying at the side of the road and I feel sick just looking at it.

At this point in the film the screen usually goes all wavy to indicate a flashback, but in my case it's delayed shock and mild concussion. I fall over and go to sleep.

Nothing again...

Suddenly it's yesterday and I'm not lying at the side of the road next to a mangled Laverda at all. I'm stuck in Torquay's

"So let's run through that again shall we sir. The motor cycle was on the wrong side of the carriageway travelling at approximately 280 miles per hour when it swerved violently to hit you..."

## History lesson

Once upon a time in the late '70s an Italian bike manufacturer called Laverda made, among other things, a 500cc, four-valve parallel twin called the Montjuic. It was loud, slow, hairy, vibrated, had a rickety and wrist-battering suspension, cost a fortune and was screamingly insane. Laverda stopped making it in '82 then went bust a few years later.

Now, in 1995, a resurrected Laverda have taken the same, 15 year-old engine, bored it out, added some fancy oil-cooling (to cure the Montjuic's fondness for starving its top end of oil), tacked-on fuel injection, and stuffed the result in a top-spec chassis. History lesson over.





# ER A LAVERDA





# HOW TO MURDER A LAVERDA

rush hour (two horse-drawn carts and a milk float) on the little red bugger. I've just left PGH Motorcycles in Torquay (0803 616164) who've loaned us the bike for photos.

First impressions aren't good and it's the engine's fault: it has to be thrashed like a bad-tempered two-stroke to keep it from bogging down. If the revs drop below 5000rpm in any gear the motor hits stall speed and the transmission starts slashing and slapping like an out-of-control chainsaw. On normal bikes this happens at around 1000rpm.

And on dual carriageways when the 650 drones up to 70mph and into top gear, overtaking, or even a modest upward incline, means going down two gears to find some power. The Laverda is not exactly grunt-laden and not for the first time I'm seriously worried at having nothing nice to say about an Italian bike.

Later on, weaving north along the tree-lined A396 toward Exmoor, I change my mind (not for the first time either). The engine is a different proposition faced with an empty, twisting road, even if said road is plastered with mud, sheep shit and wet leaves. The lack of power becomes an asset; the Lav isn't a tail-sliding liability in slimy conditions. Grumbling along between corners, trying to loose as little speed as possible on the bendy bits because it takes so long to build it back up again, the 650

► Soggy rear spring means the fairing lowers get shaved closer than a Blade or Laverda will give you your money back

feels about as fast as an RGV250. That's still pretty quick even if it isn't much by Supersport 600 standards.

The Lav's twin exhausts don't sound as rorty as the old Montjuic's eardrum-busters, but they're still louder than I'm used to.

The ancient parallel twin is remarkably un-crude. Look at the spec, then take a peek at the old-tech, air-cooled engine, surrounded by massive, braided oil hoses, you can almost see the cobwebs. But it doesn't go like it looks. It vibrates, but not intolerably. It's noisy, but pleasingly so. It carbures smoothly, it has a clean, neat gearbox (but ignore the neutral light — it fibs), and the clutch and throttle are light. It's nothing like the old Italian horrors I used to read about in my brother's old bike mags.

Admission time. Unknown to me during the test, the PGH demonstrator had odd gearing: two fewer teeth on the rear sprocket than standard. This turned top gear into an overdrive and knackered the Laverda in lower gears at lower revs. The bike we've used for speed and dyno testing comes from importers Three Cross, has the right gearing, is nippier off the line and, not surprisingly, pulls from 3000rpm instead of 5000.

But if the engine is an old hatter, check



out the chassis: WP rear shock and usd forks (both fully adjustable), aluminium beam frame and swing arm, Weber-Marelli fuel injection, Brembo brakes, and Marchesini wheels. Serious stuff. With all this finery the chassis could be pedal-powered and it'd still be a brilliant bike.

The rear shock's spring is too soft — four inches of sag even on max preload — so banging up the damping is the only easy option. This makes the rear chop about over bumps but doesn't stop the Laverda bottoming out with a shallow thump over life's deeper corrugations.

A stiffer, longer spring would jack the back end up too — no bad thing if you want to preserve the fairing (which isn't the carbon fibre jobbie it looks like from the inside — it's just matting pasted over average, everyday glass fibre). Jacking the back would also quicken the Laverda's steering which, although it's not slow or heavy, feels stable enough to take it. With so little power the bike's never going to tankslap anyway.

The forks and brakes are spectacular. The same Brembos are fitted to Ducati's 900SS and Aprilia's RS250, and are my favourite brakes anywhere. The action is super-soft,

◄ Pretty bike, pretty good bike, but with a price tag the wrong side of nasty. Hey, rich gits — don't let that put you off





## SPECIFICATIONS

### Laverda F650 Sport

Price .....£6,750  
 Test bike ..... PGH Motorcycles, Broomhill  
 Way, Toquay, Devon (0803 616164)  
 Importer ..... Three Cross Motorcycles,  
 Woolbridge Industrial Est., Three Legged Cross,  
 Wimborne, Dorset (0202 823344)

