

**2006 FIRST RIDES SPECIAL
NEW BIKE**

SUZUKI GSX-R600 **SUZUKI** GSX-R750 **DUCATI** MONSTER S4Rs **APRILIA** RSV1000 **KAWASAKI** ZZR1400 **KTM** 990 ADVENTURE



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**2006
1000cc
GROUP TEST**
ROAD, TRACK, DYNO & SPEED

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WHO'S THE BOSS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R vs **HONDA** CBR1000RR FIREBLADE
vs **YAMAHA** YZF-R1 vs **SUZUKI** GSX-R1000

**ZX-10R
CENTREFOLD
STRIPDOWN**
CHLOE AND THE
BRAND SPANKING
NEW NINJA



Q&A

RIDING ADVICE ■ TECHNICAL TIPS ■ EQUIPMENT CHOICES
■ LOOKING FOR A USED BIKE? YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

My God, the world is an amazing place. During virtually every single minute of every hour of every day we take this planet granted, but when you find yourself 270 metres above the River Tarn in France on an audacious homage to engineering, you can't fail to be awestruck at what the inhabitants of this

planet can achieve. The Millau Bridge is stunning, whichever way you look at it. But just as impressive is the mode of transport carrying me across this improbably stylish fusion of harsh concrete and robust steel. I'm riding a 2006 Honda Fireblade, a bike that costs under \$9,000 but is capable of being ridden at almost 170mph – and in the

current company of 2006's litre sportsbikes, that's slow. Yup, this world of ours is truly astonishing, if a little deranged at times.

Apologies for the shmaltz on what should otherwise be a hard-bitten test of the world's greatest motorcycles, but the Millau Bridge is both magical and majestic, worthy of this sentimental

detour. But condense the bridge's entire engineering prowess, its visionary design and the inherent dangers of its construction and you'll find a match for those same engineering demands in any of the four Japanese 1,000cc sportsbikes of 2006.

And just as the bridge has a huge gap to cross (a 2.5km one to be precise), so does

GRAND DESIGNS

WITH MODEL UP-DATES FROM YAMAHA AND HONDA, PLUS A TOTALLY RE-VAMPED KAWASAKI, THE 2006 LITRE BIKE SHOOTOUT IS A CONTEST OF GIANT PROPORTIONS. CAN THESE THREE MEGALITHS BRIDGE THE GAP TO SUZUKI'S ALL-CONQUERING GSX-R1000?

WORDS: SIMON ROOTS **PICS:** GRAEME BROWN, JASON CRITCHELL



YAMAHA YZF-R1

The 2006 litre bike crown was so nearly in the Yamaha's grasp, only pipped to the post by the GSX-R1000. The R1 only needed a few changes to be on par, so that's all it's had. Are they enough?

KAWASAKI ZX-10R

Raving mad in 2004 when the ZX-10R was launched, Kawasaki has applied the straight-jacket to the big Ten to get it to behave. Significant engine mods and major chassis changes show it means business

HONDA CBR1000RR

Tubby on the track, but hugely accomplished on the roads, the Fireblade has only shone in the right light. Some clever changes by the Big H now give the 2006 'blade a chance of burning perennially bright

Honda, Kawasaki and Yamaha in trying to better the same dynamic ability as Suzuki's imperial GSX-R1000. 2005 was one of those watershed years when a manufacturer stunned us with the magnificence of its creation, the sort of year when you can't see how a bike could be any better. The K5 Suzuki did last year what the original K1 did in 2001. Yamaha achieved this in 1998 with the first R1 but the real

missing link, connecting the GSX-R1000 with motorcycling's primates, was the original 1992 Honda FireBlade offering then exactly what the Suzuki does now – insanity. Between these leaps ahead were smaller, incremental steps forward, but it's the giant leaps, the seminal moments in bike evolution that we're interested in. After all, that's what Suzuki's rivals have to realise in order to redress the imbalance of power in

motorcycling's most revered class.

The first to show its hand was Yamaha, revealing the new Yamaha R1 in the autumn of 2005. Now, Yamaha knew that its old bike was there or thereabouts, so didn't offer any massive revisions to what was otherwise a hugely accomplished machine. Consequently, 'changes' should probably be referred to as 'tweaks' for the new R1.

Motor mods are slight while a longer swingarm is the most significant alteration to the R1's chassis. But last year, in lightly tuned superstock trim, the R1 stole the British and European crowns away from the threat of the new GSX-R1000 and the danger is that the modestly evolved R1 could do the same this year.

Honda had a bigger evolutionary step to take. The 2004 Fireblade promised much



SUZUKI GSX-R1000

The master in 2005, but now the only bike to be left untouched in 2006, the Suzuki GSX-R1000 really has a fight on its hands to remain King of bikes. Will its power and control be enough? The most comprehensive test you'll read should reveal all



GRAND DESIGNERS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE



► in its radical new design but against lighter and revier rivals the Honda only flattered in its highest states of tune at British and world superbike levels. Track tests of the stock bike revealed the 'old' Fireblade as a weighty and lethargic beast. Deep in a turn it felt as good a motorcycle as any but shoring it up and firing it out left the Fireblade shouting for less mass and more gas. On the roads these traits are penalised less and the Honda's stability and sheer damned good manners made the bike a much more attractive proposition. Changes for 2006 were small in execution but many in number so Honda needs to make two plus two equal five if it's got any chance of overtaking the GSX-R.

Curiously, Kawasaki failed to invite any UK magazines to its smart new Autopolis test track to test the new 2006 ZX-10R. Of all the new machines, the Ten has undergone the

most change. The 2004 machine was a wild beast, savagely impressing those who dare to try and tame this animal. Power rippled through the ZX-10R, barely controlled by either the chassis or the rider, but Kawasaki wanted more of everything. Yes, it wanted more power, but wanted this to be more controllable so set to a radical

redesign. The silhouette of the Ten changed massively, along with the motor, the geometry and the swingarm to make the Kawasaki even more intense than before – an amazing prospect in its own right.

All of which leaves the Suzuki GSX-R1000. Even those of us who have ridden the best in MotoGP, WSB and BSB machinery were impressed

with the completeness of the Suzuki package. All the power you'll ever need is wrapped up in a package so sublimely accomplished to make the GSX-R1000 a design and engineering icon every bit as impressive as the Millau Bridge. But there's only one thing harder than winning the *SuperBike* litre bike test and that's retaining the title. ►

YOUR GRAND DESIGNERS ARE...

Dave Smith: England
Freelance road tester

Paul Young: Australia
British supersport racer



Alan Dowds: Scotland
SuperBike deputy editor

Simon Roots: England
SuperBike road tester



Those crazy *SuperBike Italia* boys. Not only do they generally lack a bit of hair but only one of them is bright enough to know what to do with a hat on a cold day



WHERE WE WENT

Properly evaluating Premier league sportsbikes demands exotic locations, exhaustive testing and loads and loads of miles

Testing 1,000cc sportsbikes to the limits of their ability is something you simply can not do in the British winter. If you read any test that stays on UK shores then it's hopelessly compromised. That's why we headed south to bring you the most conclusive test possible. But even then, things can go wrong. After dynamically recording speed and brake figures at a cold but dry Bruntingthorpe and dynoing each bike at Carbontek we then booked the

Issoire track in France. And then the snow came. So we headed to the coast, to Dunlop's test track at Mireval, to join forces with *SuperBike Italia* (hence the variety of colours of each bike) to really put these bikes through their paces. We then swarmed over the south of France like some sort of venereal rash, taking in Marseille, St Tropez and Cannes to make this test as exclusive as it is conclusive.



Sunny tracks one day, snow-lined mountain roads the next. *SuperBike* testers clock up the miles to do the job properly



GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

ENGINES & PERFORMANCE

If a picture paints a thousand words then take a look at the dyno graphs of all four bikes and repeat the phrase 'Fuck me' five hundred times. We're talking about the sort of power

that Grand Prix machines were making at the turn of the millennium for the price of a modest conservatory. Whether you consider this to be a blessing or a curse is up

to you.

