



Megasuperwhoppasho

The boys polish the odd cliché, kneepad and elbow on this season's frothy foursome of 600cc sports

SUZUKI GSX600

Depending on your viewpoint, the GSX600 has entered into the middleweight market with either an advantage or a severe handicap. Being the last company to join in the race for

a slice of the compact superbike market, you could argue that Suzuki have allowed themselves the luxury of surveying the opposition's trump cards before playing their ace. Or, more cynically, that the boys at Hamamatsu have needed an extra year to design a bike that would make a significant impression on the

high-class competition, thereby handing a year's R and D headstart to the other factories.

To be fair, Suzuki's task wasn't an easy one. In the other three corners of the sales boxing ring were three contenders that had proven to be more than capable of looking after themselves when

the fighting got dirty. Honda's formidable CBR600, the svelte new GPX Kawasaki, and the brilliant handling, if slightly dated, Yamaha FZ meant that the new Suzuki would have to deliver a monstrous performance punch and/or be noticeably cheaper if it was to be the knockout success they wanted.



PHOTOGRAPHY COLIN SCHILLER

Foot out giant test, actually!

parts bikes. Jeans are being creamed as we speak...

This being the case, the fact that Suzuki have used the GSX-R750 — their last real winner in the showrooms — as the basis for the GSX600's powerplant should come as less of a surprise. Although a significant departure from the normal Japanese practice of over-boring a smaller lump, the use of a sleeved-down

GSX-R750 engine makes sense as it is both light and compact even in original form. It also seems fair to assume that it represented a cheaper solution than to have expanded on the GSX-R400's complicated cooling design theme.

Essentially the bottom end on the 600 is identical to that of the 750. A shorter first gear

and a slight reduction in the final transmission have been fitted to compensate for the smaller engine's obvious reduction in torque, but other than that it's a dead-ringer for big brother down below.

And that's not where the similarity ends. Performance-wise the GSX600's motor is everything you'd expect a ▶

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scaled-down GSX-R lump to be. Smaller pistons and rubber front engine mounts make it significantly smoother than the 750, but the characteristic growling buzz is still there, albeit muted. Less fortunately, the 750's mid-range power step is also there, too. In a top gear 50 mph roll-on against a CBR or GPX, the Suzuki doesn't have a chance to reach the meaty part of its powerband due to its relative lack of bottom and mid-range power, and thus it can't surmount the added problem of accelerating a plot that's heavier than the competition, the obvious conclusion being that it gets left behind. Once it's got into its stride, however, it screeches along with the best of 'em — acceptable if you want to play racers 25hrs a day, but can be tiresome after a while.

Budding tuners might like to note that an upshot of all the 600's similarities to its larger donor is that there's every chance that a 750 engine could be transplanted into the smaller bike's frame. But before you get too carried away, you ought to be reminded that the 600 chassis is not in the same league as its bigger sibling. Company accountants being inherently tight-fisted, some of the 600s chassis components have been selected for their price rather than ultimate performance — a trend which gives the impression of a compromise that errs towards street rather than track usage. The R wasn't left off the GSX by accident, after all.

A prime example of this design constraint can be seen when the considerable acreage

of surprisingly effective, but sinfully ugly, ABS fairing-cum-bodywork is removed to reveal a steel perimeter frame. Looking like an out-take from some claustrophobic designer's nightmare and weighing some 30lbs more than the GSX-R item, it achieves its pleasant rigidity via sheer over-kill rather than engineering finesse. A mixture of rectangular (where you can see them) and round (where you can't) tubes, it tends to wriggle round, rather than over the engine in an attempt to keep the C of G, and the seat height, as low as possible.

The suspension components are similarly budget conscious.

