

**Willow Springs Raceway, CA**

**What does it take to win? If you take a moment to consider competition, whether it be in the realm of sports, business, interoffice battles or even in nature, there are often clear-cut winners. But this becomes less and less the case as you move up the food chain, so to speak.**

Sports are what we most easily relate to when we think of competition. And what better, universally accepted example -- or it least it should be -- of competition than the Olympics. To compete in the Olympics, one doesn't merely show up on the day and jump into the field of play.

There's an arduous process to get yourself on your nation's team, let alone actually find yourself in the Olympics. Then the competition really begins. All those competing have earned the right to be there and are deemed potential winners. It's no longer so easy to delineate between the weak and the strong. A gold medalist today could be tomorrow's loser. And so it is with the current crop of literbikes from the Big Four. All of them, given an equal chance, have the potential to win your heart. But like so many Olympic champions, the winner may be separated from the runners-up by the slightest of margins. With so much trickle-down tech coming from MotoGP and World Superbike, the forces from Japan have made exceptionally talented machines that can -- for all intents and purposes -- be yours for a song.



## "Can you really go wrong with any of these bikes?"

Spring is in the air so it must be time for Motorcycle.Com to rouse the troops, dust off the leathers, get our game faces on -- some of us could just use new faces -- and pit the 2007 literbike offerings from Japan against one another in an effort to answer that question. With a total of seven willing slaves to evaluate four motorcycles, this year's team has had a broad mix of skill and experience. We figured we have enough talent to pluck a hands-down winner out of the group. Oh, were it only so easy to pick the perfect 1000cc motorcycle. Like a young Elton John sussing out which flamboyant accoutrement will match up deliciously to each song, this wasn't going to be easy.



### The Contenders

#### Two new, two not-so-new

Before we get too far down the path of subjectiveness, let's size up the players. In October 2006 Yamaha unveiled the familiar looking but heavily revised 2007 R1. Loaded with revisions and new tech, the R1 is almost completely new for 2007. It was only two years ago when Suzuki revamped its Gixxer Thou, but here we are with another new generation.

The word "new" was used no less than 19 different instances in the GSX-R's press materials. There must be a motivational poster somewhere around Suzuki headquarters that reads, "You can rest when you're dead!"

As for Honda and Kawasaki, both motorcycles retained all of their design from the previous year. Typical sportbike production cycles lead us to expect a major revision to the ZX next year, while the CBR is due for a ground-up redo.

Motorcycle.Com isn't a technical e-rag, but there are enough changes on board from Yamaha and Suzuki this year that it warrants a visit to each bike's important innards.





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## Yamaha R1

**\$11,599.00 (for Team Blue);**

**\$11,699.00 (for Charcoal Silver or Candy Red)**

"All-new" but very much retaining the iconic look of R1's past, Yamaha swears that it's a different bike from last year. They know when not to mess with a good thing, like the near cult following that this bike has developed since its debut in 1998.

After years and years of proven performance and reliability with its famous five-valve head, Yamaha has broken with tradition and has done away with that configuration in favor of a conventional four-valve design; additional top-end changes include titanium intake valves.

Although bore and stroke (77mm x 53.6mm) remains the same as previous years, a marginally increased compression ratio of 12.7:1 appears. Yamaha says this redesign helps increase performance across the entire power range, a statement verified by our dyno data. New connecting rods and pistons are stronger to handle the additional power.

Also of note is the YCC-I, Yamaha Chip Controlled-Intake. A small servo motor actuates variable-length intake snorkels based on rpm and throttle position. They're extended to 140mm at lower revs for maximum torque, then shrinking to their 65mm position at high rpm for optimum peak power.

Combined with their YCC-T (Yamaha Chip Controlled-Throttle, a system first seen on the R6 that is similarly operated by a tiny motor and calculates every one thousandth of a second the throttle valve opening and twist-grip position)



Yamaha claims to deliver seamless throttle response and increased power at all points. The best part of this is that you're never supposed to be able to perceive what's happening. In a word: smooth.

The slipper clutch that was fitted to last year's limited-edition R1 is standard equipment for '07. The same twin underseat exhaust configuration remains for 2007, but it comes in titanium flavor with the famed EXUP (EXhaust Ultimate Power Valve) and dual catalyzers in order to meet stringent 2008 EPA standards while retaining its light weight.

"Taking a cue from the racing world, a curved, twin-fan radiator helps keep the R1 kewl."

Carrying this new engine around is the job of an equally new frame and swingarm. With a focus on "maximizing rigidity in cast parts and flex in extruded parts" the frame was redesigned to improve front-end feel in the corners and improve "rigidity balance." A cross-member was eliminated and a reinforcing rib was added to accomplish this. The new swingarm has its pivot point raised 3mm, increasing room for taller race tires. The overall focus of the new swinger is improved cornering, turn-in and greater traction upon acceleration out of the turn.

This is achieved by increasing torsional rigidity by as much as 30 percent while actually decreasing lateral rigidity a smidgen. Suspension components also receive upgrades with the 43mm front end getting larger diameter pistons, aluminum damping rods, reduced wall thickness and a stronger axle bracket. The end result is said to be better damping with less cavitation and lighter weight. The rear shock has a revised progressive damping rate with a dual damping-speed compression adjuster and a ramp-style spring preload adjuster.

While they were down in the suspension area, Yamaha figured they should improve the brakes too. Gone are the now-classic four pots, and in their place you'll find six-piston binders that crush down on 310mm rotors. The rotors are downsized by roughly 10mm from last year, but because of where the brake pad will ride in the new calipers, effective braking area remains the same, so says Team Blue. This resizing and relocating of braking bits is said to reduce inertial movement at the axle which should result in a lighter feel.

