

# ROAD TESTS

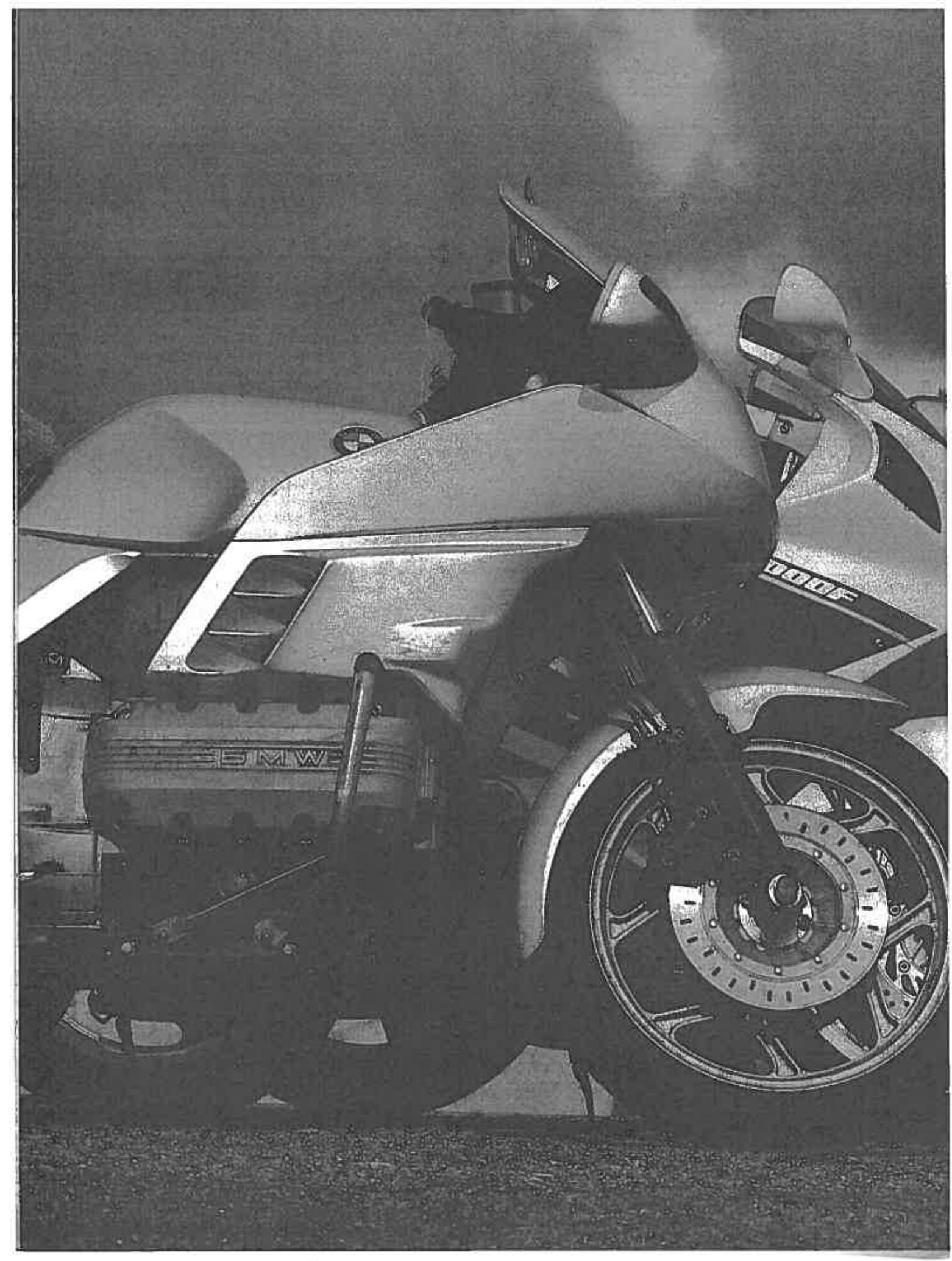


**The Japanese:** FZR1000W, FZR600, ZXR750, GSX-R750K, RGV250, CD250U

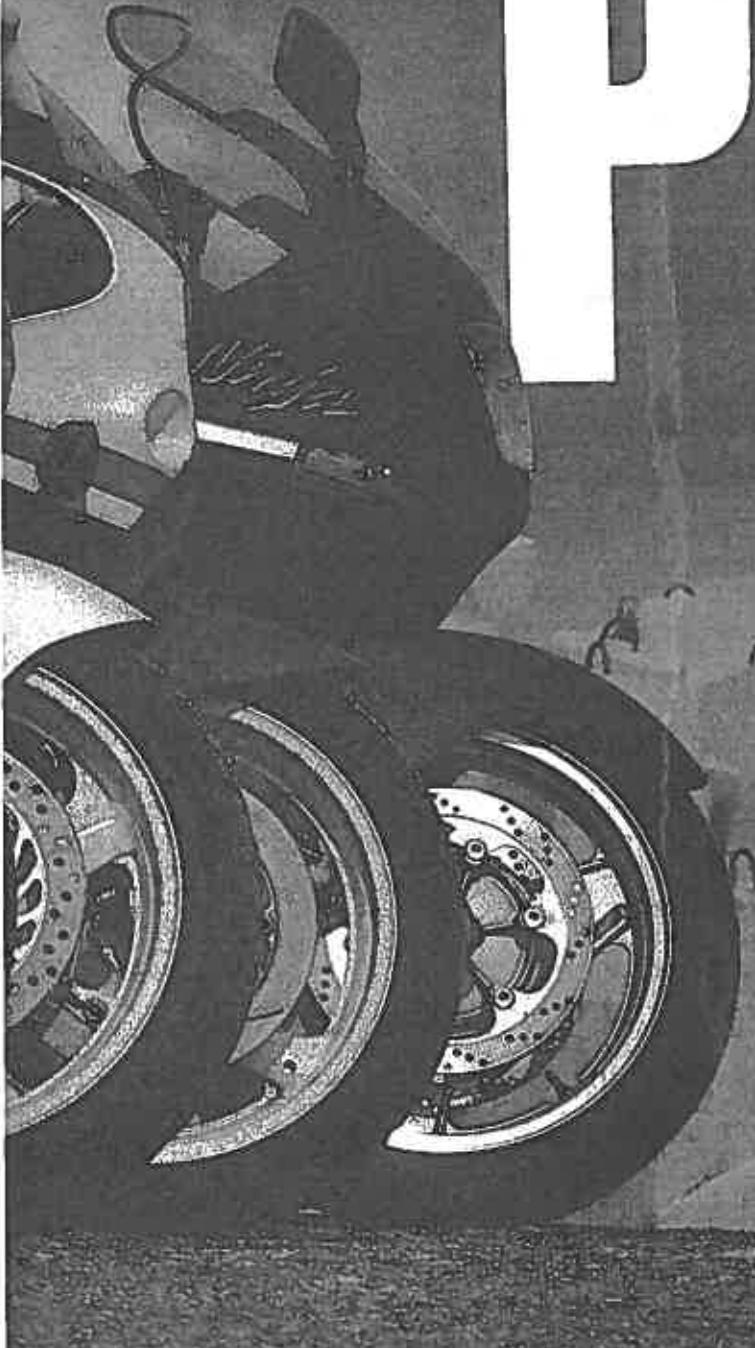
**The Italians:** Ducati 851, 750 Sport, 906 Paso, Le Mans Mk V

**The Americans:** FLHTU Ultra Classic, FXSTS Springer Softail

**Compared:** CBR1000 vs K100RS vs GSX-R1100 vs ZX-10, VFR750F vs GSX750F



# FOUR PLAY



Half the fun of a big race meeting is getting there — especially with four big-bore sports tourers to choose from. **GEOFF SEDDON** touched up the story while **JOHN ROOTH** tickled the button.

**S**OME things never change. The script called for an early mark from the office, the bike packed before dinner and a good, long night's sleep. The reality was getting home late, scrambling around frantically in a dark shed for rocky straps, sheepskin and waterproofs, no dinner and bed around midnight. Instead of a peaceful eight hours of deep sleep, I tossed and turned for four anxiously awaiting for the alarm clock like a racer waits for the one minute board.