### Engine

Type ..... air/oil cooled, 8 valve, DOHC parallel twin  
 Bore x stroke ..... 78.5 x 69.0mm  
 Displacement ..... 668cc  
 Compression ratio ..... 9.1  
 Fuel system ..... Weber-Marelli fuel injection  
 Redline ..... 9000rpm  
 Ignition ..... digital

### Transmission

Primary drive ..... gear, 2.655  
 Gear ratios ..... 2.1667; 1.545; 1.111; 0.900; 0.780; 0.676  
 Final drive ..... chain, 16/40

### Chassis

Frame ..... extruded aluminium alloy beam  
 Front tyre ..... 120/70 ZR17 Pirelli Dragon GT  
 Rear tyre ..... 170/60 ZR17 Pirelli Dragon GT  
 Wheels ..... aluminium Marchesini  
 Front suspension ..... 40mm WP up fork, adj. rebound  
 and bump damping

Rear suspension ..... WP rising rate, adj. preload,  
 rebound and bump damping  
 Front brake ..... 2 x 320mm Brembo discs, 4-pot callipers  
 Rear brake ..... 245mm Brembo disc, 1-pot caliper  
 Castor/trail ..... 26°/103mm

### Dimensions

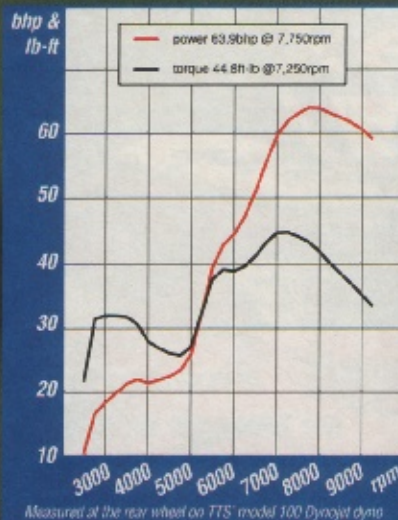
Wheelbase ..... 1375mm (54.1in)  
 Seat height ..... 770mm (30.3in)  
 Dry weight ..... 180kgs (396lb)  
 Fuel capacity ..... 16L (3.5gal)

### Tester's verdict

Good points ..... brakes, steering, torques  
 Bad points ..... doesn't bounce  
 Performance ..... interesting  
 Economy ..... more range  
 Rider comfort ..... nice  
 Pillion comfort ..... not nice  
 Braking ..... awesome  
 Handling ..... spot on  
 Value ..... not good enough

### Performance

Maximum speed\* ..... 134mph  
 prone  
 SS 1/4 mile ..... 12.4s  
 Average fuel consumption ..... 36.1mpg  
 \*Computed figures because of crash



▲ Mucho strangeness. The enormous trough at 4,000 coincides with odd gearing to produce mega-overdrive in top. 42 teeth on the rear sprocket gave the calculated speed figures opposite

Some creams the lusty twin through leafy (on the road, not the trees) Devon not long before creaming a Ford P100







like there's half an atmosphere of air in the lines. Then, as you squeeze harder, they get stronger and stronger for little effort at the lever. I like this sensitivity — you can really feel what's going on down below, right to the point of lock up (**then hit the car — Ed**).

The forks are fully adjustable — I never had the chance to fiddle, which is jouno-speak for they were good enough for me. The right amount of dive, the right amount of rebound, and comfortably firm.

In case you think it's all too good to be true, some typically crap Italian details remain. Take the aluminium petrol tank which sits under the rider's seat with its filler under the pillion seat. Its overflow pipe is cable-tied to the rear shock's compression bottle — over the righthand edge of the rear tyre. So when you fill the tank up to the brim, then pick the bike off its sidestand to ride away, a large quantity of fuel is dumped right where you don't want it. I know this because I found out the hard way. Re-routing it is easy, but it's a bit of a serious oversight on someone's part.

Other annoyances — the tacho only worked sporadically, the fuel warning light comes on (and off, depending on incline) after only 100 miles cruising at 80mph, there's no reserve tap, and the speedo is in kph.

Elsewhere the mirrors work, the high pegs

and low seat cramp knees, the ex-Jota bars are naff, the switchgear is nicked off a Honda, the clocks glow with a warm, red backlight at night but are impossible to read, and the whole thing costs £6750. Err... how much?

Suddenly everything goes all wavy again (this is a flashback, remember?) and I'm back at the side of the road next to a completely disemboweled, thoroughly mashed and comprehensively trashed Laverda. How am I going to explain this to Paul at PGH Motorcycles? So I fall over again.

The Laverda is a plaything — it's a toy for the rich who want to park it at the top of their drive and go for a spin every Sunday in the summer. And it'd be brilliant at this. It will probably be serviced regularly, have a few niggly problems, run as long as needs be, and end its short and unremarkable life buried in a museum.

But if you buy one and treat it like a normal bike — thrash it, miss the odd service after a year, forget to change the plugs, run it low on oil, and drop it a couple of times — will it really last 80,000 miles on its original bores? **SH**

► The young man laps up the great smell of benzene, blissfully unaware that those last few dollops will soon be splashed all over his back tyre

## Grovel

PGH Motorcycles of Torquay, Devon (0803 616164) for loaning us their demonstrator. Simon would like to apologise on behalf of the old twat who killed it for you.

