

June 1982

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TwoWheels

Tests

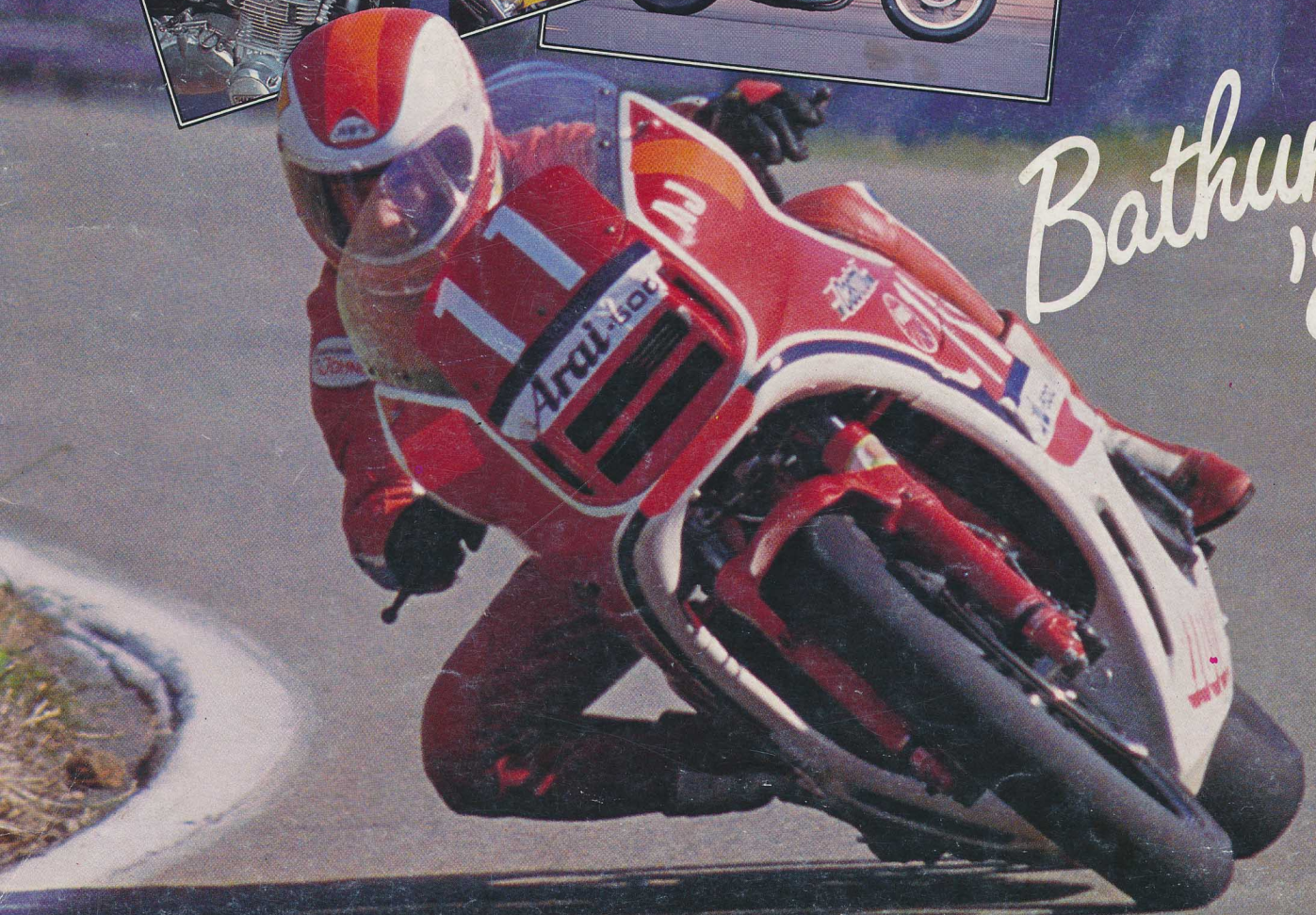
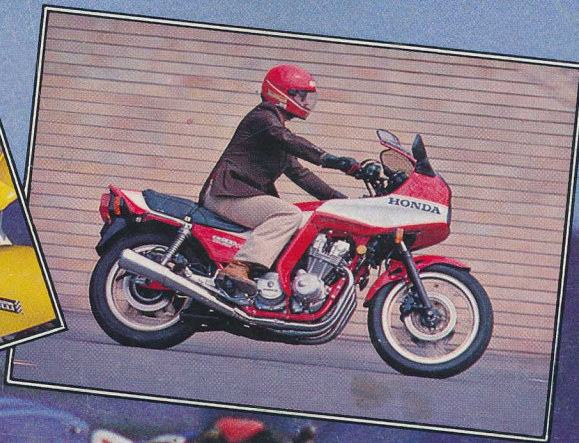
HONDA CB900F2