Although we said the bike retains its familiar look, some changes took place, primarily for improved air flow. Taking a note from the R6, the '07 R1 has a redesigned main cowl that increases intake flow while aiding in removing hot air from the engine compartment. Basically it looks a lot like the R6. In the cockpit you can expect to gaze upon a new "multi-function meter," or "tachometer and speedometer" as MO likes to call them.





## Suzuki GSX-R1000

\$11,399.00

Seems the term "all-new" gets bandied about quite frequently these days. Not wanting to be left out in the cold for more than a year or two, Suzuki made sweeping changes to the GSX-R1000. The 999cc 16-valve, liquid-cooled, Four with a bore and stroke of 73.4mm x 59.0mm boasts forged aluminum pistons, shot-peened connecting rods (Ouch, that must've hurt!), hollow camshafts and titanium valves to keep things light and airy. The transparent six-speed tranny almost seems run-of-the-mill these days with its flawless performance and is aided in its job by an adjustable back-torque-eliminating clutch. As if that weren't enough to make shifting as trouble-free as possible, the hydraulic -- as opposed to cable operated -- clutch is self-adjusting to maintain feel over the long-haul. What's next? Vehicles that operate on so-called "solar power?" Sheesh.

Also revamped for this year is the Suzuki Dual Throttle Valve fuel injection system. Instead of four big, greedy holes in each injector, you'll kindly note that the compact system is now comprised of 12 tiny holes designed to improve atomization -- one of the few times everyone has benefited from a downsizing. As a result, Suzuki engineers were able to reposition the secondary injectors to a 30-degree angle shooting squarely at the intake ports to improve throttle response.

Speaking of ports, I had a lovely aged tawny the othe... er, wait, wrong magazine job. Anyway, back to the subject of intakes and exhausts, both of which are altered on this year's Gixxer. They've both been reshaped and are eight percent larger. The exhaust valves are up-sized, too, from 24mm to 26mm. The engine's redline is upped by 250 rpm, now to a claimed 13,750 (even if it hit the rev limiter at 13,400 when we ran it on the dyno). Wrapping things up with the fueling, Suzuki fiddled with the idle speed control system to help with cold starts.

**"A rear sprocket larger by one tooth lowers the gearing for better acceleration."**



If you noticed nothing else about Suzuki's 1000 it's probably because you're eyes glazed over when you saw not one but two exhaust cans hanging out back. Yep, two mostly traditional-looking aluminum/titanium units are fed by equal length headpipes. It's all aimed at lowering the center of gravity while improving torque through some witchery of mid-pipe valves and whatnot, called SET (Suzuki Exhaust Tuning). This oddball configuration allows the use of exhaust-cleaning catalysts, which is part of the reason for a ready-to-ride weight gain of more than 20 pounds.

Another reason for an extra pound or two is the addition of the new hydraulic clutch. Continuing of the growth principle, the radiator and oil pump have increased in size also.



It's hard to believe, but the company that has dominated AMA Superbike racing for most of the past decade decided it was time to overhaul the chassis. Starting with a frame designed to capitalize on mass-centralization (where have I heard that before) you'll find fewer parts and less welds with the goal being improved accuracy and reduced weight.

The swingarm follows suit and is also lightened and stiffened, and it provides a place for the shock to mount on a link that pivots on the swingarm. The intent is to improve traction. Another feature that a few of us found quite handy was the adjustable footpegs. They can be moved into your choice of three positions over a small but useful range (14mm), giving added legroom for a sport tour or increased ground clearance for a trackday.

The Gixxer's suspenders have been updated. Both the forks and shock have been graced with high- and low-speed compression damping adjustability.

The diameter of the fork outer tubes was beefed up below the bottom of the

triple tree, but the stanchions remain at 43mm. Fork offset went up from 28mm to 30mm for a 2mm increase in trail to 98mm. Rake angle remains at 23.8 degrees. Front suspension travel picked up a whopping 5mm of distance.

Just like on the Yami, the GSX-R received an upgrade in the binder department. This year the front rotors measure the same 310mm whilst being held to the wheel with 12 floating buttons instead of the eight-button unit from last year which is purported to aid in heat transfer, the rotors are also 0.5mm thinner. So, let's see, smaller rotors, less rotating mass should translate into improved handling. We'll bet our physics diploma had from the back of *True Crime* magazine that in fact that would be the case. But if, for some queer reason, handling weren't improved all that much, we'd double down and bet again that the electronically controlled steering damper will do the trick.

"What a minute? What about the ABCs of the new Gixxer, dude?!" Indeed, I've gone a bit out of order to save the best for last. Truly all-new is the inconspicuous toggle located on the switchgear of the right clip-on. Peering at the new instrument cluster, the rider can observe a tiny window on the LCD. After the bike is started and has gone through its routine check, the rider can flip between three power mappings, simply labeled A, B and C. Position A is the default setting and provides the full force of the fabled and refined engine on this bike.

It's worth noting that none of the settings will display when the bike is started, and it'll stay that way until the rider decides to change things up. Holding either the UP or DOWN toggle for more than two seconds will cause the letter "A" to appear, and thereafter you can row down to setting B or C. Kill the engine, and go back to square one, or A as it were.

So how does it really work? We're not certain of all the trickery involved, but what you'll get in setting B is an ever so slightly softer powerband until 97 percent throttle opening at which time the bike will access full power. Switch down to C, and the reduction becomes apparent. This power position is markedly mellower through just about every point in the rev range. It's been loosely referred to as the rain mode. With nearly 160 horsepower at the rear, having a rain setting seems brilliant.

