

August 1982

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Two Wheels



**KAWASAKI'S
RED-HOT
550!**

Plus:
**HARLEY
FXRS and
YAMAHA
IT465**

Also:
**RIDING
HONDA'S
SENSATIONAL
VT 250**

**TURBOS:
DO WE
NEED
THEM?**

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August 1982

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for its cooperation, and the
Vicks cough drops afterwards.

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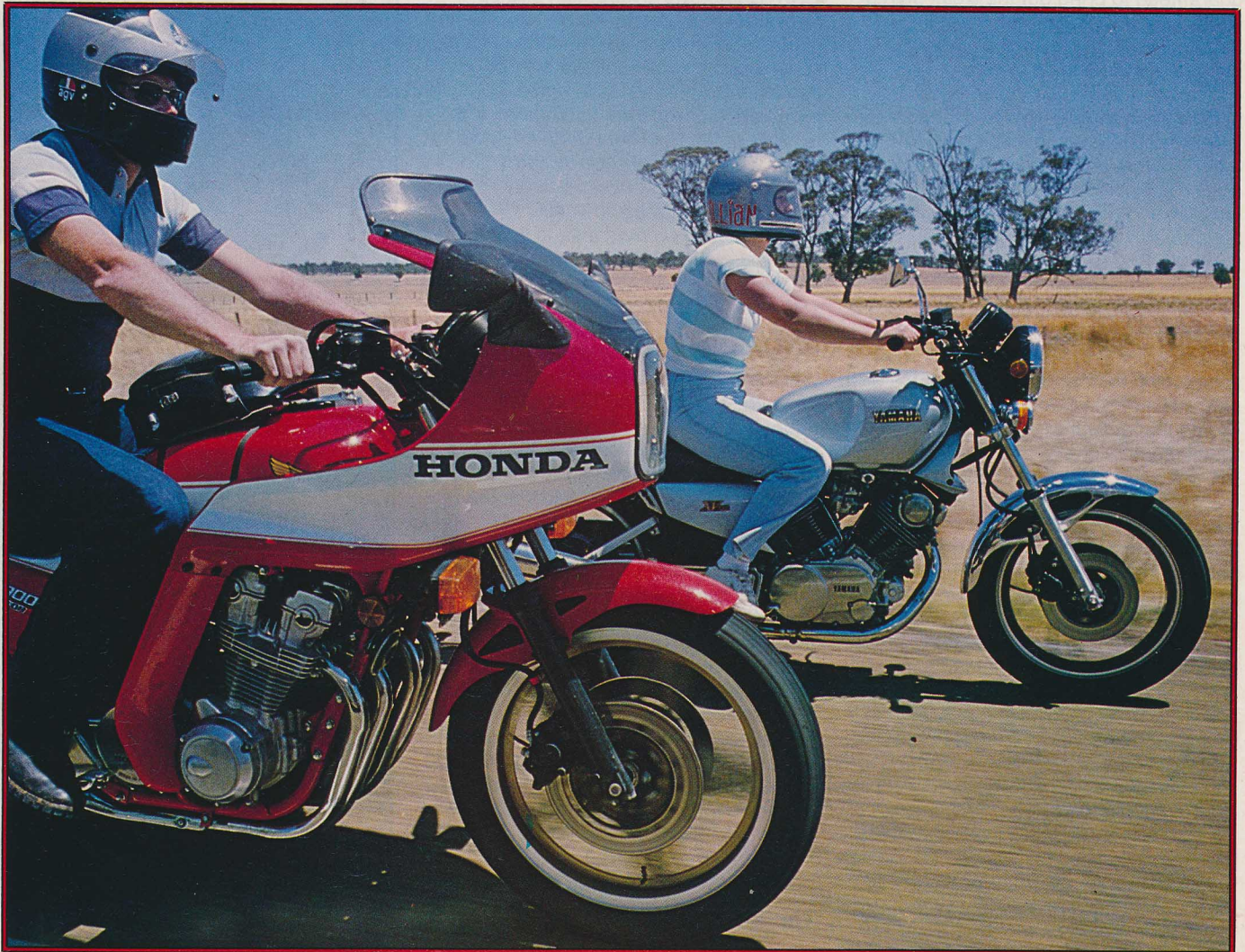
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Rough Road Justice

F2B vs XV1000H vs CX500TC



You've read the tests on Honda's CB900F2B and CX500 in the last two issues of TWO WHEELS, now it's time to reconsider both machines, and the Yamaha XV1000, as weekend tourers. The problem was, how could two people compare three bikes? The answer was to follow roughly the same route twice, using our long-term test XV1000H as a benchmark (and no, that's not the mark left on the bench when the home carpenter saws too far).

