

ROAD TEST

AND THE BEST 1000 IS...

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BY MICHAEL NEEVES PICTURES HOWARD BOYLAN

It's the test we've all been waiting for – MCN reveals which superbike is top dog for 2004

COMPETITION in the 1000cc superbike class has never been so intense. The GSX-R1000 has comprehensively wiped the floor with its rivals over the last three years. It's back again to defend its crown against the new RCV-inspired Honda FireBlade, insane new ZX-10 and MotoGP-influenced Yamaha R1.

We took all four bikes to the sunshine of northern Spain and the south of France for a punishing workout, with testers who range from ex-racers to medium-paced road riders, to the editor of MCN.

Each of the bikes was fitted with super-sticky Pirelli Diablo Corsa tyres (the

outright winner of our 2003 tyre test) to create a level playing field. Then the contest began...

Over the next 11 pages we tell you how each of these white-hot 2004 road-going superbikes performed on:

- Tight, twisty, sun-drenched coast roads around Tossa de Mar in Spain
 - Technically demanding Ledenon race track in the south of France
 - Dynamometer, to find out how much power and torque these 1000cc missiles really make
 - Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground in Leicestershire to find out top speeds, acceleration and braking performance.
- Read on to discover our verdict...



ROAD TEST

1stYamaha
YZF-R1

PRICE: £9399otr POWER: 147.9bhp TORQUE: 70.47ftlb WEIGHT: 172kg SPEED 177.72mph

On the road

If you were to take all the best bits from each of the bikes here and bolted them all together, you'd probably end up with something that looks strikingly similar to the new R1.

Yamaha has not only injected the R1 with loads more power than last year's model (up from 130bhp to a whopping 148bhp), it has wrapped the motor in a package that makes it just as usable as the new Blade.

But, unlike the Honda, the Yamaha is as electrifying to ride as the Kawasaki and Suzuki. That's job done.

Previous R1 models have been designed more with the circuit than the road in mind.

Just sitting on an old R1 will have your feet wrapped up behind your ears and your hands down by the front wheel spindle, ready for track action – not so good if you want to go any distance in comfort.

But this new third-generation R1 is different. It's been designed first and foremost as a road bike.

You sit lower in the bike rather than perched on top of it as was the case in previous models, the pegs are set lower and the handlebars slightly higher.



HANDLES rough roads without wobble or weave

All this means that it's quite possible to ride the R1 all day long with no aches or pains.

You don't get any vibes from the engine working their way through to your hands and feet, like you do when you're riding the GSX-R1000 or the ZX-10R.

Suspension set up on the new R1 is

very soft and designed to suit the lumps and bumps that we find on our British roads.

It handles even the roughest of road surfaces with neither a wobble or a weave.

And if it does ever threaten to get out of shape, accelerating hard over poorly surfaced roads, the steering

damper (fitted as standard for the first time on an R1) gets things back in shape in double-quick time.

It's quite possible to do a day's riding without ever needing to sample the explosive power that lives at the top end of the tach.

The R1 has a potent enough midrange to let you hook sixth gear along your favourite set of twisties, and keep it there – and you'll still be rewarded with a decent amount of pull every time you wind back the throttle, not to mention a satisfying deep growl from those twin titanium underseat exhausts, too.

But spin the motor hard and from 8000rpm power builds ferociously all the way until the shift light signals its time to hook another cog at 13,750rpm.

Acceleration is brutal – it not only matches the GSX-R1000, it's even quicker. Don't believe me? Just take a look at the standing quarter mile times on page 36.

The R1 is the clear winner on the road. It's fast, safe and supplies you with major-league kicks whether you're going 80mph or 180mph. It's not too shabby on the track either...

“The R1 is fast, safe, and it's not too shabby on the track either...”

DID YOU KNOW?

The R1 isn't the first Yamaha sports bike to have underseat exhausts. The 1990 TZR250 Reverse Cylinder had twin stingers poking from the tailpiece.

On the track

It took a while to get the best from the R1 around Ledenon. Its soft suspension set-up, which is perfect for soaking up potholes on the road, hampered the Yamaha's progress around the track. With the rear end set so soft, response from the steering is vague, the footpegs grind out easily and after only a handful of laps, the surface on the rear Pirelli looks like it's gone twelve rounds with a mangle.

A few deft twiddles with a screwdriver firm up the damping both ends and a C-spanner to increase the rear pre-load (see set-up guide), and the R1 is transformed into an agile and sharp handling track demon. So good in fact that it manages to lap almost a second faster than the ZX-10R – and is quickest of the bunch!

