ROAD TEST

'Because the FireBlade and ZX-10R make their peak power further up the rev range, and their gear ratios make good use of these revs, they eventually pull out yards on the GSX-R1000'

O HONDA FIREBLADE 93% O KAWASAKI ZX-10R 91% O SUZUKI GSX-R1000 92%

FIGHTING IT OUT ON THE ROAD...

MCN's world-first superbike group test delivers our verdict on which of the new 1000cc beasts is easiest to tame on the UK's public roads...

BY TREVOR FRANKLIN PICTURES JOHN NOBLE

HIS is the year of the superbike. Honda and Kawasaki have entered the 1000cc racederived motorcycle arena to take on 2003's leader, the mighty Suzuki GSX-R1000.

Honda has introduced a new FireBlade – the CBR1000RR. Designed by the same team which produced the incredible RC211V MotoGP title winner, its frame and ancillaries bear a close resemblance to the race bike. And it has bags of power and exemplary handline.

exemplary handling. Kawasaki's ZX-10R topped MCN's indepth analysis earlier this year, and looks to be the GSX-R1000's natural challenger on the road – with racing credentials, a massive beam-railed frame, petal-type discs (a first for a production bike), short wheelbase and claims of 182bhp.

MCN's world-first test of the two latest superbikes against a known enemy was conducted on British A and B-roads in British weather, and a test circuit for an exacting performance comparative giving a definitive result. But it all started with the three bikes on a dyno...



POWER AND GLORY

IT'S late afternoon and all eyes are focused on a 15-inch monitor cable-linked to a computer, which is talking binary to a Dynojet Model 250i dynamometer. Now is the time we discover how much power each bike really makes at the rear wheel, without relying on the manufacturers' claims.

+

Suzuki's GSX-R1000 sets the power pace with 144bhp and a torque figure of 74.8ftb. We've tested other GSX-Rs at 148bhp and some can dip to 141 bhp. The reason for this seemingly large difference is down to modern mass-production methods, where little time can be afforded to smooth out burrs and rough edges inside the engine that may rob it of power.

Honda's FireBlade, at the lowest point of its rear Pirelli Diablo Corsa tyre, leaps ahead of the GSX-R with 146 horses but marginally lower torque at 73.93ftlb. But the really impressive point is that the

Blade's LCD temperature gauge reads no higher than 85°C at any point in the run. The Suzuki's gauge proves equally constant, hovering around the 88-89°C range.

The reason for the Blade's efficient cooling is its huge radiator. It almost fills the front of the lower fairing, curving beautifully + into a triangular point. It's of race quality, according to the dyno man. Honda has obviously put a heap of thermodynamic thought into the Blade's design. Next up is Kawasaki's ZX-IOR. Onlooke

Next up is Kawasaki's ZX-10R. Onlookers start spurting guesses. I enter the verbal sweepstake with a figure of 149bhp. Seconds later the result is on the screen:

Seconds later the result is on the screen: power 14779bhp, torque 74.62ftlb. More power than the others and almost as much torque as the GSX-R. Nothing outrageous at all. Looks of disappointment abound as most of our guesses were way too high. The decisive and final words come from the dyno operator's dry lips: "What did you expect, a WSB bike on the road? It's a road bike; you can only deal with so much power and speed, you know..." It was time to ride the bikes.

DELIVERING THE GOODS

THE GSX-R1000's grunt is legendary. Throttle delivery is super-smooth and faultfree. From first to sixth gear the Suzuki responds impeccably.

Rising to the challenge of mastering big power by working the throttle hard nets an explosive response. The GSX-R's torque is concentrated low down and the bike is punted forward – on how many wheels exactly depends on how hard the throttle grip is cranked. Either way it will leap forward and rack up revs and speed very, very quickly. From partial opening to fully open there is a huge grin reaction.

If the rear tyre and road surface are warm then the 190-section Bridgestone will dig in to give a massive wheelie. Second gear has the same effect. And third... but this requires clutch slip. Who said big bikes are serious? They are fun with a capital F. The real beauty is the GSX-R's ability to

The real beauty is the GSX-R's ability to pull clear of traffic without banging back through the box. Only when your blood's up does the gearbox need stirring. And even then only at high speed.