But brute force doesn't get you everywhere and as if to prove this, the most powerful bike on test is also the least adaptable. There's no doubt

that the Kawasaki lives up to its race-based promises, offering an engine that spins dizzily from 6,000rpm through to the crest of its wave at 12,000rpm but away from the



BIG A'S QUICK BLAST

WHAT YOU NOTICE IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES ON... **Suzuki GSX-R1000**

While the other three bikes have only had small-to-middling changes, the GSX-R is truly the same as it ever was and identical to the 2005 bike. Feeling like a comfy pair of trainers, from the second you sit in the surprisingly relaxed riding position, it all seems right. The most exhilarating motor around is still as sweet and strong right off the bottom end, and there's no stutters or hiccups in the unfeasibly strong wave of pull all the way to the redline. Likewise the chassis which manages to impress both with its ease of use and its capability. Pootling along through

the town, the GSX-R is as sweet as the proverbial nut, just a whiff of throttle away from a gap in traffic, a flick of the wrist flinging you around a mini-roundabout with aplomb. That it's the same package that can flawlessly catapult you around a 145mph sweeping motorway bend five minutes later is nothing short of amazing. Add in the great intake noise, the price benefits of a year-older model, and the timeless good looks of the GSX-R, and you have a prince of a bike, which is probably still the king.

POWERFUL, CLASS-LEADING, 1000CC CLASSIC

Specifications

Price: £8,799

NU Ins group: 17

Engine

Type: I/c 16v, inline-four, DOHC

Displacement: 998cc

Bore x Stroke: 73.4 x 59.0mm

Compression: 12.5:1

Carburation: Twin injector electronic SDTV fuel injection, 44mm throttle bodies

Gearbox: Six-speed

Power: 161.3bhp@11,236rpm

Torque: 79.4lbf ft@9,120rpm

Cycle Parts

Chassis: Aluminium twin spar

Suspension: (F) 43mm USD forks, fully adjustable (R) Fully adjustable monoshock

Brakes: (F) 2x310mm discs, four-piston Tokico radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, twin piston caliper

Wheels/Tyres: (F) 120/70 ZR17 Bridgestone BT-014 (R) 190/50 ZR17 Bridgestone BT-014

Rake/Trail: 23.8°/96mm

Wheelbase: 1,405mm

Capacity: 18 litres (3.95 gal)

Dry Weight: 166kg (366lb)

Contacts

Suzuki GB (01293 518000)

www.suzuki-gb.co.uk

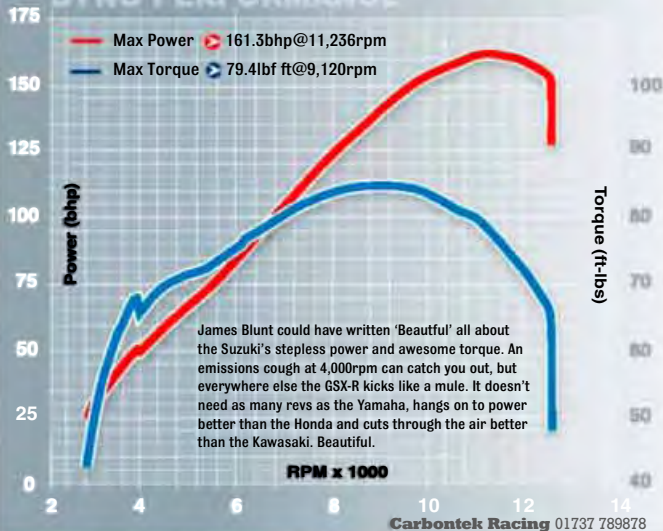
Engine

Nearly 999cc, the K5 Suzuki grew by 10.9cc but the most important improvement to the rider came in the form of the two injector per cylinder/twin butterfly valve fuel injection system to improve throttle response immeasurably. The slipper clutch is easy to use and makes backing it in a breeze.

Chassis

Changes made in 2005 gave the GSX-R1000 a 5mm shorter wheelbase and lopped 10mm from the width of the machine. The swingarm was a completely new design and was cast and stamped rather than cast and extruded – the pivot point is adjustable. Over a kilo was lost in the frame's changes.

DYNO PERFORMANCE



Suspension

Complimented by the excellent chassis, the fully adjustable forks and shock didn't change much in the 2005 revision but offer amazing feel and control and heighten the riding experience to heavenly levels.

Brakes

Old GSX-R1000s had a reputation of fading their brakes and even the radial Tokico calipers can lose a little feeling after a long day at the track. Before this they act wonderfully well, the radial master cylinder giving excellent feel and performance.

Tyres

Bridgestone's BT-014s are pretty sharp on the roads but can suffer after prolonged abuse on the track.

Exhaust

The exhaust is a statement at the very least. Its titanium construction saves weight and its offset shape improves ground clearance and aerodynamics while the positioning improves the bike's centre of gravity.

track the ZX-10R isn't quite so able to cope with the realities of riding on the road. The raft of changes to the motor may well have upped power by almost 10bhp with the throttle buried against the stop, but down low the Kawasaki really has lost the spring in its step. The motor doesn't wake up until 5,000rpm, an important area at the track, but utterly crucial on the roads where all manner of dodgy manoeuvres depend on the motor keeping up with where your mind wants to take you.

Roll-on figures in top gear against the GSX-R1000 confirm this feeling of apathy with the Kawasaki half a second slower between 40-80mph and a full second off the 40-120mph time. The Suzuki even cannily gets to 170mph a football pitch and a half in front of the aerodynamically sculpted ZX-10R. Kawasaki's single-minded approach may feel furiously

fast down Mireval track's two straights, but following Al and Youngy through French roads was plain frustrating.

Still, the ZX-10R's focus on speed is difficult to scorn, especially when the motor is belting out 12,000rpm. It defines fast and as you dial in more revs the more instantaneous becomes

the hit of sound and speed. Thankfully, Kawasaki's engineers have tamed the chassis and suspension so power can be applied without the bike wanting to shoot for the moon – although wheelies on the Ten are as easy as breathing.

Far more accomplished, flexible and, dare I say it



The R1 from above looks sleek. Alan Dowds from above doesn't



GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

The R1? Think Siamese cat. The ZX-10? Think a Pokemon that's been kicked in the face

“...The Fireblade now feels as if Honda's finishing school also incorporates a gym...”

— sensible — are the R1 and Fireblade. Both exhibit usability in an everyday sense but both are more than capable of ripping your head off with acceleration that would shame a super car. Of the two, the Honda engine is just that little bit more docile, reflected around the track, on the roads and around Bruntingthorpe. But don't think for one second that just because the Fireblade is the slowest and least powerful of the four machines on test that it lacks for anything.

Honda has responded to the explosion of revs from its rivals the easy way by adding two teeth to the rear sprocket. This isn't the most sophisticated of solutions to the

Fireblade's shortcomings (indeed, any owner could, and should, apply it to their 2004/2005 machine), but it works. Of course, this

isn't the only change as Honda has been busy shaving weight off the camshafts, upping the compression ratio, tweaking the fuelling and extending the CBR's rev-range to beyond 12,000rpm. Already a sophisticated block delivering assured performance, the Fireblade now feels as if Honda's finishing school

incorporates a gym too.

With livelier acceleration on tap, the Honda feels a lot more playful down low, but this does mean that top speeds are down on the previous version - and nearly 10mph off the Suzuki and Yamaha - yet the Fireblade's consummate abilities mask this fact well, even on track. The gearbox isn't quite what you'd expect from the big H, with both the UK and Italian bikes on test suffering from the odd false neutral.

