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MAY 2008

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



HONDA CBR1000RR **£9,299**



KAWASAKI ZX-10R **£8,950**



YAMAHA YZF-R1 **£8,999**



SUZUKI GSX-R1000 **£8,949**



With a new Fireblade and new ZX-10R in the showrooms, the flagship 1,000cc test was bound to create an upset. Wasn't it?

Words: Jon Pearson Pics: John Noble & Paul Bryant



KINGS OF THE HILL

King of the hill is a simple term describing an undisputed leader or champion but it's also a game in which players attempt to climb to the top of a point (above everyone else), while opponents try to pull or push the 'king of the hill' off. Group tests in motorcycle magazines are much like

this in that we contrive to test each player, in this case the 2008 1,000cc sportsbikes, against each other to establish the most dominant. They pull and push in different directions, some are king of the track 'hill', some more suited to the roads, some are easier to live with, while others might offer a better

package. Either way it is a monumental battle.

Jostling and barging each other about in the 2008 litre bike test are four very likely looking contenders. The established 'king' is the mighty Suzuki GSX-R1000 which has reigned almost unchallenged since its creation in late 2000. The current model is into its

THE BIG TEST

second year and all the form books point to a possible upset. Can the big Suzook keep hold of the crown? Suzuki GB is twitching slightly and has thrown a couple of Arrow twin pipes (replacing the hefty and bulky stock end cans) into the bargain as trump cards, which look better at the very least.

The other member of the pack is another model in its second year of production, Yamaha's YZF R1. The R1 needs little introduction with a proven history placing it right up there with the best of sportsbikes. Most recent models of R1 have mixed performance with a super-stylish looks, bringing a touch of class to the contest and a certain air of sophistication enhanced with some new colours for 2008.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

The two new bikes for 2008 Honda's **CBR1000RR** Fireblade and Kawasaki's **ZX-10R**.

Both bikes have undergone major changes for 2008 with new styling meaning more svelte looks, new suspension and chassis and – most importantly – stonking new engines. In addition, both replace if not lack-lustre then, at the very least, under-achieving previous models. So much for the 'in theory' stuff, how do they shape-up on road and track?



WHERE WE WENT

The port of Frejus in southern France is not a new base for *SuperBike* road tests. But instead of more favoured haunts we headed north into the hills (high enough to see snow at times). The D562 Draguignan to Grasse is a corker but the D563 north proved bereft of cars and joins one of France's best roads, the N85 Route Napoleon. After a day and a half of that it was a Sprinter van sprint back to Blighty and Silverstone circuit for a trackday. With no tracks available in France and terrible weather in Spain, the wide open spaces of Silverstone gave us a fast, but cold, track test.

YOUR TESTERS ARE...

HOUSE TRAINED, YET STILL FERAL BEASTS



DAVE SMITH Mountain Goat (*Oreamnos americanus*) Beards, short tails, long black horns and thick white hair are characteristic. Notorious for showing aggression. Vegetarian diet mainly includes grasses, herbs, hedges, moss (not Chris Moss), ferns and lichens.

JON PEARSON

Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) The biggest of the lynx family native to European forests. Mainly nocturnal and solitary, very quiet and seldom seen or heard.



SIMON ROOTS

Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*) Ice Age survivor shares ancestry with the domestic dog. Built for stamina the physique is ideal for long distance travel with a narrow chest and powerful back legs facilitating efficient locomotion.



CHRIS MOSS

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) Shape of the head is normally quite round, a wide mouth with 42 teeth. It has a powerful bone structure. Weight varies depending on habitat and time of year.



GSX-R1000

If you're going to start somewhere it may as well be at the top with the defending litre sport champion

Since it first hit the UK streets late in 2000 the GSX-R1000 has been winning road tests like this with amazing regularity. It has always carried the authority of the bike every other has to match, a benchmark in every sense for all sportsbikes. That's not to mention all the race wins it has gathered and while you could argue race-fettled superbikes are a long way removed from road bikes, there are plenty of club racers notching up championships with little more than an exhaust system and some decent tyres.

The reasons for that are simple – Suzuki has built successive bikes which handle the power and weight they carry in a way which makes them faster than the rest. Simple.

Last year was no exception with the then new K7 model. Although plenty of people slated a subdued mid-range, back-to-back with both its rivals and its predecessor the latest big Gixxer remained the most composed litre bike and by most measures the quickest bike from A to B, on road or track. Being quickest doesn't just mean

more power, this bike handles too with an uncanny ability to remain stable while all around it bikes are squirming under the pressure. All that added up to a resounding number one slot once more in our 2007 1000cc test.

The K8 remains unchanged save for a couple of extra exhaust cans you might well have noticed. Suzuki GB is selling the bike with these Arrow twin cans inclusive in the price. They're a simple, road legal, bolt-on which are no doubt an added incentive to keep the bike alive and interesting in

its second year in the showroom. The first thing to note is they look better than the bulky megaliths from the Suzuki factory which besmirch the otherwise neat-looking GSX-R lines.

Balancing can trick

The biggest trick of all though is the almost imperceptible difference they make to the handling. While the dyno might not show a great deal of difference (at 4,000rpm both make just short of 60lb-ft or torque, 10 more than the Fireblade) the shaved weight they provide just livens the handling enough for you to notice. I'll confess this test is a little incomplete because with more time I'd have removed these pipes and weighed the difference to the stock ones. But whether it's a seat of the pants feeling or hard



fact, I remember how odd my long term test bike felt in standard trim with those hefty cans hanging off the back – and this bike feels different.

Alongside the other three bikes on this test the GSX-R power deliver is clinically smooth and punchier lower down, which means coming out of slow corners with the revs low, you gain yards on them. Look at the dyno graphs and you'll see at the 4,000 to 5,000rpm mark the GSX-R is way ahead which is surprising given often-heard criticism of the K7 bike. The two new bikes proceed to tramp off ahead of the GSX-R around the 7,000rpm

mark but it has usually got the run on them by then.

Got brakes?

At the other end of the speed spectrum is the GSX-R's only major flaw though. It still has the least impressive brakes of the bunch with less power and feel and the least best (er, 'worst' surely? – Ed.) braking performance from our speed test data. It's something I moaned like a stuck record about with my long term test K7, and it's a record which is still spinning on this particular turntable. At best they stopped a whopping seven metres further from 70 to 0mph than the best of the bunch, the ZX-10R. On the

WHAT MAKES IT TICK?