On track settings, the R1's steering response is sublime, just like its younger R6 brother. Minimal effort is required to get the Yamaha rolling into turns with just a mild

nudge of the clip-ons. The transition from upright to full lean happens in one gentle, sweeping motion. Even trail braking into a corner won't disturb the balance of the steering, as it will on the Blade and ZX-10R. The Honda and Kawasaki both want to sit up and run straight on if you graze the front brake lever while cornering.

Ground clearance is still an issue with the firmer suspension set-up since you're able to corner even faster. Even with the hero-blobs removed from pegs, they still touch down. For serious track day goers' rearsets will be a very good idea.

Thanks to a narrower frame and tank (made possible by hanging the engine beneath the frame rails) the R1 feels nimble, and it's very easy to clamber all over as you shift your weight every which way during a hot lap around the track.

With the most power on tap out of all the 1000s, it goes without saying that keeping the motor

“The quickest around the track and the best on the road makes the R1 a clear winner”

spinning in the upper reaches of the tach rewards with monumental, neck straining thrust, especially coming out of Ledenon's second and third gear turns.

Careful throttle control is required so as not to spin the rear tyre too much, and you'll need to hunker over the front to keep wheelies to a minimum.

At the fastest point of the track (at the end of the start/finish straight) the R1 recorded the fastest speed at 146mph, a full 3mph quicker than the

GSX-R1000. That would have been impossible to believe when the GSX-R rocked the superbike world last year!

When it comes to stopping, the new radially-mounted front brakes work superbly, offering loads of power and not a hint of fade, but they don't offer the outstanding feel at the lever of the FireBlade.

Despite being the fastest on the track, the R1 didn't actually feel as fast as the ZX-10R or GSX-R1000 to ride. It feels almost Blade-like in the way in deals with the business of going quickly – with ease and with minimal fuss. The consensus among our testers was that the R1 was the third best around the circuit in the fun stakes – behind the Kawasaki and Suzuki.

But you can't argue with lap times. It's the quickest around the track and is the best on the road, making the R1 a clear winner. Wonder how long it'll take before we see a Rossi replica paint job?



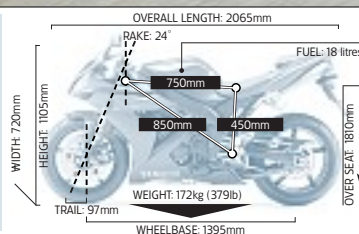
THE R1 was a clear winner for all our test riders



YAMAHA YZF R1

£9399 otr

Available: Now. Two year unlimited mileage warranty. One year RAC cover. Colours: Red, blue or silver. New for 2004: New model. Insurance group: 17 (of 17). Info: Yamaha UK; 01932-358000



SPECIFICATION:

Engine: Liquid-cooled, 998cc (77 x 53.6mm), 20v dohc, in-line four-cylinder four stroke. Fuel injection. Six gears. Chassis: Deltabox V cast aluminium. Front suspension: 43mm forks, adjustable for pre-load, compression and rebound damping. Rear suspension: Single shock, adjustable for pre-load, compression and rebound damping. Tyres: Dunlop D219, 120/70 x 17 front, 190/50 x 17 rear. Brakes: 2 x 320mm front discs with radial four-piston calipers, 220mm rear disc with single piston caliper.

PROS • Most powerful engine of the bunch but very usable too • Superb steering • Growing exhaust note • Improved brakes
CONS • Standard suspension is set-up too soft for track • Understated paint scheme • Lacks excitement of ZX-10R

94%

SET UP GUIDE

STANDARD suspension settings are too soft for the track, especially at the rear. After a handful of laps the rear tyre looked worse for wear. Pre-load does not alter damping but we increased rear pre-load to sharpen up the steering and increased damping to firm up the rear shock. Tweaks to the front forks completed the change from sorted road bike to a track demon.

MCN'S TRACK SETTINGS:

Front pre-load:

Left on standard settings

Front compression:

Added two clicks over standard

Front rebound:

Added four clicks over standard

Rear pre-load:

Two notches up from standard

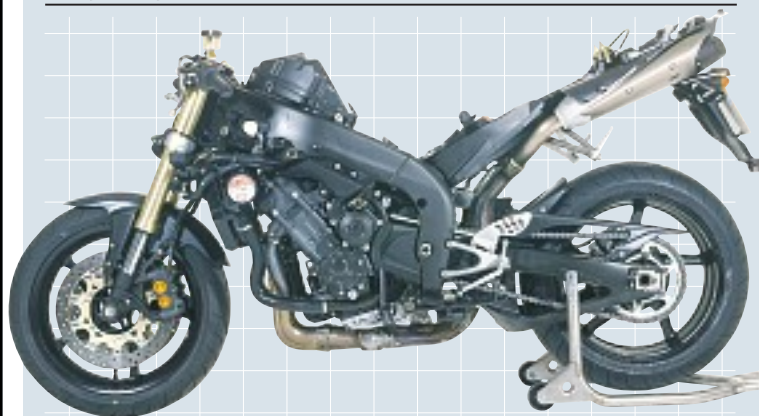
Rear compression:

Added nine clicks over standard

Rear rebound:

Added four clicks over standard

Technical



FRAME design owes much to Yamaha's MotoGP effort with the manic M1- the R1's brand new engine being hung beneath instead of within the frame spars, keeping the width of the bike to a minimum. The R1 now comes with the latest radially-mounted brakes and underseat exhaust to complete the Grand Prix look.