And while we're sticking the boot in, despite revisions, the grabby clutch makes getting the holeshot to the shops tricky. ☹



▶ GRAND DESIGNS CONTINUES ON PAGE 71



BIG AL'S QUICK BLAST

WHAT YOU NOTICE IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES ON...

Honda CBR1000RR

It was one of the curious aspects of the old bike that it made so much power and performance feel, well, a bit

tame. 170bhp at the crank it may have had, and it could get a bit lively if you cheeked it (say, during a wheelie...). But compared with the crackers GSX-R and evil stiletto R1, it was a little bit staid and unenthralling.

But that's changed. The small changes to gearing, a bit of weight loss and engine top-end have given the Blade its edge back, and it's much more of a hoot. The bars feel narrower than the R1, and there's a harsher edge to the power. Steering feels a touch sharper than the R1 too, although it lacks a little of the R1's attacking feel through the footpegs.

The new bodywork has sharpened the front end up a treat too, and it all makes for a far better bike than you'd think from those small changes. It's now a match for the classiness of the R1, and is much closer to the Yam in performance terms too.

STABLE, TORQUEY, DECEPTIVELY FAST

Specifications

Price: £8,899
 NU Ins group: 17

Engine

Type: I/c 16v, inline-four, DOHC
 Displacement: 998cc
 Bore x Stroke: 75.0 x 56.5mm
 Compression: 12.2:1
 Carburation: PGM-DSFI twin injector fuel injection, 44mm throttle bodies
 Gearbox: Six-speed
 Power: 157.6bhp@11,332rpm
 Torque: 79.4lb ft@8,780rpm

Cycle Parts

Chassis: Gravity cast alu twin spar
 Suspension: (F) 43mm Showa USD forks, fully adj (R) Unit Pro-Link Showa fully adj monoshock
 Brakes: (F) 2x320mm discs, four-piston radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, single piston caliper
 Wheels/Tyres: (F) 120/70 ZR17 Bridgestone BT-015R BT-014 (R) 190/50 ZR17 Bridgestone BT-015R
 Rake/Tail: 23°/100mm
 Wheelbase: 1,400mm
 Capacity: 18 litres (3.95 gal)
 Dry Weight: 176kg (387lb)

Contacts

Honda UK (01753 590500)
 www.honda.co.uk/motorcycles

Tyres

Honda did fit the 'blade with either Pirelli Diablo Corsas or Bridgestone BT-014s but the new model's specifically developed Bridgestone BT-015Rs offer great grip on the road from the MotoGP derived compounds.

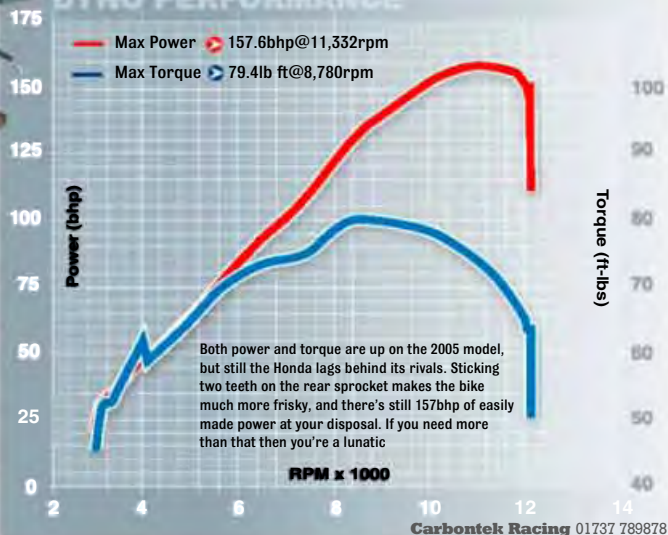
Engine

Changes to the camshaft, the compression ratio and fuel mapping have boosted power by around three per cent but the big kick to the motor comes in the form of two teeth on the rear sprocket and in increase in the rev-limit to 12,200rpm. The steel and titanium exhaust has had 1.5kg lopped off it (and another hole stuck in the tail) while the radiator has been made smaller too.

Suspension

The Fireblade's suspension gets the same frugal but effective make over as the rest of the bike. New valving at the front improves damping while the Pro-Link shock gets a revised linkage to boost traction.

DYNO PERFORMANCE



Brakes

The Tokico calipers remain but Honda has boosted the disc size by 10mm to make the rotors now 320mm – and we thought radial calipers were going to reduce disc size. At least the thickness of the discs are smaller by 0.5mm while a reduction in the weight of the rear caliper improves the 'blades unsprung mass.

Chassis

Swingarm length is a recurring theme for the 2006 litre bikes. For Honda this means 5mm less length. The wheelbase has thus shortened, although by 10mm as the steering geometry has been revised on the side of responsiveness. Rake is down a quarter of a degree (to 23 degrees) while trail is now 2mm shorter (to 100mm).

➤ In equalling the GSX-R's massive torque figures, however, the Fireblade proves itself a worthy adversary. The only area where it struggles is beyond 11,000rpm where the Suzuki holds on to its power for that little bit

longer, negating any gearing advantage the Honda may hold. But for an engine that delivers so well elsewhere, this is a small price to pay.

Honda's changes to the 'blade's motor may have been small, but compared to the

R1 they're like ripping up the blueprints and starting afresh. The Yamaha press pack tells us that the R1's compression is up a gnat's chuff, there are some efficiency improvements to the top end and, er, that really is about it. Surely

Yamaha has wasted an opportunity?

Perhaps a little shy down low, the R1 quickly develops a head of steam like a Milanese *barista* at morning rush hour. Before you know it you're in custody county, but the smoothness of Yamaha's delivery hides its speed within its sheer sophistication. Glance down at the speedo and you'd never guess that you're well past three figures, although this is unlikely to hold up as any sort of defence in court.

But when you start asking the Yamaha to get a wriggle on from 6,000rpm the motor doesn't respond as well as it might. Even with EU noise and emission controls, other manufacturers seem to have filled the enforced lulls in the midrange. But Yamaha still hasn't cracked this yet and suffers from a 2,000rpm chasm that even Sir Norman Foster, the designer of the



The lengths some people will go to just because their fingers are cold. S.O.S? Silly old sods more like as one too many wheelies made a pipe fall off the fuel pump giving Dave a very scenic walk across the Millau bridge.



“...Ask the R1 to get a wriggle on from 6,000rpm and the motor doesn't respond as well as it might...”

Millau Bridge, would struggle to gap. As you'd expect, drop down a gear and the R1 quickly gets into its stride, but like the Honda, this may prove to be too late to save the indignity of being overtaken by the Suzuki or Kawasaki.

Back in black, well at least the Italian bike we used was menacingly coloured, the Suzuki really does reign supreme, wherever we went. All of the criticisms of the three previous bikes exist solely because of the Suzuki GSX-R1000. The Honda is perfectly powerful, the Yamaha intensely exciting and Kawasaki a concentrated whirl of revs, but as soon as

you run any of these bikes against the King you quickly realise that these noble princes will never truly rule.

The Kawasaki may just trump its power and speed figures, but on a day-to-day basis the Suzuki is by far the more impressive motor. Now, that day-to-day basis may mean a 250-mile commute like I did on my GSX-R1000 longterm last year, or it may mean trying to squeeze in as many trackdays as you can in a season. It may even mean racing a GSX-R in the world superbike or UK club championship. But whatever that day-to-day basis is, the Suzuki takes it all in its stride.

Fuel delivery from the

sophisticated fuel injection system is crisp and instantaneous, but behind every throttle opening is a focused force that is as inviting as it is perilous to your license. A slight stutter at 4,000rpm is the only blot on a beautiful landscape of power and torque, but the best thing about this scene is that it's all available to empower a rider to go as fast as you dare.