I guess the scenario was replayed in thousands of homes all around Australian as enthusiasts prepared for the ride to Phillip Island. In my case, I didn't even bother with a cup of caffeine that morning — I just had to get the K100RS mobile and on the road.

Cruising through Sydney at 5 am, there were already a few like-minded souls on their way. Jamie McIlwraith on a new R100RS beemer joined up with me at Glebe and together we set off for Bulli Tops for a rendezvous with ad man John Waugh, riding a GSX-R1100K Suzuki.

Over in Coogee, Nick Rooth was strapping saddle bags to the rear of Honda's restyled CBR1000 while his mate Fred Malouk gave his trusty CB-900 the once-over after blasting down from Lightning Ridge the previous day. Meanwhile big brother John succumbed to the pressures of being a big-time motorcycle magazine editor and headed off for another day at the Bourke Road Salt Mines, planning a licence defying thrash down the Hume the next night on the '89 model ZX-10 Kawasaki.

Work was the furthest thing from our minds however, as we topped up tanks at Bulli for the run down the Princes Highway. John Waugh had arrived early and was nowhere to be seen, giving the GSX-R a dawn caning through the Bulli Bends while Jamie and I watched the steady stream of bikes heading south.

This was to set the tone for the thousand kilometre, one day run to the Island and the more leisurely, two day run home. Travelling through Berri at eight o'clock on the Thursday morning was a bit like passing through Lithgow on Easter Saturday, except that Lithgow is only half an hour from Bathurst and Berri is more like 900 kilometres from Phillip Island. Every service station, every milk bar and later in the day, every pub on the highway had motorcycles parked nearby and enthusiasts milling around. A five minute smoke by the side of the road was inevitably accompanied by waves of passing bikes. It seemed every registered motorcycle in NSW was on the road that morning.



*We'd half-expected the CBR and the ZX-10 to be very similar on the open road, but the reality was different. Waugh went for the ZX-10, Roothy and Seddo the CBR.*



*Two thousand kilometres times four bikes equals one humongous fuel bill. Thankfully, Phillip Island isn't too far from Bass Strait . . .*

### Taxing times

Unfortunately, a similar proportion of Highway Patrol vehicles were also out enjoying the fresh autumn air, but it didn't stop a spirited run through the famed Kiama Bends, Waugh way out in front on the lightly packed Suzuki and Jamie showing me and half a dozen other riders the smooth line on the new boxer. No fewer than six mobile tax collectors were spotted between there and Eden, including one hero on a bike who shadowed us for a full thirty kilometres hoping we'd do something criminal and thereby justify his obvious harassment. Sorry to disappoint you, mate.

Waterproofs were broken out at Genoa, where we stopped for lunch, and I offered to forsake the comfort, civility and weather protection of the K100RS to allow Waugh a rest from the GSX-R. John hadn't been interested in swapping bikes before that point, but his wrists finally gave out after six hundred

kilometres. Or so he said. Miraculously, at the next petrol stop at Orbost, (160 km up the road) he pronounced his body totally recovered from the earlier stint on the Suzuki and demanded the keys back. The fact that the rain had stopped and this ex-road racer wanted to scratch up some more corners was totally irrelevant, he reckoned . . .

Sipping a pot of Carlton's finest that night at the Esplanade Hotel in Inverloch (about 40 km from the Island), I reflected on spending the best part of a thousand kays in one day on our Bike Of The Year. I've never been that much of a fan of the K-series BMWs, preferring the cadence of a twin for touring or the adrenalin rush of a big Japanese four, but it can't be denied that the K100RS is an enormously competent motorcycle for trips like this.

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Rider ergonomics are very good, the fairing is first rate (apart from wind buffeting my helmet) and its ability to hold top gear at virtually all road speeds is something else again. The fact that it can also carry mountains of luggage tucked away in those fantastic panniers was the icing on a finely made cake.

I wondered how the other bikes we'd begged, borrowed and stolen from the various distributors would hold up against the sport touring king. With the soul still buzzing from Sunday's race and the brain fighting a celebratory hangover, John Waugh and I joined up with Rooth Brothers Magazines on Monday morning for the day's run back to Genoa.

