

AIR TRAFFIC

TRAFFIC

It may be the Johnny-Come-Lately of its class, but Suzuki's big-bore sport tourer at least has the electric window/Mark Williams

Suzuki's Power Shield works like an electric car window: a servo motor circulates captive ball-bearings which alter windscreen height.



CONTROLLER



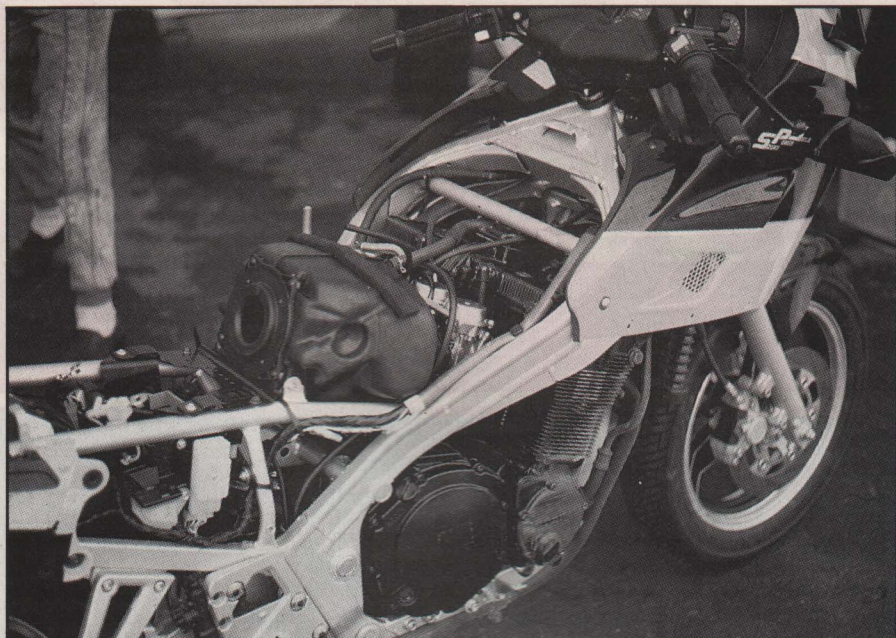
Fritzi, our coach driver, pushed the turbo-diesel Mercedes hard round the Salzburgring, obliging his passengers to brace themselves as we swung into each corner with increasing abandon. The Hairpin Curve proved almost to be his – and our – undoing, for Fritzi went into it just a little too gung-ho, as evidenced by the crash as the suspension bottomed and some nearside extremity of the bodywork crunched into the tarmac. This ‘familiarisation lap’ of the ‘Ring did not bode well for the following morning’s test session aboard Suzuki’s latest sport-tourer – indeed arguably the company’s first sport-tourer in the accepted idiom, for although it is squarely based on the thinly disguised race-bike that is the GSX-R1100, it is heavier, more torquey yet less sophisticated in its suspension.

That Suzuki chose to launch the GSX1100F at the Salzburgring (combined, however, with a 40km road route) is perhaps a measure of their confidence in a product which has also had the benefit of development that could take into account the performance – in every sense of the word – of what are already established as its prime competitors. These are obviously Yamaha’s FJ1200, Honda’s CBR1000 and, perhaps less obviously, Kawasaki’s GPZ1000RX.

It is obvious from specification alone that Suzuki’s R&D department have taken careful note of the ground rules. Much was made in the initial presentation of the company’s decision to send a brace of 1100 Katanas for a two-week, 7000km pan-European schlep in the Spring of ‘85 in order to evaluate the needs of the touring market. Even more was made of the whining elicited from wind-buffed pillion riders (or ‘co-riders’, as they are apparently now called), whining that ultimately wrought the GSX1100F’s single most distinctive gimmick (or ‘feature’ as it is apparently now called). This is the ‘Suzuki Power Shield’, which utilises a servomotor to circulate captive ball bearings to push or pull a windscreen set into grooves in the fairing. The system is basically the same as that which operates power windows in a car... and will doubtless cost a fortune to replace in the unhappy event of your GSX1100F falling off its side-stand.