Somehow, the GSX-R reins in the feelings you should be experiencing at over 100mph. The airbox's glorious

induction noise can leave you a little giddy as you pin the throttle to the stop, but rarely does the feeling of control leave the Suzuki. The controls are all so stunningly simple to use and with this much power there's no need to resort to sly tricks like changing rear sprockets because acceleration is available everywhere. Around the Mireval track the motor was nigh-on perfect. Stupidly powerful and stupidly good fun, it's a riding experience that'll stay with me for years. ☺

Engine & Performance Verdicts (Ratings apply to this test only)





KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

CHASSIS & HANDLING

The only thing more amazing than these four manufacturers being able to produce such stunning engines is the skill involved to harness this potentially devastating strength. Power may have been increased in 10bhp increments over the years, but chasis design has come on in exponential improvement, especially when engineers insist on giving these machines the same wheelbase as their 600cc little brothers.

With the power of a final generation, back-of-the-pack, two-stroke GP machine tightly housed within the Kawasaki, you'd hope that the ZX-10R

would be able to cope. And underneath everything the chassis easily manages, it's just that Kawasaki has engineered away all of the feel and responsiveness from the old machine to make riding this one an edgy and apprehensive affair.

Changes to the ZX-10R's chassis are pretty extensive, what with a new swingarm, steering head re-jig and a change to the bike's centre of gravity, but in addressing the old bike's flighty nature, Kawasaki seems to have chucked the baby out with the bathwater.

All the Kwak really

needed was a refinement in the suspension's damping properties and a steering damper just like every one of its rivals. Kawasaki blessed the new Ten with a damper, a very good Ohlins one too, and the suspension has been refined (more through settings,

although the bike follows the ZX-6R to have top-out springs front and rear), but the ZX-10R has now gone from being all Bridget Jones, an incessant monologue of babble, to Brigitte Bardot, stuck in the south of France refusing to talk.

On the roads the Kawasaki's front end feels vague and

BIG AL'S QUICK BLAST

WHAT YOU NOTICE IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES ON...

Yamaha YZF-R1



Like the Fireblade, the Yamaha has had a few minor changes made to it. But unlike the 'blade, the Yamaha had less need to improve. So from the seat, there's little to tell it's a new bike. The high-ish seat, narrow aspect at the rear of the tank

and low-ish pegs are all familiar enough. And on the road, it's still got the slightly high first gear that prevents unplanned wheelies. A steering damper makes itself felt a little at slow speeds in the cooler weather we had, but the R1 is still extraordinarily nimble. You get loads of feedback through the pegs, and it feels like you can command the bike through your feet as much as your hands. The brakes are ace, and while the Dunlop D218 rubber is old and needs replacing, the chassis still lets you get the most from them on the road. So it wasn't broke, and the minor changes haven't resulted in a ham-fisted fix. The only other criticism is the increasingly-conservative paint schemes it comes in – the burgundy one we had looked more like a pair of 1980s waffle trousers than a 21st century two-wheeled rocket ship. The yellow paint scheme is clearly the one to go for.



PRACTICAL, PURPOSEFUL, RELAXED, FAST

Specifications

Price: £8,799

NU Ins group: 17

Engine

Type: l/c 16v, inline-four, DOHC

Displacement: 998cc

Bore x Stroke: 77.0 x 53.6mm

Compression: 12.4:1

Carburation: Dual valve electronic fuel injection, 38mm throttle bodies

Gearbox: Six-speed

Power: 158.3bhp@12,374rpm

Torque: 75.8 lb ft@9,662rpm

Cycle Parts

Chassis: Aluminium die-cast

Deltabox 'V' twin spar

Suspension: (F) 43mm USD forks, fully adjustable (R) Fully adjustable monoshock

Brakes: (F) 2x320mm discs, four-piston Sumitomo radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, single piston caliper

Wheels/Tyres: (F) 120/70 ZR17

Dunlop D218 (R) 190/50 ZR17

Dunlop D218

Rake/Trail: 24°/97mm

Wheelbase: 1,415mm

Capacity: 18 litres (3.95 gal)

Dry Weight: 173kg (381lb)

Contacts

Yamaha UK (01932 358000)

www.yamaha-motor.co.uk

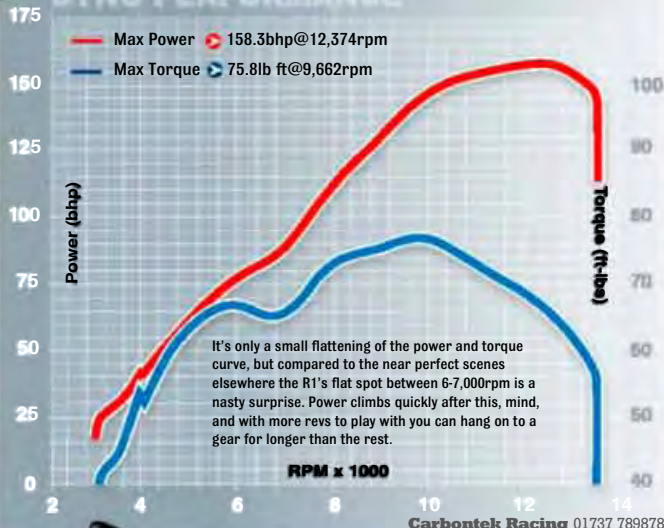
Engine

Precious little was done to the R1's 998cc 20-valve motor over the last two years. Power is impressive, but not nearly as much on the Kawasaki and Honda. Perhaps Yamaha needed to do more than raise the compression by a morsel, playing with the intake ports and smoothing the valve guides.

Chassis

Yamaha has made the R1's chassis lighter at the front but distributes a little more weight through the front wheel. The swingarm is the biggest change, mind, up in length by 20mm and with the pivot point staying put, increasing the R1's wheelbase by the same amount.

DYNO PERFORMANCE



Suspension

There's a theme developing here. Bigger all has been done to the suspension other than thinner fork uppers and a slightly re-designed triple clamp. Those with £14,000 at the ready can plump for the all-Ohlins shod SP version while we paupers have the new gold fork tubes to knock three seconds off a lap with.

Brakes

Yamaha was so busy redesigning a special seat for Valentino Rossi's mate Uccio to sit in at the races that they had no money left over to tweak the, admittedly good but not great, brakes.

Tyres

Easily the worst on test, if you plump for a new R1 make sure to get the Dunlop D218s off at your earliest convenience. The new Dunlop Qualifier works much better, especially on the roads.

uncertain. Grip from the front Dunlop Qualifier is obviously present (as all the Italian bikes were all shod with Dunlop's new hoop) but there's no conviction from the front end, a crying shame from the manufacturer who gave us the cracking ZX-7R. The Kawasaki brakes good and hard, can be turned in viciously and fired out like a cannonball, but it's the bit in the middle where it suffers.

This indifference is felt at the track too, and much of the blame lies at Kawasaki's insistence at shoeing the ZX-10R with a 55-section rear tyre that needs conviction to get it leant over but then offers little communication in return. The UK Kawasaki had a 50-section Dunlop on for our road testing miles and feelings

were much more positive, but at Mireval the OE size went back on, to the derision of everyone who rode it.

Songs of praise were louder, albeit with a hint of consternation, after a ride on the R1. Against its more compact rivals the Yamaha feels like an FJR1300, but it sure doesn't ride like

one. Indeed, the leg room of the R1 is a boon for those who enjoy weighting the pegs and getting a bike to grip – it's just a shame it's not fitted with tyres that think accordingly.

Dunlop has struggled with the advances that

1,000cc sportsbikes have asked of them. Previously, the D207 and D208, and now the D218's fitted to the Yamaha, are a sorry compromise for the razor sharp talents of the R1. Hard road use gets the rubber protesting, the front starts drifting, the rear starts spinning making the fairy tale R1 push its boots.