We had no intention of conducting a full comparison test of the four chosen



*The CBR is a real smoothie. Superb motor, good ergonomics and fuss-free, high speed handling make it hard to beat on jaunts like this.*

### HONDA CBR1000F

Claimed max. power.....	99.8 kW at 9500 rpm
Claimed max. torque.....	103.9 Nm at 8500 rpm
Bore and stroke.....	77 x 53.6 mm
Displacement.....	998 cc
Compression ratio.....	10.6:1
Maximum engine speed.....	10,500 rpm
Carburation.....	4 x 38.5 mm CV Kellins
Front tyre. Bridgestone Cyrox-15 120/70 VR17 V270 radial	
Rear Tyre.....	Bridgestone Cyrox-16G 170/60 VR17 V270 radial
Dry weight.....	230 kg
Seat height.....	780 mm
Wheelbase.....	1500 mm
Fuel capacity (incl. res.).....	21 litres
Manufacturer.....	Honda Motor Company, Tokyo, Japan
Test machine.....	Honda Australia, Rydalmer, NSW
Price.....	\$9985 plus orc

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sports tourers — we'd be kidding no-one to suggest that a two day, thousand kilometre sprint up the East Coast was a definitive test — but that wasn't going to stop us enjoying ourselves immensely and passing on our thoughts to you.

Unlike the trip down, the run home was more a series of quick 150 to 250 km squirts with lots of stops for photos, coffees and yarning with others on the road. Despite inclement weather and lots more of those funny white cars with sirens and blue flashing lights, speeds were high as we tackled some of the best riding country in Australia, particularly the stretch from Orbost in Victoria to Bodalla in NSW.

## Coffin nails

The bikes all looked fairly similar on paper with their four cylinder, double overhead camshaft engines, yet each provided a very different riding experience. At one extreme we had the K100RS with the accent heavily weighted towards serious touring duties, while at the other we had Suzuki's hard and fast mega blaster, the GSX-R1100K. In between these extremes sat the Kawasaki ZX-10 which we expected to prove pretty similar to the CBR1000. Honda, but even these two bikes were as different as chalk and cheese as our four testers changed bikes like a polygamous sheikh at a wife-swapping party. Oh dear, another nail in the coffin for that school of thought that says all Japanese bikes are the same.

The BMW four is starting to show its age in terms of outright performance against the ferocious power of the modern Japanese fours, though you would have doubted that had you seen



*The three Japanese contenders had power to burn. ABS brakes prevented the K100RS joining the fun.*

the elder Rooth clear out from the pack on one of his favourite roads. Gear changing is a waste of time on the K — it's more a matter of winding up the relatively heavy flywheel and keeping it there. The surprise however, was that everything that super-grunty K100 could do, the Suzuki could do better, not exactly what you'd expect from a supersports. The major difference is that down changing the GSX-R is certainly no waste of time, with performance above 8000 rpm right up there in Tomorrowland.

Mind you, it takes a lot of road and oversized genitalia to pick the difference in top end performance of any of the three Japanese bikes — for all practical purposes, individual rider skills would determine the outcome of a straight line drag up through the gears.

The ZX-10 and to a lesser extent, the CBR1000, lack the bottom end and midrange grunt of the Beemer and the Suzuki. The Kawasaki in particular demands a fair amount of gear shifting

# FOUR PLAY



to keep the power on the boil. When the pace got especially warm, both the Honda and the Kawasaki didn't mind holding fifth as an effective top gear, with sixth being employed as a quasi-overdrive during 'transport sections'.