COL MILLER and his lady Lil were the test pilots, Nowra-Forbes-Nowra was the task. The conditions? How's 40 degrees out round Forbes sound?



THE road runs west from Nowra, over Cambewarra Mountain, through Kangaroo Valley, up Barrengary Mountain; a narrow ribbon of lumpy asphalt, full of twists, turns and hairpins. In spite of its unforgiving nature, the road remains a favourite with bike riders: Its choppy surface is riddled with bumps and dips guaranteed to bring out the weak points in any suspension system, while numerous "stop" corners will show up any brake-fade shortcomings.

It's a stretch of road which often carries the wheels of TWO WHEELS' testbikes. Three machines it carried recently were involved in an unusual open road comparison. Using our long-term Yamaha XV1000H as a benchmark, we ran the Honda CB900F2B and CX500 Turbo on separate one-on-one trips over as near as practicable to an identical route — Nowra to Forbes and return.

Before pointing the F2B and XV1000 west on the first leg, we had a couple of opening gambits in mind. There's the saying that any large motorcycle will tour if the rider wants it to and the general point that there are *tourers* and there are *tourers*. In one sense there's the machines you tour at the cost of backside-easing stops every hour on the hour, petrol fillups each 90 minutes and decramping callisthenics sessions at ever shortening intervals as the ride progresses. Tourers of the other persuasion convey their human cargo in armchair comfort, serenely gobbling up hundreds of kilometres of outback tarmac at highly illegal speeds.

So with open minds, bright morning sun and open roads ahead, your good servant and accomplice Lillian fired up the F2B and XV1000 for the first run — a four against a twin, faired against unfaired, twin-shock rear end agin monoshock. Lillian opted to ride the XV first, feeling she'd be too slow through Kangaroo Valley on an unfamiliar bike. I stepped into the rider's hole on the F2B, intent on staying there until the first fillup, some 220 km away at Yass.

Climbing the foothills of the coastal range, one bike in each uphill traffic lane, the inevitable race developed. Both the big twin and the four were in fifth gear, effortlessly demolishing a grade which sees most cars back one gear, maybe two, and 30-40 km/h.

The F2B held the XV until Lil snapped the twin's throttle to the stop. On the 900 it was stay in top and start slipping behind or go back a few gears, dipping into the four's powerband. I went back two gears, and the result was dramatic. The 900 four soon reeled in the less powerful V-twin (though it was still accelerating strongly) and began to

forge ahead. As the climbing lane ended the F2B was 25 metres ahead and still going hard in fourth. Then it was throttles eased and single file for the twisting climb to the first summit at Cambewarra Lookout, and into Kangaroo Valley.

For most of the day sizeable portions of the two mountain passes (up and down Cambewarra Mountain and up Barrengary Mountain) alternate between glaring sunlight and inky shadow as the sun's warmth seeks pathways through dense rainforest vegetation (yes, our forebears did leave the odd patch). The huge contrast from light to dark allows shadows to conceal such motorcyclists' delights as wet patches, repaired potholes, corrugated downhill approaches to corners and, in winter, the most diabolical hazard of all — black ice.