But I digress. Suzuki have in fact applied some useful developments to the standard ‘R’ model in their quest to produce (or at least market) the perfect sport-tourer. Most significantly from an engineering point of view is an increase in displacement of 75cc, achieved by upping the bore by 2mm and the stroke by 1mm. The fundamental aim of this was to increase low- and mid-range torque, but as this was already a well oversquare engine made even more so by the extra bore, combustion efficiency was obviously the real key here. What undoubtedly had more to do with yielding the claimed 82.5ftlb of torque at 7000rpm were a newly designed two-into-four exhaust system with a tapered collector box, and a computer-controlled ignition system which accurately adjusts timing to engine speed. (The carbs are slightly smaller 32.5mm versions of the 34mm Mikunis fitted to the R-model).

For reliability’s sake, Suzuki have also increased the capacity of the SACS radiator and improved the rate at which the oil flows around the cylinder head. So much for rumours of water cooling... at least for the



Steel perimeter frame betrays usual sloppy welding, but boasts removable lower rungs for maintenance ease and cradles the most torquey motor in the business.

present. So much, too, for hints that the GSX1100F would be shaft-driven, but then drive chain technology has now passed the point where we sniff at rollers and side plates when it comes to hard, long-distance travel.

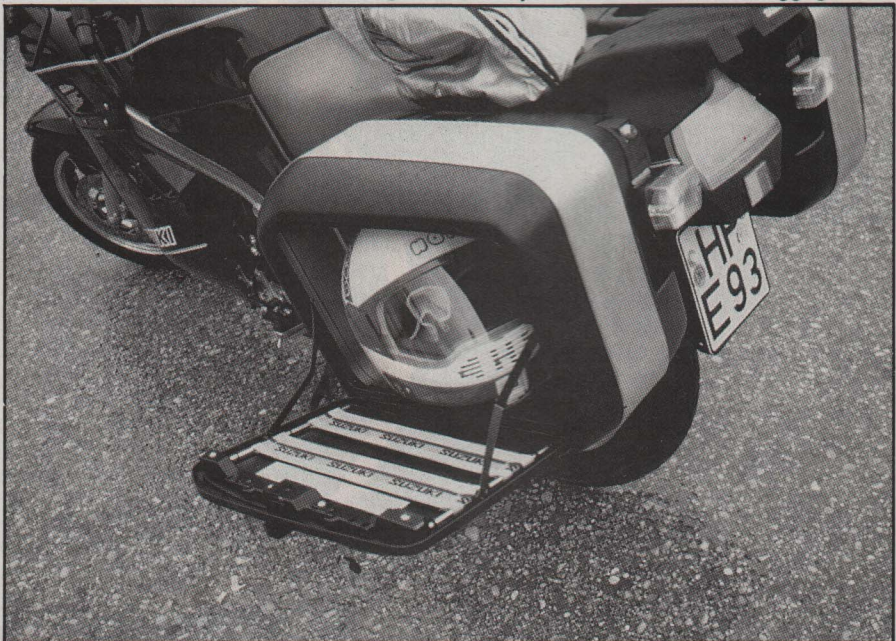
The GSX1100F’s chassis is new, however, and in some ways quite surprisingly – if not radically – so. Like the R, the F model wraps its engine and much of its 21-litre tank in a duplex perimeter frame. Unlike the R’s however, this one is made of steel, and with removable lower runs to ease maintenance. With 16- as opposed to 18-inch wheels fore and aft, the GSX1100F enjoys a lower C-of-G, a longer, 1490mm wheelbase, and steering geometry accordingly altered to invoke a shorter trail (by 4mm) while retaining almost exactly the same trail – 26°, instead of 26°30’.

Also new for the F-bike are smaller front and rear discs – 275mm all round, and a Full-Floater rear end modified to better suit the touring regimen by means of revised linkage, a more progressive spring rate and a different shock absorber. What’s really odd though is that despite the wider variety of loadings and road conditions this 27kg

heavier machine will be subjected to, the front suspension no longer wears any sort of adjustable preload or anti-dive.

As if anticipating the discomfort this might cause, the company have, however, rethought the more basic creature comforts. The riding position has been ergonomically engineered to minimise fatigue (in accord, of course, with the SPS gizmo), and the width and upholstery of the seating arrangements have been designed to better cosset a pair of posteriors.

