

Battlax benchmark

As a replacement for the BT-014, the BT-016 tyres have a lot to live up to. Bridgestone sent Casey Stoner, Marco Melandri, Jeremy McWilliams and Ron Haslam to the launch. We sent Bertie Simmonds

Over the last 18 months the tyre war has been really hotting up.

In all sectors, the major big-hitters are launching new products that are poles apart from what went before, giving customers the best performing product yet, dripping with race feedback and hi-tech know-how. For dealers this means a very marketable product and with new tyres available in all categories it's an exciting period for the tyre industry.

For the UK, the big market is still the sports sector, and Bridgestone's new Battlax BT-016 Hypersport tyre follows on from the enormously successful BT-014 tyres. The new 016 sits below the racier BT-002 Racing Streets and above the sports-touring BT-021s in their impressive range. If you're a tech-head, you'll love the BT-016s. During the launch at Jerez technical features such as HTSPC, MS Belt and three- and five-layer compounds were bandied about. Apparently all you need to know is that all this technology means these tyres offer progressive grip performance, sporty handling, good longevity and excellent high- and low-speed stability.

The new BT-016s feature three compounds on the front hoop and no less than five on the rear to give optimal performance and long life. To test the tyres we were given a whole day on the 2¾-mile Spanish GP circuit of Jerez. Jerez is a good place to experience tyres, as it has a little



bit of everything in it: short, medium and long turns. Some fast, some slow. There's also a good selection of both uphill and downhill braking sections. We had a selection of the latest 600cc, 750cc and litre-class sportsbikes to choose from – including the likes of the new Ninja ZX-10R and KTM RC8. For my first session out on track I decided to take out a bike that I knew well – Yamaha's YZF-R1 shod with the new BT-016s.

Like most modern tyres, the first thing that impresses is how quickly these tyres warm up. Traditionally I wouldn't want to be going mad on new rubber until after at least three laps, but following Jeremy McWilliams with his traditional 'spirited' warm-up lap showed that you could start to up the pace after only one single lap. Learning the track in the first 20-minute session, the Bridgestones behaved perfectly. For

the second session I was on Honda's new CBR1000RR Fireblade and I started to increase the pace. Side grip is exceptional, though saying that, even slow-old me had a couple of miniature slides on the Blade. To be honest, I'd probably put that down to the suspension telling me it needed some adjustment, rather than anything to do with the tyres: after all, McWilliams and Haslam were having no problems at all. Stability on the whole is nothing short of superb, and if anything, these new BT-016s are even more stable under heavy braking than the Diablo Rossos I tried at Catalunya a couple of weeks before. I felt that – for the first time – I could hang onto the brakes way into the corner. This is normally the preserve of racers and something I've never had the confidence to do before. The bike just bit into the tarmac and slowed down. Perfect.