Frustration also comes with the size of the Yamaha. It feels neither small nor light and as such you find yourself pushing harder to get the bike moving from side to side, fore (the brakes don't feel as sharp despite the data-logging) to aft. Smooth riding styles flatter the Yamaha better, although with these tyres smooth also means slower.

Which is why it's great to report that on better tyres, Dunlops no less, the R1 becomes the bike that pushed the GSX-R1000 so hard last year. But you can't help that feel the Yamaha only stemmed the Suzuki tide. The changes made





GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE



On your marks, get set, wheelie. First, second or third and they'll both come up a treat

to the chassis seem to have been half-heartedly made to shift bikes out of a showroom rather than genuinely contend with the class leader (*isn't that the point?* - Ed).

Though bigger, the R1 feels just as neat and balanced as the Suzuki at nine tenths, but when you strive to push for that flat-out lap the Yamaha starts to run irretrievably wide and not even the ever compliant

suspension, new swingarm and tweaks to the geometry can't make up for the lengths gained by the now-disappearing Suzuki.

At this point last year the Fireblade would be right up on the rumble strips, but not now as the Honda can cut in every which way, but loose. Honda was close in 2004 with its first 1000cc 'blade, but there was no cigar as its rivals smoked it

round a track. Subtle changes in 2006 demonstrate just how close Honda was in unsettling the order. Less wheelbase, less trail and less weight have transformed the Fireblade into a mighty effective weapon at the track – all the while retaining the Honda's impeccable manners on the roads.

The sprightly motor eggs the chassis on whenever it

can and with great traction on tap the frame and stunningly pretty swingarm easily cope with the forces running through it. The HM Plant BSB bike of last year often resorted to OE suspension linkages and close-to-spec swingarms and you can tell why as you craft your way through turns on the track. Constantly wanting to explore the greenery, the old Fireblade wandered about on its way out

Chassis & Handling Verdicts (Ratings apply to this test only)





GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

of a turn, but thanks to subtle changes the Honda can now be tightened at will without suffering traction issues, especially with help from the new Bridgestone BT-015s.

The botch-job caliper change to accommodate the larger new front discs (check out the 5mm silver spacers on the fork bottom) works as the brakes bite with a passion now that they have less weight to slow down. But the best bit about the new 'blade is the best bit of the old 'blade - that feeling of reassurance at the apex knowing that everything's under control, apart from your euphoric excitement.

But euphoria doesn't even come close to how the GSX-R1000 makes you feel after a storming ride on track, threading your way through a ribbon of road or just pottering in to work each day. The Suzuki makes every ride special because it rises to each and every occasion. It breezes through the mundane stuff to reach huge highs on track, and while the suspension isn't perfect, the chassis balances the power held within gloriously.

Paul Young jumped off the GSX-R1000 at Mireval to announce, "I can't believe I've wasted a year not racing one," and you can't fail to wonder why every racer across the land hasn't embraced the Suzuki. Even if racing's not your game you can still be

The ZX-10's handling might be a disappointment but there's no denying 164bhp makes a hell of a wheelie bike

impressed by the way the Suzuki slows, turns and spits out each turn. The brakes are pin-sharp and the forks settle quickly after their release. A little soft, the front can still be turned in exactly where you want, while the diminutive proportions, but Tardis-like positioning, allow you to have a certain grip on your line. You can dive up the inside and take an adversary or breeze past them down the straight after piling on the coals from the apex. This is piss-take riding.

While it feels like a turbo-charged 600 at the track, the GSX-R never overwhelms on the road, which is some trick. It remains precise, consistent and inspiring on all but the worst of roads. It's an utter lie that familiarity breeds contempt as I've done the best part of 10,000 miles on the big Suzuki and every ride still leaves me breathless.

BIG ALS QUICK BLAST

WHAT YOU NOTICE IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES ON... **Kawasaki ZX-10R**

This is the most changed of the four, and the one that's got most expected of it. I was surprised when it came out of the van - the ugliness of the photos is softened a little in reality. The ungainly twin silencers are high-quality and well-made up close, and the birth-defect eyes of the twin headlights remind me of serious endurance racers of the past (I'm thinking of old ZXR-7 endurance racers from the late 1980s, or the NR750 marshal bikes at Suzuka. I'm sure someone will correct me).

And fuck me it is fast and wild on the road. At one point on a dual carriageway I snapped the gas open

in second, and had to catch my breath, such was the violence of my progress. But later, on the twisty road from Le Luc circuit to St Tropez, the ZX was the one that was most work. That terrifying power output is gained at the expense of some peakiness, and you have to work the gears to keep up with the torquier Honda and Suzuki. The steering is less natural than the others too, with either the tyre profile or the Ohlins damper interfering at low speeds.



HUGELY POWERFUL, AERODYNAMIC AND GREEN

Specifications

Price: £8,800

NU Ins group: 17

Engine

Type: I/c 16v, inline-four, DOHC

Displacement: 988cc

Bore x Stroke: 76.0 x 55.0 mm

Compression: 12.7:1

Carburation: Mikuni dual-valve EFI,

43mm throttle bodies

Gearbox: Six-speed

Power: 164.0bhp@11,423rpm

Torque: 81.6 lb ft@7,921rpm

Cycle Parts

Chassis: Alu die-cast twin spar

Suspension: (F) 43mm USD forks,

fully adj with top-out springs (R)

Fully adj gas charged monoshock

with top-out spring

Brakes: (F) 2x300mm petal

discs, four-piston four pad radial

calipers (R) 220mm disc, single

piston caliper

Wheels/Tyres: (F) 120/70 ZR17

Dunlop Qualifier (R) 190/55 ZR17

Dunlop Qualifier

Rake/Trail: 24.5°/102mm

Wheelbase: 1,390mm

Capacity: 17 litres (3.7 gal)

Dry Weight: 175kg (385lb)

Contacts

Kawasaki UK (01628 851000)

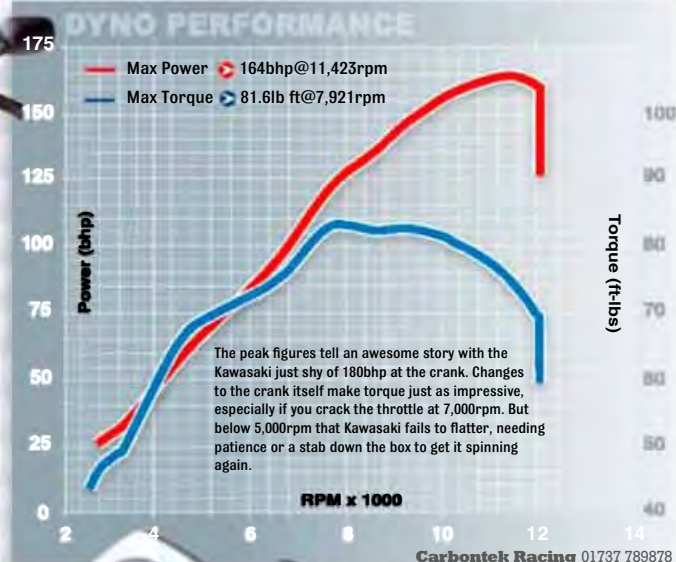
www.kawasaki.co.uk

Engine

Kawasaki employed a heavier crankshaft and flywheel to both smooth the ZX-10R's power delivery while the new 43mm butterfly valves in the fuel injection system use better atomizing injectors. The all titanium exhaust has gone from being a conventionally slung silencer to a high-weight, twin can configuration.

Brakes

The calipers and discs remain the same as the 2005 version, although Kawasaki has introduced a new radial master cylinder.



Suspension

The Kayaba forks now feature top-out springs to retain control straining on the brakes or hard on the gas. The internals haven't changed much other than some new OE settings.

Chassis

Big changes to the chassis see the steering head moved 15mm forward (increasing the caster angle at the same time) while the swingarm has been reduced in length and is pivoted lower to improve traction. A fully adjustable Ohlins steering damper is a welcome addition to the Ten.

