

ROAD TEST

☆ HONDA CBR600RR 93% ☆ HONDA CBR600F 90%

CBR v CBR

When the F is better than the RR

Honda's CBR600RR may be our Machine of the Year, but the older F still has its virtues...

RIDING POSITION

THE 600F has a much more relaxed riding position than the racy RR. Its clip-ons are positioned above the top yoke and the footpegs, which are rubber topped to isolate engine vibes from the rider, are positioned lower. The softly-padded seat is lower too, which makes it a better option for those riders who would have to use tip-toes to touch the floor on the firmer and higher RR seat.

The F's higher handlebars also mean it is easier to get the leverage necessary to muscle the bike around, and this is helpful when threading your way through town traffic. It assists when making fast direction changes at speed, too.



WEATHER PROTECTION

YOU are much better shielded from the elements on the 600F. Its screen sits slightly taller and because the seat is lower – you sit 'in' the bike rather than perched 'on' the RR – the F is much more effective at keeping off wind and rain. The tank shape also contributes to keeping your nether regions protected from the weather.

Both CBRs use the same mirrors but they give quite different views because of the differences in the bikes' riding positions. Both show more rider elbow than we like, but of the two, the F gives a marginally better view.



RIDE QUALITY

THE RR's suspension is set up firm as standard, and is almost 'track-ready' right from the crate.

Its suspension technology is MotoGP inspired. The rear remote 'Unit Pro-Link' linkage does away with a top shock mount which frees space to help centralise the RR's weight, resulting in better handling. Beefy 45mm forks adorn the front end.

The 600F has far more conventional suspension technology and is altogether softer than the RR. This gives a more relaxing ride and helps instil the rider with bags of confidence – especially in the wet.

Like the RR, the 600F has fully adjustable suspension though, so it's easy to set up for fast road riding and track days.



THE brilliant new CBR600RR may have trounced the competition on the road and the track, but

Honda is still bringing the evergreen CBR600F to showrooms next year.

The F might not be as focused as the RR but that means it has far wider appeal to those who not only enjoy the odd track day, but also want to go touring, commute

and have less to spend. So to see exactly where the F can score over the RR, we tested the two models head to head for the first time.

Even at a glance the 600F and 600RR are obviously very different machines: the RR is a dead ringer for Valentino Rossi's 2003 MotoGP bike, while the years have turned the F from cutting edge to soft and cuddly.

With the 600RR, Honda has well and truly spoiled us. It has

got looks to die for and the performance to match.

The power from its 599cc motor is crisp and smooth and despite a heady 15,000rpm redline and serious top-end punch it still has good low and mid-range power.

But handling is the RR's ace card, combining unflappable stability with razor sharp steering.

In its short life (it has only been available in dealers since April) it is already dripping



BY MICHAEL NEEVES
PICTURES
HOWARD BOYLAN

PILLION OPINION

JUST looking at the two CBRs side by side tells the story before you even attempt to carry a passenger.

The MotoGP-inspired RR's pillion seat is a token gesture. From the pillion's point of view there's nothing to hold on to (there's no grab rail), and you are perched up high, getting the windblast full on in the head. The pegs are high, so taller passengers will get cramp very quickly.

From a rider's standpoint you would only want to get someone on the back if they needed an emergency lift home: the pillion crushes you into the tank and makes moving around very difficult. The passenger's knees also cause a total eclipse of the

already poor mirrors.

It's a very different story on the 600F. Its sporty pretensions mean it is never going to rival a Pan European or BMW K1200LT in the comfort department, but it is possible for a pillion to travel all day in relative comfort.

For starters there's a grab rail so you won't lose your passenger when you accelerate – and they won't mash you into the tank under braking either. There's plenty of legroom for the pillion, and room for the rider to shift about, too. Rear view through the mirrors isn't affected, either.

THANKS to Dobles Motorcycles (020-8668-8856) for the CBR600F



RR pillions are perched higher with less legroom...



...than those on the 600F. Rider is less cramped, too

with success. The RR won our 600cc supersport group test earlier in the year, not to mention clinching both the World and British Supersports championships.

The final icing on the cake was becoming MCN Machine of the Year – the first time a 600cc bike has claimed the top prize.

But none of that makes the F

an also-ran – far from it. It takes anything you throw at it in its stride. It will grind out the daily commute in relative comfort and transport you and your other half on a Sunday in the country.

And the F has a demonic side of its own as well. It is blisteringly fast (just 2mph slower than the RR) and its fully-adjustable suspension

lets you set it up for fast road and track work. And for some it is easier to unlock the potential of the F than the RR. It's not just the slightly softer power delivery; the more upright riding position and softer suspension instil loads of confidence.

