

Cheap thrills

Words and images by Brent Lilley



“At first glance the Z8 is quite striking, with its shape aggressively styled and red and white plastic panels that shroud the exterior.”



Controls are well laid out on the dash, which also features a large easy-to-see display. A grab handle on the passenger's side will get plenty of use in tough-going.

CFMoto has been around for years but the brand itself has never really taken off in rural New Zealand. This may be about to change however, as more and more Kiwi farmers realise the value for money these machines offer. Brent Lilley took the CFMoto Z8 for a spin and was pleasantly surprised.

I'm going to be honest here and admit I wasn't sure if testing a CFMoto Z8 out on my farm was really a blessing or not. I'm probably as guilty as many other farmers of dismissing CFMoto before really giving it a chance. However, this month I decided to put all preconceived ideas aside and give it a try — and I'm pleased now that I did.

The CFMoto Z8 has been designed as a nimble, yet powerful, two-seater side by side or SSV for off-road, all-terrain use. Now, while it isn't really a dedicated farm machine, it may just strike a chord with some out there as it will make everyday jobs on the farm a whole lot more fun, and when the weekend comes around — look out. For those after a tamer, more practical machine, the company does make a range of models, including its U8 that is probably going to be more suited for everyday farm use.

Having this particular machine out on my own farm meant I knew exactly where to take it to put it through its paces, with plenty of hills, rocky tracks, and open ground to test it out.

Design and build

At first glance the Z8 is quite striking, with its shape aggressively styled and red and white plastic panels that shroud the exterior. It also has slanted LED lights at the front and rear, along with a wraparound chrome nudge bar and 14-inch alloys, which all add to this impression. A small tray on the back is largely more for show than to carry anything, with a load rating of only 100kg. The Z8 also features a tow hitch and winch.

The racing-style seats and the four-point harness are great for safety, although not overly practical on the farm when you have to get in and out often to open gates (accessory three-point seatbelts are available). One thing I'm pleased to report that I didn't test first-hand is the roll cage, as I managed to keep all four of the six-ply tyres on the ground. It is quite reassuring the lengths CFMoto has gone to to ensure safety, having built a roll cage to high standard that obtained an Independent ISO certification rating for safety.

Up front, the controls for the driver are kept simple and well laid out. In the centre of the dash

are a collection of large toggle switches, including control indicators, hazards, lights, the horn, and a kill switch. An adjustable steering wheel offers some extra comfort and a large LCD screen provides easy-to-see information that includes fuel level, engine temperature, speed, odometer, and a handy clock. Mirrors mean the Z8 comes ready for conditional registration.

A top quality suspension setup is going to be key for driver comfort on a machine like this, and like most manufacturers now, CFMoto has opted for a double wishbone setup with adjustable shocks all round to take the bite out of the bumps. Around 200mm of travel on each wheel and 300mm of ground clearance under the machine is great for climbing over deep ruts or rough rocks. I was impressed to see greaseable bushes on all pivot points and overall, this suspension setup did an excellent job.

Engine

CFMoto has now been designing and manufacturing compact engines for over 20 years, which have been widely used and proven in a variety of applications. The Z8 has an 800cc,

four-stroke, liquid-cooled, V-twin engine slung low in the chassis centrally behind the seats to keep the machines centre of gravity low and well balanced. The inclusion of well-known components, such as a Delphi throttle body and electronic injectors, along with a Bosch fuel pump, should provide some piece of mind for those weary of the unknown.

With 62hp or 42kw of power on tap, when you give it the jandal, the Z8 jumps off the mark without hesitation — which makes it incredibly fun to drive without scaring the c*rp out of you! Out on the farm I was most interested to see how this engine held on when climbing hills and the result was impressive. It held 40kph going straight up a steep climb over a good distance. Stop-starting on a hill was equally impressive, with plenty of low-end torque to get the machine moving, although low gear was definitely necessary on the steepest slopes.

Access to the engine is tough on such a compact machine and, while it's no worse on the Z8 than anything else on the market, there is room for improvement. Panels behind the seats can be removed for limited access or the air filter

Compare machinery specs at 

CFMoto Z8	
Engine	V-twin, four-stroke, 799.6cc
Power	46kW/62hp
Fuel system	Electronic fuel injection
Fuel capacity	27L
Cooling	Liquid
Transmission	CVT
Wheelbase	2040mm
Ground clearance	300mm
Dimensions LxWxH	2870 x 1510 x 1830mm
Weight	550kg
Suspension	Double wishbone independent
Brakes	Hydraulic disc brakes

Others in class

Can-Am Commander
Polaris RZR
Yamaha Viking



Checking the turning circle of the Z8 out — it gets a lot better with a little “sustained loss of traction”

and dipstick can be accessed by reaching past the rear wheels and under the tray.

Transmission

Another example of CFMoto using well-proven and reliable components is the inclusion of a Canadian CV-Tech (CVT) transmission, which uses a combination of a centrifugal clutch and a variable-speed drive belt. A T-bar gearshift between the seats gives the driver high, low, neutral, and park. Low proved great for hills and tricky situations to give precise control over the machine. In high, it was claimed it would do 100kph, so, in the interests of readers, I felt the top speed needed testing and I can confirm the Z8 is more than capable and wasn't tapped out. My only real gripe with the transmission was that

changing between high, low, and park can be somewhat clunky, especially coming out of park when on a hill.