The detail



DIE-CAST sculpted aluminium swingarm is a thing of beauty. Deep bracing adds to rigidity



THE Yamaha's front end is one of the best and the steering on road and track is awesome



PIPES are titanium and emit a delicious growl at low revs and a spine-tingling scream flat out

On a budget?

LAST year's R1 was the most track-focused of all 1000s. The underseat can, the raked tailpiece and funky, thin LED rearlight gives it a stripped down, extreme look. It is one of the best back ends in the business.

2003 YAMAHA YZF-R1
Existing stock: £6999
Private: £6650

DEPRECIATION FROM NEW

2001 £8899 NOW £5475
2002 £8899 NOW £6125
2003 £8399 NOW £6650



MCN BikeMart

If you want to buy or sell an R1 or any other bike then check out MCN every week, or log on to www.motorcyclenews.com

TURN OVER FOR
HONDA
FIREBLADE



ROAD TEST

2nd

Honda FireBlade

PRICE: £8799otr **POWER:** 146.6bhp **TORQUE:** 73.9ftlb **WEIGHT:** 179kg **SPEED** 178.15mph

DID YOU KNOW?

The Original FireBlade in 1992 was designed as a 750 with a view to competing in WSB. It has taken until 2004 for the Blade to achieve this goal.

On the road

HONDA'S new FireBlade comes from the same gene pool that has spawned the CBR600RR (our 600cc group test winner for the last two years running) and the RC211V MotoGP bike (winner of almost everything in Grand Prix racing for the past two years).

You know the Blade is going to be one hell of a bike before you even swing a leg over its RCV look-a-like tail unit. It doesn't disappoint.

The Blade is a class act. Build quality is impeccable; the handling is rock-solid stable inspiring loads of confidence even on the most poorly surfaced roads.

And the new 998cc engine makes the necessary power to stay with the big boys and delivers it with smoothness. It's hard to believe it really does tear up the dyno with 146 real-life pedigree horses.

There's even the latest technology in the shape of an electronic variable steering damper, developed by Honda's MotoGP programme and a keyfob activated ignition immobiliser.

But despite the abundance of power on tap, tooling around town on the Blade is as easy as on any one of



MID-CORNER stability is astonishing

Honda's small capacity commuter bikes, thanks to the motor's smoothness. The controls are all light and easy to use, too; from the oiled precision of the span-adjustable brake and clutch levers to the smooth action of the six-speed gearbox.

On fast and flowing A-roads the Honda becomes your best friend. The finely balanced chassis lets you use every last ounce of its power with

minimal fuss. Even powering hard out of slow turns in the lower gears sees the Blade dig in and accelerate hard, keeping both wheels on the floor. The ZX-10R and GSX-R1000 will be manically lofting the front at this point.

Steering isn't as sharp as the more track-focused Suzuki and Kawasaki, and takes more effort to hustle through very tight and twisty corners, but once on its ear mid-corner

stability is stunning. It really does feel like you can keep on leaning – just look at the pictures.

The motor's flexibility means gearchanges can be kept to a minimum (unlike the ZX-10R), while maintaining serious speed – although the throttle response is slightly snatchy at on/off throttle openings.

But if you really want to buzz through the box and use peak power, the Blade's engine – packed with lighter internal components than ever before – spins up with ferocity, delivering the kind of violent, sledgehammer-to-the-stomach acceleration only ever experienced before on the GSX-R1000.

Brakes are up there with the best, too, giving loads of feel and more stopping power than you'll ever need.

But in making the Blade into such a refined and user-friendly package, Honda has sucked out some of the character of the old model. It never gets the blood coursing through your veins like the other bikes here – which is why most of us want to own one of these mad sports bikes.

And that's a shame because the Blade is a brilliant, brilliant bike.

On the track

OUT on the track the FireBlade has the same kind of cool and calm character that it displays on the road – always composed and in control. If proof were ever needed for this, it's the bike I immediately jumped on when facing the task of learning the technically challenging formula 3 standard Ledenon race track.

While you get on with stuff like learning braking points, finding apexes and trying not to run off the edge of the track through many of the track's blind corners, the Blade will quite happily get on to take care of the business of going, turning and stopping without the rider having to think.