There's no doubting the RR is the most, but sometimes, for some people, less is more...

“The F has far wider appeal to those who not only want the odd track day but also go touring, commute and have less to spend”

PERFORMANCE

THE 600F's power delivery is silky smooth all the way through the rev range to its giddy 14,250rpm redline (the RR redlines even higher at 15,000rpm) – although there is a slight dip in power at 4000rpm. The F's smoothness allows the rider to use every last slice of power with confidence.

Although the RR makes an extra 10bhp, in real world conditions the F is every bit as fast. The softly set-up suspension actually helps the 600F track over bumps and the tyres to grip the road surface on wet days. That means that when the going gets tough, the throttle can be kept pinned while the rider on the harder RR needs to throttle off.



EXHAUST/STORAGE

THE RR has the latest in motorcycle fashion statements – the underseat exhaust. As well as looking cool and keeping your bum warm in the winter it also helps improve ground clearance compared to a conventional side-mounted item.

But the price you pay is that there is little storage space available under the seat. With the handbook in situ there isn't even enough room for a mobile phone. With the handbook removed you'd be lucky to fit a Cornish pasty inside.

So the 600F wins hands down in the storage stakes. With no exhaust plumbing under the seat there's enough room for stuff like waterproofs, maps and tools.



GENTRE STAND

THE 600F benefits from being fitted with a centrestand as standard. Although it slightly hampers ground clearance on the left side, it is only really noticeable at track speeds. The benefits for most people outweigh this anyway. Putting the bike on the centrestand makes routine maintenance a doddle, especially when it comes to chain cleaning/lubing and giving your back wheel a thorough scrub. It also makes parking more secure, particularly on uneven ground.



ROAD TEST

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

SECOND OPINION



TONY HOARE, 29, is in charge of putting together MCN's product pages. His idea of biking bliss involves packing a rucksack and touring long distances.

Neither CBR is a bike he'd normally go for, much preferring machines such as the Fazer 1000 which blend great performance with comfortable riding positions and half-decent wind protection.

"I really loved the RR. It's a special bit of kit and looks amazing. There's loads of instant power, even from low down and the brakes are good too.

"But the F is more my kind of bike. It's really comfortable and the screen is better at keeping off the elements, too.

"I have far more confidence in the F's front end and although its power isn't quite as instant and it doesn't seem quite as fast, it's more than enough.

"I'm not keen on the brakes though. On the RR there was always plenty of power in reserve, but on the F they just lacked that extra little bit."

PERFORMANCE

TOP GEAR ROLL-ON FROM 40-120MPH

THERE'S very little to choose between the bikes accelerating in top from 40mph all the way to 120mph, since low and mid-range power is very similar. However the RR's superior top end allows it to edge away from the F above the ton mark.

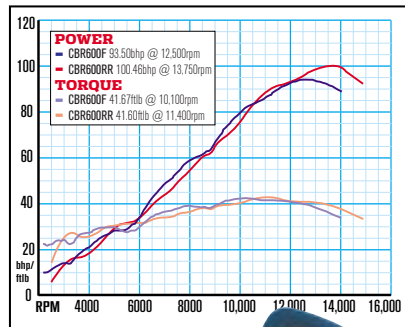
600RR			600F		
SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)
40	0	0	0	0	0
50	2.55	51.30	2.55	51.19	
60	4.95	110.33	5.00	111.54	
70	7.95	188.79	7.95	197.27	
80	10.20	274.10	10.30	275.98	
90	12.50	361.55	12.65	365.22	
100	15.05	470.08	15.30	477.90	
110	18.10	612.92	18.45	625.73	
120	20.85	754.31	21.65	790.28	

ACCELERATION THROUGH THE GEARS

THE CBRs are almost joined at the hip in a straightforward, head-to-head drag race. But amazingly it is the F that has the edge, albeit by the narrowest of margins. The F's soft suspension makes it a piece of cake to launch off the line – it just digs in and goes. Despite trying different launch techniques the firmer RR wheels away from the line every time, losing vital fractions of a second that it is unable to recover from all the way to top speed.

600RR			600F		
SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)
10	0.72	1.55	0.60	1.28	
20	1.29	5.27	1.09	4.58	
30	1.61	10.79	1.61	10.41	
40	2.29	18.55	2.13	18.55	
50	2.82	29.54	2.65	28.92	
60	3.36	42.75	3.24	43.66	
70	4.05	62.71	4.05	67.07	
80	4.90	91.44	4.83	93.26	
90	5.80	125.68	5.78	129.32	
100	6.97	175.42	6.91	177.39	
110	8.25	235.43	8.21	238.55	
120	10.07	329.34	9.91	326.00	
130	12.18	447.30	12.23	457.00	
140	15.31	636.99	15.04	626.10	
150	20.83	996.20	20.56	984.95	
160	32.02	1776.80			

POWER AND TORQUE CURVES



STANDING QUARTER-MILE ACCELERATION

THE F is slightly quicker across the quarter mile, since it is the easier bike to launch, although the more powerful RR eventually catches up and records a higher terminal speed.