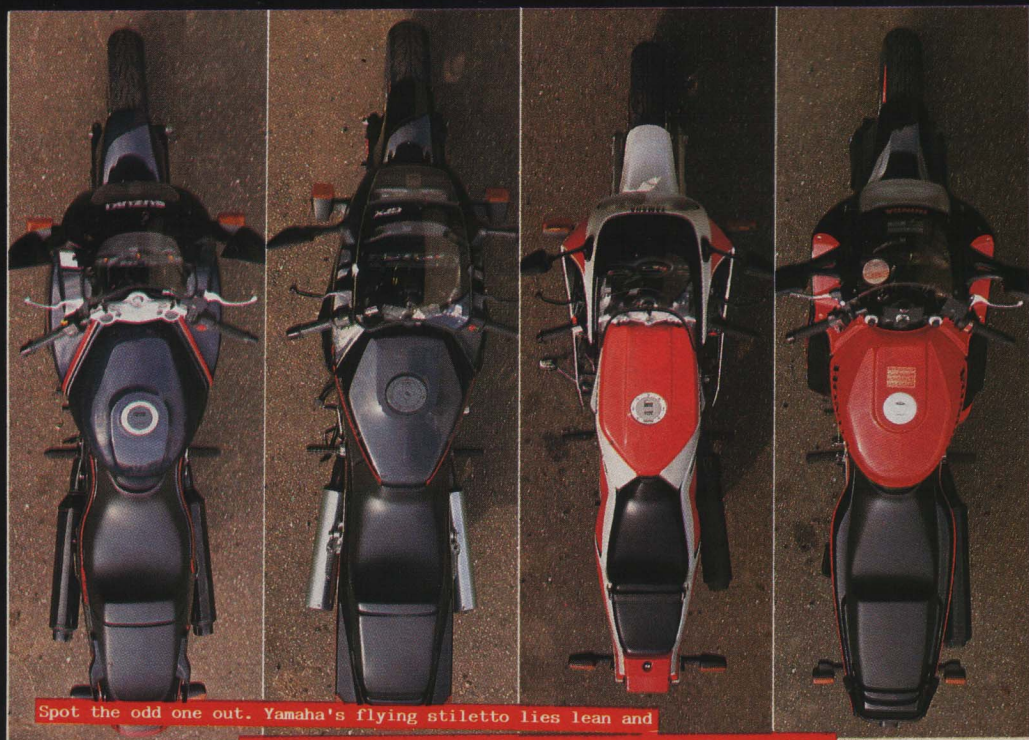
Up front is a plush please-most-of-the-people-most-of-the-time fork that was distressingly free from external adjustment. The rear makes do with a revised Full Floater monoshock that can be adjusted for preload with any C-spanner other than the one Suzuki so thoughtfully omitted from the basic toolkit. Should you play around with the various settings, it should become obvious that you weren't intended to adjust the shock anyway. In my experience, on minimum preload the back end took on most of the characteristics of a well-toasted marshmallow, this changing to road-drill mode when the shock was tightened

right up. The standard position was a compromise of the two extremes and the best of a rather ropey job.

Strangely enough, though, allied to a relatively long wheelbase (nearly an inch longer than the CBR), necessitated by the steep rake and the 17 inch wheels' reduction in trail, the questionable components add up to a better than expected whole. Generally, the steering was moderately quick and responsive to rider input, but a distinct vagueness at the front end did start to creep in — due to its softness — as speeds approached three figures, and just when you needed most reassurance. The rear also had a tendency to become fazed in long, sweeping corners if the power was turned on too quickly, showing its displeasure with a distinct wallowing.

Braking was similarly woolly on occasions. Whilst the twin front discs never failed to do their job, the lever did get alarmingly close to the handlebars under heavy braking and they did tend to lack a degree of feel we've come to expect from the competition's stoppers. Competent rather than brilliant.

Overall, the GSX smacks too much of budget engineering, but, paradoxically, this is both its forte and its downfall. On one hand you could say that a



Spot the odd one out. Yamaha's flying stiletto lies lean and low between higher-tech clone rangers. From left to right:

Suzuki, Kawa, Yam, Honda

potentially competitive bike has been spoiled by its poor suspension package. And, on the other, you might be tempted to suggest that it's so much cheaper (£400) than the CBR and GPX (but not the spartan FZ), you could spend the difference on upgrading the suspension. Ultimately, it all depends on your point of view, which, I believe, is where we came in. *Patrick Devereux*

KAWASAKI GPX600

A bike without a road is like a boozier without beer." This wasn't what Devereux actually said when he brought the GPX back from its MIRA thrashing but, with hindsight, it could have been. Although it's possible to take in the sort of roads race-cred middleweights deserve, MIRA-bound machinery is usually condemned to flat-out thrashes up and down the M1, courtesy of the manic 11th-hour production schedules perfected by my predecessor. Of course the other side of the same coin is that, wherever you're going, you generally have to arrive before you set out, which tends to find weaknesses in handling and driving licences in roughly equal measure.

Anyway, the latest Kwacker deserved something better than the concrete snoozeway which starts at Hendon. One of my more memorable rides last year was on a CBR600 from London via Aylesbury, Towcester and Hinckley to Donington — a prime scratching route if ever there was one. As luck would have it Donington's Eurolantic bash was on the itinerary at the appointed time, so a little more of the same would do nicely.

As for the GPX, it had some ground to make up. Competing with Honda's seminal CBR600 — a real goer and a hugely forgiving handler — was never going to be easy. Then there was the fact that the bike I'd ridden immediately before the Kawa — Yam's FZ600 — had made it feel nimble as a full-dress Harley.

Considering the sales importance of the machine, its launch by the big K was pretty low-key — they didn't have one! Neither have press kits exactly been flying through the ether to tell us how utterly marvellous it is. But regardless of fanfares, Kawasaki's task was easy to state if harder to achieve: 10 or 12 more horsepower with no loss of flexibility, and surer-footed handling all round.

Mechanically the bike is a hybrid of the old GPZ600 and the GPX750. The engine's bottom-end is, save for stronger conrods, pure GPZ. The extra poke — a claimed 10bhp but an actual eight horses according to the Motad dyno — comes from better breathing and a compression ratio hike from 11.0 to 11.7:1. Many of the breathing differences are altogether predictable — bigger, smoother inlet points, larger airbox, less restrictive air filter. That they work is borne out not only by the power figures but by the substantially smaller ignition advance required by the new engine — usually a sure sign that combustion is more efficient.