So composed is the Blade, that without the benefit of a lap timer, it's hard to convince yourself that you are actually going fast.

The MotoGP-inspired chassis never feels troubled at any point on the track.

It always feels stable and

unflustered whether flat-out in a straight line or heeled hard over through a buttock-clenching fast turn.

It's so stable that it's difficult to tell if the Honda actually needs that fancy new electronic steering damper.

But that chassis isn't just super-stiff; it gives you just enough feel to let you know exactly what's going on via the high quality suspension. So when all that power on tap finally overwhelms rear tyre grip, you can feel it slide through the seat of your pants, almost before it happens, and deal with it accordingly.

The chassis is so good that it feels like you could slot in a real, fire-breathing 990cc RC211V engine and it would still comfortably handle the power.

The Blade has the stomp to stay glued to the back of all the 1000s in a high-speed drag race out of turns.

“The FireBlade is cool, calm, composed and always in control on the track”

Of course this brutal acceleration is again masked by the Honda's unrelenting composure – refusing to wheelie, wheelspin or threatens to get out of any kind of shape.

It's no accident that the Blade works in this way. Honda has worked hard to ensure that even with all that power available at your right wrist it can be transferred effectively to the rear wheel with minimal fuss. Clever chassis design is responsible for this.

Centralising most of the bike's weight in the chassis keeps the Blade well balanced, and its very

long swingarm (the longest in the class) helps isolate bumps before they even get to the rear shock, as well as helping overall stability.

The Blade's new radially-mounted brakes deal impeccably with the job of scrubbing off the big speed figures it's able to amass along each straight. Combined with the superb feel you get through the lever, this makes the Blade's brakes the best.

As on the road the Blade feels almost too capable on the track.

It lacks the kind of involvement which a rider experiences on the other bikes, especially the ZX-10R and GSX-R1000, and ultimately that takes away some of the excitement it should deliver.

For racers and hard-core track addicts the Blade's user-friendly nature will be a bonus for searing lap times.

But if you just want to go and have some fun, the other bikes here all have the edge.

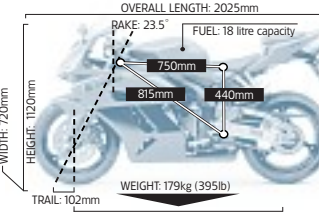


THE Blade really needs to be caned hard to raise the front

⚡ The Blade does not disappoint – it's a class act and a brilliant, brilliant bike ⚡



HONDA CBR1000RR FIREBLADE
£8799 otr
 Available: March 2004, 24 months warranty, 24 months AA recovery
 Colours: Red/white/blue, black/silver, red/black
 New for 2004: New model
 Insurance group: 17 (of 17)
 Info: Honda UK, 01753-590500.



SPECIFICATION:
 Engine: Liquid-cooled, 998cc (75 x 56.5mm) 16v dohc four-stroke, in-line four Fuel injection Six gears
 Chassis: Alloy twin spar
 Front suspension: 43mm inverted forks, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
 Rear suspension: Single shock, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
 Tyres: Bridgestone BT014; 120/70 x 17 front, 190/50 x 17 rear
 Brakes: 2 x 310mm front discs with four-piston radial calipers, 220mm rear disc with single piston caliper

PROS ● Linear delivery ● Rock-solid stable at all speeds ● Neutral handling ● User-friendly ● Best brakes of the bunch
CONS ● It's so refined that it lacks character ● Muted exhaust note ● Hard to steer on the brakes ● Un-inspiring colour scheme

93%

The detail



ELECTRONIC steering damper gives variable damping depending on the bike's speed.



UNDERSEAT pipe looks the part but has a very muted exhaust note next to competition



BEEFY aluminium swingarm looks like it's been lifted straight out of Rossi's RC211V

Technical

SET UP GUIDE

THE Honda is remarkably stable both on the road and the track. Mid-corner stability is particularly good and inspires confidence to create huge angles of lean. The suspension is almost spot-on out of the crate for most kinds of riding. On track, all we needed to do was increase rebound damping to the front forks to aid overall stability, especially coming off the brakes.