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## Honda CBR1000RR

**\$11,499.00**

Last year saw Honda give the CBR1000RR the kick in the pants that it needed to stay in the hunt. A couple of us thought it went the wrong way on the spectrum, noting in last year's shootout that "...the new [at the time] bike's responsiveness will manifest itself as an intimidating tendency to overreact to rider inputs resulting in a rider who's less-relaxed and even less likely to extract the most from his/her riding abilities." Yet, given enough time to get acquainted, most of us found that "on the CBR you can just fling the thing in there...it's not unstable, just much easier to steer."

Owing much to this new-found acceleration and agility for 2006 were a myriad of lightened internals, as well as some bits on the outside that equated to a total savings of 15 pounds. The 998cc liquid-cooled, 16-valve Four is the same today as it was in '06. But back then all the changes to the bike accounted for upwards of 60 percent over the previous model. Things like magnesium engine covers, a lighter fairing, a lighter HMAS fork and shock, lightened and improved cam and crankshafts, and a lightened radiator and exhaust were just a sampling of the things Honda tweaked. Boosting the compression ratio from 11.9:1 to 12.2:1 along with a number of other alterations allowed redline to bump from 11,600 to 12,200 rpm and certainly didn't hurt the bike's ability to accelerate.

Though the twin-spar frame remained largely intact from the previous version, much of the rest of the chassis saw more than just a couple of changes. For example, the wheelbase shriveled a tad from 55.6 to 55.2 inches, steering rake tightened from 23.75 to 23.45 degrees, and trail decreased by a seemingly indiscernible two millimeters. To me and you, that translates to 3.9 inches. Also on the chopping block was the swingarm; it lost five millimeters. Lastly and in similar fashion, brake rotors lost 0.5mm in thickness, but increased in diameter to from 310mm to 320mm. Scoff if you will at all the little reductions here and there, but when you throw in the ground-breaking HMAS electronically-controlled steering damper, renowned cassette-type transmission, and a lighter, faster revving engine into the mix, the result was -- and still is -- a bike uncharacteristically ferocious in acceleration for a Honda while still maintaining legendary Honda reliability and stability.



## Kawasaki ZX10-R \$11,249.00 (\$11,549.00 Ebony)

If ever there was an iconic motorcycle, it just might be the Ninja. C'mon, you have to admit it. That name has been stirring the souls of young men and women for decades. I remember the first Ninja that caught my eye. It was a Ninja 900, and a friend of my dad was selling one. I was but 16 years-old, and the chances of me owning that while under my father's roof was about as likely as Alberto Gonzales being able to recall anything. Nevertheless, the fact that a Ninja was so accessible was thrilling to me. It's a friggin' Ninja for cryin' out loud! Who wouldn't have wanted one?

Today's Ninja is a wee bit beyond the tech of 1985 and as popular as ever. Merely seeing a sportbike in the distance is enough to make you say: "Ninja!" even if you can't really make out what it is, as long as you can see the Green.

Like Honda did with the CBR, Kawasaki made serious revisions to the ZX-10R in 2006, taming its unbridled spirit from the previous year. But they didn't calm this stallion down by muting the near-160 horsepower 998cc 16-valve four-cylinder ballistic missile of a motor. Instead they wisely added a steering damper -- Ohlins flavor, please! -- and made some serious changes to the chassis.

Starting with a frame composed of cast and pressed aluminum bits, they



went beyond twin-spar and made the spars wrap over the engine to create a backbone of sorts. As a result, the shape narrows the bike significantly, giving it 600-class width. Additional changes to the frame last year had the engine mounted more forward and up, as well as tilted back a skosh. This series of changes aided what Kawi refers to as "roll response." None of those changes meant that the quick-handling Ninja's scant 54.7 inch wheelbase would be any different. More improvements came in the shape of unfashionably small, floating 300mm petal-type rotors pinched by four-pot radial-mount calipers. The rotors are nice and light, so why shouldn't the six-spoke cast wheels that they're attached to be just as light? Indeed, they are.



Keeping that front wheel in check is a set of what is becoming a class-standard 43mm inverted cartridge fork, although they don't have the separate high- and low-speed compression damping adjustment of the Gixxer. Some functional styling changes came about in '06 on the Ninja, namely a reshaped fairing with a set of menacing looking headlamps and a hungry ram-air intake between them. Finally, that wacky tachy was gone and in its place was a centrally located analog tachometer with an LCD speedo in the center that creates a neat 3D look. Too bad the lens is slightly tinted, marginalizing the view.

**There we have it then; two big bore bikes fresh**

**out of the oven, and two that, in this day and age of rapid development, might get placed on the day-old rack. They're still quite tasty, though!**

"Who ever will I get to ride these things on the street with me?" That was the question I needed to answer soon if we were to get the show on the road, so I called upon my courier powers and summoned the likes of long-time Brit biker friend, Steve "Speed" Kelly. Steve's been in and around motorbikes for most of his life. He was a courier in Ol' Blighty for many years, as well as here in smoggy L.A. In between all that, Steve has a least three seasons under his belt at Willow Springs Motorcycle Club and plenty of time on some the most desirable race tracks in Europe. He's also owned, ridden or raced just about every non-cruiser motorcycle from the past 20 years. Yep, he'll do nicely.

Next up, and with just as much fanfare, is the beloved Buzz "Buzglyd" Waloch of Motorcycle.Com forum fame. Buzz is an accomplished street rider and has participated in a number of our shootouts. He always makes excellent observations that we often don't, and he usually has a credible reason as to why he does or doesn't like something about a motorcycle.



### EXTRA! EXTRA! Read All About It!

**Motorcycle.Com Pillages and Plunders Various Motorcycle Webzines!**

That's how I saw the headline in my head. Let me 'splain. You see, the cool-headed, smooth-riding editor extraordinaire Kevin Duke (aka Danger) is now helping helm the mighty ship that is Motorcycle.Com. Who better, than a kick-ass Canadian to guide the magazine to its new future.

"What's that you say, Danger? You got who to come along?"