GSX-R1000



→ Engine

The Keihin fuel injectors have 12 holes per nozzle rather than the previous model's four, improving fuel atomisation. They're also more compact and point into the throttle body at a 30° angle. Bigger inlet and exhaust ports follow race bike developments and there's a slightly higher exhaust valve lift too.

→ Chassis

Five cast aluminium alloy sections make the frame stronger and lighter than the K5. The bike now has a 10mm longer swinging arm, with a longer wheelbase too with longer steering geometry (trail is increased to 98mm from 96mm on the K5). Frame is 10mm wider. Curiously, in spite of the fact it's longer, it's also lighter, by 200 grams.

→ Wheels & brakes

The Tokico radial set-up has had only slight revisions. Stat fans will love to quote the fact that the discs now have ten fixing bolts, up from eight. It's common across a couple of these bikes and helps reduce unsprung mass by a gram or two.

→ Design

Tried and tested design, let's face it you know when you see a GSX-R; it was tweaked for 2007 but retains roomy interior feel behind screen. Lower pegs (adjustable) and higher bars make it a comfortable and aid manageability (if that is a word) at slower speeds.

■ From Toulouse to Towcester, the Suzuki is still a top performer. On road or track



benchmark stability on the road hinged by a fine front end, which gives you all the confidence you can muster. You cannot ignore class-leading power either, the ZX-10R might have the highest peak output but if you can't get it down on the ground what use is it? The only down side is that this year the Gixxer loses out on the track to more agile opposition, but on the road you're hard pushed to better its deceptive speed and poise.

road they're generally OK but in the face of such opposition, merely being 'OK' isn't good enough – these are flagship models. They fade fastest on the track too, in fact they're the only ones to fade at all and are definitely the Achilles heel of the bike.

Stoppers aside, the Suzuki continues to be a contender in this class, surprisingly so if I'm honest because I was expecting to write it off as a big, old barge. But you just can't ignore





YZF-R1

In some people's eyes the Yamaha R1 is the best bike on the road simply because of its looks. But its beauty will need to be more than skin deep to see off the competition here

Solid and dependable performance underpins a very fast bike but its trademark good looks set it apart from the crowd as the stylish and sophisticated member of the club. It's clearly a bike designed with its form in mind as much as function, the opposite of the Honda.

In comparison, the riding experience is also a more comfortable one, another reason why perhaps the more discerning gentleman buying gentlemen opt for

the R1. It oozes a kind of arrogant class, the same as you might find with a 5 series BMW car or Mercedes.

Like that kind of expensive businessman's car it can also shock you with deceptive speed. A tame bottom end throttle response belies a stonking top-end which hauls you forwards like a space-age bungy cord. Its big problem in the engine department is not showing you the bearing until you're on the rev-range. Which is fine if

you're prepared to rev it a lot but even at the swift road pace we run around on during these tests it constantly loses out to the other three. It is proof that even when you're racing after each other on an empty French road you do still naturally use a lot of low and mid-range power on a litre bike.

Old hats and lard

But, again like the five-series Beemer, it can't hide its girth as much as it might think which makes it the hardest physically

to ride fast. On track that effort is amplified where you are naturally putting more effort in, the R1 is definitely the one which makes you sweat more.

A quick test of how heavy the bike feels was doing some stoppies. The R1 takes more aggression to get it up there but also feels more hefty with its tail in the air. The twin pipes under the seat are partly to blame and it's hard not to think that oh-so-important fashion statement of just become oh-so-old-hat.

Twin, under-seat pipes are so passé you know. We need less weight Mr Yamaha

and we need it to be lower down where the centre of gravity is not way up high making the tail end heavy. For the record – here's the science – the Yamaha was the heaviest bike on this test, fully loaded with fuel it weighs in at 210.4kg compared to the Honda's 201.7kg. It's a bit of an old cliché but to get a good idea of what next time you're in the



supermarket pick up nine bags of sugar and see how it feels.

Where to now?

Generally the R1 has a very direct handling character, like you are literally holding on to the front spindle, which has been a trait since the earliest of YZF models. But there's also a sensation, on the road mainly, that any kind of drive in a corner makes the front wheel feel light and not quite planted enough. Any kind of bump makes the

front tyre bobble and the bars go a little light (like the difference between a car with power steering and without). It's nothing much but sometimes it gave me the sense the front tyre wasn't gripping as it might have been and quickly had us reaching for the tool kit and making some adjustments. Dave the Goat had one as long term last year and listed some quick suspension adjustments which quickly dialled this out and kept it pitched further onto its front wheel.

WHAT MAKES IT TICK?

YZF-R1



→ Engine

The 2007 R1 features Yamaha chip controlled throttle (YCC-T) (as launched on the 2008 YZF R6) plus electronically controlled air intake funnels (YCC-I). The funnels adjust from 140mm at low rpm to 65mm at full revs. A new four-valve head is designed to work with the YCC-I and YCC-T with a higher compression ratio (12.7:1) and a revised valve angle of 24 degrees (the same as the R6).

→ Chassis

Deltabox frame side walls are a mere 2.5mm thick (1mm thinner than 2006) and designed for 'forgiveness' by reducing overall rigidity by as much as 50 per cent vertically across the frame. Longer swingarm improves cornering performance at turn-in by increasing down-force under acceleration. 3mm higher swingarm also helps reduce the rear's tendency to squat under acceleration.

→ Wheels & brakes

Smaller front disc (by 10mm) and back to the future front calipers have six pistons. Yamaha claims effective braking diameter is maintained but the smaller discs are also thinner, reducing unsprung rotating mass. Decent Pirelli Diablo tyres are standard at last.

→ Design

Improved heat dissipation from engine is the knock-on effect of the negative air flow created by the completely re-designed front cowl (designed to reduce air resistance and increase the air flow to the airbox). Negative pressure causes the hot air to be drawn away from the engine, more so at higher rpm and speeds.

It's all about feel you see and in this test the Yamaha now feels like a middle-aged spread has taken over its hips, possibly just like the sort of businessman who drives around in a five-series BMW. To some that will be a bonus of course, it comes to us all and you might very well decide the style and class of the R1 literally outweigh performance. In most situations, particularly when you're not riding around like a hooligan, it matches the GSX-R in being very certain of itself, more likely to keep its wheels on the ground and your bum happily in the seat than deliver a roller-coaster ride.