Tyres

There's no complaint about the choice of tyre, Dunlop's new Qualifier offers great grip and feel, but Kawasaki's decision to run a 55-section tyre seems to have backfired as its profile hampers feel and confidence.

STYLING & ERGONOMICS

And we thought Kawasaki's design studios were going through a renaissance. The 2006 ZX-10R isn't ugly, but compared to the version it replaces it just looks both blunted and bloated. Much of the new design is the result of extensive wind tunnel research but when the GSX-R1000 goes just as fast using less horsepower, you can't help but think that Kawasaki has scored not one, but two own goals. I used to love prancing through town on my old ZX-10R longterm but you wouldn't get me doing that now. Its looks defined everything about it, a pugnacious statement of no compromise riding, but now the plastic surgery looks prissy and pretentious.

And, somewhat worryingly, it rides like it looks. The stretch to the bars, the high pegs and the ensuing raked

neck all mean that riding any sort of distance is a pain while the change in the steering geometry doesn't quite give you the same front-end feeling that you felt on the old machine. At least when Ducati

finally buried the 998 it had the decency to make the 999 more rideable, but the ZX-10R doesn't even achieve this. Give me the steering damper and I'll take the old one back, thank you very much.



The times they are a-changing, and the once dynamic looking R1 is starting to look a bit bulky and in need of a work out. The red machine we used almost had a hint of the old Thunderace about it – the polished wheels and chrome effect decals almost prompting us to look for the anodised bar ends. The yellow and black Kenny Roberts Snr rep from our Italian friends looks sweet (but is cheekily £200 more), but then you take one look at the new R6 to suddenly see what a modern machine really looks like.

You can ride the R1 all day though, and with its low slung pegs and easy reach to the bars, the Yamaha would be the first choice for the long ride home. It eats miles, but then in an instant can devour corners too without compromising too much on ground clearance. ☺



GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE



“The jury’s still out on the exhaust, but everything else on the Suzuki looks like it’s made to perfection.”

● Honda’s paint jobs in recent years have been a bit hit and miss, but this red and black version falls into the hit camp. Styling changes are few and far between (the front cowl is a little narrower and the bottom fairing doesn’t stretch as far) but the new scheme sharpens up the Fireblade’s looks while the new twin-holed underseat pipe really looks the business.

The slight reduction in weight and the changes in steering geometry and wheelbase haven’t affected the Fireblade’s friendliness and it remains as comfortable and complete skirting through Nice as it does decked out round a set of nice corners. It feels small on the stand and that

size seems to shrink the faster you go. It’s some trick.

The GSX-R feels similar to the Honda, only even more

compact, but the bijou cockpit affords more space than you’d imagine. When a bike is this easy to ride, everything else

seems to take care of itself and having ridden anything up to 500-miles a day on my old longterm I can vouch for its comfort and manners.

Not only does it feel right, but it looks right too. OK, so the jury’s still out on the exhaust, but everything else on the Suzuki looks like it’s made to perfection. Catch the rear end at the right angle and the sculpted cowl looks fit for the Tate Modern gallery, while the other elements of the bodywork will either draw you in with their subtle beauty or repel you with their raw aggression. ●

Engine & Performance Verdicts (Ratings apply to this test only)





SPEED TESTING MAX POWER?

Take one *SuperBike* features editor, JP, give him four bikes, MotoGP-spec data logging and a two mile runway...

Funny how your world can change so instantly in a few short seconds. A few hours driving the van around collecting the bikes and off up to a cold but sunny Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground with Jo Whiley on the radio left me as relaxed as a cat on a warm sofa. I went from a smiling and stationary data guru (Bob Gray) to 150 mph in about 13 seconds and 500 metres. About fifteen hundred meters later I was contemplating how the hell I was going to brake hard on a cold tyre before hitting the piles of tyres at

the end on the runway. Nothing can prepare you for that.

So, to the facts. There's basically very little in it between them all. The Suzuki and Kawasaki are closest (and bestest), both doing a mental 178mph. The Kawasaki is less than half a mile an hour faster, which is effectively nothing. The Suzuki reaches its top speed 30 metres quicker than the ZX-10R however and performs better in the roll-ons than any of the others. The GSX-R rips 40-120mph in top gear a second faster than anything else and more than two seconds quicker than

the slowest, the R1.

The Honda is clearly down on the rest in top speed and it felt that way at the time. It reaches a point where you feel like it cannot physically push through the air any faster. I'm not sure if that's aerodynamics, gearing or power but it definitely hits a point and stops accelerating.

It's also the hardest to launch from a standstill, the clutch is extremely grabby and will not allow you to pull away at high revs slipping the clutch. The GSX-R is the best, with loads more grip and feel from the clutch plates

which lets you balance the revs better. None of this is super important unless you plan on racing of course.

Braking figures show a very similar set of differences to the roll-ons with the Suzuki once again just ahead of the rest and the Fireblade last by a metre.

The figures show one thing clearly – there's piss all in it this year. All the bikes perform to a similar level in this scientific, repeatable test scenario. In truth I wouldn't base any buying decisions on these figures, they are facts to back up the truth that litre sports bikes are mental – official. ➤

YZF-R1

Rider: JP
Top speed: 173.04mph
Time: 34.65 seconds
Distance: 2158.992 metres

ACCELERATION

Speed (MPH)	Time (Secs)	Distance (Metres)	Accel (Gs)
10	0.70	1.453	0.65
20	1.23	5.011	0.74
30	1.75	10.851	0.78
40	2.29	19.341	0.80
50	2.81	29.704	0.81
60	3.45	45.541	0.79
70	3.96	60.516	0.81
80	4.51	78.798	0.81
90	5.25	106.980	0.78
100	5.95	136.921	0.77
110	6.97	184.583	0.72
120	7.93	234.256	0.69
130	9.25	307.912	0.64
140	10.83	403.576	0.59
150	13.11	551.493	0.52
160	16.93	817.147	0.43
170	23.80	1326.911	0.33

Standing ¼ mile: 10.85s @ 140.11mph

BRAKING

Stopping distance (70mph): 50.483 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-O

40mph-80mph: 6.40 seconds
40mph-120mph: 12.15 seconds

FIREBLADE

Rider: JP
Top speed: 168.52mph
Time: 33.00 seconds
Distance: 1989.945 metres

ACCELERATION

Speed (MPH)	Time (Secs)	Distance (Metres)	Accel (Gs)
10	0.80	1.526	0.57
20	1.35	5.134	0.68
30	1.84	10.633	0.74
40	2.33	18.323	0.78
50	2.90	29.737	0.79
60	3.40	41.938	0.81
70	3.99	59.183	0.80
80	4.57	78.624	0.80
90	5.54	115.150	0.74
100	6.25	145.238	0.73
110	7.27	193.442	0.69
120	8.28	245.436	0.66
130	9.65	322.207	0.61
140	11.36	425.351	0.56
150	13.98	595.574	0.49
160	18.30	896.803	0.40

Standing ¼ mile: 10.95s @ 139.83mph

BRAKING

Stopping distance (70mph): 51.61 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-O

40mph-80mph: 5.85 seconds
40mph-120mph: 11.65 seconds

GSX-R1000

Rider: JP
Top speed: 177.74mph
Time: 33.60 seconds
Distance: 2129.190 metres

ACCELERATION

Speed (MPH)	Time (Secs)	Distance (Metres)	Accel (Gs)
10	0.68	1.526	0.67
20	1.22	5.125	0.75
30	1.76	11.216	0.78
40	2.30	19.606	0.79
50	2.88	31.211	0.79
60	3.42	44.614	0.80
70	3.93	59.454	0.81
80	4.52	79.330	0.81
90	5.27	107.974	0.78
100	5.88	133.668	0.78
110	6.75	174.618	0.74
120	7.70	223.833	0.71
130	8.98	295.348	0.66
140	10.25	372.065	0.62
150	12.34	508.342	0.55
160	15.02	693.757	0.49
170	20.36	1089.724	0.38

