

Motorcycle News Road test of the BMW F650-CS by - Jon Urry - and pictures by - Double Red

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# More to this than meets the eye

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The F650CS's wacky styling isn't just a gimmick - it hides a host of sensible features BMW believes are just the thing to seduce a whole new breed of bikers.

A select group of bikes draw crowds when you park them up. Some, like Ducati's 996 and the MV Augsta F4, attract admirers who just want to ogle their beautiful styling. Others act as people magnets simply because they're so different. The BMW F650CS definitely falls into the latter category. But what makes it so odd? It's hard to pinpoint which of its many outlandish features stands out most. Is it the nose? The colours? The huge exhaust pipe? The tank?



**BMW is banking that the CS will look just as shinily seductive to non-riders on a wet weekend in Wolverhampton**

The bike's designer, David Robb, describes the CS as "like an orchestra" That doesn't mean it blasts out a few bars of Beethoven's Fifth every time you stop - now that really would attract attention. What he's trying to say is that all the style features on the bike have been designed to work in concert with each other. He has a point. The CS may stand out from everything else around it, but from nose to tail it follows its own peculiar aesthetic principles.

You have to admire BMW for not suddenly losing courage halfway through. Take the three black rubber protectors on the frame, They're there to minimise damage if the bike falls over. But as they may have upset the look of the bike on their own, Robb has added three complementary ridges to the black under-seat fuel tank. They're so subtle you hardly notice them until the light falls on them. But they mimic the frame protectors perfectly, as do the three similar slashes in the fairing. That's just one example of a number of themes Robb has designed to run through the CS. He says: "We wanted the bike to be like a person.

When you first meet someone, you know very little about them. The more you see them, the more you learn about them." Er, indeed. But though that all sounds like corporate claptrap,

it does make a strange kind of sense. The question is, what kind of people does BMW hope will want to learn more about the CS? It's clear the firm is after a very different class of rider from the people who bought the more conservatively styled F650GS. It calls them "experience seekers", which means people who want something a bit different.

They may even want something different so much that they're prepared to switch to two wheels for the first time. Kevin Pascoe, BMW's UK marketing manager, says: "We predict 40 per cent of sales will be to people who don't already own a bike." That's some claim, but BMW has a few tricks up its sleeve to make it happen. For one, there's the insurance offer. The firm will cover you for £400 fully comp if you're between 21 and 26, or £200 if you're over 26. And if that doesn't attract people in a world of spiralling insurance prices, there's the image. BMW is marketing the CS in a totally different way - expect to see adverts in FHM as well as MCN.

For this new market, Robb took a step back from current motorcycle design and thought about the simple practicalities that would make non-riders seriously consider a bike as an addition to their lifestyle.



**BMW designer David Robb reckons the CS's mix of pizzazz and practicality will be a hit.**

If you're going to a trendy restaurant you don't want to have to find somewhere to plonk your helmet. So a new luggage system had to be invented. Most scooters have storage under the seat, but the CS has something extra. As the tank is under the seat, there's a nice space where the tank should be. BMW has created a whole range of equipment to fit in there. As standard you get a soft rucksack which clips in.

Pay extra and you can have a secure helmet holder, a hard plastic storage box or a waterproof audio system, you can plug any music player into. The idea is to give the urban rider everything they need. It's not just the rider, either. Two rails run up the tank which provide excellent grips for pillioners. It's a brilliant idea which makes you wonder why no-one has ever thought about it before. The fact it looks different is unlikely to be disputed, but what really matters is what it's like to ride. And for something that looks suspiciously like a case of style over substance, it's surprisingly good.

The motor is a slightly tweaked version of the F650GS's 650cc Rotax single. When you start

it up you get the familiar "thud, thud" coupled with a few slight vibrations. It feels exactly the same to sit on as the GS. The seat is low - there's an even lower option if you call Ronnie Corbett "Lofty" - and the bars are high and wide. The switchgear has an identical layout to the GS's, but it's big and brightly coloured like a baby's toy to suit the new styling. It's only when you get moving that the main difference between the GS and CS manifests itself. Whereas the GS pretends to be an off-road bike - though I suspect very few owners ever took to the dirt - the CS has 17in wheels with road tyres. Fantastic. Personally, I hate the fact that Big Trailies come with fake knobblies. What's the point? Would you ever try and take a Triumph Tiger off-road? Or a BMW R1150GS? Of course not.