But there's a big surprise. Motad's new Datum system for the GPZ gives over 6bhp more than stock at peak whilst still meeting all the noise laws. It thus seemed pretty obvious that Kawasaki would go the same route to grab half their needs. Not so! The GPX wears exactly the same system as the old 600 with only minor modifications to fit the new frame. From where I stand, that's an astonishing oversight — one which goes a long way to explaining how Motad's SeniorStock pipe gives such a huge boost in performance.

As things stand the GPX is down about 4bhp on a healthy CBR at peak, not that you'd notice on the road. On bottom-end it's as strong as the GPZ (which was stronger in turn than the CBR), but when the better breathing comes into play at around 6000rpm it clears off. Even more impressively, it doesn't use sheer revs to do it, peaking a few hundred rpm lower than the GPZ. A strong, amenable engine, and free from flat spots.

The GPX ditches its forerunner's peripheral frame in favour of a simple, GPX750-like tubular steel cradle. In the process the GPZ's slightly skittish geometry goes even more manic with reductions in trail and wheelbase of 6 and 5mm respectively. But, despite the retention of 16in wheels at each end, the bottom line is that the GPX is a more stable animal at speed without sacrificing anything in agility.

Some of the credit for this must go to the suspenders. Gone are the basic GPZ forks, replaced by an ESCS set-up similar to that of the 750. An adjuster on the right leg offers three positions for the anti-dive/variable damping. When the bike arrived it was dialled to the softest, number one ▶

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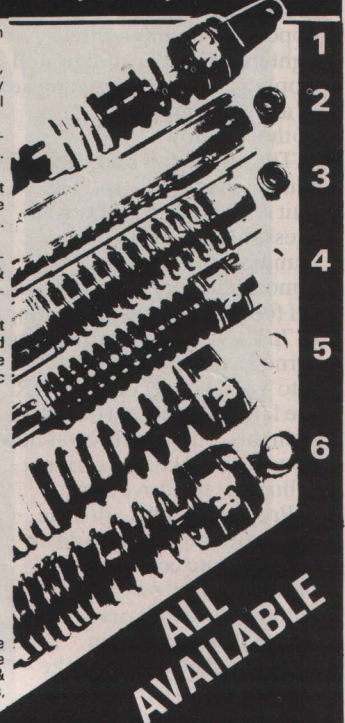
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position which not only felt mushy but led me to complain at the lack of feel in the front brake. Some Kwackers I could mention go from bad to worse on the anchors when the forks are dialled-up; the GPX did the opposite — number three tightens up both handling and stopping, albeit at the expense of a pretty choppy ride over potholes in town.

The rear Uni-Track showed similar characteristics. The unit is adjustable for both air pressure and rebound damping. Originally set at atmospheric pressure and two (of four) on damping, uprating to 7psi and maximum damping turned a merely good handler into a real hacker. True, CBRs are far more tolerant of setting than this, but the GPX was now set up to chuck some serious silliness at the drive north.

Programmed like this the front end can be nailed down savagely into corners, then picked up hard on the gas without a second's under-damped uncertainty in between. The sole fly in the ointment is an irritating abruptness between overrun and drive which can make leaving slow corners a comparatively clumsy affair. If this were a racing bike I'd compensate by lifting the tickover 500rpm or so but, since GPXs are supposed to deal with humdrum realities like traffic, a more elegant solution would come in handy.

Sadly the trip would have been better — and quieter — if one of the other gorillas who works here hadn't lunched the Kwacker's valvegear. A rattle like a bucketful of pebbles betrayed what was probably either a bent or sticking valve and limited peak revs to 10,500 (although this is just beyond peak power it denied me the delinquent sensation of hitting the rev-limiter in every gear). Thankfully the GPX has enough urge slightly lower down the trashometer for the shortfall to make no difference.

This still left the GPX as quick as almost any 750 of four years ago and most 1000s of five years before that, wrapped in a chassis a generation ahead of any of them. This is an invitation, if one were needed, to go bloody fast. Twenty minutes later a chap in a camouflaged 4x4 Sierra gave me an invitation of a different sort, but what the hell — this is worth it. Even he didn't suggest that riding something this good at those (alleged) speeds was actually dangerous.

Which is where this and all the 600s are at — weight, brakes and chassis with plenty to spare and an engine to make the most of them. The GPX doesn't quite succeed in knocking the CBR off its tantalising perch, but it comes close as makes no difference under most circumstances. If I were in the market for real, usable performance — rather than something for high-profile posing — I'd take a 600 any day of the week *Mac McDiarmid*

YAMAHA FZ600

Everyone else, after one look at the spex, reckoned I'd drawn the short straw in being handed Yamaha's entry in the Senior! Stock stakes. What they didn't know was that I've been planting my backside on Yamahas of one sort or another almost since my pants were held together with a big safety pin. A continuous diet of two-stroke Elsie's right up to last year's F2 model had left me hooked on snappy middleweight handling and

keen-edged power curves. Maybe if the latest and littlest Eff Zed came up to scratch I could park the Evans backside on one — permanently. At a bargain-basement £2999, even The Bank That Almost Always Says "No" couldn't object too strongly.