YAMAHA IT250J

Plus

RACE BIKES ON THE ROAD

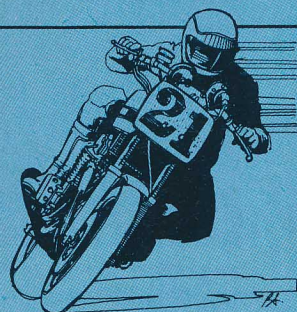
TOP TOURER CHOSEN



Bathurst '82

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June 1982



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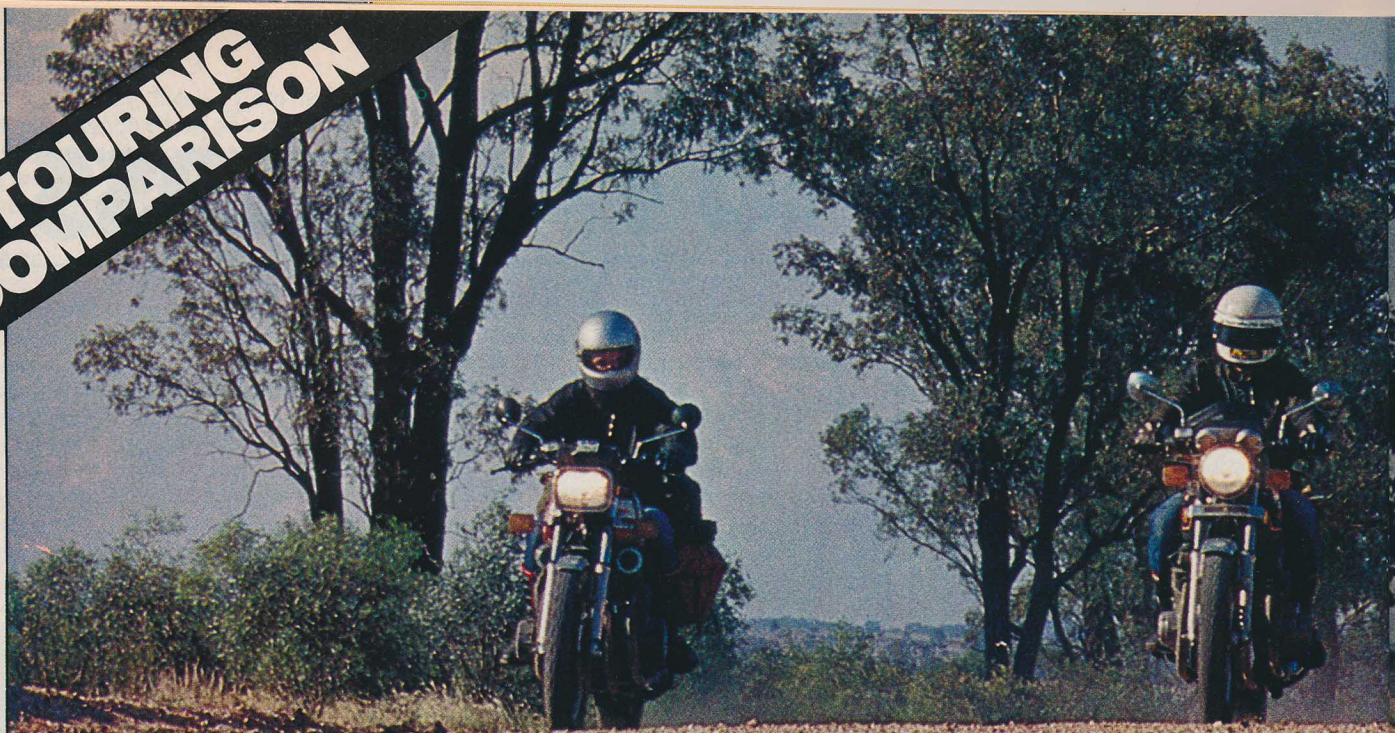
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TOURING COMPARISON



IN SEARCH OF THE

Years in the making, with a cast of thousands and a budget of millions, the giant touring comparison rolls on! This month, we analyse the performance, fuel economy, handling, braking, transmissions and ease of maintenance of the seven contenders for Top Dog Tourer, and come to our conclusions.

LAST month, we delved into the comfort aspects of our seven candidates but as every motorcycle tourer will agree that is only part of the story. A superbly comfortable bike may be ill-suited to a cross-country run if it doesn't display talents in other areas. This month we'll see how the bikes fared in these domains.

Performance

We all know how it feels to pull out of a slipstream behind a semi, open the throttle and then find that, relative to the truck, we're going backwards. Admittedly, this is an extreme case but something encountered quite often by Whitworth St J. Socket while touring on his Honda C90 Interstate. Oh well, knock it back a few gears and perhaps you'll avoid a head-on with the traffic roaring towards you! For a tourer adequate power is a basic necessity, makes touring less fatiguing and (if used sensibly) much safer. Obstacles can be passed quickly with a minimum of fuss if there's plenty of urge on tap.

Sensibly, all of the bikes supplied for the comparo were quite well endowed in the horsepower department but within that sphere they were as different as their engine configurations, ranging from the sedate BM and the moderately unresponsive Goldwing to the demonically powerful king of the cubes, the Z1300.

Honda: The 1085 cm³ horizontally-opposed four-cylinder motor is a real mixed bag. Unfortunately, its qualities of smoothness and quietness are more than offset by mediocre responsiveness and overall lack of get-up-and-go. Of all the bikes on the comparo the 'Wing had the worst top gear acceleration from 80 and 120 km/h; and only just pipped the BM and the Darmah at higher speeds. The left foot needs to be kept busy to get the GL moving — and to slow it down. Engine braking wasn't a strong point. However there is one facesaving feature. The motor is robust, virtually guaranteeing long and faithful service.

Kawasaki: The firebrand of the bunch, a six-cylinder water-cooled rocketship,

the Z1300 is smooth and flexible with heaps of power right through the rev range. Tractable at low revs, responsive at any engine speed and very exhilarating when screwed to the limit. Top gear passing acceleration is brilliant, and with a claimed 89.5 kW on tap it's little wonder the Z is almost totally unaffected by the addition of a pillion and a pile of camping gear.

Very few riders are going to constantly run the Z near the red line so the big six should purr away contentedly for many years. Certainly, the great multiplicity of engine parts may weigh against this, but Kawasakis generally have a reputation for robustness so a long troublefree association would be the rule rather than the exception.

Suzuki: We've often moaned about the Suzuki's lack of success in the marketplace. The GS doesn't deserve to be ignored. Partly it's the superb transmission and commendable handling and partly the well thought-out integration of the whole package. The fact that Suzuki didn't just stick a shaft drive on a 1000S and call it a tourer hints at how good this model is. Rather, it uses a bored and stroked GS850 mill, with power output well suited to a touring role. Plenty of low and midrange punch (about par with the Z and a little inferior to the XS), loads of top end and



PERFECT TOURER

Part 2

substantial engine braking. Only the Yamaha and Kawasaki were more responsive at 140 km/h-plus cruising speeds.

Yamaha: A very similar kettle of fish to the Suzuki in the engine department, although there are some relatively minor differences. On the one hand it's a little rougher and not as refined but on the other hand the XS motor has a healthier low and midrange power output and a better top end. The easy roll-on-the-throttle-and-pull-away performance is the Yamaha's main strength. In the tight stuff the XS has superior tractability out of corners. Essentially a robust motor that won't bog down at all with the addition of a load.