The dilemma for Yamaha (among other things) is what to do next? Do you send the 2009 R1 down the same route again making it classier and stylish? Or, like the other three, take a more track-oriented approach and help some of those Yamaha race teams get some championships at last? An up-scaled version of the R6 would surely be fantastic. I know which I'd prefer.



■ "Get your my knee down you say? What, now? Are you sure?" Editor KP can't believe the weather or the roads.

■ This was done on closed roads with the full cooperation of the authorities as well as the Health and Safety inspectorate



CBR1000RR FIREBLADE

The best bike here? It's a bit early in the test to be saying that but from the moment it turns into the first corner it certainly feels that way



It's a knack several Hondas have had over the years, the VFR for instance but the best direct comparison is the 'blade's all conquering younger sibling the CBR600RR. It's won the group test so frequently over the years because it is a perfected 600cc sportsbike. There's an air of competence about the CBR1000RR which makes it hard not to feel exactly the same way in this test.

The hard part was trying to disprove that instant reaction to the bike. God knows the smashed-in-the-face-with-a-spade nose of the bike does its best to

dissuade you from liking it. Ignore that front end and there's a neat and tidy air to it, from the rider's eye view at least. Opinion about the look of the bodywork divided us, but I'm surprised to say that – generally speaking it – grew on us. The more time you spend around it the better sense it makes.

Ready and steady

Then someone said that Honda had simply designed the bike to work, to function and then closed up shop, job done. Armed with that knowledge we all felt a lot better about the snub-nose, strange side-fairing

vents and minimal tail piece (but not necessarily the antique Honda wing tank badge).

The riding experience can appear subdued at first with a throttle delivery like the R1 and ZX-10R right at the bottom of the revs, in short, a bit flat. Come out of a slow corner and open the throttle wide and not a lot happens for bit. It sounds weird to say it about a litre bike but more and more bikes are engineered that way to stop you highsiding yourself every five minutes. Just above that point though, around 4,500rpm, the 'blade's throttle response





WHAT MAKES IT TICK?

CBR1000RR



→ Engine

The heavily revised 2008 motor returns to a separate cylinder block with new linerless bores and clever, electro-deposited coating inside the cylinders. Inlet valves are titanium and the bore is up (1mm) while the stroke is down (1.5mm). Pistons are claimed to be lighter and stronger with total engine mass reduced by 2.5kg.

→ Chassis

The cast aluminium frame is 30mm narrower at its widest point and, like the engine, is 2.5kg lighter. It's stronger too, allegedly. The 'Gulwing' swingarm is longer and has a higher pivot point, though otherwise suspension is unchanged from last year's model except for a wider span on the forks and more offset.

→ Wheels & brakes

New, 430g lighter, calipers are Tokico monoblock one-piece castings. Four chrome-plated pistons use two pads to bite 320mm discs. Discs use six mount points now rather than 10 as previous to save weight. Wheels are 240g lighter at the front and 310g less at the rear.

→ Design

A cause for great concern among most who've seen the 2008 styling is the snub nose. It's certainly true to say "it grows on you" and looks better in the black and white scheme here. Reduced side-fairing panels help the bike turn, apparently.

“The Fireblade feels more complete and user friendly so you are confident, fast and above all enjoying the ride from the moment you climb aboard.”

sweetens right up and quickly makes it feels as alert as a cat that's spotted a mouse. From there, if you look at the dyno curves, the Honda power curve remains super-sweet right through to the rev-limit and always responds quickly to your requests at the twist grip without hesitation.

It sounds like a crap little analogy but just imagine for a moment a cat chasing a mouse. It's pouncing, darting this way and that, jumping yet always landing firmly on its feet. Grasp that in your mind and you've pretty much gathered the feeling of riding this bike fast along a twisty, French mountain road. You might take from this I think the chassis is a good one. It's the alert theme carried through the bike and the subtle and

supple suspension is no exception. The response and movement over bumps feels solid but works progressively well the more you ask of it, much like the GSX-R. The shock needed increased damping on circuit, but feedback once the Dunlops were losing the will to live was always good. Long, controlled darkies out of corners are definitely the order of the day.

Weight loss champ

One area where it does trounce the rest is at the weigh-in. While it may not make the most power on the dyno it does have – and get this – nearly 10kg less weight. It reflects well on the Suzuki which is packing a decent punch if it can still out pace a ten kilo lighter bike during speed testing but that

starts to mean less when you're razzing along a road feeling like a cat chasing a mouse.

Ultimately it is how all the relative components come together in one complete package which make the 2008 Fireblade a triumph. There's an argument which says everything performing in a perfectly competent way makes it boring bike. Compared to the Kawasaki in a way, it is, but saying it is less interesting as a riding experience is missing the point. The point is Honda has made the rider feeling so spot-on, made every point of contact you have and every point of control you use bang on you can forget about what the bike is doing and just get on with riding fast (or riding slow if you want).



■ Finally, a pic that shows the tiny dimensions of the 'Blade and hides its ugly snout

The Honda goes about its task by not necessarily having the most power, better suspension, better this or that (although it is most often there or thereabouts). More simply

(or more expertly) it feels more complete and user friendly so you are confident, fast and above all enjoying the ride from the moment you climb aboard.



→ DUCATI

ZX-10R

"What an animal! I feel like the true ZX-10R is back; scary, edgy and fast on the road, a weapon you can't quite get used to."

Those were the first words in my notebook on day one of this test and like the new Honda these first impressions set a trend. And, no matter how many miles and testing we did, that phrase rang true to

including Kawasaki itself, brand it an "expert's bike". I'm glad to say it feels just the same with the 2008 10R.

Since those heady early days the mighty ZX-10R, like so many great bikes over the years, was

I'll confess to some nervousness getting on this bike at the very dawn of this test. The twisty as hell French road we pitched up on first is a beast of a thing if you're not totally confident with bike and turn

started to be talked about as "edgy", "harsh on the bumps", "angry" by the test team.

The excitement builds from the moment you work out where the thing bolts together, controls

the 10R is getting at you as a rider, "come on you fucker, stop messing about and ride me."