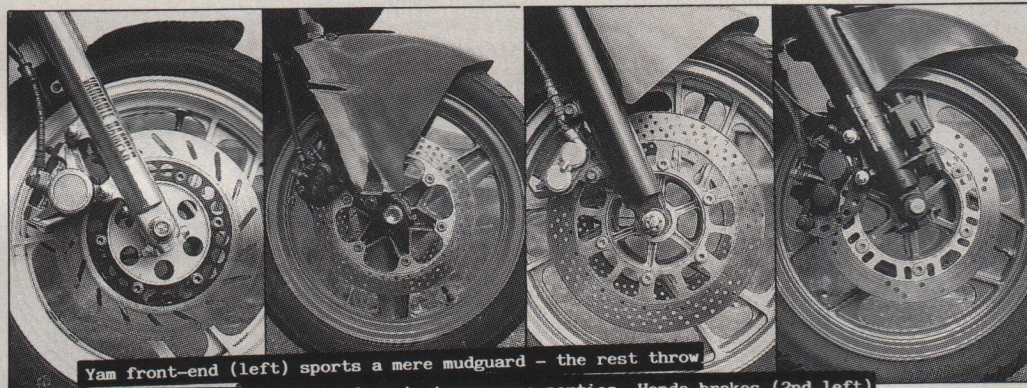
Elsies have always been seen as the boy racer's ultimate street tool — lightweight, fast and cheap to unbend after the inevitable stack. Low, light, and lean seems to have been the design specification for the FZ and indeed its compact dimensions make the L.C. feel like a beached whale. R and D chappies back in the land of the Rising Yen — not generally known for their ability to throw bitzas together — came up with the notion of stuffing left-over FJ600 engines into a pre-pubescent FZR400 chassis. Bitzas are usually a disaster. This one's brill.

Or it would be if it fitted. The FZ's ergonomics were just too small for my six-foot frame. Any semblance of haste involved head jammed into the front of the fairing, elbows on

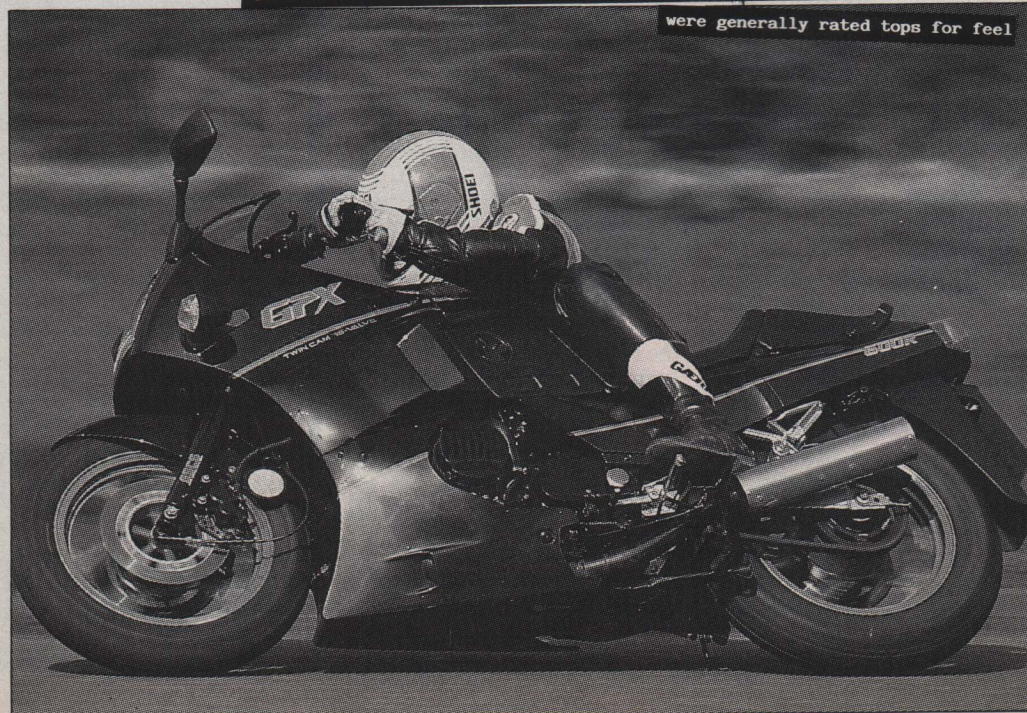
knees and legs shoe-horned into what was left by the rear-set pegs. Anything else was left hanging out to dry in the breeze.

Except, naturally enough, yer bum, which suffered a far worse fate. Upholstered by the Marquis de Sade's little-known Japanese cousin and styled along the lines of a cornplaster, it induces acute arseache after about half a tankfull. Its one redeeming virtue is to encourage hooligan hanging off in the name of rectal self-preservation. He, she or it on the pillion has an even worse time. A matchbox-sized slab combined with no grab-rail (other than the rider's paunch) will have even the most seasoned pillion screaming for mercy within a couple of miles — if they haven't fallen off or baled-out before then.