BMW: In stark contrast to the three Japanese blasters the BM is a sedate, though not sluggish, performer and as such offers a viable alternative for a rider who isn't a pawn in the horsepower game. While the RT hasn't the bottom end of the Suzuki, the Yamaha, the Kawasaki or the Ducati, it will stay with the Guzzi and give the Goldwing a good run. Turn up the taps though and the BM is left trailing in the wake — but then this isn't the intended role. Although the bike takes a while to wind up to a fast cruising speed, once it's there, good throttle response is available at the twist of a wrist. In addition, the absence of



frenetic four cylinder type buzzing promotes an aura of relaxation so the RT can be easily forgiven for the scarcity of high rev power.

Kept in perspective though, a rider with a lust for mindbending or exhilarating performance won't be completely satisfied and will find the RT feels any extra weight attached to it. Fully laden, the BM needs some extra punch to promote easier passage past the tintops.

Guzzi: In a way the Le Mans is much

like the other twins. Because few revs are needed to attain a particular road speed (compared to the fours and the six) and there's only half as many power pulses per revolution (compared to the fours), the motor throbs away unhurriedly and this leisurely pulsing tends to put a rider in the same frame of mind. Power output characteristics are quite different from the BM or the Ducati though. The Le Mans doesn't really get into gear until the motor is spinning at the upper regions of its best top gear

acceleration (about 150 km/h), so between 100 and 140 km/h a little footwork is required.

Ducati: Once again certain similarities can be drawn between the Duke and the BM. Both aren't overly endowed with top end but both possess reasonable low and midrange power. However, the Duke pulls more strongly at low revs and unlike the other twins is as good as the GS, Z and XS in this regard. A sprightly top end completes the picture.

Overall: Taking into consideration engine power output characteristics alone it's not really difficult to choose the top runners in this section. This may surprise a few of you but the Orientals

Table 1

PERFORMANCE RATINGS

	BMW	DUCATI	GUZZI	HONDA	SUZUKI	YAMAHA	KAWASAKI
Bottom end power	fair	av.	fair	poor	av.	good	good
Top end power	fair	av.	good	av.	good	good	ex.
Top gear accel.	av.	good	av.	fair	good	good	good
Engine braking	av.	good	av.	fair	av.	good	av.

Top three: YAMAHA KAWASAKI SUZUKI

romp it in. Yamaha takes top spot because its XS11 is torquier than the rest where it counts most for a tourer — in the midrange. The big Z creeps in a close second because it's nearly as good as the Yamaha and has that beautiful top end boost for a bit of

excitement when the freeways get boring. Just the shot for the Nullarbor. With a trifle less power all through the rev range than the XS but still with enough urge to satisfy sane riders is the GS. Top spot for the Euro bikes goes to the Darmah due to a meatier midrange

Hall-From A Distance

THE INTERSTATE'S exhaust pipe cannoned off the rough gravel road, sending the machine sideways, lurching towards the grass verge. A short, desperate run along the gutter and we were suddenly back onto the road! So that's what happens when you push it hard in the dirt.

The long rooster tail of dust extended once more across the western plains as the speedo climbed steadily up to 180 km/h; it was nearly sunset and Dubbo was still 60 km away . . .

It was a small part of TWO WHEELS' weekend tests on a number of touring machines. Each of the major manufacturers was requested to nominate its best touring machine and supply it prepared for battle. We took two groups of machines over the same course on consecutive weekends in a straight shoot-out. In the evaluation were: Suzuki GS1000G, BMW R100RT, Yamaha XS1100H, Kawasaki Z1300, Ducati Darmah, Honda Goldwing Interstate (what state?) and the Moto Guzzi Le Mans Mk 3.

Yes, only one chain drive. Six years ago it would have been a vastly different story. Finally the manufacturers have realised that tourers don't want the hassle of chains and the crap they attract.

Strangely enough, the late-comers in the shaft-drive stakes have tended to produce the best. Despite the new damper in the RT's drive, the rear ends of the GS1000G and the XS1100H were markedly superior in performance. The Suzuki was especially smooth, with very little freeplay, or drive-line snatch.

Although the manufacturers have recognised that shaft drive is required on a touring motorcycle, they haven't come to grips with another very significant touring necessity. Only three of the

seven machines had fuel tanks of sufficient size for the machine to cover 320 km at touring speeds. Why is 320 km a magic number? It happens to be the longest distance without fuel on Australia's Highway One. What is the use of a touring machine which cannot traverse such a basic course without carrying extra fuel?

The Z1300, Le Mans and R100RT were the only ones which could make the trip between Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing without refuelling. That simply isn't good enough. Manufacturers/local distributors should seriously consider the viability of offering large tanks, either standard or as optional extras. *

Dear Sir, please re-design . . .

Suspensions also came in for criticism, although the situation has improved considerably in some cases. The Goldwing's units (which were pumped up to maximum allowable pressure) proved totally inadequate for the two-up touring with a load. Even medium-sized bumps caused them to bottom out, especially on rough dirt roads and corrugations. A large rethink is required in that area.

The RT with its new ride leveller shocks also proved to be a disappointment, even when fully inflated (the only safe operating level). The ride was not up to usual BMW standards when the machine was pushed hard over uneven terrain. Two-up in full cry on the uncertain dirt roads near Hill End, the rear end frequently "bottomed out". Other times it unexpectedly jacked itself up halfway through a corner. I doubt its ability to handle a series of long, deeply-corrugated sections at speed with a touring load. The old models will do that no sweat.

It is nice to be able to report that the

Z1300's air-assisted rear suspension has improved markedly since the original version in 1979. They still require some more damping but they are sufficient for most applications. The remainder were satisfactory if unspectacular, although the Le Mans units were hard and uncompromising, only really suited for the racetrack. If I were to personally outfit any of these machines for touring they would end up with S&W airshocks. In fact some manufacturers should give up the battle and simply fit them as standard.