After I picked myself up off the floor and patted my own brow dry, I remember distinctly hearing Kevin say that none other than the Edge was joining us. Not that impressive Irish guitarist from some mildly popular band called U2. No, Duke was talking about Alex Edge of

MotorcycleDaily.Com. Surely with the addition of Alex, major publishing houses around the country would scramble their business managers to learn if Motorcycle.Com was planning world domination. Rest assured, we are!

With the street beat covered, this left only a couple more issues to resolve. Where in the world -- or at least the three surrounding counties -- should we track test these monsters, and who's going to punish them correctly? The track gods smiled upon us, and with an incredible stroke of luck we were able to capitalize on an abandoned reservation for the "big track" at Willow Springs International Motorsports Park, located in Rosamond, California. Hell, yeah! One down, one to go. Duke, without missing a beat, knew he had our go-fast man:

**"Straightaway, Duke was full of bright ideas. With many bikes to ride and not so many riders, we needed one more talented titan tamer to help us."**



Kev spells it out like this: "Once we decided to rent the big track at Willow Springs International Motorsports Park, we knew who to call set some fast, consistent times for our shootout: Curtis Adams. At 6-foot-six and 215 pounds, Adams isn't your typical sportbike jockey, but he's logged a million



miles at Willow and he was a longtime holder of the outright lap record at what's known as "The Fastest Road In The West" until the AMA Superbike championship held a couple of races there. Racing a Triumph in the AMA's former Pro Thunder series, he took more wins than anyone else, and he was also a five-time race winner in the old Formula USA championship. Not only a super-nice guy, Adams is also able to crank out laps at Willow like a finely adjusted valvetrain, clocking in tours around Willow within a tenth of a second. As the 46-year-old is also the lead instructor for the Willow Springs Motorcycle Club's Advanced Race Clinic, his consistency and speed around Willow probably shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. And speed runs in the Adams genes, as 17-year-old son Bradley is already faster than we will ever

be."

The first day of street time had us winding up and down the Angeles National Forest, sampling the roads that keep many motorcyclists residing in greater Los Angeles. This little route of ours provided a good mix of nearly flawlessly paved sweepers. Other portions of this initial ride gave us ample opportunity to see just how well these bruisers could be hustled through tight, first-gear turn roadways that seemed to double back on themselves.

Day two was edgy and dangerous...um, I mean Alex, Kevin and myself worked our way to the Mojave desert via more twists and turns courtesy of highways 150 and 33, with our final leg connecting us to the 5 freeway by means of Lockwood Valley Road. Ah, SoCal, ain't it grand?



## Conclusion:

### The Nitty Gritty

#### Fourth Place: ZX10-R

All of the motorcycles in this test have something we like about them. Buzz was quick to note that the Ninja has a "very attractive shape without fussy graphics and stickers." Well noted, Buzz. The Kawi could be taken for a minimalist in styling, yet it doesn't suffer for it. The front indicators are cleanly integrated into the fairing and a fork shroud does a great job of complimenting the fender. The lines on this bike, from front to rear, are swoopy if nothing else. It has an artistic flare when viewed in profile, with unique geometric shapes carved into the bodywork. And though a bit obvious -- as compared to say, the CBR -- when you first approach the bike, the under-tail exhaust immediately brings your attention to the deep saddle, enticing the rider to climb in rather than on.



#### On The Street

The first impression most people get on the ZX is that it is rather large feeling when confronted with the big fuel tank and low seat height. Though he doesn't ride in the street, it's worth noting that even gigantasaur Adams commented, "Initially the Kawasaki feels big; it may be the shape of the tank." And in a half-hearted effort to be a comedian, he joked, "Maybe it's all that green!" One thing none of us could complain about was the plush seat. Buzz gave it a slightly backhanded compliment saying it had "the least horrible seat of the bunch."

An ergo issue raised by both Buzz and Kevin were the high footpegs. Seems an aggressive, racy stance isn't so quaint on the street for extended periods. According to Buzz, the long-ish reach to the clip-ons impacted his comfort level, noting, "I like to really get over the front end and it wasn't possible to do on the Kawi." He also attributed what he called poor front end feel to this ergo trait. As a matter of fact, at least four of us noted the vague and at times confidence-zapping front. Steve owned an '05 unit and was really looking forward to giving the latest iteration a go. Unfortunately, he was disappointed, saying the Kwakker was "the hardest to hustle through the corners" and that "it just felt downright unstable, as if the front end and back end were in a constant battle with each other." Zoinks! Not good.

Lucky for us, get up and go is not a problem on Mean Green. It still has that same tour de force of an engine and we all loved the way it developed power. Second-gear wheelies were as natural as turning on the ignition. Kevin, despite his years of poetic prose, was left with nothing more to say than, "awesome motor!" Atta boy, Duke. Regardless of its dubious front-end feel,

Alex had plenty of happy feelings toward the Ninja, quipping "The ZX-10's turn-in was crisp and smooth." Danger was just as happy with the motor as any of us but was keen to observe that it was "coarse at some revs but smooth at others." And he also felt that the tranny, as smooth shifting as it was, produced an ever-present and annoying whine while at cruising speeds. That Duke, what a whiner.

#### On The Track

Sadly for the Kawasaki, it seemed that countless laps at two and half miles each only exacerbated its ill-handling nature on this trip. For those that rode on the street, little else changed at the track. But even on this day in a completely different environ, things like "insane power" and "felt like the fastest" were still being heard. Even Adams admitted that what ever handling woes plagued the Ninja -- in the first half of the track day -- could be forgiven to a small degree once you open the throttle. "Get the thing pointed straight, then it's like, 'Oh my goodness, it just made up for whatever we gave up right there, and then some!'"