Fast'n'hard

It feels a little at odds with some of the other bikes

The original ZX-10 was just as much an instant hooligan too, it jumped into the party and caused something of a riot and helped most people,

mad bastard is now having one king-hell mid-life crisis which has you back riding with your wits and laughing at the audacity of it.

knew was potentially the animal of the test onto it required a certain amount of caution. That feeling is sort of justified because the Kwacka quickly

the lever and revs don't always pick up from a blip of the throttle which meant people kept stalling it when pulling away. But in another way it is like

corner entry is very accurate and helps make the most track-bias bike here. It's whole ethos is about riding fast and hard and that naturally



“With a couple of rougher edges here and there the ZX-10R is slightly harder to ride fast and get along with. Brilliant but slightly flawed.”

enough either means you need to go TT racing or get yourself on a track to enjoy that energy at its fullest.

One problem you'll find the faster you get is a rather poor example of an Ohlins steering damper. Even turned fully on it doesn't really do a great deal. It slows the steering just enough to stop the regular flapping bars you'll find under hard acceleration, but full-on race damper it ain't.

The suspension is an

odd one on the 10R too. Kawasaki UK supplied us with road and track settings for the test bike and they do make it work better in each situation. Not everything works for everyone which is why we do road tests en masse to gather opinion. But so much opinion helped prove the point for us. The problem with it is, like other areas of the bike, a harshness to the initial bit of the suspension stroke which makes you feel a little uneasy. It's like you're

WHAT MAKES IT TICK?



→ Engine

Increased power at high revs is the name of the game with 13bhp more up top making the bottom end feel flatter. A lighter crank has 1kg of weight shaved off the fins but this has no effect on the inertia. Dual secondary fuel injectors kick-in at 6,000rpm to feed the engine better at the top-end. Oval throttle bodies suck air from a larger airbox too.

→ Chassis

The outer edges of the frame (the widest point where your knees rest) is now convex rather than concave to give better rider contact with the bike. Overall the frame is stronger too and has been developed by among other top-flight racers, Akira Yanagawa in the Japanese superbike championship. Minimal two-piece subframe features a light, aluminium die-cast design aimed at race fairing fitment.

→ Wheels & brakes

Six-spoked wheels are different to the originally planned five-spokers. Rims are painted completely green before masking the rim strip off and painted black. Apparently this offers better durability than any other painting method tested. 310mm petal discs are larger, naturally enough to make the brakes stronger.

→ Design

Design project leader Shunja Tanaka runs a democracy at the K-Tek design department in Akashi. They all go away for a couple of days, do some scribbling and then whoever comes up with the best ideas goes to the top of the tree for that project. This might be the ZX-10R one week or a ship the next. The theme for the overall look was the Samurai sword, the katana.

hitting bumps rather than absorbing them which points to a lack of damping control. In turn that makes you a little more nervous on the 10 than you are on the same bumps at the same speed on the other three bikes. It's not a big "problem" by any means but it adds significantly to the feeling of edginess.

So long as you want your biking experience a

hair-raising one this is the bike for you. With a bit of extra effort it could be smoothed out and become an awesome weapon. The cause and effect of trying to ride this bike fast is as exhilarating as they come. Which is exactly what the ZX-10R model needed after going stale for a couple of years.

Overall, the Kawasaki doesn't quite arrive

as sorted and refined as I'd hoped it would following the launch at the admittedly fast, flat and billiard-table smooth Qatar launch. It does everything it should brilliantly and is arguably the most exciting bike of the bunch. But with a couple of rougher edges here and there it's slightly harder to ride fast and get along with. Brilliant but slightly flawed.

■ Our lads visit Tourrette. Amazingly, there was no swearing. What a bunch of ...gents

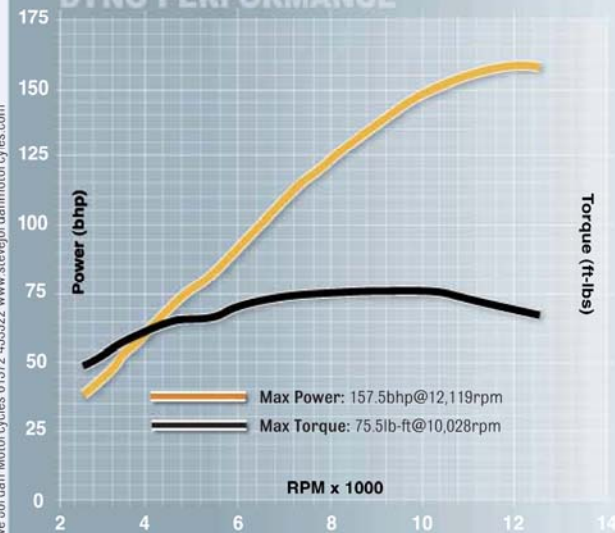


→ HONDA CBR1000RR

Price: £9,299 Nu Ins group: 17

Contact: Honda UK (01753 590500) www.honda.co.uk

DYNO PERFORMANCE



DYNO

Electronically tagged to keep itself all delicate until 5,500rpm when it comes on strong with the ZX-10R producing the best mid-range torque figures. At 7,000rpm it's making nearly 10bhp more than the R1. Has the most consistently smooth power and torque lines.

ENGINE

Type: LC 16v, DOHC, inline-four **Displacement:** 999.8cc **Bore x Stroke:** 76 x 55.1mm **Compression:** 12.3:1 **Carburation:** Fuel injector, 46mm throttle bodies, dual injectors per cylinder **Gearbox:** Six speed, chain **Power:** 157.5bhp@12,119rpm **Torque:** 75.5lb-ft@10,028rpm

CYCLE PARTS

Chassis: Cast aluminium twin spar **Suspension:** (F) 43mm USD forks, fully adjustable (R) Fully adjustable monoshock **Brakes:** (F) Twin 320mm discs, six piston radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, single-piston caliper **Wheels/Tyres:** Cast aluminium (F) 120/70-ZR17 (R) 190/50-ZR17 **Rake/Trail:** 23.3°/96.3mm **Wheelbase:** 1,405mm **Capacity:** 18 litres (3.96gals) **Wet Weight:** 201.7kg (444.7lbs)