Moreover, the GSX1100F is imbued with a ‘marketing philosophy’ which has it that Mr and Mrs Touring Person will want matching luggage and clothing to accompany them on their travels. (One Suzuki person even had the gall – or was it ignorance? – to explain that this was because most motorcyclists didn’t know where to get accessories to fit their machines!). Effectively this means that Krauser are now decorating their proprietary K2, 42 or 30 litre panniers with horrid great strips of fluted alloy and Suzuki logos. What is new, but will also be marketed independently by Krauser, is a lightweight, aerodynamic carrier rack. Soft luggage of



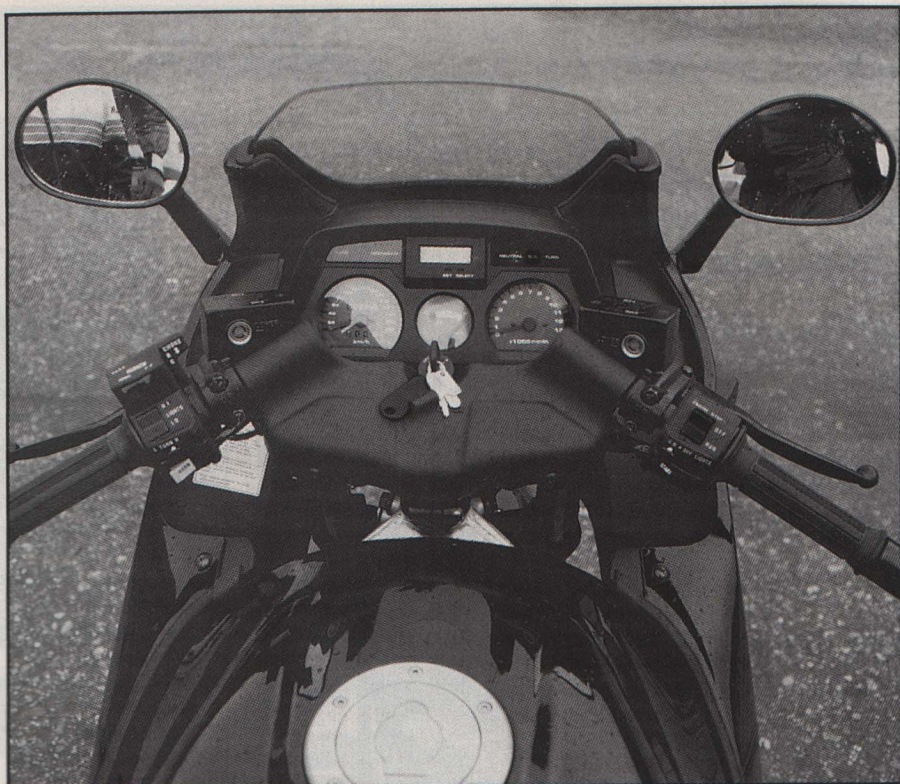
42-litre panniers are waterproof, capacious, but deeply unattractive – and you can buy them cheaper without the Suzuki logo.

various ilk (and doubtless, parentage) will also be available, as will some neatly vented leather suits... modelled by the inevitable toothsome lovely at the press reception (and that was only the male of the species).

But were all these accoutrements mere sideshows to divert us from the fact that Suzuki's uneasily late entry into the sport-tourer market might not in fact be very much better, or even different, from its peers? The pouring rain that greeted us on the morning of our ludicrously brief, one-hour test ride bode even worse than Fritz's perambulations in the big Merc, although as more than one wag pointed out, it would at least test the efficiency of the Power Shield.

The Salzburging in the leaf-strewn wet is not my idea of Big Smiles, so after a couple of gingerly completed laps I headed for the highway, which at least had the benefit of no Armco. Here the deep-down grunt of the larger, retuned engine made itself abundantly and immediately obvious. The thing will pull from below 2000rpm in top, but like far too many Jap bikes, the GSX1100F is too low geared (3.466:1 final drive) to optimise the top-end potential of fifth gear. On the well-sluiced Austrian roads, 175kph (110mph) was all I had space and bottle to hit, and this at approx 8000rpm. The red-line is at 10,500rpm, a maximum 136hp is claimed at 9500rpm, and I reckoned on 25km or 15mph per 1000rpm... so you can draw your own conclusions about ultimate velocity.

