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AVON 3D ULTRA

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE AVON PRODUCED RUBBER THAT MADE US PROUD TO BE BRITISH. THANKFULLY, THAT'S CHANGED...

Did you know it was Avon's 100th anniversary last year? No, probably not. The little British rubber company has been chugging along under the sportsbike radar for a few years now, and it's all too easy to forget that Avon was winning British championships just 20 years ago – along with Isle of Man TT race victories, too. Nowadays, associating Avon rubber with hardcore track

The world's press were flown over to the warmest part of Europe, and the place where least precipitation takes place. Almeria was a safe bet, but we woke up to snow in the hotel car park. Arriving at the circuit there was standing water blanketing the entire track – it looked like the job was crocked. Thankfully, (after several hours) God sent in the sun squad and we carried out a proper tyre test.

AVON BOSSES THE TOURING CLASS AND AMERICA'S BILLY-BOB CUSTOM SCENE

riding is like suggesting Moby would be a good horse racing jockey. Racing monopolisation through control rubber has brought the 'race on Sunday, buy on Monday' ethos to tyres.

While Avon bosses the touring class and America's Billy-Bob custom scene, the Melksham factory admit that it hasn't had a competitive fast road/trackday tyre to compete with the likes of Pirelli and Dunlop. The 3D Ultra family is the retaliation, comprising three different tyres that cover the sportsbike spectrum – and the Tarmac in rubber...

Tyres have the final say in cornering, braking and acceleration. You could have the sweetest handling cornering assassin ruined by shonky rubber. And too many do.

SPORT

It wasn't a scorching day in Spain. It was warmer in Skegness, and the track conditions were like P60 sandpaper – wet and dry, and could result in scuffing. This meant a perfect test for the do-anything 3D Ultra Sport tyre.

Niall Mackenzie (Avon ambassador) wasn't talking shit with dollar signs in his eyes when he said these tyres warm up quickly. The Sport-shod Kawasaki ZX-6R felt planted immediately and coped well with the scattered damp patches around Almeria.

The front tyre is very progressive, which allows precise and neutral steering control, but may also slow down steering a smidgen on front-end sensitive bike. You'll only notice ▶



A damp track and snow on the mountains didn't bother the Avons



3D ULTRA SPORT

The Sport variant of the 3D Ultra is an all-condition road tyre that's palatable for sportsbikes. It utilises tri-compound technology for a mix of side grip and high mileage, and 3D siping for rapid warm-up time. Competitors include Dunlop Roadsmart and Michelin Pilot Road III.



3D ULTRA SUPERSPORT

The Supersport is a fast road and track tyre, and uses the same construction and tread pattern as the Sport but with a softer compound. A nano carbon compound and less silica make things stickier. This is a Bridgestone S20 and Dunlop Sportsmart rival.



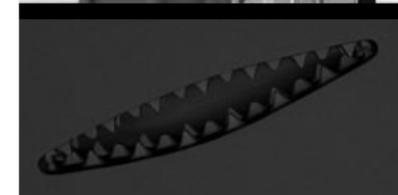
3D ULTRA XTREME

The Xtreme uses minimal grooves to escape with being road-legal rubber – it's a track tyre that's OK for the road. Like the rest of the 3D Ultra family, you get tri-compound technology. Avon pitch these against Pirelli Supercorsa Pros and other track-spec rubber. Sticky...



Shredding rubber like Ron...

Listening to Al's praise, it sounds like the Supersport derivative could be the choice for 2012



TYRE TECHNOLOGY: IT'S IN THE SIPES

The 3D sipes used in all three tyres aren't just extra treads. A closer look reveals the siping mimics more of a shark's mouth, complete with teeth. Whereas standard grooves in the rubber are simply there to clear water (and partially aid warm-up through tyre flex) Avon's 3D Sipes have interlocking 'teeth' that limit the amount of flex, and control heat. What else is intriguing? There's an undertread, which is a base layer that sits underneath the top compounds and bonds everything together. This is where the tyre would normally overheat first. Avon also use Advanced Tread Arc Combination (ATAc) that varies the tread profile, with the curve angle changing three times around the profile for maximum footprint when cornering hard. And, according to Avon, they were the pioneers for inverting the front tyre's grooving in the late 1980s., spawning the 'Here, mate, your front tyre is on backwards, innit,' comments of old.

► on the track and this isn't a tyre aimed at circuit skulduggery, although the 3D Ultra Sport never threatened to show me a close-up of the Spanish scenery. We actually rode a Sport-shod 'Blade in the UK before the launch. It slowed the steering slightly but the bike felt utterly planted.

Overall grip is more than acceptable for a fast-road tyre and the limit of adhesion is readily evident. You get a squirmy sensation as the tyres start to protest, rather than a sudden scurry like other harder compound road rubber. Unless you're loading the front-end like Colin Edwards, trail-braking like a hero, or riding on ice, you'll struggle to crash on these. The only time the harder compound revealed itself was over hidden damp patches, and the grip vanished a little too quickly.

ASIDE FROM GRIP, THE SUPERSPORT'S BEST ATTRIBUTE WAS LONGEVITY

And the stability is fantastic in all areas, with a stiff but not-too-rigid carcass that allows the consistency needed for a road tyre.