Give them proper rubber and stop pretending they're something they're not. Despite the Trailie/Tarmac combo, the CS is no mental supermoto. But the road wheels and tyres make a world of difference to handling and general road-holding. Because it's light at just 189kg (415lb), it's a doddle to flick from side to side at low speeds, which makes it ideal for dodging through traffic. The riding position puts you quite upright, which gives you a good view over cars, and also means your wrists have an easy time when you're filtering slowly.

From low revs, the motor is quite punchy and picks up speed quickly. With maximum power coming in at 6,800rpm and the limiter stopping the motor at about 8,000rpm, you do find yourself changing gear quite a lot, but for pootling around at low speed in second gear, it's fine. Because both the wheels are the same size and the tyres are wider, the bike feels much better and more planted than its trailie sibling. I always found the GS a little vague in giving feedback from the front, mainly due to the knobby tyres, but also because of the 18in front wheel. The CS has none of that and it's even more noticeable when you get out of town.

Initially, it flops a bit worryingly into comers, but that's just a trait of the slightly strange trailie-style geometry. Once it's leaned over it feels quite stable. Despite the large can, there are no problems with ground clearance. The motor's 50 bhp is enough to let you leave it in one gear and just roll on and off the throttle. If the road has slightly tighter corners, a lower gear may be needed to stop it stuttering, but as there are only five gears and first and second are low, shifting is minimal.

The small front screen does a good job of deflecting the wind over you and the seat is even padded enough for my tastes - I'm usually the first to start fidgeting. As with most BMWs, there's optional ABS for an extra £345, though you don't really need it. The brakes are more than up to the job as standard and once the soft front suspension has dived down under the initial pull on the lever they stop the bike quickly, though they do lack feel slightly.

ABS is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to optional extras. Heated grips cost £185, there's a huge range of luggage for the rear seat rack, and you can opt for chrome mirrors or a new instrument panel. There'll even be a range of CS-branded clothing. This isn't just a bike, remember it's a lifestyle.

And as the last thing BMW's target riders want to do is get their hands dirty, it has 6,000-mile service intervals and belt final drive - which has no real downside in terms of performance and a major upside in that it only needs changing every 30,000 miles. Welcome to the world of hassle-free hiking. The F650CS looks amazing and does everything well, but personally I'd prefer a little more oomph. However, if you've just passed your test or are looking for a highly competent commuter with seriously wacky styling, it's a good bet. It's fun - it pulls wheelies in first gear off the throttle - and has great features like the luggage system.

BMW has already sold more than 65,000 F650s worldwide and the CS is different enough to justify its place alongside the GS in the range. If it really does what BMW hopes and gets more people into biking, I'll be the first to applaud. We'll have to wait until next year to find out whether it turns out to be a fly-by-night fashion accessory or becomes a can't-do-

without classic.



**It looks like a Trailie - sort of - but with road rubber and 17in wheels the CS's feet are planted firmly on the tarmac.**



**Monster can does not mean problems with ground clearance**



**Useful screen means the front is more sensible than it looks**

**THE FACTS -**

BMW F650CS - £5400

Availability - now.  
BMW: 01344-426565

**Colours** - Light blue, dark blue, gold

Insurance group NU, max 17 - Group 8

**Engine** - 652cc four-stroke single  
Power and torque claimed - 50bhp, 44 ft lb

**Weight**, power to weight - 189kg (415lb), 0.26bhp/kg  
**Top speed** - 120 mph

**Geometry**, Rake, trail, wheelbase 60\*, 11.3cm, 147.5cm

**Fuel consumption** - Average mpg, tank capacity, range 56mpg, 17 litres, 210 miles

**Engine** - 87%  
Just right for the job

**Handling** - 86%  
Good riddance to knobblies

**Braking** - 88%  
ABS not needed

**Comfort** - 89%  
Plenty of padding

**Grin factor** - 90%  
Laugh at me or with me

**OVERALL** - 86%  
Style and substance.

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