"As the day wore on, there just seemed to be no end in sight for what had become an insurmountable problem with the Kawi's shock."



Even with its preload adjuster on its maximum setting, we couldn't dial in the correct amount of sag for the 215-pounder Adams. Big guys will want to fit a stiffer aftermarket spring. Everyone could appreciate the engine, the brakes, slipper clutch or even the slick-shifting transmission. Yet, despite having friend-of-MO Lee Parks and his good buddy Paul Thede, founder of Race Tech Suspension on hand, there was no reprieve from the rear. Curtis summed it up succinctly and accurately saying, "The rear travels up and down violently through the stroke. It's just moving around so much that you miss your mark." This presented such a problem to Willowliscious Adams that he found it distracting and wasn't able to fully focus. Conversely, Adams didn't have a problem with the ZX's front end, especially after raising the rear ride height.

Which brings us to another trouble spot for Adams on the Ninja: the instrument cluster and its smoked lens. It was so much of an issue that he said, "The tachometer is nonexistent as far as I'm concerned. Can't read it. No where can I see it. It's completely out of view the whole time. I just have to go by the shift light; when it comes on, I shift."

Phew! Pretty harsh stuff, no? Since the shock maladies seemed so dramatic I'd be willing to chalk it up to some kind of anomaly. But all OEMs had tech representation on site, save for Suzuki (and for that we had Paul Thede. Still, no matter the amount of messing with rebound, or shimmying up the shock for additional ride height (that made the bike steer much better), the Ninja's rear suspender just couldn't be made to work satisfactorily for Adams, though it was okay for our lighter riders. In the end, this was probably the killer for the Kawi.

In an industry with such rapid development and implementation of trickle-down tech, a bike can fall hard from grace quickly. Perhaps Team Green will do to the ZX-10R next year what they did for their ZX-6R of this year: make it one of the best handling Kawasakis ever.

### In My Garage... (formerly known as "What I'd Buy.")

**Kevin Duke** - Editor-In-Cheap

I'd buy the bike that made my frilly little skirt least pink. The bikes in this class are freakin' monsters, after all, and it took most of my courage just to hold the throttle to the pin on these things for more than a couple of seconds. And I'm talking about on The Fastest Road in the West, not anywhere on the street.

With this in mind, I'd park the Honda in my garage. The CBR makes very competitive power below 10,000 revs, and the amount of times I can get a fire-breathing hyperbike above 10k on the street is negligible. The double-R makes me feel like the one in control rather than the other way around. I believe the Gixxer deserves class-leading honors this year for its mega power in a rock-solid chassis, but for me, I'll ride Red.

**Alex Edge** - Interweb Guru

These days, with the incredibly rapid development cycle of new sportbikes, most riders seem to assume that the 'latest and greatest' models are always better than those that were released in the previous model year. So you may be surprised to see that my first choice for a literbike is one that wasn't even all-new in 2006.

Why? I can't cite any one feature of the CBR that stands out as being the best in the group. It isn't the most powerful, the sharpest handling or the best looking. No, what really makes the Honda great is the way that all its strengths are *integrated*. The handling is neutral, bringing an excellent balance between stability and quick reflexes. Even the riding position is a near-perfect compromise between around-town comfort and the more aggressive balance needed for racetrack use.

If I had to live with a 1000cc sportbike in my garage as my main form of transportation and recreation, the CBR would be it. And no matter what I rolled it out of the garage for -- morning commute, weekend backroad blast or trackday -- I wouldn't find myself thinking I'd made the wrong choice. What more can you ask for when you open your wallet?

**Steve "Speed" Kelly**

My winner is the 2007 GSX-R1000. Words cannot do justice to describe how much this bike kicks ass! From the second I sat on this bike the fit was perfect. You sit in the Suzuki as opposed to some of the other bikes in this test, which you just sit on. This bike has it all: looks, power and perfect fueling. A feeling of sublime balance is how I would characterize the Gixxer. It makes a good rider a faster rider. The power the Suzuki made throughout the rev range was just phenomenal; everything about the Suzuki just oozed confidence. I felt it had the best suspension and was the most stable under power. But just as importantly, it was the easiest to wheelie and just damn fun to ride.

I currently ride a Triumph Daytona 675 and after owning a 2005 ZX-10R I truly believed that literbikes were dead. I had come to believe that they're just too fast anymore to ride hard, and that 600s were the best all-round bike to have.

So how good was the winner of this test to me? Anyone want to buy a slightly used Triumph 675?

**Buzz "Buzglyd" Waloch**

"Good Afternoon, Buzz speaking."

"Hey Buzz, it's Fonzy. How would you like to spend the day cavorting with four Supermodels and then report back to me later?"

Fonzy might as well have asked that question as I was already hyperventilating at the prospect of spending the day riding four of the fastest bikes on the planet. The Honda was easiest to like. My turn on it in the rotation came after the nervous front end

Kawasaki and the midrange-challenged Yamaha. It had a nasty rasp from the motor yet was easy to ride quickly the moment I swung a leg over. It blends the best elements of a brutal literbike and friendly street ride. The ergos are good (except for the worst-in-test seat) and the bike turns so easily that it really instills confidence in the rider. It's got a ferocious midrange which really pulls your face into a wide smile with every twist of the throttle.

On the street, I'm riding with Big Red.

**Pete Brissette** - Mangy Editor

"I love riding these things but hate having to evaluate them. Hate, hate, hate it!" That's what kept running through my mind when this epic finally came together and we had everything in place. Why? Because, as I said in the story, they really are all so darn good and each one excels at something. This year the Kawi was somewhat of an exception, but what we essentially wind up doing with motorcycles like these are picking nits. Yet we're supposed to come up a definitive winner.