Despite the budget price, plastic is cheap so the Yamaha is every inch the eye-grabber its FZ soubriquet suggests. It certainly copped many an admiring look. However, it ▶50



Yam front-end (left) sports a mere mudguard — the rest throw quasi-aerodynamic tupperware parties. Honda brakes (2nd left)



were generally rated tops for feel

Megasuperwhoppashootoutgianttest, actually!

turned out that our test bike had a touch of the Trojan Horse about it as behind the voluptuous bodywork hid an engine that was down on horses and flatter at around 8000rpm compared to last year's model. The engine is the same air-cooled in-line four that first saw life on the XJ600 and is unfortunately beginning to show its age, not to mention a reduction in gee-gees thanks to smaller carbs and a more restrictive, crammed-in airbox. Maybe Yamaha's stated two-year development policy means a full-blown FZR twenty-valver for '89? On the other hand we were hoping that last year, too.

46 The box section frame, though, is light years better

than its silver-painted mild steel would suggest. Nothing, simply nothing, in this class or almost any other steers or handles so well. There's nothing in the suspension components to account for this — basic Mono-Cross rear and variable damped teles up front — but the FZ is a joy to ride hard.

Even with an inept, cold and wet rider who wished he were tucked up in bed with something warm; (like Gill) the chassis laughed-off wild late braking or frantic mid-bend directional changes and any other lunacy you could throw at it. When all else failed the brakes performed with retina-popping, fade-free reliability during the 1100 miles

we covered during our two days (or should that be daze?) away — albeit with a trace of insensitivity in the wet. Granted, touring buffs may find the suspension a tad too firm, but then they'd be nuts to buy such a device in the first place.

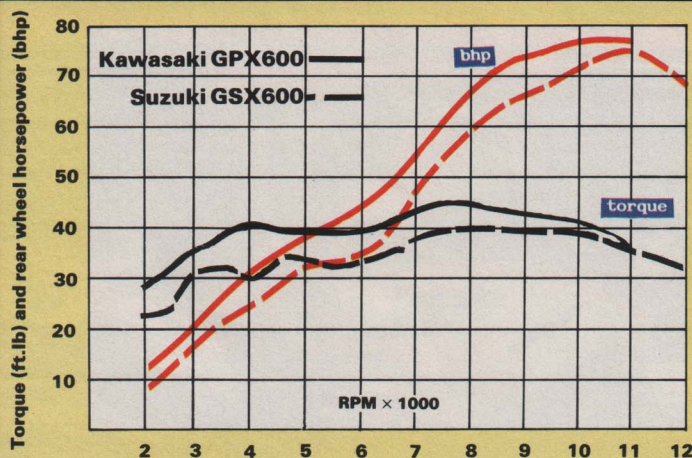
The nominal focal point of our trip north was a motorcycle rallycross meeting near Darlington. That was crazy enough but the trip back was dafter still. It wasn't until we left the A170 over the North Yorkshire Moors and headed West along the backroads that the little FZ really came into its own. As the roads tightened the little bitch managed to conjour enthusiasm from a rider who was craving yet again

for a hot bath and a cool butt.

Then we found ourselves on some of Yorkshire's finest lanes. Speeds decreased slightly but through the lanes at about seventy to ninety the bike was a jewel. Cog down a gear for a hundred yard burst up into fifth and then hard into the apex on the brakes, helmet brushing the hedgerow, down two gears, hard on the gas again, screwing every last drop of go from the peaky motor, the next bend tightening up but it's no panic — dab on the bars, a smidgeon of brake or just lean it in harder — easy. You'd have to be Superman or one

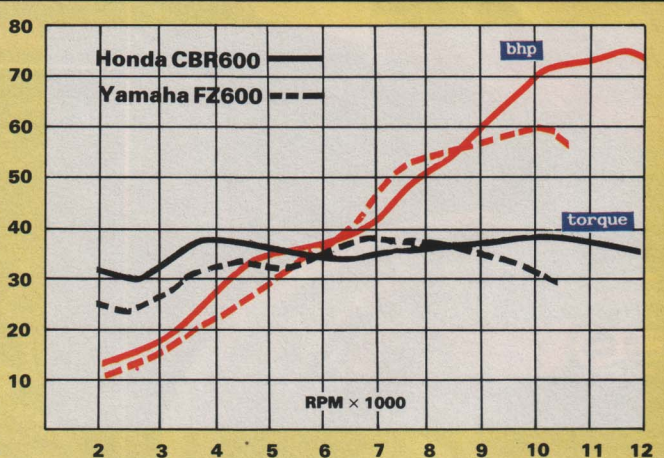


FZ can cream GSX — and 'most anything else — on the twisties



Maximum horsepower: Honda CBR600 74.7bhp @ 11,500rpm; Kawasaki GPX600 77.7bhp @ 10,250rpm; Suzuki GSX600 76.3bhp @ 10,500rpm; Yamaha FZ600 60.3bhp @ 9700rpm.