In the field of ergonomics, some manufacturers still have to come to grips with the basics of seating positions as they relate to wind pressure. The Z1300, XS1100 and to some extent GS1000G, required a lot of "hanging onto" at 140 km/h, especially after a couple of hours straight.

All bikes were candidates for lower/wider sets of handlebars to bring the body into an equilibrium situation with the wind. Try an unfaired BMW for a couple of hours and you will discover the relationship required. At touring speeds your body weight is almost balanced by wind pressure, leaving just sufficient weight on the handlebars to give you control. The Ducati was acceptable, while the Le Mans racing crouch was boy racer's material. Speed meant stomach on the tank, elbows on knees, large Veglia tacho staring you straight in the eye. Pure soul, but hardly touring.

Those with fairings (in my mind essential for long-distance touring) numbered three: R100RT, Goldwing Interstate and the Le Mans. The Le Mans had a pretty piece of fibreglass with a screen which didn't fit properly. Protection was only gained if you flattened yourself, lizard-like on the tank. Hardly a position which you would want

than the 'Wing, BM or Guzzi. Then follows the BM, Honda and the Le Mans.

Bear in mind, these comparisons are all relative. All of the bikes have sufficient power for easy touring — some are just better than others.

Fuel economy

Among other things the touring comparo took a small step towards burying the vicious rumour that the fewer the cylinders, the better the fuel economy. The most frugal consumer turned out to be the Suzuki with a best of 18 km/l. Not far behind were the Ducati and the Guzzi with best figures of 17.2 and 17.5 km/l respectively. In fact, the

Table 2

FUEL CONSUMPTION

	BMW	DUCATI	GUZZI	HONDA	SUZUKI	YAMAHA	KAWASAKI
Best (km/l)	16.1	17.5	17.2	16.7	18.0	14.3	14.8
Worst (km/l)	11.5	14.3	15.1	13.3	14.4	11.2	11.6
Fuel capacity (l)	24	15	25	20	22	24	27
Touring range (km)	380	260	430	330	400	340	400

Top three: SUZUKI GUZZI DUCATI

Le Mans didn't consume vastly different amounts of fuel if it was nursed along or thrashed while the BM was reasonably economical at sedate cruising speeds but quite thirsty if pushed hard. Both the Kawasaki and Yamaha were heavy users but the Z could claim a good touring

range due to the 27-litre tank. Conversely, despite the Darmah's good economy, a small (15-litre) tank limits the distance between fuel stops. Some of you may be able to get better fuel economy from all the bikes but the pattern will remain the same.

to maintain for ten hours a day, day after day. The Goldwing's fairing offered adequate protection, although you sit so far back from it, that the weather tends to pour around the screen onto the rider. Furthermore, you are forced to look through the screen, which frankly is dangerous, especially on dirt roads, or in areas heavily infested with insects. A screen should be positioned so that you can comfortably look over it should the need arise. Quite a large amount of engine heat is also retained by this fairing.

In contrast, the RT fairing provided excellent protection for both rider and pillion at high cruising speeds. The screen is adjustable to provide the correct height for most riders and the airvents are sufficient to flush out most of the engine heat build-up. It is a pity that the plastic gloveboxes still have their poorly-fitting lids . . . ah well, nothing's perfect. The new, wider screen has certainly improved protection and armchair comfort standards.

The seat of it all

Seats have ceased to be a very critical factor in touring comfort since the advent of the airseat. All seats were tested naked so we could endure the sins of the manufacturers. Some good, some not so good!

The BMW's seat still suffers from the old R90S syndrome, the steel frame which runs along either side of the seat cuts into your thighs after only short periods. Pillions complained because the shape of the pillion seat caused them to slide towards the rider. Under braking, the pillion ends up where the rider was and the rider is hard up against the tank — *ouch!* There is one saving grace and that is the RT's excellent pillion grabrail, a very important fitting missing from some machines.

The Interstate's rider saddle was comfortable, although there could have been a little more padding for long

distance work. There is an adjustment to move the seat backwards and forwards, a good idea, except neither position really suited any rider. Moto Guzzi didn't really intend anyone to sit on the pillion seat of the Le Mans, so they made it a half-bum seat! You can only fit half your bum on the seat at any one time, because it is so narrow. The seat is hard and there is no grabrail, only a strap which got progressively longer as the hours went by. We didn't lose anyone, but it was close. Most of the Japanese seats were okay. The Ducati's was hard but comfortable, although the accessory rack gnawed into the pillion's back on rough roads.

Front suspensions have a great bearing on touring comfort. Those which are too hard make you feel like someone has tapped you on the wrists with a hammer every time you hit a decent bump. Too soft and you feel like you are riding an automotive pogo stick. These descriptions best describe the Le Mans and the RT respectively. Experience dictates that spacers plus heavier springs and oil cure the RT. Most of the Japanese were reasonable, and proved satisfactory after experimenting with oils and air pressures.

The Goldwing Interstate had a front end like limp spaghetti, vague, spongy and not very responsive. There is an enormous weight strapped to the steering head designed to promote front end "stability" with a fairing attached. I'd hate to think what it would be like without the weight. A lot of work is required on the Interstate's front end.

The Darmah's front suspension was hard, but good, although the steering damper seemed to have no effect at all.

Most of the manufacturers had given little thought to the provision of pannier/rack installation bar BMW, which provided optional extras of panniers, rack, tankbag and other touring goodies. The Ducati had been fitted with a ridiculous rack which was

too close to the pillion and a potential cause for machine instability if any significant load was attached to it. It would be sacrilegious to carry more than a toothbrush on the Le Mans.

Japanese manufacturers need to include options such as panniers and racks or at least provide adequate fittings so these accessories can be fitted. Pillion grabrails should also be provided with every touring machine.

Our only live pillion commented as follows: The Interstate came out tops in comfort followed by the GS1000G, Z1300 and XS1100H, the latter three suffering from hard seats. In the case of the XS1100H, the seat was too short to fit two decent-sized bums. Of the remainder the Darmah's was too narrow and hard, while the RT tilts the pillion too far forward. Pillioning someone on the Le Mans is crazy, especially over rough surfaces, because the pillions rarely touch the machine except to renew their grip on that beleaguered strap.