Because the Honda and Kawasaki make their peak power further up the rev scale, and their gear ratios make good use of these revs, they will eventually pull out yards on the GSX-R.

The Kawasaki is a different animal to the Suzuki, although not an animal that's an uncontrollable beast. It just delivers the goods differently.

Without the GSX-R's low-down stomp the



ROAD TEST





From previous page

other two bikes feel flat below 6-7000rpm especially when jumping between them. But they are not. How could a race derived 1000cc bike feel flat?

At 4000rpm the Kawasaki kicks hard, then kicks again at 6000rpm. From this point the engine buried between those massive frame spars screams as loudly as the exhaust note, and both increase in pitch until the revs hit 12,000rpm. The Kawasaki is one of the few bikes where the noise from the exhaust is still heard in the higher gears where windblast would normally carry the noise away from the rider's ears. Like the GSX-R, the ZX-10R's wheel is

Like the GSX-R, the ZX-10R's wheel is happy to claw its way skyward under power. But where the Suzuki does it low down, the ZX-10R won't lift until the 6000rpm mark. It all adds to the effect of a definite powerband. It has been said that it feels peaky, but it isn't – it's just that the green devil only gets into its stride further along its LCD rev counter (see page 30). The Honda is much the same as the Kwak. There is little impression of velocity below 6000rpm, but after that it hitches its knickers up and gets underway. There is a difference though. The Honda feels less eager or rampant from 0-60mph. And the reasons are...

At 213.5kg fully laden (all fluids including fuel) the Blade is the heaviest of the bunch (the GSX-R weighs 201.5kg, the ZX-10R 199.5kg). This makes a difference when mated with a 1410mm wheelbase – the same as the GSX-R's. The Kwak has an unbelievably short wheelbase of 1385mm which is the main reason that it rears up a lot a saise than the Blade.

Iot easier than the Blade. This impression of comparatively lacklustre performance low down also encourages the rider to downshift when he doesn't really need to. If it's a case of wanting to crack on with the front hovering just above Tarmac then all three bikes' gearboxes have to be stirred. Yes, these bikes do bring out the hooligan element. The Kawasaki loses marks in the engine department due to its heavy gearchange. It's not so much stiff, or reluctant to let cogs mesh, but heavy. And it needs a positive movement of the lever to ensure the gears engage. It is tiring and painful. By the end of a day's riding there was a blister forming on one of our tester's big toes.

As if by way of saying sorry, Kawasaki has provided a bike with a smile-inducing slipper clutch. By allowing the clutch to partially slip until engine speed matches rear wheel speed, the bike remains poised and stable when braking hard and banging down the box without blipping the throttle – using engine braking to its best effect.

QUALITY OF RIDE

KÅWASAKI makes no bones about the fact that its ZX-10R is for experienced riders only – and with very good reason. If you can imagine a race bike that is amazingly quick steering at all speeds, which drops into turns at the blink of an eye and fires out of them even quicker, then you're thinking of the ZX-10R.



FIREBLADE

WHAT you get with the FireBlade's Showa suspension is near perfection from the off. And so it should be, as Honda all but owns Showa.

MCN'S ROAD SETTINGS:

 Front pre-load:
 One ring extra (clockwise)

 Front compression:
 As standard

 Front rebound:
 One click extra (in)

 Rear pre-load:
 As standard

 Rear compression:
 Quarter turn extra (in)

 Rear rebound:
 Quarter turn extra (in)



ZX-10R

FOR a full-on superbike the ZX-10R's suspension is really compliant – nowhere near as hard as the 636cc ZX-6R equivalent, thankfully.