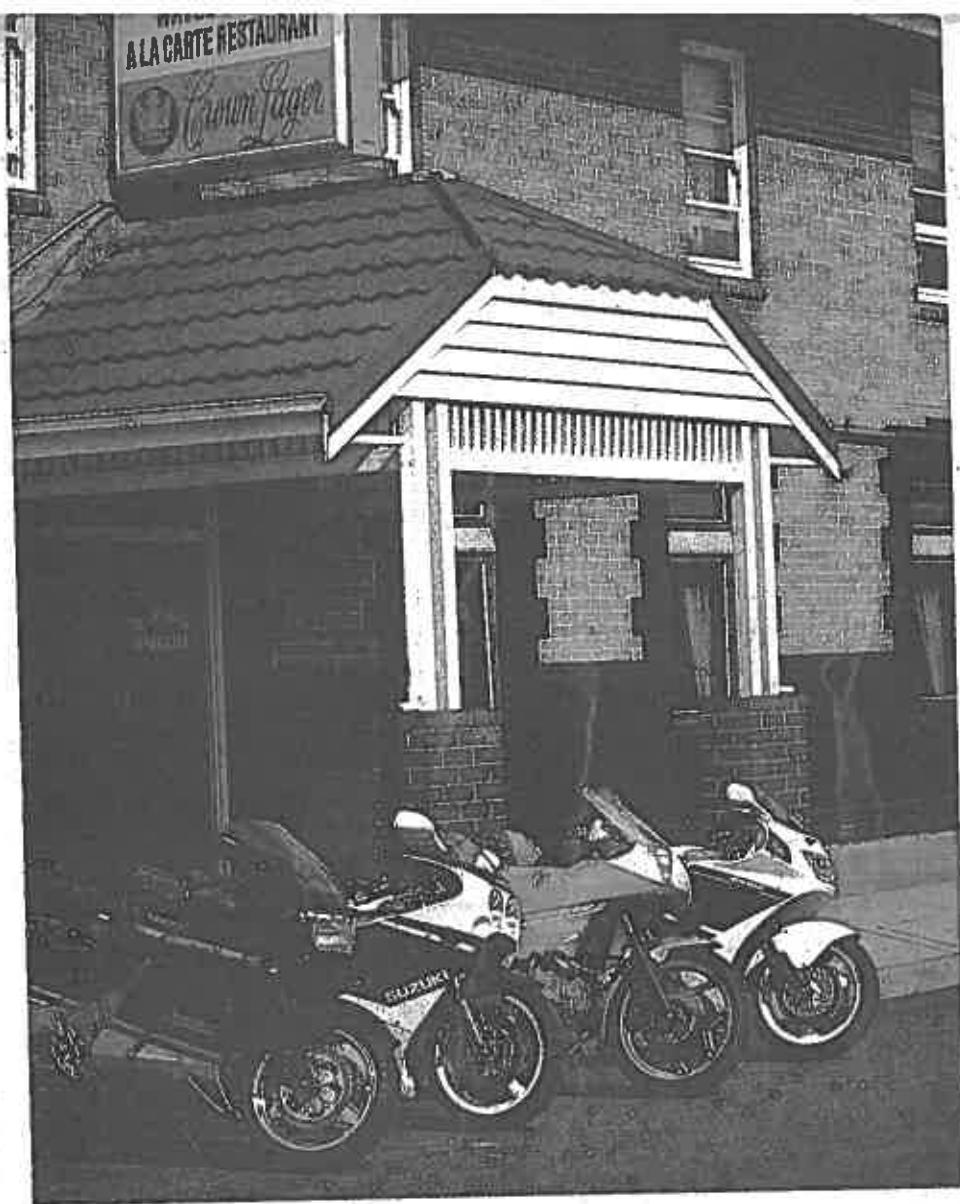
These comments should be read of course, in the context of the race — I mean ride — up the South Coast. A bloke could ride on his own from Brisbane to Cairns and never get the ZX-10 out of top gear. It's just that when a fellow motorcycle journalist goes flying past you on say, the GSX-R, prone on the tank and with a maniacal grin bursting through his beard, the incentive is there to knock it back a



Sharp steering, firmer suspension and a top end that'd put Dolly Parton to shame make the ZX-10 a fine, interstate highway blaster.