I could start to slate the Sport for not allowing a 60-degree lean angle and only utilising 80 per cent of the ZX-10's ability, but that would be like slagging off Usain Bolt for being shit at ballet. Want a high-mileage tyre for road-only action? You won't find much better than the 3D Ultra Sport.

SUPERSPORT

While the circuit was moist and some of the

fair-weather Jonny Foreigners were sipping café con leche, I went out on a Supersport-shod R1. The track temperature was cool, with snow layering the surrounding mountains, yet the tyres lost that stiff, plastic sensation halfway through the first corner. Within a lap, the bike was athletic and willing, naturally tipping into turns without hustling the bars. Although the construction of the Supersport is identical to the Sport derivative, the extra grip (and assurance that comes with it) was instantly evident. The R1's OE rubber is less useful than a tumour, so any upgrade in

rubber flatters the big Yammy, but there are serious liberties to be had with these Avons. The R1 felt brilliant, tracking the contours of Almeria like a needle on a record.

I also back-to-back tested a ZX-6R with Sport and Supersport tyres fitted on a dry track, and the Supersport bike felt lighter. I could put more trust into the front-end, on and off the throttle, and side grip at considerable lean angles was immense. I was beginning to get a tad giddy. Aside from the grip, the Supersport's best attribute was the longevity. We started the day on scrubs, used for the whole afternoon on the previous day. The grip was constant and predictable, and never really dropped off despite the caning.

Something that's lacked in previous Avon tyres has been feel and feedback when close to

the limit. You can have as much ball-busting grip as you like, but without feel, you're left pissing onto an electric fence. The Avon Supersport provides the squidge and softness for feel, with outstanding outright grip. If you ride smooth, you'll swear it's a race tyre.

Aside from standing water/lakes across the circuit earlier in the day, the Supersport coped impeccably with the wet. It has to be one of the most capable tyres in such difficult conditions. The confidence they bring is as mind-boggling as the lean angles.

Beej came back from Portimao raving about the Bridgestone S20. I've returned throwing some serious shapes about the 3D Ultra Supersport. So much so, I've blagged a set for my longterm. I wasn't expecting Avon to produce such badass hooligan rubber. ►



Front, back, left or right, the Avon's impressed

► **XTREME**

Tagged as a trackday/racing tyre, the Xtreme is obviously road legal but takes more effort to get up to working temperature. With a virtually impossible task of going racing (through budget and control tyre series) this is Avon's top-shelf trackday tyre for trackday addicts. Well, they hope so.

wasn't enough heat around to get the Xtreme front tyre to fully function. I was knee-down, going faster than I had all day, but there was till another 10 per cent of the Xtreme's ability left in the tank. I needed tyre warmers and bigger bollocks to do that. It's not often we say we're looking forward to testing in the UK...

Whether or not the 3D sipes is just

AVON HAS FINALLY CREATED A TRIO OF PROPER SPORTSBIKE TYRES

The current incarnation of the R1, with the cross-plane crank, boasts one of the easiest and most predictable rear ends to get spinning. Yet with the Xtremes fitted, I was struggling to get any tyre spin with a heavy throttle hand. The carcass isn't too stiff though, there's just lashings of outright grip. The Xtreme was simply digging in and gripping.

The added turn-in pace gave the R1 some mojo without losing steering neutrality. The Xtreme's racier profile, softer compound and added stiffness made for serious scratching.

Despite the drying track and praise, there

marketing hype, we'll never know. I'm sure the raw structure and design of the tyres works well enough without the technology. But Avon has finally created a trio of proper sportsbike rubber that can rival the 'big' four. As long as the price is right (around £225) the 3D Ultra family is an absolute winner.

The Avon 3D Ultra Supersport is my revelation of 2012. Money is tight for everyone, so if you can ride to your trackday, ride at your trackday, and ride home on the same set of tyres for a few thousand miles, you're on to a winner. Rule Britannia.



AVON TEST RIDER: RICHARD DOBSON

I joined Avon in June 2003, nearly nine years ago, and I'm now senior tyre development test rider. I got into the job through word of mouth really, having spent a lot of time on the road on my R1 and doing trackdays. They were looking for a test rider to bring in as a stability rider, so I came into the job doing mileage testing at Keevil and Bruntingthorpe, and then that led to track work.

We benchmark all the tyres, so before marketing them, we test against Dunlop, Michelin, Pirelli, Metzeler, etc, so we know where we are.

We've come on a long way in the last few years, with new compounds, new constructions, plus we've got new technicians working in the company now, coming up with some new ideas - like a new steel structure.

The designer will come up with a load of different variants to test, and we'll bring a benchmark tyre for comparison. We use a performance datalogging box to extract data, and then I'll compile a report afterwards, giving feedback to the designers.

I ride at 80 per cent capability to maintain consistency. If you ride balls-out all the time you're putting it on the line for nothing. You won't be able to relay all the info back to the designers, and if you're on the 'Sport' tyre, for example, you've got to ride how the customers would ride.

Lap times? We're there. We're competitive with all three tyres in the 3D Ultra family.