MCN'S ROAD SETTINGS

Front pre-load: Tw	o extra turns clockwise
Front compression:	Two clicks extra (in)
Front rebound:	Two clicks less (out)
Rear pre-load:	As standard
Rear compression:	As standard
Rear rebound:	Quarter turn extra (in)









4



THE 2004 SUPERBIKES IN DETAIL















- **RADIAL** calipers work on twin 300mm discs
- **2ANALOGUE** rev counter sits next to the GSX-R's digital speedo
- SWINGARM is unchanged from The 2003 model
- **STRONG** chassis is retained on the British Superbike racer this year

DISTINCTIVE cluster of LEDs marks out the GSX-R's rear

The Suzuki is also quick to drop on to its side, but not so rapidly at high speed. More muscle input through the bars is required, or a good few yards earlier reaction time, to haul the old girl over. Remember, at the speeds these bikes generate reaction time has to be as good as – if not better than –

the brakes. Somewhere in between is the Honda. The Blade has the most neutral feel when it comes to tackling corners. What it also has is a tendency to run wide in slower speed turns if you're not 100 per cent committed to opening the throttle at the apex. Go out of the turn on a neutral throttle, or back off by one millimetre and the front will push wide. This was reduced to an acceptable level – no worse than the GSX-R – by hiking up the front pre-load (see below). When it comes to braking, the Kawasaki's stoppers did lack initial feel – compared to

the other two bikes – on our British roads. They seemed to lack overall power compared to the machines ridden at the



didn't get any better the harder and longe the lever was squeezed.

One theory that holds water is that the bike was run-in over the course of a typically wet British winter and the pads had simply glazed over. Arm ache is the end result of a fast life with the Honda. The FireBlade's front calipers stop with the authority of a Russian

calipers stop with the authority of a Russian border guard brandishing a high-powered rifle. They are very precise and powerful. Just a gentle pull of the lever is all it takes to haul the Honda up without fuss.

As all the bikes on test here run with the same brand of caliper it's surprising how much difference there is in action and feel between the three. The Suzuki's work very well too, but the difference in feel between the FireBlade and the GSX-R1000 is like chalk and cheese. Differing pad compounds may well account for this.

Superbikes are meant to be mad and bad, but if you want the most rewarding and easy to ride, the Blade is best. But then there's styling to take into consideration...

GSX-R1000

THE Suzuki's stock suspension suits varying weights, riding speeds and conditions. But a better all-round set-up can be achieved for little effort.

MCN'S ROAD SETTINGS





BLADE'S four-pot radial calipers grip 310mm discs

- **2**RCV-STYLE readout features a gearshift warning light
- **SUNIT Pro-Link rear shock allows** Trouting of rear cylinders' exhaust
- **DIE-CAST** alloy frame travels over the motor, keeping width down

Stwin-EXIT exhaust has **EXUP**-style Svalve maximising torque and power



PETAL' 300mm discs designed for increased feel and stopping power

- **2**X-10R digital readout is identition to the ZX-6R's display
- SWINGARM is massively braced and weighs less than ZX-6R's unit
 - LIGHTWEIGHT, compact chassis ensures razor-sharp handling
- **SCLEAR LED** tail-light gives the **ZX-10R** a tidy rear end



BUT if you had



Which one takes the crown for the staff at MCN?

UPERBIKES are almost as much about looks as they are performance. When you've got one of the fastest bikes about you want people to know about it it is vital that it kicks butt in the car park as much as it does on the race track.

Few bikes have caused such a stir as these three. As soon as

they appeared outside the MCN office, people from all departments were crowding around, twisting throttles, prodding and speaking in hushed tones. "Which one looks the fastest?" asked one. "What's your favourite?" asked another. We listened in on what they had to say. Unlike the road test, opinion is split.



VIEWS FROM THE OFFICE



AUSTIN SMITH Age: 27 Job: Designer

Current bike: Honda NC30 Which bike do you fancy? The ZX-10R. Its chassis and swingarm look like they're from a GP bike. The built-in indicators are

good too. Which sounds best? The GSX-R. Its raspy note makes it the only choice. Which would you have?

The ZX-10R - it's just awesome. The riding position was the best, too. It's just so small I felt like Rossi. Would you be swayed if it wasn't the fastest? No

Is the reputation of previous **models a factor in your choice?** *No. I like the fact the ZX-10R is a* fresh start and that it will build as aood a history as anything else. Would you say you're a Kawasaki person? l've always been a Honda person but I still prefer the Kawasaki



DAVID GRANGER

Age: 33 Job: Production Editor Current bike: Suzuki Bandit GSF600N Which of these bikes do you like the look of most? The GSX-R1000. The styling works the best for me - it looks slightly less agaressive than the other two

and I prefer that. Which sounds best? The Honda FireBlade. I love the exhaust note coming out of the underseat pipe.