## KAWASAKI ZX-10

Claimed max. power.....	103.6 kW at 10,000 rpm
Claimed max. torque.....	103.0 Nm at 8000 rpm
Bore and stroke.....	74.0 x 58.0 mm
Displacement.....	997 cc
Compression ratio.....	11.0:1
Maximum engine speed.....	11,000 rpm
Carburation.....	4 x 36 mm
	Kelvin CVKD
Front tyre.....	Dunlop K455FG 120/70 VR17 radial
Rear Tyre.....	Dunlop K455A 180/60 VR18 radial
Dry weight.....	222 kg
Seat height.....	780 mm
Wheelbase.....	1490 mm
Fuel capacity (incl. res.).....	22 litres
Manufacturer.....	Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Akashi, Japan
Test machine.....	Kawasaki Motors Pty Ltd, Rydalmere, NSW
Price.....	\$9900 plus ort



couple of gears and (as the police have a habit of saying in court) "give pursuit". Great fun.

Where the Honda excels above the other three contenders is in engine vibration, or more accurately, the virtual absence of same. The damn thing's like riding a turbine, whisper quiet and smooth as an ad man's bottom. I guess the power characteristics of the GSX-R, combined with the smoothness of the CBR and the flywheel effect of the BMW would give you the perfect sports touring motor, but really all four bikes had wonderful touring engines and all acquitted themselves well.

Similarly, general steering, handling and comfort of the four bikes were all more than adequate for this type of trip. For the long haul, the BMW is clearly the best bike although the Honda is also remarkably good, and at a much lower price. The Kwacka is a little more harsh and the GSX-R much more so. Having said that, Waugh managed a one thousand kilometre day on the Suzuki

with only a brief respite and found it okay.

Our mad, stop/race progress up the coast basically reversed the long haul rankings. For this style of 'touring', the BMW was relatively slow and the handling unresponsive in contrast to the Suzuki, which ended up being the bike everyone wanted to ride after each stop. Waugh also enjoyed immensely the sharper steering feel of the ZX-10 compared to the slightly softer CBR, whereas I much preferred the slower steering Honda to the Kwacka.

As far as practicality goes, again the BMW came up trumps by virtue of its superior fairing and luggage system. The Honda and Kawasaki were pretty good with plenty of spots to attach octopus straps, whereas the GSX-R rider will always travel light. The Suzuki's high foot rests were in stark contrast to the much more relaxed riding position of the Beemer, with the Kawasaki just being edged out by the Honda for runner up spot.



Bench testing at the bar of a packed Genoa Hotel on the Monday night and again in the office on Wednesday saw little chance of reaching consensus on which was the best bike for a run like this. John Waugh went for the ZX-10 as the right blend of high speed handling, steering and comfort, Nick Rooth fell for the K100RS for its genuine touring finesse and luggage capacity, while John Rooth and I opted for the Honda. Putting all notions of objectivity aside (a rare pleasure for road testers), Rooth The Elder reckoned the BMW was the one he'd most like to own ("...longevity, grunt, parts availability, ABS brakes, and people have only just started to customise them . . ."), while the rest of us lusted after the GSX-R1100 on an "in for a penny, in for a pound" rationale. The big, horny Suzuki is one exciting motorcycle, there's no doubt about that.

The opinions of the hundreds of riders we spoke to over the trip and at the Island itself were similarly divided. Those

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## SECOND OPINION



who saw themselves as serious scratchers opted for the Suzuki while the waxed cotton brigade and many of the more mature enthusiasts scored the K100RS a clear winner. Those who like a bit both ways were pretty evenly divided between the flash CBR and the imposing ZX-10.

If anything, the howl down and back up the east coast proved that there is no shortage of serious sports touring motorbikes around, and each is different enough from the other to enable the prospective buyer the opportunity to get the one that suits him or her right down to the ground. The ride also reminded us what a terrific motorbike road the Princes Highway is (NSW police notwithstanding) and reaffirmed why we all got into this business in the first place. Sharing the experience with the thousands of enthusiasts who rode with us will ensure we remember this ride for a very long time.

Motorcycling. There's nothing like it, is there ...

I stopped breathing from the time I realised that was a police car coming over the crest to the moment he'd become a spec in the mirror. I was on my own, trying to make up time so the trip to the Island wouldn't drag on all night. I'd let the big ZX-10 have its head on the straights past Goulburn and there's nothing like having the speedo flickering over 200 km/h when you spot those blue lights.

That's the trouble with all these four bikes. They've got so much potential, it's hard not to use it when you're in a hurry. But if nothing else, this trip away served to reinforce two ideas that have been bugging me for a while.