Electronic push-button 2WD/4WD makes it easy to change on the fly if the going gets tough and once in 4WD a diff-lock can also be engaged at the push of a button. With the rear diff locked at all times, locking the front diff will get you out of the toughest situations.

Braking

In a machine that goes this quick, it's pretty important it can also stop quickly. Thankfully, with hydraulic disc brakes all-round and braided steel brake lines, the Z8's brakes provide solid and responsive braking, with no problems bringing the machine to a stop even on a steep hill.

Where I did encounter a problem was with the mechanical handbrake between the seats, which had trouble holding the machine on a hill without it creeping off — although I'm sure a few tweaks could tighten this up enough to hold.

I sometimes wonder whether I harp on a little too much about engine braking, but, for me, it's pretty important on any machine with a variable-speed transmission — especially when they weigh in at over half a tonne, as I'm not a big fan of freewheeling down hills. The Z8, I'm pleased to announce, does have engine braking, which is a relief for me at least. In high range going down a steep hill, the belt in the transmission noticeably held the engine speed back, although it wasn't aggressive enough to stop it gaining speed.




Need a new farm bike, ATV, or side by side? Visit farmtrader.co.nz, where you'll find over 350 for sale right now. Search 'motorcycles'.

Double wishbone independent suspension with large adjustable shocks gives 200mm of travel to take the bite out of even the roughest terrain

The CFMoto Z8 is a whole lot of fun and should leave a smile on everyone's face

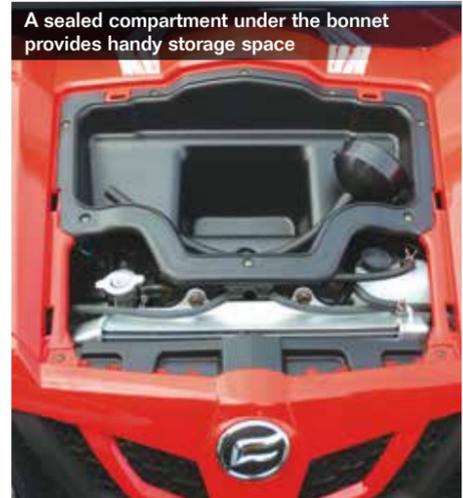


Racing seats and a four-point harness keeps the driver safe and secure, although not entirely practical for life on the farm

Low range is where it really shone — aggressive enough to hold the machine under 10kph on a very steep downhill without locking the wheels up and sliding.

About CFMoto

As mentioned earlier, CFMoto has now been manufacturing engines since the late 1980s and more recently motorbikes, scooters, ATVs, UTVs, and SSVs, in its modern factory in



A sealed compartment under the bonnet provides handy storage space



14-inch alloy wheels add to the overall aggressive yet pleasant styling

Hangzhou, China. Unlike some exporters, it takes pride in manufacturing a quality product and selling it at an economical price. CFMoto now exports to more than 60 countries and it's seeing strong growth in western markets such as Australia, USA, and Canada.

Here in New Zealand, many will have been aware that for the past few years CFMoto ATVs were sold through CB Norwood. However, this has recently changed and Mojo Motorcycles is the sole importer for the brand and is currently working on establishing a strong network of independent motorcycle dealers throughout New Zealand. Being a subsidiary of Mojo Motorcycles Australia, this gives dealers support and access to an impressive stock of parts from the Melbourne warehouse which can be shipped overnight.

Warranty and price

By far the biggest selling point, in my opinion, is the exceptional value for money offered by CFMoto. The Z8 I tested is currently retailing for an unbelievable \$13,050 excl GST, which is incredible when compared to other makes that come in around the \$20,000 mark. A standard two-year warranty on all machines should offer peace of mind to those concerned about build quality.



A T-bar style automatic gear shift between the seats gives the driver a choice of high, low, neutral or park



- Unbelievable pricing
- Impressive engine braking
- 800cc V-twin engine gives excellent power-to-weight ratio



- Transmission can be clunky to shift
- Handbrake did not hold the machine on a steep downhill
- Engine access could be better

Verdict

A big plus for this machine is its fun-factor. The V twin engine provides enough get up and go to get the heart racing and, combined with its lightweight design, you just can't help but do the odd donut out in the paddock or drift round a corner, making it a winner even if it's not totally suitable for everyday use on the farm. As mentioned, I was quite naive about CFMoto products in general and somewhat sceptical, but my opinion soon changed when I discovered how well built the machine was,

combined with a variety of proven components from well-known and respected companies. The hands-down stand-out feature for me, though, was the price — it is almost unbelievable. You would be hard-pressed to find any other comparable product even close to this exceptional value for money. For anyone in the market for a side by side, don't dismiss the CFMoto Z8 without first taking a look and deciding for yourself. I for one can't wait to check out more products from CFMoto's range of great value farm vehicles. ■