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# Return Of the Fireblade

At a time when motorcycles were heavy and powerful, Honda's CBR900RR Fireblade came along in 1992 to crush everyone's expectations of what a superbike should be like. With a power-to-weight ratio unheard of in its class, it ran rings around rivals and became an instant classic. With 2012 being the 20th anniversary of Honda's iconic superbike, can the latest descendant of the original live up to its famous name? We find out...



In 1992, Honda heralded in a new era of superbikes when it introduced the CBR900RR Fireblade. It did not do it with obscene power figures or cutting-edge technology but rather employed a drastic weight reduction program to ensure their bike was lighter, smaller, more agile and more focused than its rivals. Case in point: The Fireblade was 34kg lighter than its next-lightest rival at that time. In the competitive world of superbikes, you might as well be towing a caravan with that extra weight. The Fireblade's power-to-weight ratio was staggering. It moved the yardstick so far that it took another six years before the Yamaha R1 came along in 1998 to take

away its crown. But in the eyes of many, the Fireblade was already a legend.

In the 20th anniversary of its iconic predecessor, the big H has released the latest version of their flagship superbike. And in typical Honda fashion, their latest creation does not boast of the hottest new traction control system (in fact, it does not even have one), feathery weight or even the most powerful engine. In fact, in its press release, they say the new Fireblade has a lap timer and a gear indicator in its dash. The thing is, these so-called 'luxuries' have been standard issue on all of its rivals for years now. A case of 'Johnny-come-lately?' Possibly.



But here is the thing: Despite lacking the gizmos and looks to set your pants on fire, everyone knows that the 2012 Fireblade will be the best all-round superbike out there. It is a given. It is what Honda is renowned for. Having owned many Hondas in my short life, including the Fireblade's smaller sibling, the CBR600RR, I know one thing: Hondas thread that perfect balance between speed and usability, comfort and single-mindedness, excitement and practicality. While Kawasaki, BMW and Aprilia have been left to slug it out in the power battlefield, the humble Fireblade will go about its business flattering even the most novice of riders with its ease of use, immaculate balance, stupendous quality of its suspension and smooth, near-flawless powerband.

However, for those of you easily impressed by technical mumbo-jumbo, here are some of the updated goodies that can be found on the 2012 Fireblade: The bike is now suspended by Showa's latest generation Big Piston front forks, which

offers improved damping and a first-of-its kind double-tube system rear shock, which ensures smoother and more accurate response leading to improved traction, new 12-spoke cast aluminium wheels which provide more rigidity, a new LCD instrumentation panel with a lap timer and gear indicator, a new assisted slipper clutch, a new electronic steering damper, Honda's brilliant Combined Brake System and ABS and revised fuel injection settings, which smoothens out an already near-perfect power delivery.

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Despite lacking gizmos and head-turning looks, the Fireblade treads the perfect balance between speed and usability.



What about power and torque figures? You can refer to the 2011 catalogue for that because those figures are the same. That is right. No extra power and torque for the big H's 20th anniversary model Fireblade. That is because with Honda, power is nothing without control. They do not offer astronomical power figures but what the new updates give you is complete, accessible control. Unlike many of its rivals, where the last gazillion horsepower can only be found at the last 500rpm of the rev range, wringing every single horsepower out of the Fireblade's engine will feel like a stroll in the park. Furthermore, when was the last time you heard someone complain that 175bhp on a machine weighing 200kg is too little?

Unfortunately, Honda do not have test rides for the 2012 Fireblade, which is a shame because in my opinion, people would be easily swayed by its impeccable manners, especially if they have ridden nervous and peaky superbikes that only a racer can tame. (Are you listening Honda?) Spell-binding speed does not always have to be accompanied by hair-raising, pants-wetting episodes and the Fireblade is proof of this. How do I know? I have ridden the 2011 model, which is basically the same bike minus all the updates and even without those, it was bloody brilliant.

If I may liken the Fireblade to a woman's wardrobe it would be like that pair of classic, perfectly-cut blue jeans. It may not have the bells and whistles of other more trendy attire with glittery sequins or killer prints but at the end of the day, you wear it more often than anything else because it is comfortable, trendy, functional and is perfect for all occasions. With the new updates on the 2012 Fireblade, that pair of jeans now comes complete with six-inch heels for maximum appeal.



## Specs

Engine: Liquid-cooled 4-stroke 16-valve DOHC inline-4  
Frame: Diamond; die-cast aluminium twin-spar  
Front suspension: 43mm Showa Big Piston fork, fully-adjustable  
Rear suspension: Showa balance-free rear shock, fully-adjustable  
Weight: 200kg  
Power: 175 bhp @ 12,000rpm  
Torque: 112Nm @ 8,500rpm  
0-100km/h: 3 secs +  
Standing ¼ mile: 10.32 secs  
Top speed: 290 km/h  
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