Firstly, bikes can look much the same and rack up similar specifications yet be totally different in character. To wind up with a favourite on a run like this is to find the bike that 'fits' you best because they're all damned good machines — just different. Secondly, to be 'king of the highway' — the fast guy (or girl) that others can't catch — could be achieved on any bike of this calibre, because it all boils down to how good the rider is — and how far he's prepared to push the limit.

Without a doubt the GSX-R1100 was

Mr Quick on tour but at the expense of some comfort. Then came the mighty ZX-10 which has a similar top-end to the Suzuki, but felt weaker lower down than Honda's big smoothie, the CBR1000. BMW's K100 was outclassed in the power and handling departments but try shaking the bloody thing from your mirrors when things start to get gung-ho! Especially in the rain, where tractability combined with ABS brakes means the limit can be strung out that little extra bit. After all, going fast on the open road is a confidence trick at the best of times.

It's a funny thing, but a lot of the chat we had with fellow motorcyclists was about the good old Bathurst days. I guess Phillip Island really tickled a few memories. But whichever bike I was on when the flashbacks hit there was one thing that was blatantly obvious — motorcycles have come a hell of a long way in the last decade. This year's crop is the best yet.

And having said that, I'd better mention that Fred's nine year old Bol d'Or 900 was never far behind. Makes you wonder what the rush is about, doesn't it?

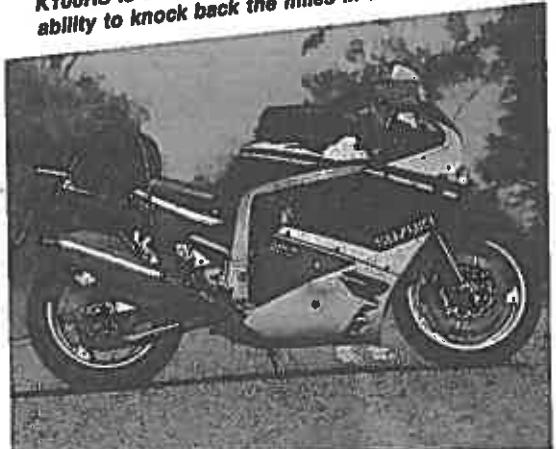
— John Rooth



K100RS is the slowie of the bunch but has the ability to knock back the miles in double-quick time.

### BMW K100RS (ABS)

Claimed max. power.....	66 kW at 8000 rpm
Claimed max. torque.....	86 Nm at 6000 rpm
Bore and stroke.....	67.0 x 70.0 mm
Displacement.....	986 cc
Compression ratio.....	10.2:1
Maximum engine speed.....	8500 rpm
Carburation.....	LE-Jetronic injection
Front tyre.....	Metzeler A49 100/90 V18
Rear Tyre.....	Metzeler M49 130/90 V17
Curb weight.....	249 kg
Seat height.....	810 mm
Wheelbase.....	1516 mm
Fuel capacity (incl. res.).....	22 litres
Manufacturer.....	BMW Motorrad, Munich, West Germany
Test machine.....	BMW Australia, South Yarra, Vic.
Price.....	\$14,350 plus org



The bike that looks like it's doing the ton sitting on its stand does not disappoint on the highway.

### SUZUKI GSX-R1100K

Claimed max. power.....	104.3 kW at 9500 rpm
Claimed max. torque.....	111.7 Nm at 7250 rpm
Bore and stroke.....	78.0 x 59.0 mm
Displacement.....	1127 cc
Compression ratio.....	10.0:1
Maximum engine speed.....	11,500 rpm
Carburation.....	4 x 38 mm CV Mikuni 'Slingshots'
Front tyre.....	Michelin A59X 120/70 ZR17 Radial
Rear Tyre.....	Michelin M69X 160/60 ZR17 Radial
Dry weight.....	210 kg
Seat height.....	795 mm
Wheelbase.....	1440 mm
Fuel capacity (incl. res.).....	21 litres
Manufacturer.....	Suzuki Motor Company, Hamamatsu, Japan
Test machine.....	Suzuki Australia, Camellia, NSW
Price.....	\$11,399 plus org

AUSTRALIAN

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