MCN'S TRACK SETTINGS:

Front pre-load:

Left on standard settings

Front compression:

Left on standard settings

Front rebound:

One full turn in from standard

Rear pre-load:

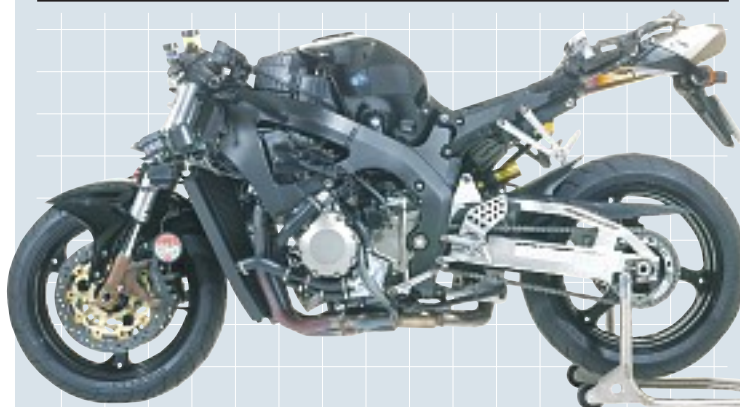
Left on standard settings

Rear compression:

Left on standard settings

Rear rebound:

Left on standard settings



THE rigid nine-piece cast alloy frame was developed by Honda Racing Corporation (HRC). The fuel tank looks small but leads down behind the airbox to keep overall weight centred around the engine – the result of Honda's mass-centralisation programme.

On a budget?

The 2003 Blade can still cut it. It might lack the MotoGP-inspired bling factor of the newer machines but is still one of the most user-friendly superbikes about. Pundits say that it is more involving than the new bike too...

2003 HONDA CBR900RR FIREBLADE

Existing stock: £6995

Private: £6525

DEPRECIATION FROM NEW

2001 £8699 **NOW £4995**

2002 £8699 **NOW £5950**

2003 £7999 **NOW £6525**



MCN BikeMart

If you want to buy or sell a FireBlade or any other bike then check out MCN every week, or log on to www.motorcyclenews.com

TURN OVER FOR
SUZUKI
GSX-R1000



ROAD TEST



3rd Suzuki GSX-R1000

PRICE: £8549otr POWER: 144.4bhp TORQUE: 74.8ftlb WEIGHT: 168kg SPEED 175.57mph

DID YOU KNOW?

The GSX-R1000 is so good as stock that in 2002 on the Isle of Man the late, great David Jeffries lapped within a couple of mph of his fully-tuned F1 bike on his production-spec GSX-R.

On the road

THE Suzuki's motor is still unquestionably one of the best in the business. It's the reason it trounced the old R1 and FireBlade last year when the K3 GSX-R1000 was launched (this year's K4 is the same bar the new colour schemes).

It is also the reason it still impresses – even against the new breed of road-going superbikes.

Power delivery from the 998cc four-cylinder motor (the longest stroke engine of the four bikes) is stunning throughout the entire rev range. It's beautifully smooth, the fuel injection is devoid of any glitches (unlike the Blade and Kawasaki) and the throttle action is light. The GSX-R1000 makes consistently more power than any of the bikes here, from tickover to the higher reaches of the rev range – it's only at peak revs where the others overtake and make slightly more outright power.

All this makes the Suzuki ridiculously easy to ride on the road, much more so than the Kawasaki. It doesn't matter if you're trickling down the high street, cruising down the motorway or scratching through your favourite lanes, the Suzuki makes



THE GSX-R always has rider comfort in mind

smooth, instant and accessible power – made even more potent by the fact it's lugging the least weight around – it's 11 kg lighter than the Blade.

It's comfy too. The softy-padded seat gives you enough room to move around and fidget on long journeys, and the riding position isn't as extreme as the ZX-10R, although nowhere near as comfortable as the

new, more road-focused R1.

Thrill-seekers will be pleased to know it's still got a darker more vicious side to its personality, just like the ZX-10R. The hollow, metallic rasp that barks out at you when you blip the throttle at a standstill sends shivers down your spine, and the Suzuki will do its best to throw you off the back when you accelerate hard

through the first two gears.

If wheelies are your bag, then the GSX-R1000 is by far the easiest here to practice your mono-wheeling skills. With so much low down power and little weight, it can be tickled up on to one wheel at slow speeds and it's so well balanced that it can be kept there with the digital speedo reading very naughty three-figure speeds.

The GSX-R could have won our test, were it not for the competition improving in a few important areas.

The first is the brakes. While the GSX-R's radially-mounted four-piston Tokico front stoppers do the job of slowing you from the silliest of speeds, they lack feel and are prone to fade.

The rest of the class has moved things on style-wise too, leaving the GSX-R1000 looking dated. The quality and design of the cycle parts aren't even in the same league either. Just look at the Kawasaki's aggressive nose, the R1's beautifully sculpted swingarm and the Honda's overall build quality, and compare it with the more utilitarian-made Suzuki and you'll see what we mean.

But never mind that. What an engine...

On the track

JUDGING by the scorching lap times we managed on the GSX-R1000, it's clear Suzuki isn't quite ready to lie down and have the fancy new competition walk all over it.

In fact, it's only the R1 that went around Ledenon faster – but only by a measly hundredth of a second.

It's not that difficult to see why the GSX-R1000 still has the ability to rock around a circuit with the best of them.