These lines, apart from the obvious way the Yamaha lags behind on horsepower, probably say as much about the way the bikes were set up by their importers as about the engines themselves. Dyno graph interpretation isn't simply a matter of looking at the highs and lows in the curve — details count, too. The GPX drew a beautiful line — smooth and fluent; the Yamaha and Suzuki were almost

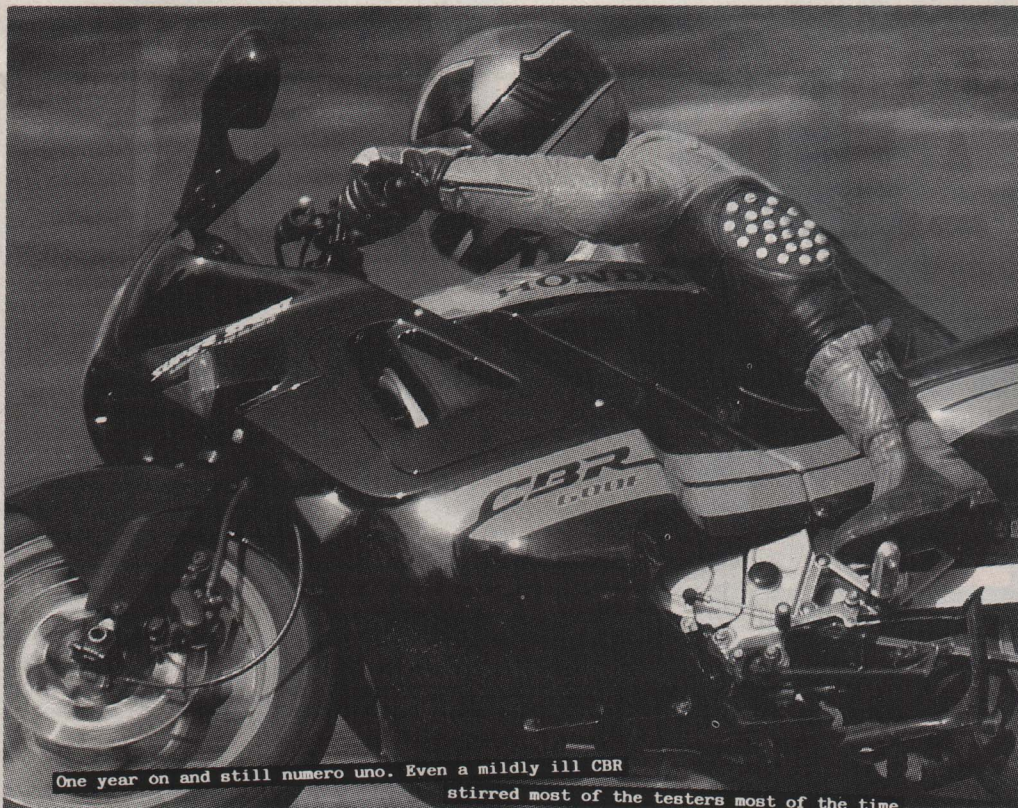


Maximum torque: Honda CBR600 37.9 ft. lb. @ 10,500rpm; Kawasaki GPX600 44.8 ft. lb. @ 8000rpm; Suzuki GSX600 39.7 ft. lb. @ 8500rpm; Yamaha FZ600 38.2 ft. lb. @ 6800rpm.

as good. Clearly all three were set up pretty well as Japan intended. Honda's CBR, however, zig-zagged all over the place — a sure sign that it wasn't running properly, only two days after it was collected from Power Road. We know that CBRs consistently develop around 81bhp, but our slug didn't.

Mac McDyno

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smooth wake. In fact it whopped the competition so comprehensively, the public's clamour to score a piece of the hottest action in town led to a complete sell-out within weeks of the first batch arriving — a trend which led to the CBR becoming the top-selling 600 in 1987. All this and not a warranty claim in sight seemed to condone Honda's decision to shelve the unfortunately all too dodgy vee-fours, despite their public expression of undying love and faith for them, and make a return to the more socially acceptable transverse in-line-four.

But that was all a year or more ago, when the only direct competition was limited to Kawasaki's still highly competent, but ageing nonetheless, GPZ600, Yamaha and Suzuki still sitting on the fence of indecision at the time. This year Honda haven't got it quite so easy.

can short of a six pack to deck this baby, its that good. As I am neither of the aforementioned I couldn't do it. Outside of a racetrack that's the way it's likely to stay.

The smallest and crudest of the FZ clan the 600 may be. It's also, in numerical terms, the runt of the 600 litter. But stay away from motorways (unless you have masochistic tendencies) and stick to the twisties and there won't be many who'll catch you. They'd have to amputate your soul to stop you enjoying this one.

HONDA CBR600

Finding something new to say about the CBR600 has become something of a consuming pastime over the past year or so. When it first arrived back in February '87, superlatives flowed from hacks' typewriters like Niagra Falls on St Swithen's Day. A few seasoned their waxing praise with a sprinkling of cynicism concerning the public's reaction to the bike's fully-enclosed styling, but no-one could actually summon the sheer bloody-mindedness to actually slag it off. Suddenly, everyone was being nice about a Honda.