→ CBR1000RR RATINGS*

*Ratings apply to this test only

ENGINE: 9/10

CHASSIS: 9/10

USABILITY: 10/10

**OVERALL
9.5/10**



Looks, agile, light, easy-going



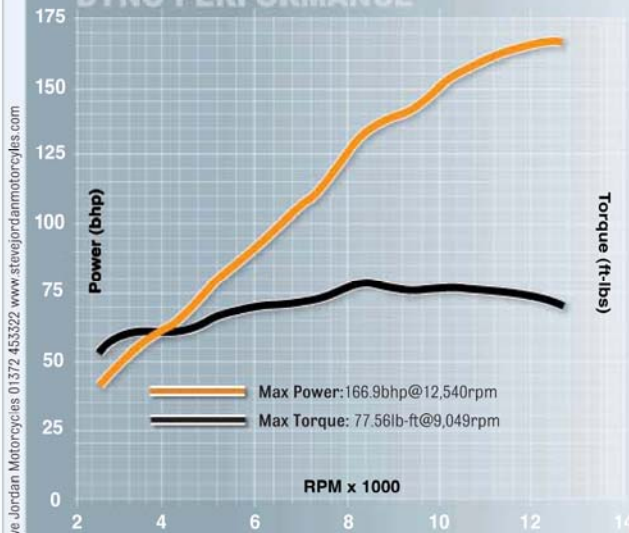
Looks are mildly characterless

→ KAWASAKI ZX-10R

Price: £8,950 Nu Ins group: 17

Contact: Kawasaki UK (01628 851000) www.kawasaki.co.uk

DYNO PERFORMANCE



DYNO

Much like the Honda's curves they begin slowly, tamed by electronic aids saying whoa-there son, easy with the throttle. Then comes in all singing and dancing from the 6,000rpm mark. 166.94bhp@12,539rpm makes it the most powerful litre sportsbike we've ever tested.

ENGINE

Type: LC 16v, DOHC, inline-four **Displacement:** 998cc **Bore x Stroke:** 76 x 55mm **Compression:** 12.9:1 **Carburation:** Keihin EFI, 48mm throttle bodies **Gearbox:** Six speed, chain **Power:** 166.9bhp@12,540rpm **Torque:** 77.56lb-ft@9,049rpm

CYCLE PARTS

Chassis: Cast aluminium twin spar **Suspension:** (F) 43mm USD Kayaba forks, fully adjustable (R) Fully adjustable Kayaba monoshock, fully adjustable (inc high and low speed comp) **Brakes:** (F) Twin 310mm petal discs, Tokico 4-piston radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, Tokico single-piston caliper **Wheels/Tyres:** Cast aluminium (F) 120/70-ZR17 (R) 190/50-ZR17 **Rake/Trail:** 25.5° x 110mm **Wheelbase:** 1,415mm **Capacity:** 17 litres (3.74gals) **Dry Weight:** 210.1kg (463.2lbs)



→ ZX-10R RATINGS*

*Ratings apply to this test only

ENGINE: 9/10

CHASSIS: 8/10

USABILITY: 8/10

**OVERALL
8.5/10**



Pure attitude, track focused



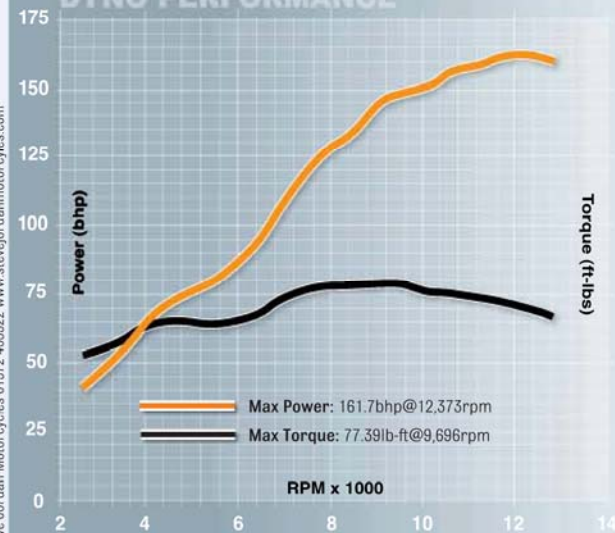
Harsh, track focused

→ YAMAHA YZF-R1

Price: £8,999 Nu Ins group: **17**

Contact: Yamaha Motor (01932 358000) www.yamaha-motor.co.uk

DYNO PERFORMANCE



DYNO

You can't see it but the R1 has the sorriest-looking air-fuel ratio of many a bike as the ECU tries to conform to EU regulations. Suffers from a power trough just where the CBR and ZX-10R are strong, but then comes in with a bang around the 8,000rpm mark.

■ ENGINE

Type: LC 16v, DOHC, inline-four **Displacement:** 998cc **Bore x Stroke:** 77 x 53.6mm **Compression:** 12.7:1 **Carburation:** 45mm throttle bodies, fuel injection **Gearbox:** Six-speed, chain **Power:** 161.7bhp@12,373rpm **Torque:** 77.39lb-ft@9,696rpm

■ CYCLE PARTS

Chassis: Aluminium die-cast Deltabox perimeter **Suspension:** (F) 43mm USD forks, fully adjustable (R) fully adjustable monoshock **Brakes:** (F) Twin 310mm discs, six piston radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, single-piston caliper **Wheels/Tyres:** Cast aluminium (F) 120/70-ZR17 (R) 190/50-ZR17 **Rake/Trail:** 24°/102mm **Wheelbase:** 1,415mm **Capacity:** 18 litres (3.96gals) **Dry Weight:** 210.4kg (463.9lbs)



→ YZF-R1 RATINGS*

*Ratings apply to this test only

ENGINE: 8/10

CHASSIS: 8/10

USABILITY: 9/10

**OVERALL
8.5/10**



Classic looks, roomy



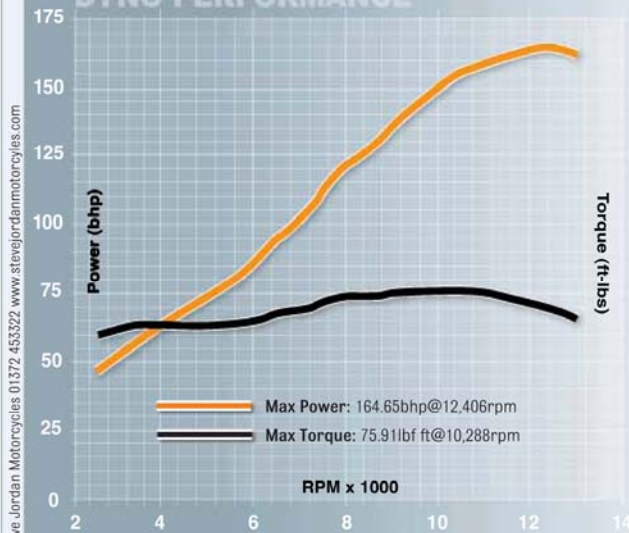
Power too concentrated at the top of the rev range; heavy

→ SUZUKI GSX-R1000

Price: £8,949 Nu Ins group: **17**

Contact: Suzuki GB (0500 011959) www.suzuki-gb.co.uk

DYNO PERFORMANCE



DYNO

The GSX-R motor offers several trump cards. Firstly fuelling is pretty much immaculate from the bottom to the top with no glitches. Secondly it might lose out to the ZX-10R and CBR1000RR in the mid-range but it's already beaten them out the blocks with nearly 60bhp at 4,000rpm.