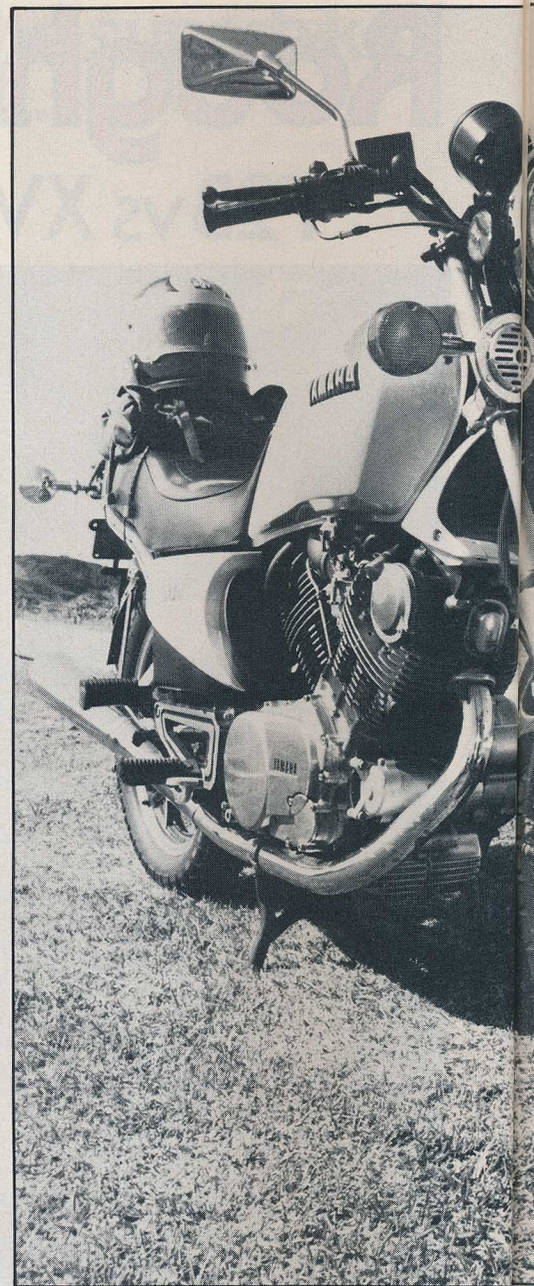
In this type of terrain what was a comfortable pace on the V-twin bordered on hard work on the four. While the 900's rider rowed up and down the gearbox, the XV's pilot could adopt a much more relaxing roll-on, roll-off style, letting the super-flexible twin provide instant pickup or solid, predictable engine braking to suit the occasion. The F2B would certainly post faster ultimate times, even on this switchback road, but only because it could be squirted harder between corners.

Such riding, however, demanded 100 percent, racing-style concentration, necessitated carrying a significant risk and was too tiring to sustain for any period. If the two bikes were cruised through the Valley at speeds which made equal demands on the rider, the XV would torque its way up Barrengary Mountain and be on the plateau, headed for Moss Vale, well before the 900 powered up and out of the lowlands.

The third bike theme

Now you've been wondering when Honda's CX500 Turbo comes into this two-person two-bike weekend. Well, the Turbo travelled the same route alongside the XV1000 two weeks later, on a St George Motorcycle Club road trial. A road trial is a touring weekend with a twist — entrants have to make observations, read notices, answer questions and pick up odd bits and pieces as they ride along a pre-mapped route. Speed is not a factor; the winner is the rider who fares best with the questions, collecting and route-following.

The club touring weekend didn't quite go all the way to Forbes: It finished in a small town called Gooloogong, some 40 km short of Forbes on the Cowra-Forbes road, at the Gooloogong Hotel in fact. St



George Club being based in Sydney's southern suburbs, the route was Sydney, Katoomba, Hartley, Oberon, Bathurst, Blayney, Cowra, Gooloogong.

On the day after the trial, while other entrants headed back to Sydney by the shortest possible route to catch the live television coverage of the Yamaha 750 production race, Lillian and I headed home via the most direct route from Gooloogong to Nowra — the same road we travelled, in both directions, on the 900F2B and XV1000. And not only was the weather similar (too bloody hot), so were the luggage loads, road traffic and cruising speeds. A perfect recipe for comparison, using the XV as a benchmark.

But back to the testing Kangaroo Valley road . . . The Turbo would have



been a joy over the mountains (thanks to its superb suspension, comfort and brakes), but for two features of its engine/gearbox unit — turbo lag and too large a gap between first and second gears.

The numerous uphill hairpins in the Valley forced the rider to use low gear. That part is understandable, as the Turbo is much taller geared than its normally aspirated brother; but due to the time taken to get the puffer spinning, the tachometer is usually showing about 8000 rpm before the boost hits in first. So the rider gets a split second's worth of super urge in first, then has to shift to second.

Turbine speed does not fall appreciably on a gearchange, so in second the motor pulls strongly all the way; but by then the next hairpin is

looming and it's time to return to first. That's a clunky operation, the first-second ratio gap and the CX500's built-in driveline freeplay, which hasn't been reduced on the turbo version.

Roll across Australia

Complicating matters further from a smooth progress viewpoint is the Turbo's variable engine braking, and also the variable rev pickup when the throttle is blipped for a downchange. Back off when the turbocharger is whistling and engine braking is very strong. Back off when the turbo isn't boosting and the CX500TC feels like it would roll halfway across Australia — just what you'd expect from a very heavy, tall-geared low-compression 500 twin.