What I didn't like about the engine's mighty powerband was a twinge of vibration that set into the 'bars around 6000rpm and hung on until 7250 - on a long run this could be a problem. But otherwise the bike was indeed comfortable to drive - it reminded me not a little of the FJ1200's riding position with the feel of the CBR1000. As for the SPS however, on full extension it appeared to protect me only very, very slightly more than when it was wound completely into its enclosure. Whether it would allow the dox to adjust her make-up when howling along in a



Dash-board is all serious business and the wing-mirrors truly superb. Power Shield control switch is on left 'bar, adjacent to choke lever.

thunderstorm seems decidedly iffy to me. But maybe these things are designed to cater for riders of smaller, oriental mien than great lunks like yrs trly?

The appalling weather rendered any examination of handling limits somewhat out of the question, although the (non-radial) Metzeler did a fair impression of limpets provided one didn't get really silly. I did, however, notice a distinct tendency to oversteer in slower corners and a trace of a twitch when decelerating from 160-140kph (100-85mph). This might've been down to the larger-size panniers that I was carrying. Or it might've been down to the slippery roads. Or it might've been down to the suspension. But with so little time (and so many snapshots to take), I wasn't about to tax the mechanics back at the 'Ring in my normal objective fashion.

Roadholding was again hard to properly assess under the circumstances, which is particularly frustrating given the alleged nature of the GSX1100F, but apart from the aforementioned high-speed quiver, the bike sat as confidently on the tarmac as any bike in its class has a right to in the driving rain. The brakes also seemed par for the course; plenty of feel from the floating calipers and progressive retardation - although I wasn't about to test this to the point at which they locked up. One of the Swedish journalists did and was not amused by the consequences!

It is worth mentioning in the Suzuki's favour that the C-of-G does indeed feel lower than either the CBR1000's or the FJ1200's, certainly if you're trying to chuck the thing around at low to medium speeds (and notwithstanding the marginal oversteering tendencies). And the longer wheelbase will probably prove useful in ongoing long sweeper situations on dry roads that I wasn't willing to try and simulate on Austrian tarmac that accurately resembled a paddling pool.

Obvious and major weaknesses just didn't present themselves for inspection in my few dozen kilometres and I think I've

recorded all the dark hints... save for one rather curious, even amusing bit of bother: After tooling along like Moses crossing the Red Sea and then pulling to a halt, water caught on the exhaust pipes and radiator turned to steam and the steam clouded the instruments, wing-mirrors and windscreen - sorry, Power Shield. Since this does not happen on any of the yardstick bikes I have mentioned (and ridden in similar, typically British conditions), I can only put it down to the design of the GSX1100F's fairing



16-inch Metzeler-shod front wheel hangs on comparatively primitive forks.

enclosure. However in true Japanese style, Suzuki have provided a costly and elaborate solution to a small and easily remedied niggle. An electronic windscr...oops, Power Shield which, when lowered from its full erection, allows the steam to escape.

Now that's progress! And the price we'll have to pay for it when the dark metallic blue and burgundy versions of the bike slip into UK showrooms later this year? Around £5200, plus another £350 for a set of panniers and their sub-frames.

SUZUKI GSX1100F

Engine	Oil-cooled, 16-valve, DOHC, in-line four
Displacement	1127cc
Bore and stroke	78 x 59mm
Compression ratio	10:1
Maximum Power (claimed)	136 @ 9500rpm
Maximum Torque (claimed)	11.4kgm @ 7000rpm
Carburettors	4 x 32.5mm Mikuni
Transmission	Gear primary, 5-speed box, chain final
Frame	Steel duplex cradle with removable lower section
Front Fork	Oil-damped telescopic
Rear Suspension	Full Floater with adjustable preload and 4-way damping
Brakes front	275mm dual discs
rear	275mm disc
Tyres front	Metzeler ME99 2.75 x 16
rear	ME33A 3.50 X 16
Wheelbase	1490mm
Seat height	795mm
Dry Weight	244kg
Fuel capacity	4.6 gallon (21 litre)
Top Speed (est)	150mph