Overall, I concluded that the GS1000G is probably the best all-round value for money, with the XS1100H and Z1300 coming in close behind. Both the Interstate and Darmah are adequate if you aren't too serious about touring while the Le Mans is a pure-soul, scratcher's machine (it's a pity we weren't supplied with a touring SP1000 Moto Guzzi).

Where does that leave the BM?

There is a simple answer to that. Owning a BMW is a way of life, they are bloody expensive with some annoying faults. They do offer a tremendous amount of *touring ability* and are very easy to ride hard (and fast) for long periods of time. Most riders seemed to agree that of the seven machines tested, it was the one most likely to be running long after the others had died.

— Geoff Hall

(Geoff is *TWO WHEELS'* tour freak and contributes the Rally Rave column.)

Handling

This is another aspect of motorcycling close to a tourer's heart and we're pleased to report that most of the bikes handled quite admirably under the arduous conditions encountered during the comparo. There was one exception though. Not an ill-handling uncontrollable motorcycle, just not up to the high standard of the rest.

One of the most interesting features was the different degree to which each bike was affected by loading with a pillion and gear. All of the bikes suffered some lightening in the steering although the effect on three of the heavyweights — the XS, Z and GS — was barely perceptible. The Guzzi and Ducati were a little more affected while the BM and 'Wing suffered the most in this regard. This generally wasn't a serious problem but riders had to contend with vaguer steering and an increased propensity to wheelies.

Honda: It soon became obvious that the Goldwing isn't ideally suited to many of the roads riders will encounter during touring excursions. On freeways and highways with smooth sweeping curves the Honda can be pushed along at a moderate pace quite comfortably, but turn up the taps and the bike tends to wallow over bumps and on occasion throw the odd weave. It demands to be ridden sedately, and if it is everything is okay. When the road tightens up, the lack of cornering clearance, the steering insensitivity and generally awkward feel impose a limitation on fast riding. Fork flex and a propensity to bottom out too easily is also a problem.

Off the tar the Honda suffers from steering vagueness to the extent that on wet clay pans a rider can swing the bars from side to side with little change of direction. Well it's not quite that bad, but the Honda certainly didn't behave as well as the other contenders on the dirt. Geoff Hall liked it, though! He found that

sitting on the tank (ouch!) and keeping the throttle screwed on, it didn't really matter what the front end was doing. The bike just soldiered on in the direction dictated by the fat rear tyre.

Kawasaki: Probably the Z's biggest (but not large) liability is its mammoth dimensions. In most situations the weight is well disguised and once mobile the Z doesn't feel as heavy as it should. Only through tight corners is real musclepower necessary. Out in sweeper territory only a slight bulkiness (mainly due to tank size) reminds the rider he is on a large motorcycle — a 320-odd kilogram bike to be more precise.

However, to consider the Z1300 as a two wheeled monstrosity doesn't do it justice. Overall, it's a good handler on the tar and the dirt although on occasion a sizeable bump can induce a small wallow. One does need to exercise care on slippery surfaces or dirt roads since the great mass could turn a relatively controllable slide into a hair-raising

Finch—The Personal Viewpoint

MY VIEW of a good touring bike follows the same lines as most other people. The main prerequisites are reliability, comfort, handling at touring speeds and economy. In sum, the ability to cover long distances quickly with the rider feeling reasonable at the end of a long day in the saddle. Also, things which many people forget when they choose their new mount, such as ease of maintenance and spares availability. Roll these things together at a price the bank manager likes and you have my ideal touring bike.

To my view the best tourer we tested was the Suzuki GS1000G. The bike did everything asked of it sweetly and was fun to ride. It has a brilliant shaft drive with gearing which suits the engine characteristics well. It goes well, stops well, handles quite respectably and has an exceptionally comfortable seat. The ergonomics suited me and with the low vibration level proved to be my ideal mile eater. However the spares availability is extremely poor (like all Suzis) so we need a bike to use for those months we may be awaiting the "parts on the dock".

Enter the Yamaha XS1100H — my second choice of tourer. The XS1100 motor is the equal of any in low down grunt, the sort of power tourers need and the motor has proven to be as unburstable as the early Kawasaki fours. It is fairly economical and with the 24-litre tank the fuel range is very good.

The XS is a very good bike for two-up touring with its large comfortable seat

and low-set rear pegs making the pillion's ride among the most comfortable of the bikes tested. A surprise was the XS11's dirt road manners which were very good, even exceptional considering its weight. It was the best of the Japanese bikes on the dirt.

The bad points of the Yamaha centre around the gearbox and shaft. The bike is undergeared in top gear quite noticeably and the gearbox has a heavy, clunky change. Combine the clunkiness with a shaft with too much freewheel and considerable amounts of rise and fall and the bike becomes frustrating to ride through towns.

Big Six takes third

My third choice was the Kawasaki Z1300, the heaviest and most powerful bike tested. The overlapping power pulses of the big six made it the smoothest bike on test and with the watercooling jacket muffling mechanical noise it was a deceptive bike on which to try to estimate speeds. I was usually travelling faster than expected and this gave me the impression that you could load the Kwaka to its limits and still go immense distances fatigue free. It would undoubtedly be a good bike to tour with a chair attached. The low-down power was good but no better than the XS11, probably due to its weight. The seat was comfortable but the handlebars had a bit too much rise for my liking. On the riding position side of things the footpegs were too far forward and the switchgear was

unbalanced — some switches were large and well placed while others were far too small and inaccessible.

The bike's handling was not good as it would weave around corners at 140 km/h-plus. This was due to the standard tyres fitted and also the weight; this weight also made things interesting in tight dirt situations. Another sore point with me was the gearbox which was too heavy and most shifts were "double changes" — two clicks — one a normal change as the clutch is pulled in and another movement which my foot felt as the clutch was released and power applied. The gearing, however, was good. All in all a great motor let down by a less than average driveline.