I had a reality check this time and truly thought about what life would be like if I could only have -- because I certainly couldn't afford more -- one bike. I know there's just no way I would be getting to the track more than a few times a year, at most. What I would do most of the time is zip up and down the many freeways and endless miles of surface streets in Southern California. Track time would be a rare occurrence. And with that realization, the CBR was the obvious choice. It makes the most sense in that respect because it has so much usable power where it's most needed for everyday living: down low and in the middle. But keep the gas on, and it still goes crazy fast. Fast enough to keep me more than entertained on any track.

**Lee Parks** - Coach

The 2007 CBR1000RR, while a little down on horsepower compared to say, the ZX-10R, was the only bike in the comparison to not have any handling issues. It could be accelerated out of the difficult turn 9 without a hint of headshake. I'm not sure how much of that was due to the high-tech steering damper, but it certainly didn't hurt.

The Honda was the easiest to feel comfortable on and would make an excellent street bike, racer or endurance racing mount. Whoever was in charge of the CBR's suspension deserves a gold star. Not only were the spring rates right on the money for my 190-lb. frame, the lighter testers also found good results with less preload. Damping was expertly balanced on both compression and rebound making for plenty of traction and loads of confidence. With the exception of the excellent suspension, the Honda didn't really shine in any one category, but it was definitely the best package in the group by virtue of the fact that it had no meaningful faults.

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## Third Place: R1

### On The Street

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you just can't win. Yamaha heaped worthwhile revisions on the R1 for '07. Yet it placed no better than third in the big picture. It's still as good looking as ever, but Eagle Eyes Buzz picked up on some cosmetic nuances saying, "...Yamaha has added so many cuts, panels, etc. to further the look they may have gone too far. It's very busy."

Buzz found on the R1 what he couldn't on the ZX. "It had the best ergos for me. It had a better seat-to-peg relationship and I was able to really get forward over the clip-ons and front tire." As for Duke, well let me just say that I wish I were a man of as few words as he. Danger doesn't dance around the subject (but he's a helluva karaoke singer) when he chimed in on the R1's wind protection: "It's crap." Don't hold back, Duke. We can be sure of one thing with the R1; it didn't fail in the handling department.

Everyone seemed to be inspired by its cat-on-Velcro front end, and the brakes were nothing short of superb on the street and track. Alex noted how its composure allows a rider to carry impressive cornering speeds. With the most conservative steering geometry and the longest wheelbase (the latter tied with the GSX-R at 55.7 inches), Kevin observed that it's "not especially nimble." However, he did say that "the suspension has a decent street setup," adding that he appreciated the R1's ramped preload adjuster (shared with the CBR) that made adjusting rear preload easy. My view of the blue bike's street manners was that the front did stick well, but the rear was a little sketchy. It often felt like it was on the verge of breaking loose, but not from acceleration.

It seems the real thorn in our collective sides was -- I cringe to say this -- the engine; at least on the street. Yes, it received some reworking and the YCC-I and YCC-T is cutting edge tech. Unfortunately, it's lacking in



some good old low-tech oomph off the bottom. Was this a problem on the track? Not really because low rpm use is almost a joke on a race track. But in real world use, power straight off the bottom can make a bike livable. Alex put it best, "The problem for me comes in day-to-day street use; to me, half the point of buying a 1000 is the offer of abundant power and torque."

This deficit of usable power wasn't lost on Steve or Buzz either. "At one point I was asking myself if we accidentally got an R6," smirked Buzz. And "Speed" offered his opinion: "This bike is easy to ride fast and really did nothing wrong, but the engine was just too flat and unexciting too me." I wouldn't have gone quite so far as to say that it wasn't exciting, but I would agree whole heartedly that below roughly 5,000 rpm, the engine is just plain flaccid.



And how's this for wacky? Duke clued me into a little glitch that I had to sample to believe. Take the R1 up into second gear and whack the throttle open at precisely 5,500 rpm and you'll get... absolutely nothing. No, really! It's as if you just found yourself aboard a hydrogen-powered Radio Flyer. The tach needle advance ever so slowly. The bike simply falls on its face and barely accelerates. This phenomenon is one of the craziest things I ever experienced in over 13 years of riding. Sniff, sniff. I smell another revision next year for the R1. In general use, this glitch isn't really an issue (and it's only german to U.S.-spec bikes), but its soft powerband from 6000-8000 revs is.



Chassis aside, other key components found favor with us too. Kevin was pretty confident that the R1 had the best brakes. "Firm and strong" he opined. Firm and strong, Kevin? Meeoow, big

boy! Maybe Duke will think twice next time before he hands his notes over to me.

This year the R1 comes with a slipper clutch, but it wasn't quite as smooth as the Gixxer's or ZX's. It's the slightest bit rough on heavy deceleration when engine speed isn't matched to road speed.

Like we said above, the engine is a different experience in a track setting and is similarly matched up to the group. Mr. Curtis "Willow Springs" Adams often remarked that "They're so close in power you can't hardly tell the difference between them." Summing up the R1 for himself -- and making the Yamaha crew happy -- Curtis said of the R1, "It feels like you could go out and race the thing tomorrow." That's quite the accolade, but unless you're going to follow Curtis' lead and never spend another minute on the street, chances are that you'll suffer the same soft mid-range that the rest of us did. Let's face it, the street is where most R1s will live. Research by one of the OEMs shows that only 5 or 6 percent of sportbike riders take their machines to the track.

## "Thanks, Pirelli!"

Once we had the bikes finalized, the next obvious step in the evolution of this monstrosity we call our annual literbike shootout was to procure some sticky tires. No problem. Pick up the phone, speak with the famous Peter Jones and voila! In abundance we received the Diablo Supercorsa. This tire was developed with extensive testing in World Supersport and AMA racing.

Like any quality performance tire, the rider wants it to come up to operating temperature quickly and last as long as possible. This happens in spades with the Supercorsas.

