

Mundesley, just off the Cromer Road, Norfolk: sun, cheap icecream and Bimota's new and phenomenal Tesi H2



HERE'S TO GOING TOO FAR...

Utterly bonkers engine, the most innovative motorcycle chassis ever built, outrageous styling, and it actually works. We're in...

By **John Westlake** Photography **Stu Collins**

Exotic strangeness is everywhere on the Bimota Tesi H2. The front wheel is bereft of forks and held by a vast swingarm machined from one block of aluminium. Above it, carbon wings as big as tea trays sprout from the fairing. And just when you think it's getting conventional towards the rear, you spot two Öhlins shock absorbers nestling behind the engine – one suspending the front wheel, the other the rear. Plus of course there's the small matter of a 237bhp supercharged engine taken from Kawasaki's sledgehammer H2.

Despite all this, the idea behind the bike is straightforward. In fact, there's a deranged logic to it: Kawasaki now own Bimota, so why not take the best bits from each company's most famous model, bolt them together and serve with lashings of carbon fibre? The result is the most extreme production bike on sale, but what's it actually like to ride? And can it possibly be worth £59,000? We take it for a rapid blast to the coast to answer the all-important questions.



Tesi is awash with carbon fibre and other exotic materials



Tick: Bimota's reason for being is to create extra special motorcycles

How did this happen?

» To understand how we got to this 1000cc pinnacle of excess, a short history lesson is required. Bimota were founded in 1973 to take advantage of the many technological lapses made by major manufacturers of the era. Back then, the Japanese big four were spending millions on R&D to make thrilling engines, then welding some tent poles into a frame and punting bikes out the door. Top speeds were high, weaves were terrifying and crashes were inevitable. Bimota stepped in to produce motorcycles that handled – they even won the 350cc Grand Prix world championship in 1980 with a Bimota-framed Yamaha ridden by privateer Jon Ekerold. But by the mid-Eighties the Japanese were getting the hang of chassis and the need for Bimotas was ebbing – they looked great and were exclusive, but no-one actually needed them. A GSX-R750 handled just fine thanks (and cost half the money). Cue two decades of financial pain, bankruptcies and turmoil as Bimota flailed about trying to find a reason to exist.

Which brings us to 2019, when Kawasaki bought a 49% stake in Bimota and provided some much-needed direction. The Japanese factory would provide their engines and electronics and Bimota would turn them into something extraordinary. The idea is you get all the reliability, power and polish of a Kawasaki, but in an even more extreme package. The Tesi H2 is the first of the new collaboration.

Is the Tesi H2 really more extreme than the H2?

» Yes. The power is identical because Bimota must leave the engine and electronics alone in order to pass homologation, but the riding position and handling are even sportier than the H2. It's the riding position you notice first. Whereas the H2 feels like a moderately civilised sportsbike – aggressive without being sadistic – the Tesi is one step closer to the track. The bars are close, wide and low, forcing you to either perch up like a meerkat or slide back along the long saddle until you're in a semi-racing crouch. After riding over to Bimota's UK HQ in Norwich on my Triumph Sprint the Tesi felt like a long, wide-barred 250 GP bike.



Just 250 Tesi will be built. This one is no.6

On standard settings, the suspension is too firm for UK roads. It feels like both ends are set up to convey torrents of crucial information as you set lap records around Mugello. On the Norwich ring road this is suboptimal: your head rattles, your spine rattles, your teeth rattle.

Luckily, because the suspension is Öhlins' finest – TTX shocks front and rear – adjusting it makes a big difference. Reaching under the self-supporting carbon fibre tail section I take a moment to swoon at the twin shock absorbers neatly sitting side by side, then wind three turns off the compression damping of both to see what happens.

Things do improve – the bike is still too firm for my road-going arse, but the unpleasantly jagged edges are instantly rounded off.

OK, so it's uncomfortable. If you want luxury, buy a Gold Wing. How does it handle?

» Fair point. And further fiddling would no doubt make it more tolerable without getting to the stage of swapping springs. As for handling, the stand-out quality is how fast it steers. Because of the bike's weight and the sheer size of the front end – those wings make it feel tourer-wide – I expected steering to match. But it dives for apexes like an R1 with the back-end jacked up. The first time I heaved it into a slow 90-degree corner it bolted for the inside kerb so fast I had to make a panicky readjustment to prevent placing £59,000 of Bimota in a wheat field.

