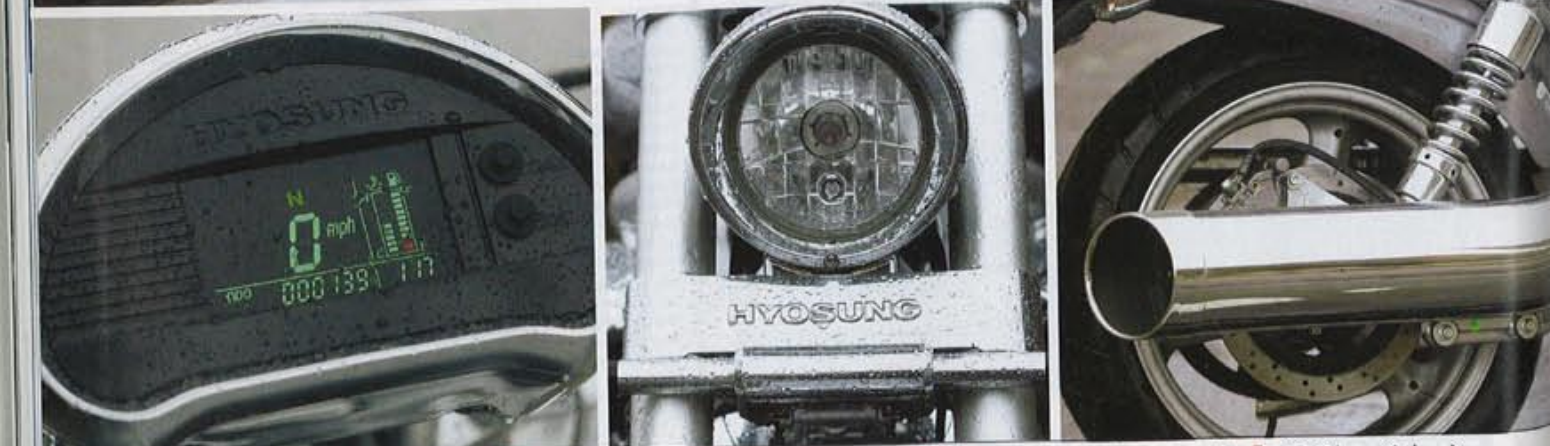




Hyosung's GV650 is the fastest and best equipped middleweight cruiser money can buy. It's also the cheapest



AT A GLANCE + £4849 + 647cc, 8v, dohc, V-twin + 70bhp (claimed) + 218kg (dry)

Watch out Harley

Hyosung's GV650 Aquila is much more than just another cheap chopper. Harley-Davidson owners beware... there'll be a Korean cruiser on your tail soon

Words by Martin Fitz-Gibbons Photography by Chippy Wood

Preconceptions can be dangerous. If you expect something to be rubbish, you tend to spend your time looking for reasons

to prove you were right all along. But there are exceptions – occasions when, despite all your prejudices, you realise you need to stand back, hold up your hands and admit you were wrong. So here goes: I was wrong; Hyosung's GV650 Aquila is actually a very good bike.

Perhaps understandably, initial expectations aren't high for a Korean-built middleweight cruiser. It's trickier still to be upbeat when Hyosung's efforts so far – namely the Comet and GT650R – fell short of their Japanese contemporaries.

But the Aquila – Italian for 'eagle', if you wondered – doesn't fall short at all. In fact, it's leagues ahead of its rivals. It uses the same forks and engine as the GT650 and, although they feel underdamped and underpowered in the original machines, in a cruiser they offer upside-down style and surprisingly rorty, revvy grunt.

Hyosung claim 70bhp from the 647cc liquid-cooled motor. If the rear wheel figure is even close that still wipes the floor with all its rivals. It makes every one – the Honda Shadow (44bhp), Suzuki Intruder (56bhp), Kawasaki VN900 (54bhp) and Yamaha DragStar (40bhp) – all look utterly gutless. It

even stomps all over a 1449cc Harley, which makes less than 50bhp at the wheel. That's because the engine can rev. Although there's no tacho, peak power is made at a heady 9000rpm. Non-cruiser engine in a cruiser: genius.