Which would you have? The GSX-R. It not only looks the smartest to my eyes, it is also the most comfortable of the bunch to ride – it looks the least terrifying, too

Would your decision be swayed if the GSX-R wasn't the fastest or the most powerful? Yes

Is the reputation of previous models a factor in your choice? No, but you do need to know

'I'd still go for the GSX-R1000. It not only looks the smartest to my eves, it is also the most comfortable of the bunch to ride – it looks the least terrifying, too' DAVID GRANGER

you're buying a quality bike. Would you say you are a particular make person, eg 'he/she likes his Kawasakis'? No, I try to judge each bike on their merits



JAY LINGFIELD Age: 27

Job: Salesman Current bike owned: ZX-7R Which bike do you fancy? The CBR and Kawasaki equally Which bike sounds the best? The ZX-10R - it sounds awesome Which bike would you have? I would go for the ZX-10R. It is a stepping stone up from my bike and is a lean green racing machine. It also has the most

extreme image. Would your decision be swayed if it wasn't the fastest or the most powerful? No

Is the reputation of previous models a factor in your choice? No.

Would you say you are particular make person, eg 'he/she likes his Kawasakis'? No. I try and look at all bikes equally, no matter what make they are



MICHAEL GUY

Age: 31 Job: MCN WSB reporter Current bike: KTM Duke Which bike do you fancy? The FireBlade

Which sounds the best? The GSX-R1000 - the resonance of the airbox shakes through the whole bike.

Which bike would you have? The Honda. It just looks right - like a GP bike. The rear end is beautiful and the styling is typical Honda right first time. It makes the Kawasaki look crude and the GSX-R look old.

Would your decision be swaved if the Honda wasn't the fastest or the most powerful? No

Is the reputation of previous models a maior factor in your choice? No

Would you say you are particular make person, eg 'The Honda just looks right – like a GP bike. The rear end is beautiful and the styling is typical Honda - right first time. It makes the Kawasaki look crude and the GSX-R look old' MICHAEL GUY

'he/she likes his Kawasakis'? Yes, but I'm actually more of a Yamaha man - I can't wait for the new R1

brand of bike. Would you say you are particular make person, eg 'he/she likes his Kawasakis'? Yes I've always been a fan of Suzukis – they look good and handle well.

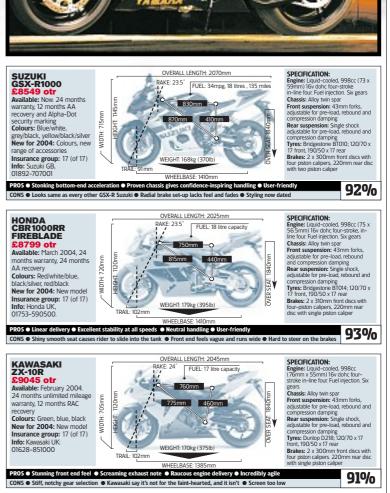


TONI LIBURD

Age: 31. Job: Ad sales manager Current bike: Suzuki SV650S. Which bike do you fancy? The GSX-R. They always look awesome to me. Which bike sounds the best? The ZX-10R Which bike would you have? The GSX-R. I feel that I would have more control over it. The other two just look too powerful. Would your decision be swayed if it wasn't the fastest or the

most powerful? Is the reputation of previous

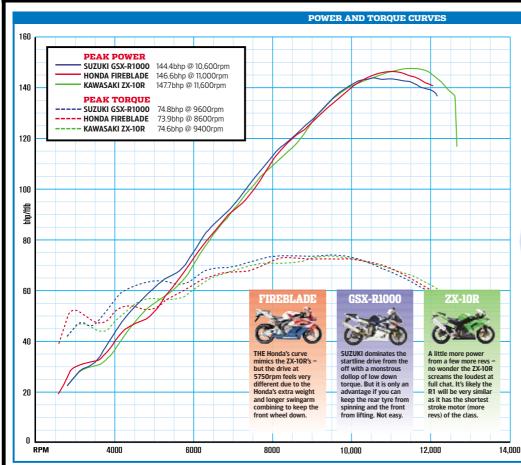
models a factor in your choice? Yes - you always want the coolest