■ ENGINE

Type: LC 16v, DOHC, inline-four **Displacement:** 999cc **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, chain **Power:** 164.65bhp@12,406rpm **Torque:** 75.91lb-ft@10,288rpm

■ CYCLE PARTS

Chassis: Aluminium twin spar **Suspension:** (F) Fully adjustable monoshock (R) Fully adjustable monoshock **Brakes:** (F) 2x310mm discs, four-piston Tokico radial calipers (R) 220mm disc, twin piston caliper **Tyres:** (F) 120/70 ZR17 (R) 190/50 ZR17 **Rake/Trail:** 25°/98mm **Wheelbase:** 1,415mm **Capacity:** 17.5 litres (3.75 gal) **Dry Weight:** 209.8kg (462.5lb)



→ GSX-R1000 RATINGS*

*Ratings apply to this test only

ENGINE: 9/10

CHASSIS: 9/10

USABILITY: 9/10

**OVERALL
9/10**



Fast, very useable engine



Lacklustre brakes, looks big



Second Opinion Simon Roots

4 Yamaha R1
It's not that the Yamaha is a nostalgic hint of yesteryear, after all, any machine capable of doing what the R1 can is worthy of terrific respect, but you do sense that the Yamaha's best days are past. The now four-year-old silhouette looks too big and bulky, the clocks staid, the riding position way too conventional for this class. The litre class should be a showcase for technology and innovation, but climb on the Yamaha after being on the decks of the other stellar craft you can't help feeling a little short changed.

Economical bimble fest
The same is true of the bike at low revs, if you bumble economically through town you get little return from opening the throttle at anything below 4,000rpm, but from this point onwards the Yamaha comes alive and shows that there's life in the old dog yet.

It'll take a good rider to escape from the Yamaha's clutches as the combination of great midrange power and confidence inspiring cornering means that it makes a great choice for pure road riding. Indeed, this is where the facets of the longer wheelbase, higher centre of gravity and slightly lardier feel help to make the R1 feel planted and sure, rather than flighty and unpredictable.

The better leg room will appeal to many, as will the slightly lazier engine and refined manners. This makes it the best bike on test for certain riders, but for those who want an edgy, supremely strong and technologically laden experience the Yamaha falls short for another year.

3 Kawasaki ZX-10R
Forget that the 2006/07 ZX-10R ever existed because this is the true heir to the original Kawasaki wild child. Like the original, the ZX-10R demonstrates a hatred of the humdrum and appears on the scene every bit as insolently as Johnny Rotten on the Reg Grundy show way back when.

The motor is an absolute riot of revs. The tachometer heads to the red stuff in an instant; the acceleration of the machine belies the gear you gas it in. Open the throttle in second and at fires away like you're in third, a blink of the eye adds another 10mph. For a normally aspirated machine this really is the new benchmark – even more eager than the Suzuki. Am I really writing this? Yes, I declare it so.

No fun? God save us!

If the rest of the machine was so user friendly (an experienced user, admittedly), then this really would be better than the astonishing Honda, but the riding position doesn't work as well on the road as its rivals. Sitting on top of a bike on the road always leads to a degree of initial nervousness, and the Kawasaki's suspension doesn't quite offer the same levels of communication at road speeds as the Suzuki or Honda – the Öhlins steering damper doesn't breed confidence either and belies the Swedish firm's reputation.

If you loved the original Ten, you'll rejoice at this new version. It won't suit everyone, but for those that do it'll be like the Sex Pistols at the Hundred Club. Wrong, but oh so right.

2 Suzuki GSX-R1000
I love everything about the Suzuki GSX-R1000. I love its looks, I love its colours, I love its sound and I love the riding position. The connection between bike and limbs offers the perfect balance for me to ride aggressively and as I twist the throttle as hard as I dare I feel at one with this motorcycle; confident, composed and content.

I love the way the forks and front tyre communicate news to me. Be it good, bad or indifferent, you develop a close rapport with the road no matter what. I love that you get a pair of fancy, free Arrow cans that give it a bit more guts at lower revs, I love its crisp delivery to the rear tyre, I love the way it works at so many speeds, accommodating nervous first runs on an unseen road through to life committing cornering on turns you've ridden a thousand times.

All guns blazing

There is so much that I adore about this bike, but for the first time in three years I wouldn't buy one if I had the choice. I think it's the second best bike on test, but I'd have the Honda first, for reasons that you'll read, and the Kawasaki next, purely because I loved the first version of the ZX-10R and see this new one as a polished reincarnation of an original sinner. Which leaves the Suzuki ridiculously low down in my pecking order. I'm confident that Suzuki will come back all guns blazing in 2009, but in 2008 the GSX-R's radiance has dulled. It's still brilliantly bright in every respect, but as unbelievable as it sounds, someone has made a better bike.

1 Honda Fireblade
Here's a coup I didn't see coming. I thought that the Suzuki GSX-R would never relinquish its crown, forever destined to fight off challenges, like a mighty despot ruling interminably with a delicate balance of love and fear. But the transition of power is complete, the new Honda Fireblade is the most complete bike I've ever ridden and makes the choice of a winner of this test easy.

How does it beat the Suzuki? Well, it just does everything the Suzuki does, but that little bit better. The engine's blend of strength and delivery is nigh on perfect. Perhaps a little shy below 5,000rpm, the Honda soon shakes off its inhibitions to offer an astonishingly useable spread of power. The ZX-10R may be stronger on paper, but on cold, French Tarmac, the Honda delivered the more cultured ride.

Organic orgasms, it says

But the most striking element of the Honda is its agility. Even rolling about round the car park gives an indication of how light a touch you need to get complete control of this machine. With diminutive dimensions and barely a breath of weight to it, the Honda truly goes where you want it too. The riding position is intense, without becoming too aggressive, and it's from this foundation that the Honda transfers so much control to the rider. The suspension, both front and rear, offers deft handling on such a powerful machine and the balance between front and rear is truly organic, and get the inputs right, orgasmic too.