The steering isn't the sharpest, as you'd probably expect, and ground clearance is bad enough to still pose a problem at 90mph in the wet, but these are traditionally moot points with cruisers. There's no point being unduly harsh about the Aquila, considering it's certainly no worse than any of its rivals. It's a decent package and far more satisfying to ride than you'd expect – capable twin-disc brakes, an authentic V-twin exhaust tone and almost 120mph flat out. A Harley copy? Nope – the Hyosung's way better.

But if performance doesn't matter so much and what you really want from a cruiser is 'The Look', you won't be disappointed either – it's big, beefy, solid and shiny. Feet-forward pegs? Check. Huge, wide, pull-back bars? Of course. Belt drive? Naturally. Chrome is plentiful, but styling is aggressive rather than tarty. There is a clear Harley V-Rod influence, as well as hints of other power cruisers (exhaust from the old Yamaha Road Star Warrior, for example), but it still manages to look individual.

Onlookers will love it – right up until they realise there's no Harley-Davidson badge. But then if that

puts you off, all H-D offer in this price range is the 883 Sportster – a very different (slower, heavier, older-looking) prospect indeed. In fact, at less than five grand the Aquila is just 40 per cent of the price of a V-Rod, just as much fun to ride and no less impressive to an untrained eye.

So it's not only the fastest, best-equipped middleweight cruiser, but also the cheapest. And the catch is... well, nothing really. As a smaller brand you won't find a dealer on every doorstep, though there are 50 Hyosung retailers throughout the country and new importers EP Barrus reckon that number could increase to 80 in the next year. Spares are readily available, services are at a reasonable 6000km and all new bikes come with a two-year, unlimited-mileage warranty.

If you're in the market for a mid-size cruiser, there's no reason to overlook the Hyosung. Unless your preconceptions have still got the better of you... ■

THE SPEC SHEET Hyosung GV650 Aquila



Price	£4849
Top speed	120mph (est)
Power	70bhp @ 9000rpm (claimed)
Torque	43 lb.ft @ 7500rpm (est)
Engine	647cc, 8v, dohc, V-twin
Bore x stroke	81.5 x 62mm
Compression ratio	n/a
Transmission	5-speed, belt
Frame	tubular steel
Front suspension	41mm usd forks
Front adjustment	compression, rebound
Rear suspension	twin shocks
Rear adjustment	preload
Front brakes	2 x 290mm discs/2-pot calipers
Rear brakes	270mm disc/2-pot caliper
Tyres	Bridgestone BT54
Front; rear	120/70 ZR18, 180/55 ZR17
Dry weight	218kg (claimed)
Wheelbase	1700mm
Seat height	705mm
Fuel capacity	16 litres
Insurance group	NU10
Colours	blue/silver/black
Available from	EP Barrus (01869 326400 www.hyosung.co.uk)

The big questions

1. A Korean middleweight cruiser... yawn.

That's not a question. And your implication is wrong. This is a class-leading bike.

2. But isn't it just a cheap Hyosung version of a Yamaha DragStar?

Not at all. This is the first middleweight cruiser blessed with a decent amount of drive – certainly enough to expose the Japanese competitors as the breathless lumps they are. Hyosung claim 70bhp – that's 20bhp more than even a 1449cc Harley puts out. The brakes are up to the job and it steers properly until the pegs deck out. And it tops out at a respectable 120mph.

3. It's a cruiser – it's not all about speed and power, you know.

That's not a question, either. Your statement is correct but if the fact that you can actually enjoy hustling the Aquila about (at least, in a limited way) doesn't get you excited, you've got to admit it looks pretty damn cool. Upside-down forks add to the sporty look, while the enormous exhaust, huge cow-horn bars and lashings of luminous chrome should satisfy even the most attention-deprived cruiser fan. Plus it's just £4849 on the road – that's damn good value, less than any rival and even cheaper than the far inferior Harley 883 Sportster. Whatever way you look at it, the GV650 is the best bike in its class by some considerable distance.

THE RIVALS + Harley Sportster 883 + Honda Shadow + Suzuki Intruder M800