

## Remember this?



Built using the DR650SE motor, the Freewind offered high levels of comfort with legendary reliability. This one also has a big-bore kit installed.

# Suzuki Freewind

In 1996 Suzuki released the DR650SE to enthusiastic Australian punters. The bike is still around today and it's more popular than ever. That same year, Suzuki released a milder, more road-oriented dualsporter called the XF650 Freewind. The XF650 went the way of the wind, but there's at least one very nice example still around.

**M**al McConnell's been part of the Australian motorcycle industry for a very long time. He's raced road and off-road motorcycles – and won – he was a pioneer competing on quads, he's owned bike dealerships and he's managed race teams. He's still a keen competitor.

But after all those decades nurturing a passion for motorcycles and fierce competition, Mal and his



Above: Mal McConnell is a big fan of the Freewind, and is very happy to have a great example.

wife Karen have settled down a little. They're still in the thick of things with their on-line store Adventure Bike Australia, and while we were ordering a few parts Mal jolted us back to the mid-1990s when he told us he had a Suzuki Freewind.

"I believe the XF650 was probably before its time," said the happy Gold Coaster. "When you think about it, it was probably pretty modern back then with its nice speedo and smooth finish. It happened before



anyone took any notice of, or even cared about, adventure bikes."

Mal and Karen had Suzuki dealerships going back to the early 1980s, and for the few years the Freewind was available they didn't sell many, but Mal thought the bike was a great concept. "A lot of people thought it odd to ride a half-looking-road-cum-trailbike," he laughed. "They couldn't get their head around it back then. I rode one and it was great in the tight, bumpy stuff. I rounded up sports bikes on the road back then, and I do the same today."

When a Freewind became available in good shape a few of years ago, he grabbed it – original 1996 Queensland numberplate and all. Even by today's standards he feels the Freewind is a great all-rounder.

"I love the thing," he said, gazing lovingly across several other immaculately cared-for bikes in his garage.

"It does everything. I pillion on it all the time and I do overnights via back-roads. I'm trying to keep it to more road-going stuff and not wreck it, but it's still a great back-roads tourer available at a budget price."



**Above:** A digital speedo! That was a big deal in 1996 when the bike was released.

**Above right:** Dougal spent four years riding his Freewind around the world with his wife as a pillion.

**Below:** Good protection for the rider and high comfort levels.

### Good financial sense

Mal's Freewind is in great condition. It's kept clean, shining and well-serviced, and while it's mostly still stock, Mal did fit a Procycle 790 big-bore kit, new tyres and had the suspension serviced. For a bike that cost a measly \$2900, complete with an incredibly detailed service history, paperwork and even brochures from the time, this thing looks and feels mint. We know how it feels because Mal was busting for us to ride the bike and see what he'd been enjoying.

We had a grin a mile wide when we returned. The Suzuki was so damn smooth and civilised. It was a blast in the Gold Coast traffic and scooting around some small backroads. The digital speedo and the smooth, vibration-free feel was balanced nicely by the throaty induction roar and punch in the small of the back when the throttle was cracked open. We could clearly see why Mal became so animated when he talked about the Freewind.

The motor is very clearly and obviously a DR650SE unit, right down to the pipe, and that can only be a good thing. Parts and maintenance on a bike like this one would be as about as affordable as these things could be, and the comfort level is very high.

### A winner

Just to fill in a few historical facts, the Freewind was available in Australia in 1996, 1997 and 1998. It retailed then for around \$9600 plus on roads and Suzuki marketed



Image: Mal McConnell

the bike as 'The Escape Machine'. A pair of Mikuni BSR32s feed in fuel – we grinned like fools when we pulled on the choke – and, stock, the 644cc four-stroke single fed its power through a five-speed box. As we said, it's pretty much the same mechanical spec the DR650 still runs today. Fuel capacity is 18.5 litres in a plastic tank hidden under a cover with a glossy paint job.

Mal has favourite memory of Dougal, a customer who pillioned his wife 130,000km around the world on a '97 model and took four years to do it.

We love seeing a bike that holds great memories being ridden looked and after, and this Suzuki clearly qualifies.

Is Mal a happy owner? We reckon he is.

He set up a Freewind banner on his fence for us to see when we arrived, and pointed out, "It has a bit of cult following in Europe, and I think it's something special having such a nice one sitting in my garage."

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### Basket case

Do you have something a bit wild or different in an adventure bike? Or maybe a basket case you've nursed back to its former glory? We'd love to see it and tell the story. Send an email to [tom@maynemediamedia.com.au](mailto:tom@maynemediamedia.com.au) and tell us about it.