600RR	125.76mph	11.40sec
600F	126.84mph	11.30sec
Terminal speed		Time to cover 1/4-mile

TOP SPEED

THE more bulbous fairing on the F helps the rider tuck in to record an impressive top speed – just 2mph down on the more powerful RR. The rider sits lower in the F too, further helping to improve the bike's aerodynamics.

600RR	161.15mph	25.25sec
600F	159.68mph	35.85sec
Top speed		Time taken to reach top speed

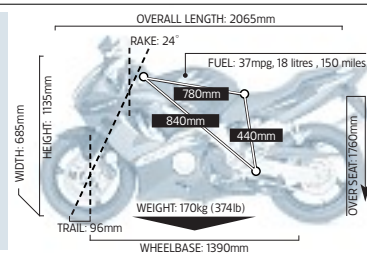
BRAKING FROM 70-0MPH

THE RR shows its race pedigree by stopping in a shorter distance than the F. Braking power and feel are both superior on the RR. The F's brakes are good, but the RR has moved things on.

600RR	47.30m	3.29sec
600F	50.81m	3.64sec
Distance covered		Time taken

HONDA CBR600F £6849 OTR

Available: Now, 24 months warranty and 12 months AA roadside recovery. Smart Water security marking. Colours: Blue, red/black. New for 2003: No updates. Insurance group: 14 (of 17). Info: Honda UK; 01753-590-500



SPECIFICATION:

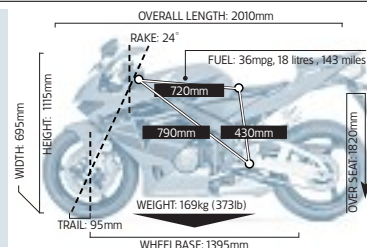
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 599cc (67 x 42.5mm), 16v dohc 4-stroke inline-four. Fuel injection, six gears. Chassis: Aluminium twin spar. Front suspension: 43mm telescopic forks, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping. Rear suspension: Single shock, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping. Tyres: 120/70 x 17, front; 180/55 x 17, rear. Brakes: 2 x 296mm discs with 4-piston calipers, front; 220mm disc with 2-piston caliper, rear.

PROS • Comfortable enough for touring and commuting • Cheaper to run • Still fast • Solid, predictable handling
CONS • Starting to look dated now • Brakes are left behind by RR • Handling not as sharp as the race-ready RR

90%

HONDA CBR600RR £7149 OTR

Available: Now, 24 months warranty and 12 months AA roadside recovery. Smart Water security marking. Colours: Red, black. New for 2003: Existing model. Insurance group: 15 (of 17). Info: Honda UK; 01753-590-500



SPECIFICATION:

Engine: Liquid-cooled, 599cc (67 x 42.5mm), 16v dohc 4-stroke inline-four. Fuel injection, six gears. Chassis: Aluminium twin spar. Front suspension: 45mm telescopic forks, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping. Rear suspension: Single shock, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping. Tyres: 120/70 x 17, front; 180/55 x 17, rear. Brakes: 2 x 310mm discs with 4-piston calipers, front; 220mm disc with 2-piston caliper, rear.

PROS • MotoGP-style looks to die for • Screaming top-end but excellent low and mid-range power too • Fantastic handling
CONS • More uncomfortable than F on long journeys • Pillion seat is a token gesture • Poor view from mirrors

93%

The F is more my kind of bike. It's really comfy and the screen is better at keeping off the elements, too

TONY HOARE, MCN

DEALS AND INSURANCE

BECAUSE the CBR600RR has only been with us since March, you'll be lucky to get much change from the £7149 list price. However you can get

some stonking discounts on the 600F. We found brand new CBR600F2s from Dobles Motorcycles in Coulsdon, Surrey for just £5695 on the road – a

massive £1154 off list price. And although running costs are very similar, the F will slash your yearly insurance bill. Here are some examples:

QUOTE 1: 33-year-old with full no claims discount, clean licence living in Peterborough. Fully comp: 600RR – £449, 600F – £3411

QUOTE 2: 25-year-old with zero no claims and three points, living in Margate, Kent. Fully comp: 600RR – £888, 600F – £786

THE CBR600F (foreground) may not have the zap and MotoGP style looks and handling of the RR version but it does arguably have more real world virtues