Once you'd ridden it you found out why. Offering a previously mythical performance package, the CBR quite simply left all previous efforts at similar-sized tackle gasping in its whisper-

SPEX	SUZUKI GSX600F	KAWASAKI GPX600R	YAMAHA FZ600	HONDA CBR600
Price.....	£3199	£3599	£2999	£3599
Importer.....	Heron Suzuki GB Ltd, 46-62 Gatwick Road, Crawley, West Sussex	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd, Deal Avenue, Slough	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey	Honda UK Ltd, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4
Warranty.....	12 months/unlimited mileage	12 months/unlimited mileage	12 months/unlimited mileage	12 months/unlimited mileage; 24 months engine and transmission
Engine.....	Oilcooled, 16-valve, dohc, transverse four	Watercooled dohc 16-valve	SOHC air-cooled, 8-valve four	Watercooled dohc, transverse 16-valve, four
Bore x stroke.....	62.6 x 48.7mm	60 x 52.4mm	58.5 x 55.7mm	63 x 48mm
Capacity.....	599cc	592cc	598cc	598cc
Comp ratio.....	11.3:1	11.7:1	10:1	11:1
Carburation.....	4 x 31mm Mikunis	4 x Keihin CVK32	4 x 33mm Mikun s	4 x 32mm CV
Gearbox.....	6-speed	6-speed	6-speed	6-speed
Electrics.....	12V 11Ah battery; 60/55W headlamp	12V 12Ah battery; 60/55W headlamp	12V 12Ah battery; 50/55W headlamp	12V 9Ah battery; 55/60W headlamp
CYCLE PARTS				
Tyres.....	Dunlop K655	Dunlop radials	Dunlop	Dunlop
Front.....	110/80 V17	110/80 V16	K125 110/90 x 16in	110/80 x 17in
Rear.....	140/80 V17	130/90 V16	K125 120/80 x 18in	130/80 x 17in
Brakes, front.....	Twin 290mm (11.4in) discs	2 x 270mm (10.6in) discs	2 x 270mm (10.6in) discs	2 x 276mm (10.9in) discs
Rear.....	250mm (9.8in) disc	Single disc	230mm (9.1in) disc	Single disc
Suspension, front.....	Telescopic, non- adjustable	Air-assisted telescopic with ESCS	Telescopic air-assisted	Telescopic fork, air- assisted
Rear.....	Full Floater monoshock, screw preload adjust	Air-assisted monoshock with adjustable damping	Monocross single shock, screw preload adjust	Pro-Link monoshock preload adjust
DIMENSIONS				
Wheelbase.....	1430mm (56.3ins)	1425mm (56.1ins)	1385mm (54.5ins)	1410mm (55.5ins)
Weight (inc 1 gal fuel).....	207kg (455lb)	201kg (443lb)	194kg (426lb)	201.6kg (448lb)
Fuel capacity.....	25 litres (5.5 gal)	18 litres (4 gal)	14.8 litres (3.3 gal)	16.5 litres (3.7 gal)
PERFORMANCE				
Top speed in 1/2 mile, prone	121.7mph	119.8mph	111.6mph	123.1mph
Upright.....	116.4mph	118.1mph	104.1mph	112.9mph
Best one-way.....	123.0mph	121.3mph	113.5mph	124.2mph
Standing 1/4 mile (mean).....	12.58sec/108.8mph	12.8sec/107.9mph	13.1sec/101.6mph	12.46sec/109.5mph
(one way).....	12.20sec/110.3mph	12.59sec/108.7mph	12.97sec/105.8mph	12.39sec/110.0mph
1/4 mile roll-on from 50mph (mean).....	12.9sec/88.4mph	11.53sec/98.45mph	14.2sec/96mph	12.3sec/93.45mph
One way.....	12.6sec/89.1mph	11.52sec/98.5mph	14.1sec/96.7mph	12.21sec/94.3mph
Top gear.....	12mph/1000rpm	12.4mph/1000rpm	11.7mph/1000rpm	12.4mph/1000rpm
Fuel consumption, overall	47mpg	46.6mpg	40mpg	49mpg
Worst figure.....	39mpg	43mpg	33mpg	41.6mpg
Speedo accuracy				
At ind 30mph.....	29.9mph	29.4mph	27.8mph	29mph
At ind 50mph.....	50.3mph	47.4mph	50.6mph	46mph
At ind 70mph.....	69.1mph	69.2mph	62.7mph	66mph

Ironically it's the new Kawasaki GPX600 that is the strongest threat to the Honda's supremacy. Featuring a glassy smooth and efficient engine, it reduces the Honda's 12bhp lead to a much more threatening 4.5bhp margin on last year's figures. Also catching up fast are Suzuki. Their GSX600, whilst a blatant budget copy of the CBR, gets within 6.5bhp of the Honda's class-leading 81.8bhp on the dyno. No such powerplay problem with the Yamaha FZ600, though, as the archaic eight-valve XJ motor still only turns out a smidgen over 60bhp; but then its merits have never been concentrated in the engine room anyway.