CONTINUES OVER PAGE

ROAD TEST

POWER AND TORQUE CURVES



Talking the torque

DYNO charts are good at revealing how much power and torque an engine produces at the rear wheel, but can also make manufacturer power output claims look preposterous. Why? Kawasaki claims the ZX-10R produces 172.5bhp

Kawasaki claims the ZX-10R produces 172.5bhp – at the crankshaft. MCN gives power as a real world, rear wheel figure, where we got 147.9bhp.

The difference is due to a number of factors. The biggest is driveline loss – the bhp sapped in the transfer of power from the crank, through the clutch, gearbox, drive chain etc, to the rear wheel. This usually takes as much as 11 per cent of claimed crank power, taking the ZX-10R to 153.2bhp. Close, but not the whole story.

In addition, manufacturers give their figures as a SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers, the normal standard for claimed figures) measurement. But to ensure test conditions (atmospheric pressure, temperature, air humidity) are equal at all times an agreed SAE correction factor is then used.

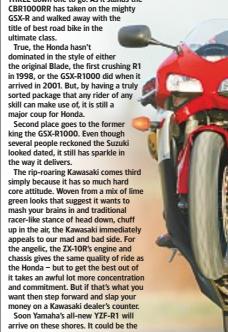
However, Asia and most of Europe including the UK use a slightly different correction factor (EEC) which gives lower results. If we'd used the SAE factor, that 153.2 becomes 148.4bhp – or almost the 147.79bhp EEC figure we measured. So, noone's lying, just technically stretching the truth...



MCN's dyno figures are taken at the rear wheel

STANDING QUARTER-MILE ACCELERATION THE closest recorded quarters in the history of MCN. This tells us the manufacturers have perhaps reached the limit on what they can produce and what we, and the tyres, can deal with from a standing start. ZX-10R 10.50sec 142.81 GSX-R1000 10.55sec 140.54mph 10.55sec 141.27mph CBR Terminal speed Time to cover 1/4-r TOP SPEED THE ZX-10R and GSX-R speedos were both locked at 186mph yet they were still pulling. Expect higher figures in the dryness of summer, especially from the Blade. Its top 31sec 179.8mph ZX-10R 32sec GSX-R1000 179.03mph CBR100 12.53sec TEST ABANDONED DUE TO ICE speed run was stopped due to ice Top speed en to reach top speed BRAKING FROM 70-OMPH ALTHOUGH lambasted on the road, the Kawasaki's brakes perked up on the braking test to good effect. The Suzuki, meanwhile, shows once 3.88se ZX-10 50.101m 3.40sec GSX-R1000 53.783m 3.74sec 50.247m again how to get superbike brakes Distance covered Time ta wrong TOP GEAR ROLL ON 40-120MPF THE GSX-R's torque delivery punches it to the front and it never gets topped. The Honda is stiffed because of a pronounced dip in its 10.40sec ZX-10 365.35m 354.29m 10.00sec GSX-R1000 11.70se torque 3750rpm – where it sits at 40mph. Don't do it, folks. Distance covered Time tal

And the winner is...



Soon Yamaha's all-new YZF-R1 will arrive on these shores. It could be the fighting cat amongst the racing pigeons. MCN's track, road and performance test in our February 18 edition will see which is the real superbike.

THE FireBlade is back on top – until the new R1 arrives at least

Did we sell our soul to the devil?



MCN sports bike of the year over 601cc • Fast Bikes sports bike of the year • Superbike best litre sports bike • Superbike best of the best • Men and Motors top supersports bike • Formula 1 and Senior IOM TT winner • 7 firsts, 10 seconds, 5 thirds in BSB 2003 - 22 places out of 36 • World Endurance champions and runners up • Masters of Endurance GSX-R1000 3 races - 3 wins • 2003 AMA Superbikes champion and runner up • 2003 Australian Superbikes champion • No.1 selling bike over 601cc • Just wait for 2004



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