Similarly, engine response to a throttle blip is far from consistent. If the turbo has been doing its thing a second or two before, it's still spinning plenty fast enough to make the tachometer needle really jump on a rev; if it hasn't, the CX500T responds with all the gusto of a tired BMW (no offence R60/5 owners).

But would-be Turbo buyers should not be put off by these characteristics of engines with exhaust driven superchargers. Riders quickly develop a sixth sense which subconsciously lets them know what response to expect, how hard to blip on a downchange, when to open the throttle so the big power arrives when you want it to and so on.

In fairness to the Turbo, we must point out that the 900 four had more driveline freeplay than the 500, and that on a road containing tight bends rather than hairpins the Turbo would fare better.

As it was, the CX500TC's magnificent suspension (the best street Pro-Link yet and the best road monoshock system of any marque TWO WHEELS has encountered), unique steadiness at speed on all roads (bettering the F2B's already outstanding security on below-par roads), superb brakes (the best anti-dive arrangement yet) and super comfortable seat and riding position weighed heavily in its favour. But not heavily enough — the easy-to-handle Yamaha got our vote as pick of the trio for the Valley section. It did nothing badly and its knife-through-butter gearbox, minimal drivetrain lash and tractor-like spread of power reduced the tricky Kangaroo Valley road to little more than a Sunday ride.

Whereas the Yamaha felt less ponderous than the two faired and bulky Hondas in tight going, the F2B and the Turbo came to the fore in the suspension and steering departments. The XV has always exhibited more self steering than

we'd like. While the 900's steering is heavy at low speeds, it lightens up as speeds rise until, at 80 km/h and above, the steering feels well balanced and particularly secure. The Turbo, weighing only six kg less than the F2B, has more highly refined steering geometry again. Only at walking pace does it betray the weight it's connected to. At any higher speed, right up to the bike's maximum, the turbo 500's steering is impeccable.

Suspenders and thirsts

The XV1000's suspension is very good, with two provisos. First, the rear monoshock cannot be set stiff enough to prevent occasional bottoming on bad roads when carrying a heavy pillion and, second, a sharp steepening of road grade can likewise bring about a bottoming (the Pro-Link CBX also displayed the latter malady, the Turbo does not).

The beefed up forks of the FB series 900s and the multi-adjustable rear spring/damper units (five spring preloads by four rebound dampings by two compression dampings) do a first-rate job of making the 900 feel a tightly controlled thoroughbred. What's more the suspension of the F2B allows very few road shocks to reach the rider — compliance has not been sacrificed in a misguided attempt to improve handling on some obscure racetrack.

Capable though the F2B's suspension is, it is completely eclipsed by that of the Turbo. The bottoming problems of earlier air-assisted road monoshocks under heavy loads have been completely circumvented. Like the conventional rear suspension of the 900 there is plenty of stiffening available to offset loads or mileage-induced component wear.

Fuel consumption on the Nowra to Yass leg of the trip was 17.2 km/l (48.9 mpg) for the XV and 15.3 km/l (43.5 mpg) for the 900F2B, odometers corrected. As well as the slower Kangaroo Valley road the bikes cruised down the Hume Highway dual carriageway from near Exeter to the Canberra turn-off at an indicated 100 to 120 km/h, then travelled at higher speeds from there to Yass on non-divided road.

Alongside the Turbo in the reverse direction, the XV returned a slightly better figure, 18.2 km/l (51.7 mpg), probably because the mild headwind of the earlier trip had vanished and some strategically placed fog slowed up our crossing of Kangaroo Valley. The Turbo returned a commendable 16.9 km/l (48.0 mpg) over the same stretch of road, despite generally being given its head more than the XV in overtaking manoeuvres.

Although the F2B was never closer

than 1:1 km/l (3 mpg) to the XV1000's economy (which, while reasonable, is still nothing to write home about), the Turbo, on several fillups during the club touring weekend, used substantially less fuel than the XV.