Such is Honda's confidence in the CBR's original design, changes for the '88 model have been limited to nothing more than a new paint job. This means that the handling remains as confident and capable as ever. If anything it felt slightly better, a product perhaps of the move to Dunlop (rather than the occasionally unpredictable Bridgestone Exedra) tyres as standard fitment. Whilst the handling's still not quite in the FZ's precocious league (like 99.9 per cent of other bikes), at all but the very highest of its three figure capabilities, the bike actually feels as if it's laying more rubber on the road when it's cranked over than in a straight line. A sensation, obviously allied to the engine's premium poke, that goes a long way to explaining why the CBR is still the quickest of the bunch. When, that is, the engine isn't as sick as our test bike's example.

However, this ailment — probably plugs again — did have some value in that it allowed us to see just how effective the CBR's aerodynamics really are. Despite suffering from a significant 7bhp power deficit over last year's model, top speeds with the rider prone showed a reduction of little more than five mph. With the rider sitting upright, though, the difference doubled to a yawning 10mph down on the previous test-bike, as the rider caused a greater interruption of the air-flow which couldn't be compensated for by the languishing motor.

Talking of brakes proper, the CBR's Nissin units are still more than impressive even compared to the other three bikes' set-ups. Being both powerful and progressive at the same time, they continue to cosset the rider by allowing him to get away with sometimes

quite ridiculously short halts, where any of the other three might have had you reaching for the bicycle clips to save any bowel movement embarrassments.

At present the CBR looks like it's still top of the 600 pile, but for just how much longer is hard to say. If it's subject to a revision for '89 it might well stay ahead of the already purposeful competition. If not, the whole class is going to be wide open to the highest bidder. Bearing in mind the next year will probably see the new Yamaha middleweight come into the frame, any one of four bikes could secure the crown. But, for the time being at least, it still belongs to the CBR600.

Patrick Devereux

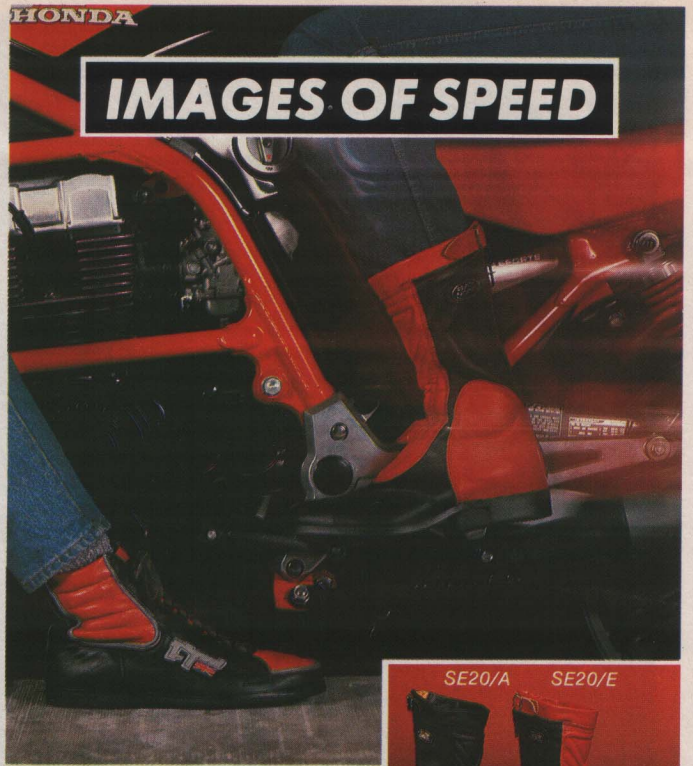
Getting on this year's latest mega-models and pronouncing them the best in history is one of the privileges of hacking around at Lord Emap's expense. In commercial terms making last year's hardware obsolete in the twinkling of a winter is the game — and since Japan more-or-less invented the game when the British industry didn't give a stuff, I suppose we shouldn't grumble.

So it's a refreshing change for everybody but the new-bike-every-spring filthy rich when things don't work out. '88 is strictly stay as you were: the old tackle is still the best tackle.

Much though it pains me to give credit to Honda's smug-faced company men, the CBR still creams the rest on performance, fuel economy, comfort, civility and, with one exception, handling. Assuming the sick example we had truly was a one-off, none of its clones do anything quite so well. Having said that, the Suzuki, apart from looking dull to the point of invisibility, offers stacks of performance and all-round competence for the price.

The shining exception to this bunch of Sierra rip-offs is, of course, Yamaha's beguiling FZ. If you'd tried all four and wanted to ride rather than merely travel, you'd chose the Yam every time — even if it meant leaving the missus behind. It's the sort of bike Ducati might have built if they could have brought themselves to build a four (and had anyone who understood electrics). Except that no Italian factory could possibly have made it that cheap.

Mac McDiarmid



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