On a normal bike, this sort of speedy steering would probably be accompanied by instability or a steering damper the size of a Christmas cracker. But of course the Tesi is not normal. The front swingarm geometry means it feels utterly stable, even when accelerating hard on sketchy road surfaces. It does have a steering damper though, so perhaps it can be provoked under circumstances I failed to create.

Another advantage of the front end is that if you don't acclimatise to the rapid steering – and one day on the bike wasn't enough

Tesi is happy dawdling in country, but there is no doubt it prefers to be ridden hard

'It feels like both ends are set up for Mugello. On the Norwich ring road this is suboptimal'





Wings the size of dinner trays and lickety-split steering

for me – you can adjust it. Well, someone who knows what they're doing can. By simply shortening the two torque arms that transfer the braking forces to the frame you can increase the rake to calm things down.

In faster corners the steering feels more natural and my confidence that the Tesi would go where I want increases. In fact, the whole bike feels more comfortable the faster you go, as the suspension starts working in its sweetspot and the Bridgestone RS11Rs get up to temperature. The H2 Tesi prefers to be ridden hard. You get the feeling it would be stupendous fun on a track, when you might also get some use out of those vast wings.

Are the brakes as astonishing as rumours suggest?

» As 1250GS owners know, the combination of powerful brakes and a front end that separates suspension duties from braking forces makes for impressively calm stopping on cruddy British roads. Brace against the tank, pull the lever as hard as you dare and marvel as the Tesi hauls to a neck-straining stop with only the slightest dip of the front (and even that is engineered in to reassure you all is well). And all the time the front wheel tracks over bumps as if you were tootling along. It's bizarre and addictive.

Is it any more effective than a decent set of forks? Racing experience would suggest not – when Bradley Ray raced a hub-steered Vyrus in the Spanish Moto2 championship in 2015 he didn't see off the conventional bikes under braking. In fact, he struggled to make any impression, with a best

result of 16th. However, Bimota say the Tesi outrakes the H2 because the rear doesn't lift as much, and that tallies with the half hour I spent mucking about on a deserted B-road. Once you get the confidence to just grab the lever, the Tesi stops in the undramatically efficient manner of an F1 car.

You haven't mentioned the engine. What's that like?

» Preposterous. The H2 engine is a crazed work of art, from its almighty smack of torque at almost any revs to the turkey gobbling impressions of its supercharger off the throttle. On the road, you can ride it blisteringly fast without going above 7000rpm, or you can use the top-end and hope you get a nice cellmate. The Tesi's acceleration is likely to be similar to the H2's because their weights are roughly the same, but drag from the Tesi's Eurofighter wings will probably knock the top speed down to a piffing 190mph or so. If you can live with that level of disappointment...

Back in my world of half term traffic heading to the coast, the engine's manners are exemplary. It burbles along contentedly behind caravans at 2500rpm, sits in queues without overheating (though your legs might), and during repeated U-turns for the photographer the clutch was never less than silky (which is a good job because the Tesi has the turning circle of a tea clipper). To start with the throttle response felt slightly snatchy at low revolutions per minute, but after an hour on the bike I barely noticed. It's a thoroughly civilised crackpot.

'From its almighty smack of torque to the turkey gobbling impressions'



A double-shot of Öhlins, and just look at that glorious bend

50 years of Bimota in *Bike*



Bimota SB2 April 1978

Suzuki 750 powered jewel, cost £2500. Without engine!



Bimota DB1 June 1986

Air-cooled 750cc Ducati-engine, and £7495 price tag.



Bimota Tesi 1D 906 April 1992

The Tesi cost £26,000 in '92 – equivalent to £55,000 now.



Bimota SB6 June 1994

GSX-R1100 power, 180mph performance; £16,000.



Bimota Mantra Feb 1996

First naked bike had a fake walnut dash and £12,750 ticket.

Hang on, rewind. Did you say the weights are similar? What about all the carbon?