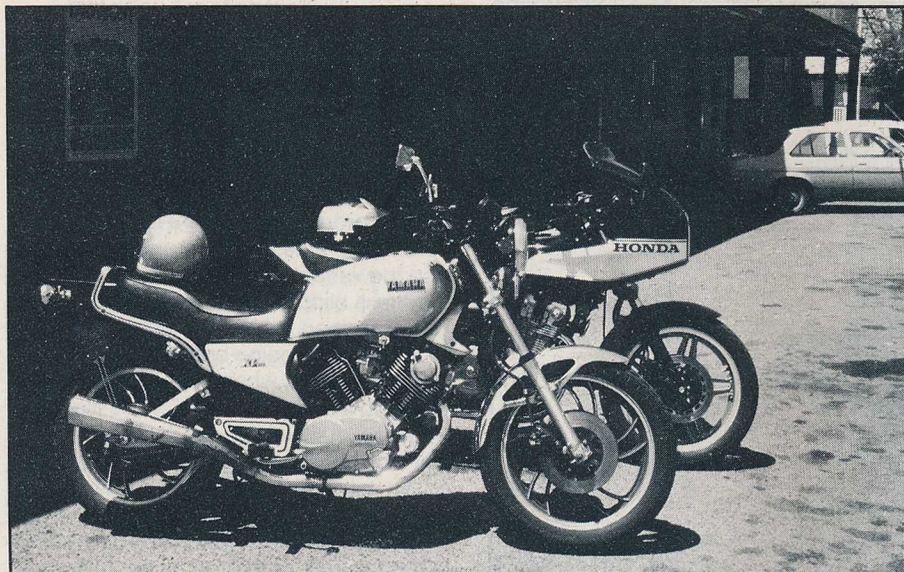
Roads worse to bad

The road to Cowra turns right off the Hume just before the one pub hamlet of Bowning, some nine km on the Gundagai side of Yass. It crosses the main southern railway and proceeds to gently wind its way across slowly flattening hills to the dozy rural subcentre of Boorowa. The 44 km of pavement from the Hume turnoff is fairly narrow and the surface a mass of repaired potholes. Boorowa to Cowra travellers are better catered for with a slightly wider seal, better roadmarkings and bulk potholes; the 100-110 km/h cruise of the Bowning-Boorowa leg could be comfortably upped by 20-30 km/h.

Following only the briefest thirst quenching-stop in Cowra (both bikes had plenty of petrol to reach Forbes without reserve being called on) the XV and F2B were pointed west once more, towards Grenfell on the Mid Western Highway. But not for long. The Gooloogong/Forbes road heads north-west off the Mid Western just six km from Cowra.

This road continued the pattern of improvement begun at Boorowa by the Cowra road. Although no wider, the road was straighter and the country flatter. If you are prepared to ignore the kangaroo warning signs very high speeds could be attained; but we were not, so the comfortable 130 km/h cruise of the last segment was re-instituted. It was another 37 km to Gooloogong, then another 51 parched kilometres to Forbes.

The mid-summer timing of the trips meant the fairings of the F2B and Turbo stopped a lot of the much wanted airflow



reaching their riders' bodies, making the XV popular as a mount to cool off on.

The F2B's fairing is most uncomfortable in hot weather because its leg shields, mounted immediately behind the engine block, very effectively draw engine heat onto the rider's legs. The Turbo's narrower crankcase-abbreviated fairing and much cooler engine block combine to make it less of a leg roaster. Both fairings demonstrate their wind-tunnel design by remaining largely unaffected by crosswinds and enhancing the stability of the bikes instead of decreasing it.

Lazy Sunday afternoons

On both trips we spent Sunday in Forbes with our feet up, watching the energy-sapping heat of the western sun wear itself out on the garden plants and vegetables. It was four pm before the bikes were fired up for the homeward journey, and at least part of the afternoon was spent reflecting on the bikes' performance as tourers over the first half of the trip.

One interesting outcome was the

divergence of opinion on seats. Lillian clearly preferred the XV1000's softer, wider seat, whereas my vote only just went the XV's way. The 900's seat was higher, firmer and narrower, but to my backside it was quite well shaped.

What I didn't like about the F2B was the sporty riding position, in particular the high rearset footpegs. At 160 km/h they were of little consequence and on tight twisty roads they were a blessing (lean clearance). But for 80 percent of our open-road cruise the footpeg location was a definite liability. We are both short, but the kneebend situation was tight enough to force regular leg stretches and relief spells on the passenger's footrests. Presumably taller riders would find the situation worse.

The only drawback to the Yamaha's upright riding position is windload discomfort. It becomes noticeable at 125 km/h, considerable at 140 km/h and damned uncomfortable at anything faster (the bike is not able to cruise comfortably at more than 135 km/h anyway due to engine vibration).

However, the Turbo must be rated as

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