Standing ¼ mile: 10.50s @ 140.47mph

BRAKING

Stopping distance (70mph): 49.872 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-O

40mph-80mph: 5.10 seconds
40mph-120mph: 10.05 seconds

ZX-10R

Rider: JP
Top speed: 178.34mph
Time: 33.55 seconds
Distance: 2099.301 metres

ACCELERATION

Speed (MPH)	Time (Secs)	Distance (Metres)	Accel (Gs)
10	0.72	1.450	0.64
20	1.28	5.253	0.71
30	1.83	11.402	0.75
40	2.39	20.228	0.76
50	2.90	30.397	0.79
60	3.44	43.591	0.80
70	3.99	59.639	0.80
80	4.52	77.541	0.81
90	5.37	109.869	0.77
100	6.02	137.887	0.76
110	6.76	172.414	0.74
120	7.79	225.346	0.70
130	9.05	296.266	0.66
140	10.43	379.610	0.61
150	12.75	530.007	0.54
160	16.21	770.278	0.45
170	22.64	1245.931	0.34

Standing ¼ mile: 10.80s @ 142.26mph

BRAKING

Stopping distance (70mph): 51.54 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-O

40mph-80mph: 5.65 seconds
40mph-120mph: 11.05 seconds



1 Suzuki GSX-R1000

Climbing aboard the Suzuki instantly sets it apart from the other bikes. In size it's more akin to a 600cc bike than a big bore sportsbike. Being able to include a bit of body English (or even Australian) into the riding mix not only makes you look and feel like you're a GP hero, it really does help steer the bike onto tighter, faster lines.

All this track prowess, yet I really can imagine taking one of these on a long holiday. Sitting on it all day wouldn't be a drama thanks to the bars being relatively high and relaxed for a sports bike. This combined with its short tank makes it the only bike I didn't feel stretched out on.

But life would be pointless, not to mention boring, if perfection were possible. The GSX-R's contribution to our imperfect world is in its suspension. More than a touch on the soft side, and without the range of adjustment required to satisfy the diverse slice of humanity (and others) that will flock to fang it. This has been

a recurring annoyance I've found with all GSX-Rs over the years. Testing on tyres with a road riding focus meant that this wasn't as big an issue as if the test had been carried out on race tyres. More grip demands generally harder suspension settings and a big fat fast bloke on super sticky tyres trying to get the best out of the Gixxer might be spending a lot of time on the bump stops. But then he'd be too busy whooping and giggling to be worried about that.

At the moment the Suzuki is the only bike within cooee of creating a 1,000cc superbike with the weight, size and agility of a 600 supersport bike. How can it not be best?

2 Honda CBR1000RR

Having superstock raced the Fireblade in its original 2004 guise, I'm truly impressed with how it's progressed since then. It's carefully evolved over the last three years and

it shows. It now offers by far the best overall package in its class. Everything about the 'blade works, and all its assorted gubbins do their work in complete harmony. Finishing on the Honda is also the best. It is exactly what it should be, the best road going sports bike Honda has ever produced.

My only gripes about the previous incarnation, were the lardsome weight and the low rev-limit. Well the weight loss is duly noted and appreciated, agility improved. Braking, another weak point on the old model, is another area to benefit from the Fireblade's diet. With weight down and the front discs growing an extra 10mm as well, finally all's well on the anchors.

The extra revs are there too. When it comes down to the nth degree of a



superstock race battle, it will definitely help the Bladerunners now that the Big H has put another 500rpm of faith in the RR's durability. On the road the motor is pure peaches and cream. With the most useful bottom-end power of all the bikes you can end up riding in a rev-range 1,000rpm lower and still be carving up the opposition. Through the technical mountain switchbacks ridden on part two of the test, it was a case of stick it in any

gear and grin all the way to St. Tropez.

So with all this praise heaped up high, why is it not top of my heap? Well I certainly wouldn't question the sanity of anyone voting the Blade number one. Although not as much of a stretch as the R1 or ZX-10R, the Blade is still too big for me to shift my weight everywhere it needs to be. For the fuller rider a Blade could well be weapon of choice. In fact, judging the bikes purely on function and finishing I would have to put the Fireblade top. It's only when I factor in my own size and riding style which means its the sharper steering Suzuki that gets a nose ahead.

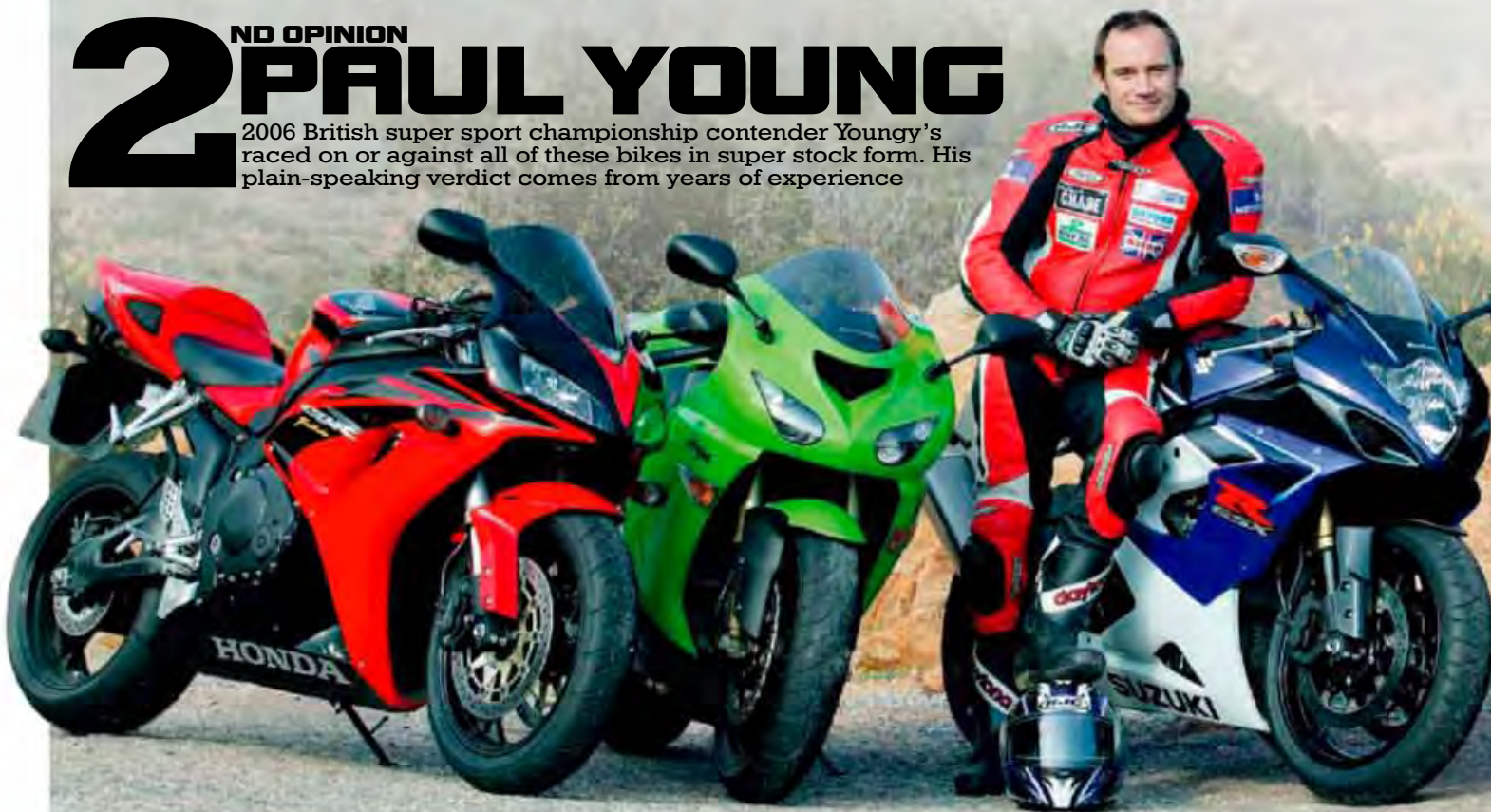
3 Yamaha YZF-R1

The R1 has done a lot of winning over the last couple of years so there is no doubting its credentials. That said, I still think the time is overdue for a smaller, sharper, more powerful R1 to take the fight to the 'blade and GSX-R. From my point of view as a superstock racer, the lack of meaningful updates on the standard 2006 version has the R1 well past its use-by-date. Top-end power is still eye-watering, but then again fairly dismal when lined up against the GSX-R1000. The Suzuki not only outguns the Yam but also out-stops and out-turns it. I suppose now that the R6 has finally been re-launched, Yamaha's development time will be devoted to giving R1 this much needed spruce up (next year's litre shoot out should be a cracker!).