Next came the BMW R100RT — the legendary tourer. The light weight was welcome after the Jap bikes and the fairing offered good protection. The Nivomats on the back worked well and were a great idea after a familiarisation period. In addition, the simplicity of the motor would be appreciated in the middle of nowhere. Now these points are quite important to touring but in most other respects the Beemer has fallen embarrassingly behind the Japanese tourers. The handling was quite poor with bad weaving above 140 km/h. There was a fair amount of fork flex at most speeds. The weaving was most noticeable one-up and probably due to the panniers but as BMW fit these as standard, people are expected to ride the bikes equipped as such. The seat was damn awful; the rider felt like he

excursion off the track. Nothing like that happened . . . but . . . And of course you have to consider the difficulties involved in returning the bike to an upright position after a mishap. Mmmm! Ah, well, always travel in company.

There is one advantage in riding a heavy but well-designed two wheeler. On gravel roads the additional traction and extra weight on the front wheel promote a feeling of security. The Z just ploughs on through. More good news: Clearance and rear shocks are much improved over the previous model and steering is responsive although there is a slight tendency to understeer. High speed stability is tops.

Suzuki: Unanimously declared the top handler on the comparo, and for good reason. Best balanced bike just about sums it up. A strong flex-free frame and good compliant suspension produce a sweet handling package that never gave cause for alarm. No weaves or wobbles — no stained undies! Although the GS

was sitting on the frame rails and the pillion comment was similar. The rider and pillion pegs were too close together, my size nine could easily straddle both pegs.

The motor vibrated at all revs, most noticeably down low and lacked power all the way. The two stands need re-thinking especially the sidestand which was ridiculous. The brakes lacked feel and needed too much effort to work effectively — rare for Brembos. Combine all this with a below average gearbox and shaft and to me the BMW legend is just that — a legend and at \$7000 that's just not good enough!

More sports than tourer

The Ducati Darmah came next. More a sports-tourer than pure tourer the Duke had the necessary credentials to cover long distances safely. It had tremendous handling and stability at high speeds and brakes to match. The bike had sufficient low-down acceleration but lacked top end power. The Duke was let down by poor quality control and bad fitting up — the chain adjustment fiasco at Dubbo being a classic example. The seat was poor and the seat-peg-bar relationship did not suit my 178 cm frame at all.

This left the GL1100 Honda next. This bike is well suited to its designed purpose — cruising American expressways at 55 mph. Australian touring, however, sees the Goldwing out of its depth. Poor power for an 1100 means passing is a "hang on and hope" affair. Dreadful fork flex and poor ground clearance make high speed travelling hazardous and high speed stability is poor. The air suspension at both ends

wasn't as easy to throw around as the lightweights, particularly the Ducati and the BM, it was much easier to live with than either the similarly weighted Yamaha or the more massive Kawasaki.

Steering is beyond criticism, cornering clearance excellent and high speed stability only marginally worse than the best, the Darmah. That means excellent in anyone's book. On the dirt the Suzuki emulated the Kawasaki's talent by ploughing through regardless and sticking to the chosen line well. One difference though, the GS does it better.

Yamaha: The elephant won a few converts on the weekend away. A little rough round the edges but the XS did surprise a few riders with its overall competence. Hardly set a foot (sorry, wheel) wrong and showed all the right attributes for a high speed cross country cruiser, like reasonable clearance, excellent high speed stability and no nasty weaves or wallows over the bumps. Much like the GS in fact,

was run at maximum pressures but this would not stop the wallowing of the 'Wing.

To be fair, there were some good points on the bike. The fairing offered good protection, the seat was comfortable and the seat's adjustability was a great idea. The engine was smooth and the low-down weight made the bike feel lighter than it is. Getting back to the adjustable seat, due to the high pullback bars the seat needed to be in the most rearward position to be comfortable.

Lastly, the Guzzi Le Mans, which is a great bike. It was the bike I enjoyed riding most, it was just so much fun. Its handling at all speeds was exemplary, top speed stability amazing, tremendous ground clearance, it had the best set of forks I've ridden at high speed and was capable of the best point to point times of any bike tested.

The Guzzi is not, unfortunately, a touring bike. It has a poor seat, uncomfortable riding position at low touring speeds for long periods and has nowhere to put the masses of touring gear we tend to take with us. Other niggling points were the long reach (read impossible) to the levers, the tall gearing at low speed and knees hitting the pots on bumpy roads. But to hell with convention, we all enjoyed the bike and everybody wanted to take it home and I would buy one tomorrow as a second bike if I had the money as it's one of my most wanted machines. Now for the SP1000 . . .

— **Dave Finch**
(*Dave was one of the cast of thousands who put the bikes through their paces on the comparo.*)

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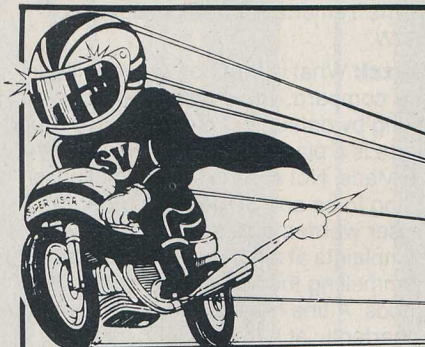
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although steering wasn't as pinsharp, the bike was less forgiving and more top heavy, and didn't feel as surefooted on the windy dirt section from outside Mudgee to Sofala. On the more open gravel the Yamaha received a lot of praise.

Ducati: In true Italian tradition, the Darmah is a polished handler with the typical Ducati traits of ponderous but accurate steering, excellent high speed stability and plenty of cornering clearance. The new air-assisted Marzocchi rear shocks have helped partly cure one of the unfortunate Ducati habits. Although the rear still tends to skip across corrugations it's not nearly as bad as the Dukes of old. In fact, the bike behaves immaculately on sealed surfaces and can be punted very briskly around the twisties if one adopts predetermined lines and uses body english for direction changes.

Off the tar, however, the Darmah doesn't quite keep up the good work. Being chain driven, it doesn't gain as much traction as the heavier shaft-driven machines and is more inclined to be upset by ridges or smallish rocks. Tall gearing, slow steering and limited steering lock all contribute to a certain awkwardness on gravel roads, and consequently the bike couldn't be blasted along with as much confidence as the Yamaha, Kawasaki, Suzuki or BMW.