I'm not sold on the looks, but on riding ability alone it is peerless. There are many traits it shares with the Suzuki, indeed, in many ways it feels like a truly sorted Gixxer, but the engineering, ergonomics and emotion that went into the bike has reaped rewards in spades and surpasses the perceived perfection that I once thought the Suzuki solely owned.

“The most striking element of the Honda is its agility. Even rolling about round the car park gives an indication of how light a touch you need to get complete control of this machine.”



SPEED TESTING & TRACK TIME

The interesting thing about the data gathered from speed testing is that the Suzuki remains the top performer. 0-60mph, 0-100mph and overall top speed figures show the GSX-R1000 still rules the roost.

2007 YZF-R1

Top speed: 179.02mph
Time: 33.41 seconds
Distance: 2114.68m

ACCELERATION

Speed (mph)	Time (s)	Distance (m)
0	0	0
10	0.72	1.49
20	1.26	5.06
30	1.78	10.9
40	2.3	19.02
50	2.84	29.88
60	3.33	41.92
70	3.87	57.61
80	4.5	78.85
90	5.12	102.37
100	5.77	130
110	6.61	169.71
120	7.62	221.4
130	8.71	282.43
140	10.27	376.37
150	12.43	516.85
160	15.21	709.96
170	20.84	1125.58

Standing ¼ mile: 10.68s @ 143.03mph

BRAKING

70mph-0mph: 51.33 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-ON

40mph-80mph: 5.84 seconds
40mph-120mph: 11.07 seconds

2008 ZX-10R

Top speed: 179.63
Time: 35.35 seconds
Distance: 2261.17m

ACCELERATION

Speed (mph)	Time (s)	Distance (m)
0	0	0
10	0.61	1.23
20	1.18	5.03
30	1.77	11.61
40	2.34	20.56
50	2.91	32.01
60	3.42	44.52
70	3.95	59.92
80	4.65	83.48
90	5.29	107.8
100	5.98	137.08
110	6.74	172.75
120	7.95	234.97
130	9.02	294.85
140	10.65	393.56
150	12.37	505.22
160	15.17	699.4
170	20.75	1113.48

Standing ¼ mile: 10.79s @ 140.93mph

BRAKING

70mph-0mph: 49.58 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-ON

40mph-80mph: 5.52 seconds
40mph-120mph: 9.98 seconds

2008 CBR1000RR

Top speed: 179.68
Time: 32.57 seconds
Distance: 2061.27m

ACCELERATION

Speed (mph)	Time (s)	Distance (m)
0	0	0
10	0.76	1.52
20	1.28	4.96
30	1.76	10.34
40	2.26	18.14
50	2.76	28.22
60	3.3	41.48
70	3.8	56
80	4.46	78.13
90	5.05	100.57
100	5.72	129.06
110	6.5	165.7
120	7.56	220.17
130	8.62	279.48
140	10.34	383.46
150	12.32	512.39
160	14.95	694.8
170	19.62	1058.7

Standing ¼ mile: 10.49s @ 145.42mph

BRAKING

70mph-0mph: 55.59 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-ON

40mph-80mph: 5.52 seconds
40mph-120mph: 9.98 seconds

2007 GSX-R1000

Top speed: 183.4mph
Time: 32.43 seconds
Distance: 2100.08m

ACCELERATION

Speed (mph)	Time (s)	Distance (m)
0	0	0
10	0.63	1.24
20	1.15	4.73
30	1.72	11.11
40	2.25	19.37
50	2.74	29.23
60	3.22	41.03
70	3.72	55.58
80	4.27	74.01
90	4.85	96.17
100	5.54	125.34
110	6.24	158.29
120	7.21	208.34
130	8.17	262.05
140	9.56	346.19
150	11.1	446.19
160	13.63	621.75
170	17.87	936.32
180	25.68	1550.93

Standing ¼ mile: 10.44s @ 146.14mph

BRAKING

70mph-0mph: 57.19 metres

TOP GEAR ROLL-ON

40mph-80mph: 5.13 seconds
40mph-120mph: 10.32 seconds

→SILVERSTONE NATIONAL CIRCUIT

Why spend time on track as part of this test? Simply because there's a difference between the everyday capability of each bike on the road and the prowess delivered on the track. Both areas are equally valid but this sportsbike elite need their track capabilities thoroughly examined.

Silverstone National is a stumpy little fellow amid what is probably the fastest and most wide-open GP circuit in Britain. The national circuit features just one true fast Silverstone corner, the rest are blends or deviations from the main circuit. Together they provide a good mix of fast entry corners and some agility-testing tight ones in the shape of the poxy little chicane thoughtlessly put in place for WSB and BSB racing.

Nevertheless it is fast and a good place to exploit the 160 plus horses of these bikes. With some suspension and chassis testing bumps scattered around it's bumpier than you'd imagine which, surprisingly made it a good place to test and analyse the bikes, despite some brisk February weather.



THE TYRES

Dunlop Qualifier RR

Fed up with major group tests being compromised by half-arsed OE fitment tyres we opted to soap them all onto the same hoops.

A balanced, neutral and grippy sport road tyre with as broad a capability as possible is needed for a road test which takes as many conceivable riding experiences as possible. Which is where Dunlop's Qualifier RR comes in. The dual compound tyre is tailor-made for easing you into a cold morning and hanging on to 160bhp back wheels on track. 'Too Tall Tongze' at SnC motorcycles in Ockley (01306 627144) fitted them at very short notice with a smile, a cup of tea or two and a very professional service. www.dunlopmotorcycle.co.uk

AND THE WINNER IS...

We've said it before and no doubt we'll say it again. None of these bikes is bad. You would love any of them. But one is better than the others. And it's a Honda

1 HONDA CBR1000RR

The result of this test presented itself within the first couple of miles of road testing. From that point on my natural instinct as an experienced road tester and journalist was to try my hardest to prove myself wrong. But there's no real getting away from it, Honda has built the best bike.