We could spool off a bunch of esoteric talk about carcass design, ply density, length of contact patch, so on and so forth. It's all worthwhile stuff, but we figured the best thing to do was to ask an AMA Pro like Curtis Adams to summarize what he thought about the tires at the end of a long day on the track.

"As the day went along, the tires wore at very consistent rate while offering good grip."

You can clearly see the advantage here. A tire that wears evenly throughout the day won't have you guessing which lap is going to be you last. You'll be better able to determine when that will be instead of your tires making that determination for you.

Thanks, Curtis! Thanks, Pirelli!

## Second Place: GSX-R

### On The Street

The '07 GSX-R looks and feels essentially like the 2006 model. And it has the same basic power and torque from the previous year. Truth is, we feel essentially the same about the GSX-R. It's grrrrreat!



Buzz said that it had a nice profile, and we thought the Gixxer's level of fit and finish has improved. The ergonomic package really made a hit with the Edge: "The relationship between seat and handlebars is very natural," he said. And it was Alex who bothered to fiddle with its adjustable footpegs, making his and my street ride a little more tolerable on the ol' knees. Really, shouldn't all these bikes have such features? Kevin had a slightly different opinion on the overall ergo fit, noting that it had a "wide tank" making it "girthier than all but the CBR." You could use some girth yourself, Canuck!



If we'll just get honest with ourselves for minute, we'll come to our senses and realize that when we think about a GSX-R -- especially the liter version -- looks and ergos are probably last on our list. It's the power, man; we're here for the power! With the legacy that Suzuki has built in the GSX-R, you'd think that they could just sell an engine with a couple of old inner tubes, and people would still clammer for them. It is the king of the dyno. But it's also highly refined after years of Superbike development. Curtis simply said that it feels "electric" because its power is so smooth and linear. Danger said that it was "so strong it's scary." A bike that can produce so much rear wheel horsepower and still be so accessible is bound to be a success.

#### On The Track



In light of my lame inner tube joke above, you simple have to have more than just a brilliant motor. I know it may be hard for most Americans to swallow, but horsepower will only get you so far. Chassis refinement is integral to a successful package. Adams was surprisingly not as happy with the Suzuki's handling, pointing out that it wasn't quite as flickable as the CBR. But he couldn't deny its high-speed stability, saying, "That [high-speed stability] usually relates to ultimate lap times." He had the times to prove it. Alex was impressed with the Suzuki's mid-corner stability, probably aided by the new electronic steering damper.

Like my observations on the Yami's slipper clutch, Kevin found that the GSX-R's slipper clutch -- revised and improved for '07 -- still lacked something when compared to the ZX, saying that it drags more. He also felt that the brakes required a stronger squeeze than others. Is this guy every happy?

When it came down to it, no one could deny that outstanding motor. As a matter of fact, it's so potent that it had Curtis thinking "it has such a strong rush that when the tire wears a little bit you become so concerned with tire spin." That might present the perfect opportunity to utilize the variable power settings. Kevin felt that "riding in the B mode doesn't hurt lap times much unless you're an aggressive rider who is getting tire-spinningly hard on the throttle on corner exits." If that's the case, then chances are that you're at 97 percent throttle and already back into the A power curve. As it was

described to me by Suzuki personnel, the B mode is there to help prevent some tire spin and wheelies out of turns.

In the end, the Gixxer seemed to lack just enough to keep it out of first place this year. For Curtis he didn't pick it first despite turning his fastest laps on this bike. He was a little disappointed with the fact that it seemed to "move around a little bit more than either the Honda or Yamaha." Alex had a pretty good idea of why he didn't pick it number one, stating that "the GSX-R would be an excellent choice but it loses out to the Honda on overall rider-friendliness as well as streetability." Despite being our first choice for a track environment, both Kev and I didn't place it numero uno on the street, which meant that its total score was just low enough to put it into second place. Honestly, though, do you, dear reader, really give a rat's patootie what we think? It is a GSX-R1000, isn't it now?

#### First Place: CBR

"What in the heck are you clowns talking about! How does a bike unchanged from last year that finished dead last in your 2006 shootout claim victory this year?"

Good question. It's simply a matter of an all-new crew, except one; me. Let me quickly save face and point out that I was the only rider who *didn't* vote the CBR fourth place last year. I didn't vote it first either, but, hey, it's a new year so who's counting. I'll also openly admit that in the span of the past year I've matured a bit and strive to be a discerning reviewer. So, after more track time and more miles on many more bikes, I simply re-evaluated my thoughts about the CBR. I realized that this is a literbike that makes a lot of sense to have on the street without sacrificing a competitive edge on the track. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. Judging by the votes, though, it appears I'm in good company. The Honda was voted number one on the street with three out of four riders, with the holdout rider placing it second.

#### On The Street

It's a perfectly competent race track machine, but even more than its lapping prowess, the CBR is very inviting to ride longer distances. The clip-on/saddle/footpeg relationship puts the rider in an attack-ready position but does so without causing the early on-set of arthritis. But Buzz's tushy felt -- quite literally -- that the saddle's "rounded profile" made transitioning from side to side easy, still it was too hard and can become "very painful after a while." Alex said the ergos were great and observed that the windscreen does what it's actually supposed to do: block the wind. Seems that's a rare skill with some of the bikes in this test.

Of the quality control, Buzz said it was nicely finished like all Honda products, yet its conservative design probably wouldn't polarize anyone. Steve thought that the dash was "a well thought-out unit with a big tachometer that's clearly in view at all times." I couldn't deny that the tachometer was prominently displayed, but I found a little mundane and, well, just not as fancy as the others. It has that square, 1980s computer techno thing going for it. Eh, it works well and that's the important part.