Guzzi: What is that boy racer doing in this comparo, you may ask? It came along by default but pleasantly we found there is a place on the highways for the Le Mans. Not surprisingly, handling is going to be one of the Guzzi rider's lesser worries on a tour — very few complaints at all! If the body can take the pummelling the Mark III will deliver the goods. A fine high speed blaster, which is perfectly at home on long straights and fast sweepers, but a trifle awkward in tight territory. Two-up cornering clearance isn't brilliant either.

It's quite passable on the dirt too, although the clip-ons make matters interesting over very loose or wet and slippery gravel and lower gearing would help. Essentially the Guzzi doesn't fill a rider with confidence but it's certainly no dog in the dirt.

BMW: If one keeps in mind that the RT is a specialist tourer then it's easily seen that this bike is an apt illustration of Germanic thoroughness in engineering. Within the design limits the BM is a very capable handler. A little like the Goldwing in *one* respect — at sensible speeds everything works well. Any deficiencies didn't show up on test until the RT was pushed to the silly side of 140 km/h. And when that happened —



the dreaded weaves. It was a little puzzling really, the bike didn't weave with the live pillion aboard but with the heavy but inanimate objects strapped to the back the big W's set in as soon as we reached that critical speed. We finally blamed it on the panniers which are protected from the airstream by the pillion's legs but we have known other RTs that had that unfortunate characteristic — without panniers.

Through the tight twists and turns the RT feels awkward, steering becomes a little imprecise and clearance (especially left side) is somewhat limited. Over very bumpy stretches the Nivomats tend to pump up past their optimum level (good for clearance) and combine with rear end rise and excessive fork dive to create an unsettling aura.

On the positive side the RT is very forgiving, light and easy to throw around and quite capable on dirt roads. Although the bike is more easily upset by irregularities and mounds of loose gravel than the three Japanese sports-tourers its lack of mass is a distinct advantage. In direct contrast to the Kawasaki, it would be a lot easier to get out of trouble with the BM.

Overall: Need we say more! We'd like to but there's not enough space left in the magazine. Suffice it to say that with the possible exception of the Honda, the

Mist-shrouded rest stop on the Bell Road during the "Japanese" weekend.

handling characteristics of each bike reflected the high quality of the motorcycles supplied. The rest you've already read!

Brakes

A very important part of a motorcycle, a definite aid in preventing collisions with wombats, suicidal kangaroos and careless car drivers. Briefly here's a rundown on what each bike had to offer in the braking department.

Honda: Average feel and only adequate stopping power don't suit the 'Wing for hard and fast charging. Quite suitable for its intended use though.

Suzuki: Good stoppers offering superior feedback and a powerful progressive action. Not too bad in the wet.

Kawasaki: Considering the weight of this motorcycle these brakes work extremely well. Average feedback with enough stopping power to allow safe use of most of the Z's horses. Best in the wet.

Yamaha: As good as the Suzuki items but a little more insensitive. Like the rest of the Oriental brakes a little too eager to lock up in the wet or off the beaten track.

Continued on page 76

Table 3

HANDLING RATINGS

	BMW	DUCATI	GUZZI	HONDA	SUZUKI	YAMAHA	KAWASAKI
Clearance	av.	good	av.	poor	good	av.	av.
Dirt roads	good	fair	av.	fair	ex.	good	good
Bumpy bends	av.	av.	av.	fair	good	good	av.
Sweepers	good	good	good	good	good	good	good
Tight bends	good	av.	av.	poor	good	av.	av.
Stability at speed	av.	ex.	ex.	av.	ex.	good	good

Top three: SUZUKI YAMAHA KAWASAKI

IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT TOURER

Continued from page 40

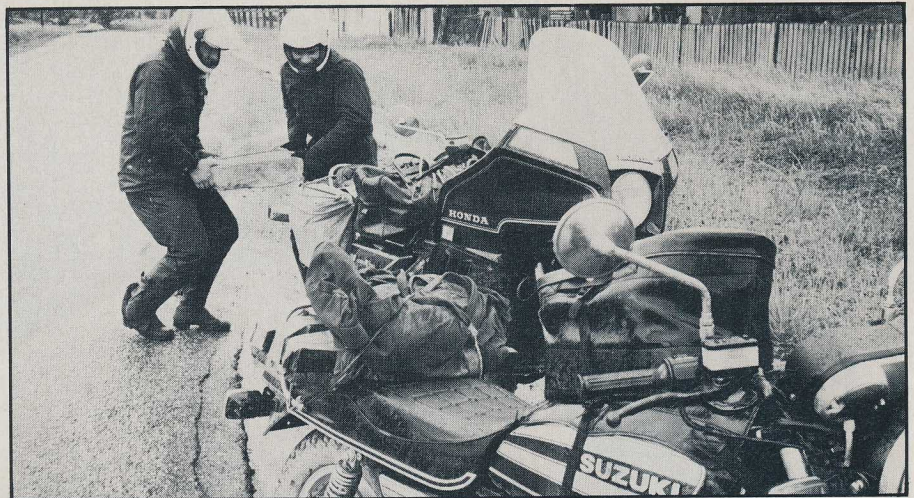
BMW: Not inspiring as far as braking power goes and fair amount of lever pressure is required but they are apparently designed this way to prevent lockup in emergency situations. We can't disagree, the brakes are far less liable to lock up if the levers are squeezed a little too hard.

Ducati: Excellent brakes, a trifle insensitive and need a bit of muscle to use. Good in the wet and resistant to lockup.

Guzzi: Once accustomed to the unique linked braking system, a rider will find this impressive. Extremely effective from high speed with good feel and reasonably difficult to lock up. Top brakes. It's a pity that the front brake lever is so difficult to get at.

Transmission

When we pulled the clutch in and moved the left foot each bike responded accordingly by shifting into another gear. However the ease with which this was accomplished varied from bike to bike. The Moto Guzzi and Ducati had relatively heavy clutch actions, and the Guzzi a stiff lever action. All the Japanese models and the BM were considerably more refined and generally gear ratios were ideally suited to touring applications. Both Italian jobs and the 'Wing could have done with lower gearing. Drivetrain freerplay varied quite a lot. As well as the sweetest gearbox the GS had the smoothest shaft. In contrast the Z, XS and GL were all a little rougher.