Because not only does it look like a race bike with lights, it also feels like a thoroughbred superbike to ride too.

With its wide tank and fairing, the GSX-R1000 gives the impression of being bulky on the road.

But somehow it manages to shed its skin and feel lithe and nimble the second you head out on to the track – exactly as it should since it's the lightest bike here.

This lack of weight not only makes for more exciting

acceleration, it makes it easier to hustle the bike through some of Ledenon's technically demanding, and downright scary turns, too.

Of the bikes on test the GSX-R1000, alongside the ZX-10R, was our favourite to ride around the track, simply because it is so exciting.

If this were a track-only test, the Suzuki and Kawasaki would be top two.

With all that instant grunt on tap from that growling engine, you can punch out of each and every turn with tyre-shedding, mono-wheeling ease, while the acceleration slams your bum hard back, pinning you into the rear seat hump.

The engine has so much grunt that you could even ride the circuit in a gear higher than normal, and you would still get around almost as fast.

Handling is sublime too. You feel 'wired in' to the bike, just like the

4 Of all the bikes the GSX-R1000 was our favourite to ride around the track because it's so exciting...

equally lightweight ZX-10R, the chassis letting you know exactly what's going on at all times – more than the more refined and road-biased Blade and R1.

Just a nudge of the clip-ons is enough to get the GSX-R1000 rolling neutrally into the corners, and once there mid-bend stability is amazing.

It's rock-solid when it's leant over hard on its side, and has bags of ground-clearance – nothing

scrapes as it does on the R1 and FireBlade.

In fact the handling around Ledenon was so good we barely needed to touch the suspension, just a few tweaks to the forks to keep the bike stable as lap times dropped.

But even then the tyres looked unmarked and unshredded after an entire day on the track – a good sign that the suspension was working exactly as it should.

The only upset on the track was the brakes, which didn't give the power or feel of the newer tackle.

However, we know that replacing the standard brake hoses and fitting braided steel items and adding better quality fluid helps sort this situation.

The Suzuki was the only bike here that all our testers liked in equal measures – both on the road and on the track – which is a sure sign that Suzuki has got the mix for the GSX-R just right.



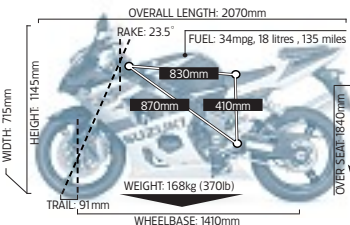
AND it's none too difficult to pull the front end up either...

Thrill-seekers will be pleased to know it's still got a darker more vicious side



SUZUKI GSX-R1000
£8549 otr

Available: Now, 24 months warranty, 12 months AA recovery and Alpha-Dot security marking
Colours: Blue/white, grey/black, yellow/black/silver
New for 2004: Colours, new range of accessories
Insurance group: 17 (of 17)
Info: Suzuki GB, 01892-707001



SPECIFICATION:
Engine: Liquid-cooled, 998cc (73 x 59mm) 16v dohc four-stroke in-line four. Fuel injection. Six gears
Chassis: Alloy twin spar
Front suspension: 43mm inverted forks, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
Rear suspension: Single shock adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
Tyres: Bridgestone BT010, 120/70 x 17 front, 190/50 x 17 rear
Brakes: 2 x 300mm front discs with four piston radial calipers, 220mm rear disc with two piston caliper

PROS Stinking bottom-end and smooth power right through rev range • Light, flickable handling • User-friendly
CONS Feels unrefined compared to new tackle • Radial brake set-up lacks feel and fades after hard use • Styling now dated

92%

The detail



Technical

SET UP GUIDE

THE Suzuki's suspension is almost perfect straight out of the box. We didn't need to touch it on the road and only need to make subtle changes to the front forks to keep the bike more stable when riding hard at the track. We left the rear shock alone - it felt good on standard settings. The rear tyre was unmarked even after a day's riding, a good sign the set up was spot on.

MCN'S TRACK SETTINGS:

Front pre-load:

Left as standard

Front compression:

Added three clicks over standard

Front rebound:

Added two clicks over standard

Rear pre-load:

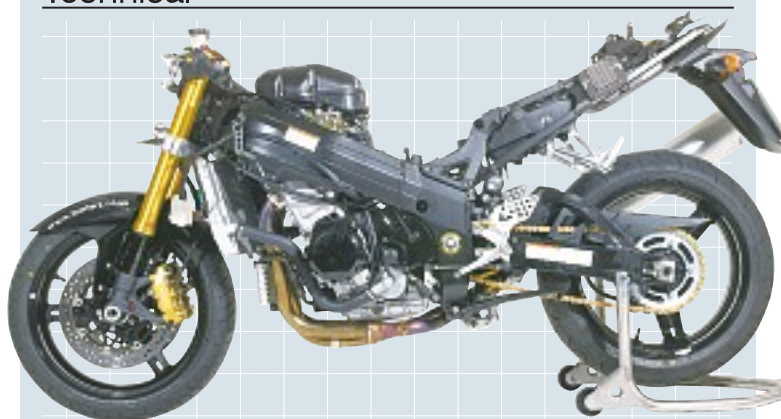
Left as standard

Rear compression:

Left as standard

Rear rebound:

Left as standard



STRIPPED of all its bodywork, the GSX-R1000 looks the most conventional of all the bikes here. Its beefy extruded aluminium frame is so strong that the Suzuki BSB squad sees no need to add extra bracing for their race bikes. It's also the lightest of all the 1000s, weighing in at a svelte 168kg - one kilo lighter than a CBR600RR!

On a budget?

THE 2003 GSX-R is the same spec as this year's, meaning that an '03 bike is excellent value. The second best-selling bike of last year, there are lots of 2003 models going very cheap in Bike Mart. How does 180mph for £6999 sound?

2003 SUZUKI GSX-R1000
Existing stock: £6999
Private: £6480

DEPRECIATION

FROM NEW

2001 £8999 NOW £5475

2002 £8999 NOW £6095

2003 £8199 NOW £6480



MCN BikeMart

If you want to buy or sell a GSX-R1000 or any other bike then check out MCN every week, or log on to www.motorcyclenews.com

TURN OVER FOR
KAWASAKI
ZX-10R



ROAD TEST

4th



Kawasaki

ZX-10R

PRICE: £9045otr POWER: 147.7bhp TORQUE: 74.6ftlb WEIGHT: 170kg SPEED: 176.3mph

DID YOU KNOW?

The ZX-10R's predecessor, the ZX-9R is one of the longest running superbikes. Originally introduced in 1994, it is now 10 years old. Only the FireBlade and GSX-R750 have been going longer.

On the road

THE ZX-10R is Jekyll and Hyde, a completely split personality depending on whether it's on the road or track.

While the Kawasaki rocked our world on the track (see below), there are a few niggles that mattered enough for us to put it in last place in this test. But it still dishes out plenty of thrills on the road too, thanks to that screaming 147bhp motor, sharp steering and even sharper styling.

As you'd expect from such a sports-focused machine, the riding position is extreme. Rearset footpegs are high enough never to touch down when riding hard on the track, but aren't designed for comfort.

Low set clip-ons mean your wrists get a hard time, especially around town. That raucous engine buzzes through the bars, footpegs and frame rails, too. In fact, the ZX-10R feels pretty much like a race bike – brilliant for short blasts and track foolery, but tiresome on long journeys.

The front brakes are disappointing on the road, especially since as well as following the current trend for radially-mounted calipers, the ZX-10R also boasts petal-shaped discs like

ZX-10R's stiff rear end spoiled things on the road



those used on many race bikes.

They feel slightly wooden and they need a good squeeze to bring the ZX-10R to a halt. It's as if the bike is fitted with racing compound pads, which work brilliantly at track speeds but lack feel at a more sedate pace.

The gearbox has a stiff action, too. It won't give you blisters, but cog swapping isn't in the same league as the honey-filled box of the GSX-R.

But it's the ZX-10R's rocket-powered

engine that causes the most frustration on the road.

At town speeds the motor is smooth. There's a healthy serving of low-end grunt and the throttle action is beautifully light, making it twist-and-go easy to ride through city streets. But the ZX-10R's midrange fuelling isn't as crisp as the competition. Keep the needle hovering between the 6000rpm and 8000rpm mark – the place it tends

to live riding through sweeping A-roads, or when you start accelerating out of slower corners – and the power delivery is a bit fluffy.

Throttle response is snatchy when you're rolling on and off the twistgrip. It clears when the revs build and you enter the ZX-10R's hyperspace zone at 9000rpm, but riding the ZX-10R at more licence-friendly speeds isn't as easy as the FireBlade.

Just like the ZX-6R, the ZX-10R's rear suspension is set up very firm as standard. Plonking your bum in the saddle does little to compress the suspension – adding to that race bike feeling. But it's all too easy to spin up the rear wheel by accident even with moderate throttle openings – and that's with the sticky Pirelli Diablo Corsas we fitted to all four bikes.

Softening the rear shock (see below) helps the rear find grip, but it never felt as good as the others.

For many, the ZX-10R's untamed road manners will add to the appeal of this lightning-quick and aggressive Kawasaki. If you like your superbikes with attitude, making your heart skip a beat just looking at it in your garage, look no further than the Green One.