» Bimota faced a couple of problems with the weight. The first was that the H2 engine is most of it, and they can't do anything about that. The second was that conventional forks are light, so as soon as you replace them with a huge swingarm, an extra shock absorber and half a dozen tie-rods, you're playing catch-up. So despite using CNC-machined alloy components galore, forged wheels, and turning the tail unit into a self-supporting carbon monocoque, the Tesi's weight without fuel is 214kg. Add 13kg of petrol (17 litres) and you're up to 227kg, only 11 less than the H2. You could view cramming all that tech into 227kg as deeply impressive, or be rather disappointed your £59,000 doesn't buy you a far lighter machine than the £26,000 Kawasaki.

Is anything about it normal?

» Yes, the few bits pinched from the H2 (discounting the engine, which is abnormal cubed). Consequently the wing mirrors work perfectly, the switchgear is neat and efficient, and the clocks tell you everything you need to know. These components look a bit drab compared with the carbonfest elsewhere but aren't glaringly out of context. All the electronics are standard

H2 apart from the ABS which Bimota had to do months of work on to take account of the different way the front suspension behaved.

What's it like close up?

» Jaw dropping. People who don't know anything about bikes stare, and people who know their stuff walk into lamp posts. After taking in the headline trinkets you can't help but gaze at all the details – the eccentric adjuster that lets you shift the rear swingarm pivot point, the carbon clip-on handlebars, the rose joints at each end of the tie-rods. Everywhere you look there's immaculate carbon or CNC-machined alloy. Looking at the beautifully packaged steering pivots and levers, it would be easy to believe the H2 motor was designed to fit the Tesi rather than the other way round. The only point where the merging of Kawasaki and Bimota grates are the plastic clocks.

It can't be worth £59k. Can it?

» Why not? It's got a road bike engine the like of which we may never see again, the most innovative motorcycle chassis ever built, styling that stops traffic, outstanding build quality, only 250 will ever be built and it actually works. You can even get it serviced at a Kawasaki dealer. The Tesi H2 doesn't succeed like early Bimotas – it's no great improvement on the base bike and you could argue that semi-active suspension renders hub-centre steering redundant – but it does have a reason to exist. It's a technological extreme, a middle finger to convention, a love letter to anyone who's ever gone too far. If you've got the money, buying into that world makes a hell of a lot more sense than getting another Porsche. **BIKE**

Don't pass: if you've got a spare £59,000 there is no better way to spend it than a Tesi H2

Sumptuous details at every turn

Mmm. Make yourself a cuppa, settle down, and stare at titanium headers

'It's a middle finger to convention, a love letter to anyone who's ever gone too far'

Rival exotica

Harley-Davidson CVO Limited

» £37,495 » 105bhp » 428kg

PROS: comfy saddle, stereo with 75W per channel, panniers like wardrobes, fabulous paint
CONS: bargain price, conventional front end, no wings



Ducati Superleggera V4

» £86,000 » 234bhp » 159kg

PROS: carbon fibre frame and swingarm, mind-boggling power/weight ratio of 1.54bhp/kg
CONS: quite common (500 built), small wings, conventional front end



Brough Superior Lawrence

» £56,700 » 102bhp » 200kg

PROS: titanium frame, unconventional Fiori-type front end (also titanium), best brand name ever
CONS: not much carbon, light on rider aids, no wings



SPECIFICATION	BIMOTA TESI H2
Contact	bimotauk.co.uk
Price (otr)	£59,000
Typical finance	national-lottery.co.uk
Capacity	998cc
Engine	supercharged 16v inline four
Bore x stroke	90 x 60.8mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain
Power (tested)	237bhp@11,500rpm
Torque (tested)	104 lb.ft@11,000rpm
Top speed	190mph (estimated)
Frame	Alloy omega
Front suspension	Alloy swingarm, fully adjustable
Rear suspension	monoshock, fully adjustable
Brakes (f/r)	2 x 330mm discs, 4-pot Brembo calipers; 250mm disc, 2-pot Brembo
Tyres (f/r)	120/70 ZR17, 190/55 ZR17
Rake/trail	21.3°/117mm
Wheelbase	1445mm
Wet weight	235kg (est)
Seat height	840mm
Tank size	17 litres
Economy	28mpg
Electronics	Cornering traction and ABS, wheelie control, two way quickshifter, modes, connectivity
Colours	Tricolore and carbon (ie no paint)
Availability	Now
Bike rating	8/10