"Righto ladies, back on the bikes!" Our "pillion passengers" on the comparo were a hard, hard bunch!

Ease of maintenance

Since the Orientals have taken a stranglehold on motorcycle sales their bikes have gained a reputation for reliability and low maintenance. The "press the button and go" syndrome has extended to "press the button and go well." The Japanese multis essentially need very little attention to keep running sweetly. Multiple carburetors may require an afternoon and a set of vacuum gauges to set up optimally but the bikes will stay in tune for long periods. Conversely the Ducati and the Guzzi and to a far lesser extent the BMW may only have two carbs but these will generally drop out of tune sooner.

All of the bikes apart from the Guzzi have electronic ignition so that's one problem avoided. Valve clearance adjustment varies from quick and simple on the screw/locknut systems on the BM and Guzzi through the time consuming and fiddly shims on the Suzuki, Yamaha and Kawasaki to the

difficult desmodromic system on the Darmah. In general, accessibility on all the bikes to such items as oil filters, brake fluid reservoirs and spark plugs is good. However, the Z poses a problem with spark plugs, while on the Guzzi the sump needs to be removed to change the oil filter, and air filter is similarly awkward to get at.

Top three: **BMW HONDA SUZUKI.**

Accessories

Such a staggering range of touring accessories is available today that even a moderately comprehensive survey would fill the magazine by itself. During the comparo the riders discussed the accessories which they felt each model could do with to improve it as a tourer. Here's the list we compiled. None of the machines is a poor tourer, and with the addition of extra bits and pieces, each one can be made significantly better.

Honda: Suspension needs beefing up both front and rear, and a fork brace would help prevent annoying fork flex.

Kawasaki: Better damped rear shocks would help, and an air seat would be appreciated by the rear ends of both rider and passenger. A fairing will not increase the weight of the Z1300 proportionally as much as the other models, and would be a worthwhile addition.

Suzuki: If you have spare cash and nothing else to spend it on, a full fairing will improve this already impressive touring package.

Yamaha: A fairing and a set of GS shocks perhaps?

BMW: The RT would benefit from stronger suspension all round to alleviate bottoming and fork dive problems.

Guzzi: Before leaving the showroom with your sparkling new Le Mans Mark III take with you kidney belts and air seats

Table 4

BRAKING RATINGS

	BMW	DUCATI	GUZZI	HONDA	SUZUKI	YAMAHA	KAWASAKI
Stopping power	av.	good	ex.	fair	good	good	good
Feel	fair	av.	good	av.	good	av.	av.
Wet weather	av.	good	good	av.	av.	av.	good

Top three: **GUZZI SUZUKI DUCATI**

Table 5

TRANSMISSION RATINGS

	BMW	DUCATI	GUZZI	HONDA	SUZUKI	YAMAHA	KAWASAKI
Clutch	av.	fair	fair	av.	good	av.	av.
Gearbox	av.	av.	fair	av.	good	av.	av.
Ratio suitability	av.	fair	fair	fair	av.	av.	av.
Drivetrain play	good	av.	good	av.	ex.	av.	av.

Top three: **SUZUKI BMW YAMAHA**

if you intend retaining the standard shocks. Also, look for an accessory headlight.

Ducati: A shaft!

In addition to the items suggested to improve the models, there's a huge range of touring accessories designed to improve the convenience and comfort of being on the road. They range from ration-pack hexamine stoves to on-board stereo systems, from a handful of cents to heaps of hundreds of dollars. To give an idea of what is involved in becoming the Compleat Tourer, the list below indicates the price range into which some of the more commonly-found items fall.

- Tank bags: \$30-60
- Throwover saddlebags: \$30
- Panniers: \$120-140
- Racks: \$30-40
- Fabric back packs: \$60
- Full fairings: \$300-350
- Bikini fairings: \$60-80
- Driving lights: \$50-60
- Rear shocks: \$100-125

Conclusion

There you have it, a brief overview of six top tourers and one sports tourer. We hope it gives you an inkling about which one would suit you best.

The Suzuki comes out on top because it's a refined and well-balanced touring

package that is comfortable as well as being a strong performer with the slickest gearbox and the smoothest shaft. We'd rate the BMW second even though it is lacking in the horsepower department, is not as successful as an allrounder and is expensive. However the RT is the least fatiguing to ride due to its light weight and very effective fairing. Straight off the showroom floor the bike is set up very well for a touring role with a top quality range of tools, a first aid kit and a good range of tailor-made (though expensive) touring accessories.

For the power freaks there's the Z1300, quite similar to the GS but heavier and a little rougher around the edges. The Yamaha is similar too, and both of these blasters are well worth considering if you're expecting to carry a pillion most of the time.

For those who insist on Italian machinery the Duke is a reasonable proposition, although the lack of a shaft puts it behind the eight ball straight away. The bike isn't that comfortable and won't blow your eyesockets backwards when the throttle is screwed and despite good fuel economy has a limited touring range. However, it will make a few friends. The Guzzi, apart from its previously mentioned shortcomings, was the only bike without a decent headlight.



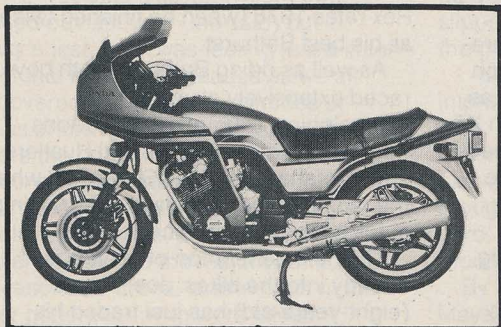
But don't forget the Honda. It is supremely comfortable on smooth roads so if you are going to stick to major highways and travel at a moderate pace it's great. Off the beaten track you'll get there on a wing and a prayer . . .

The overall ratings:

- SUZUKI
- BMW
- YAMAHA
- KAWASAKI
- DUCATI
- HONDA
- GUZZI



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