The R1 proved far more enjoyable on the roads than on the track. Its tendency to understeer was less of an issue at a slightly silly road pace than when 'cutting sick' at Mireval.

2^{ND OPINION} PAUL YOUNG

2006 British super sport championship contender Youngy's raced on or against all of these bikes in super stock form. His plain-speaking verdict comes from years of experience



It's all quite controlled and predictable but you still end up looking enviously inside at lines left by the GSX-R. Repeating the same corner along the St. Raphael seafront over and over again for the camera, I had the Yamaha's front end washing out on demand. Fun, but not very clever and not very quick. The firm rear suspension and long swingarm gives excellent brain/throttle/tyre/track/brain communications, and plenty of grip. It could in part be this abundance of grip at the back that was causing the front to push so much.

One difficulty I had with the Yam this year was with the riding position. On the positive side the seat is ultra narrow, which makes it easy to really stand up on the footpegs and flick the bike from side to side beneath you. But then once seated again the reach to the handlebars is quite a stretch, making it hard to get weight over the front and help it cut back mid turn. Taller riders won't have this problem and I'd certainly recommend the R1 to anyone who is too big to comfortably fit into the Suzuki. Despite being a little bit behind the times the R1 is still one hell of a tool.

4 **Kawasaki ZX-10R**

The 2005 version was but a factory-fit steering damper away from giving the GSX-R a big green wellie full of botheration. So where...why...how did it all go wrong? That lovely new Ohlins damper astride the top yoke would have been all that last year's Ten needed to go head to head with the Suzuki. Yet on this year's ZX-10R that single sensible update is lost, adrift in a sloppy pea-green sea of mediocrity and pig ugliness.

It is an absolute truth that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And doubtless there will be those amongst us for whom the new ZX-10R represents the horniest thing since Divine wore a green chiffon body glove.

Thankfully for them, the worst

"Can't that guy get his knee down?"



"What do you mean?"

point of the bike is easily rectified. The rear tyre size is all to cock. It seems like the Kawasaki caught a site of itself in the mirror wearing a slinky 190/50 Dunlop and realised how big its arse looked. True, the 190/55 is a little more complimentary to the saddlebag muffler design cues but it properly fucks the handling. It has the feeling of a tyre with too many motorway miles under its belt, squared off, horrible.

Considering that 10 years ago Kawasaki's ZX-7RR was way ahead of all the other four cylinder superbikes with an excellent slipper clutch, it's a bit of a disappointment that this bike had a major shudder through the clutch lever on downchanges. The ZX-6R we tested last year had the same problem. The only solution was completely clutchless downchanges. That's not how it should work. A slipper clutch is only a useful tool if it also allows you a degree of manual operation with good modulation. This one just has a fit in your hand.

Apparently, the ZX-10R gave the most peak power in the dyno runs carried out for this test, but the truth is on the road and the tight test track it 'felt' like the one with the least due to its lack of response in the lower rev-range. A big fat spread of torque and instant neck snapping throttle response is what makes this class of bike usable, not a fleeting glimpse of 2bhp extra at the top.

In the light of its competition, I can't help but feel a little embarrassed for the hapless Kwaka, bless. >



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GRAND DESIGNS

KAWASAKI ZX-10R SUZUKI GSX-R1000 YAMAHA YZF-R1 HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

2006 LITRE SPORTS

THE VERDICT

AND FINALLY, AFTER THOUSANDS OF MILES ON THE ROAD AND TRACK WE BRING YOU...THE LOW-DOWN FROM THE SHOW-DOWN. HERE'S WHAT TO BUY AND WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

KAWASAKI ZX-10R

4

Of all the manufacturers lining up to knock Suzuki down this year, Kawasaki was surely the one in pole position. Riding the old ZX-10R really made the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It was so involving and intense that a year of riding one gave you ten year's worth of stories. Now the only tale to tell is one of disappointment. Not only does the ZX-10R look the shadow of its former self, but its performance puts it in the shade of its contemporaries too. Its nervousness on anything uneven and uncertainty at the edge of traction leave it last on the track and the lack of power at the bottom end and woeful riding position leave it struggling on the roads too. Fastest and most powerful it may be, but without confidence and assertiveness the ZX-10R is nothing. I'd buy a 2005 model, add a steering damper and book a season's worth of trackdays over the new model.

HONDA CBR1000RR

2

Second place, and a dramatic leap up the rankings given the un-dramatic nature of its changes, goes to the Fireblade. For the last two years we've said that beneath the puppy fat lies an athletic machine and now Honda has put the 'blade on a diet and stretched the boundaries of its motor, it really does challenge the GSX-R on the roads. Its balance remains, but its abilities have been extended. The old bike was probably the most composed in a turn, but its weight forced it to struggle into the corner and understeered on its way out, but now the track is as much its home as the roads.

3

YAMAHA YZF-R1

Third, and the 'could do better' lecture from teacher, goes to the R1. There's barely anything wrong with this machine, but having put so much resource into the M1 project, Valentino Rossi's pocket and the development of the R6, the coffers must have run dry when it came to the R1's re-design. Connoisseurs will spot the differences between the 2005 and 2006 versions, but the changes made by Yamaha simply don't warrant a current owner upgrading. Indeed, source a pre-registered 2005 bike out for peanuts (well, £7,300) and you'll be laughing.

1

SUZUKI GSX-R1000

A bike's development cycle normally means that it gets the full-on surgery every four years while the cuffs and collars are seen to every other year. The GSX-R's rivals have been trimmed and preened, but are all in need of a substantial change to compete with the imperious Suzuki. The GSX-R remains head and shoulders better than its rivals around a track and while the Honda rivals its abilities on the road, it never surpasses what must be considered the most complete sports bike ever.

The GSX-R1000 is as beautifully effective and as stunning to look at as the Millau Bridge itself. Building both must have been one hell of a job but both prove that if something is worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Overall Test Verdicts (Ratings apply to this test only)



THANKS TO:

On a test as big as this we use the services of lots of good, good people, and we recommend these folk to you too. The *SuperBike Italia* boys because they're top fellas always up for a laugh and ready to help us out when the Blighty weather is shitey. Dunlop (www.dunlopyres.co.uk/bike) are top chaps too for arranging their Mireval testing facility and laying on a smorgasbord of new Dunlop Qualifiers. Simon and the boys at Carbontek (www.carbontek.com or 01737 789878) have never let us down and are even offering free dyno runs for the early risers on Saturday while www.bikers-lot.com put us up in regal comfort in the middle of France, and they'll do the same to you too. Also: Earl Gray, Youngy Young, Critch, Broon and Gerard at Issoire.



**“...The GSX-R
remains head and
shoulders better than
its rivals... it must be
considered the most
complete motorcycle
ever built...”**