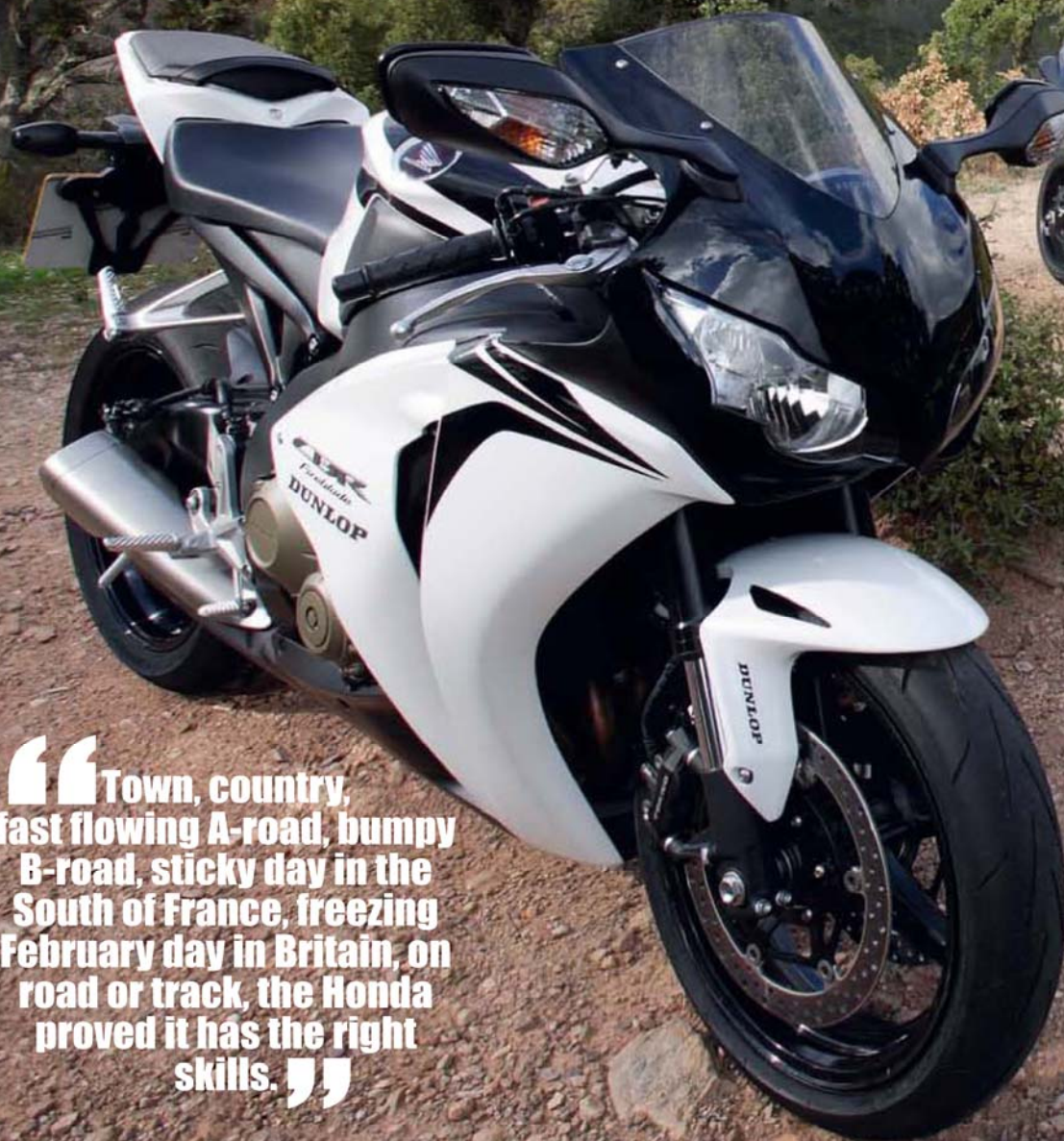
Town, country, fast flowing A-road, bumpy B-road, sticky day in the South of France, freezing February day in Britain, on road or track, the Honda proved it has the right skills. Those skills are not easy to come but it is a blend Honda is traditionally good at mixing, not least with the class defining CBR600RR, which also competently delivers a perfect slice of sportsbike pie by comparison to its rivals. At last, and for the first time in the many years I've been writing litre bike road tests, the Fireblade is king of the sportsbike hill.

2 YAMAHA YZF R1

The R1 ends up fourth in this test by not really doing anything wrong as such, just not quite doing anything well enough. Make no mistake this is a very fast and competent motorcycle. What it does best is kind of what a top of the range BMW 5-series car does best which is look and feel very refined – and be very fast. There's a quality of design about it, which the other three bikes here simply don't have. If the Honda's looks favour function then the Yamaha's looks clearly promote form.

In performance terms it does everything right but it's clearly the hardest work physically, especially around the relentless Silverstone National circuit, so a diet should be in order before next year to sharpen up the R1. An R6-style re-vamp might just be the best course of action.

“Town, country, fast flowing A-road, bumpy B-road, sticky day in the South of France, freezing February day in Britain, on road or track, the Honda proved it has the right skills.”





2 SUZUKI GSX-R1000

I'll be honest with you and say I have terrible doubts about saying the Suzuki GSX-R1000 sneaks in ahead of the ZX-10R but I'm willing to stick my neck on the line based purely on a seat of the pants feeling.

From A to B on any sort of road it is the most planted with a chassis design and set-up which allows you to ignore (or not even notice) bumps which have the others getting twitchy. It's deceptively good and in the reality of everyday riding on a litre sportsbike this counts for a lot.

It's non-too shabby on the dyno still either and there's no getting away from the facts from our speed testing – it's still the fastest bike here from 0mph to 60mph, 100mph and has the highest overall top speed. To do all that with the composure of a sports tourer (almost!) is impressive.

Price also marks the big Gixxer up a notch. Officially prices are fixed from last year but don't forget Suzuki will want to carry on selling bucket loads of this bike into its second year so expect a few price cuts.

3 KAWASAKI ZX-10R

You could easily flip this summary on its head and say a litre sportsbike should be edgy, aggressive, make you feel slightly nervous, angry even. There's definitely an argument for ranking the ZX-10R number one if you consider all of this as important.

There's definitely no getting away from the realisation that it is devastatingly fast either and with stomping brakes and a pin-sharp chassis it is also deadly accurate on track too.

In isolation I'd probably agree but tested alongside the other three bikes in this class you come to realise something just a tiny bit better in certain areas, something a bit easier to live with, particularly on the road, has its benefits. The rougher edges smooth away somewhat on the track which is where the 10R excels but there's a harsh edge to it which just manages to take away more than it delivers in excitement.