The other sensation about the bike from Big Red was how compact overall the bike felt. It had more than one of us feeling like we were on a middleweight machine. After I quickly accustomed myself to the fit and started down the road, I couldn't help but feel like the bike was a natural extension of what I wanted to do. Time and again during the street portion, riders could be heard saying, "The Honda is the easiest of the bikes to jump on instantly and just ride fast."

**"Not only does just about every part on the bike exude a highly-refined and tank-like durability, it's got itself a whole lot of low and mid-range power."**

That, as much as anything, contributed to the user-friendly attitude of the CBR. It's not until past 10,000 revs that it gets overpowered by the others. The bike flows effortlessly through tight and technical



sections of canyon road with the steering ease to match. My only complaint on the street -- and to a lesser degree on the track -- was the abrupt transition from closed to open throttle. It generated a rather jerky ride when modulating the twistgrip, requiring a smooth hand. Ultimately this issue had me spending too much mental energy on it instead of where to position myself for the next corner.

#### On The Track

Apparently this was the first time Curtis Adams had ridden a CBR1000RR. Boy oh, boy was he impressed. For the longest time he waffled between it and the R1 for his top pick. What was so appealing to him? Sir Winsalot was always impressed with how compact the whole package was. He, too, felt like someone had slipped him a 600 when he wasn't looking. But by Turn 1, the case of mistaken identity was gone and the stump-pulling torque made itself evident. "Just like the GSX-R, it feels like a big electric motor," said Adams. If any bike fit that description, it was the CBR.

Regrettably, all the power down low and in the middle runs out while the others effortlessly scream past the Honda's 12,200 redline. It just ain't got the top-end. Speaking of turns, Duke noticed that the CBR's HESD tightens the steering at higher speeds (such as into Turn 8) and makes it harder to turn or steer, which is quite different from its characteristics at lower velocities. I didn't have the acumen to assess such detail, but I certainly could tell how composed the chassis was under heavy braking and how its mid-corner stability made me a better rider. I didn't need to be a rocket scientist to pick up on that.

Probably the greatest compliment the bike received on the track day came from Curtis who said that as the day wore on, and along with it the tires' capacity to grip, the Honda's linear power allowed it to hook-up better and thus performed consistently all day long.

I didn't expect such humility and candor from an AMA pro when he summarized the CBR for himself: "I felt like I left something on the table with it. It never did anything wrong." Couldn't have said it better myself.

In the beginning of this sprawling mass of text I posed the question of what it takes to be a winner. Using elite athletes as my example, I tried to illustrate just how evenly matched competitors can be, and that given the right set of circumstances, the victor on one day could become the defeated on the next.

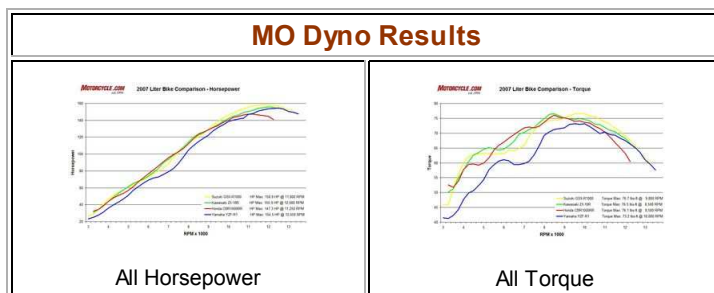
Steve "Speed" Kelly put it best when he said: "Of the four, there was one outright winner, one loser and two runners up." Although the CBR is the same today as it was last year when it didn't fair as well, given a second chance with us in 2007 -- and the right set of circumstances -- it took the overall honors in this test.

To the consumer, most of what takes place in motorcycle comparisons is highly subjective. He or she should heed the fact that, in reality, a very thin line separates a winner from a loser in this group of incredible machines.



| <b>Best Lap Times</b><br><i>As Sung By Curtis Adams</i> |         |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Suzuki GSX-R 1000                                       | 1:26.67 |

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Honda CBR 1000RR | 1:26.88 |
| Yamaha YZF-R1    | 1:27.02 |
| Kawasaki ZX-10R  | 1:27.46 |



| <b>"For Our Money" Table</b><br>How the testers would spend their own money.<br>We scored the bikes 5 pts. for 1st, 3 for 2nd, 2 for 3rd and 1 for 4th. |               |              |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------|
|                                                                                                                                                         | On the Street | On the Track | Totals |
| Honda CBR 1000RR                                                                                                                                        | 18            | 13           | 31     |
| Suzuki GSX-R                                                                                                                                            | 14            | 15           | 29     |
| Yamaha YZF-R1                                                                                                                                           | 7             | 12           | 19     |
| Kawasaki ZX-10R                                                                                                                                         | 5             | 5            | 10     |

### Nits and Notes

Observed fuel economy:

Suzuki: 35 mpg

Kawasaki: 33 mpg

Honda: 32 mpg

Yamaha: 32 mpg

-- Kevin made an interesting observation about the bikes at the track during the various suspension adjustments for each rider: The Yamaha and Honda have ramp-style preload collars on the shock, while the Suzuki and Kawasaki both have a locking ring set-up.

-- The toggle switches for the ABC power settings on the Suzuki took some getting used to. Many riders had them confused for the kill switch when they weren't paying attention.

-- If you wisely choose to spoon on a set of Pirelli Diablo Supercorsas, note that Pirelli recommends setting pressures *after* a few opening laps in order to achieve the "hot" temp settings. Also note they only come in one size: 120/70 x 17 --front and 190/55 x 17 --rear.

-- Curtis Adams often remarked how the Kawasaki's engine was so quiet that he couldn't use it to tell when it may have been time to shift, and often resorted to using the shift light. A sportbike with an engine that's "too quiet?" Whodathunkit?

-- Alex Edge needs a haircut