On the track

THE slack-jawed ramblings from every one of our testers as they pull in after a session around Ledenon on the ZX-10R is a sure sign that Kawasaki has got it right – on the track at least.

Massive grins, mad, staring eyes and incomprehensible babbling about arm-wrenching power, retina-detaching brakes and super-quick steering are still going on long after the ZX-10R's rasping in-line four-cylinder 998cc motor has cooled down.

In standard trim, the Kawasaki is the most exciting of our superbike quartet around the track – no contest. It might not be the most polished on the road, but all that's forgotten as you take the ZX-10R by the scruff of its neck and hurl it around this circuit in the south of France as fast as you can.

The brakes, which felt wooden on the road, are now in their element. Just one finger's worth of pressure

on the lever is all it takes to haul the ZX-10R up from three-figure speeds to single digits with astonishing speed.

You don't give a damn about the engine's less-than-smooth midrange power delivery either. All you care about is lapping up more of that addictive and brutal power the ZX-10R is so keen to dish out at the top end of the rev-range. Power that's so strong that you need to give a prudent dab of the rear brake pedal to stop the Kawasaki from flipping when cresting the fourth gear rise over Ledenon's start/finish straight.

The ZX-10R's firm rear end is much more of a blessing on the track than the road. It keeps the back of the bike high, even with a rider on board, helping to retain its steep steering angle and willingness to turn into corners unbelievably quickly.

It's also able to deal better with

Massive grins and babbling are still going on long after the ZX-10R's motor has cooled down

the greater cornering forces generated on the track, keeping the bike super stable mid-corner and inspiring the confidence to push really hard. That said, we still had to soften it to give more feel through the rear and search out every bit of available grip.

Brilliant front ends have become a Kawasaki trademark and the ZX-10R does nothing to dispel this. It lets you know exactly what the front tyre is doing at all times, whether it's skimming the Tarmac

coming out of turns or buried deep into the road surface on the brakes, even at extreme lean angles.

But if we were astonished by the ZX-10R's track manners, especially after its unruly behaviour on the road, we were equally astounded to find that it was the slowest of the 1000s at Ledenon – albeit by fractions of a second.

After much head scratching we put this down to the gearbox, which wasn't as slick or positive as the other four bikes. This simply meant we weren't able to swap cogs as quickly as on the ZX-10R's rivals. The fluffy midrange may also have affected the Kawasaki's acceleration coming out of some of the trickier and tighter turns, too.

Kawasaki has built a stonkingly capable track tool, which is also fantastically exciting to ride. Four grown men fighting in the pitlane for the ZX-10R's keys wasn't a pretty sight.



TEST rider gathers his thoughts before tackling the ZX-10R

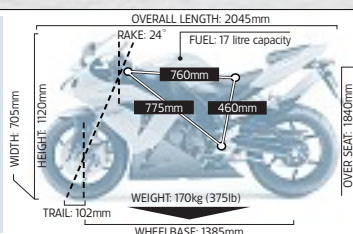


⚡ The ZX-10R dishes out plenty of thrills on the road, thanks to that screaming 147bhp motor ⚡

KAWASAKI ZX-10R

£9045 otr

Available: Now 24 months unlimited mileage warranty, 12 months RAC recovery
Colours: Green, blue, black
New for 2004: New model
Insurance group: 17 (of 17)
Info: Kawasaki UK; 01628-851000



SPECIFICATION:

Engine: Liquid-cooled, 998cc (76mm x 55mm) 16v dohc four-stroke in-line four. Fuel injection. Six gears
Chassis: Alloy twin-spar
Front suspension: 43mm inverted forks, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
Rear suspension: Single shock, adjustable for pre-load, rebound and compression damping
Tyres: Dunlop D218; 120/70 x 17 front, 190/50 x 17 rear
Brakes: 2 x 300mm front discs with four-piston radial calipers. 220mm rear disc with single piston caliper

PROS • Stunning front end feel and sharp steering • Screaming exhaust note • Most exciting on track • Incredibly agile
CONS • Stiff, notchy gearbox • Brakes feel wooden at sane speeds • Snatchy throttle response • Engine vibes through bars

91%

The detail



PETAL-SHAPED discs look the part to run cooler on the track



COMPACT LCD display is ripped off the ZX-6R, and still difficult to read in direct sunlight



HUGE frame rails look like they've been lifted off the MotoGP bike

Technical

SET-UP GUIDE

THE main criticism of the ZX-10R's suspension is the rock-hard rear end. Just pushing down on the seat fails to make the rear shock compress by any significant amount. This translates to a feel overload and the rear tyre spins up very easily, even at relatively slow speeds. We softened the rear compression damping for the track, which improved feel and grip.

MCN'S TRACK SETTINGS:

Front pre-load:

As standard

Front compression:

Added two extra clicks

Front rebound:

Added one extra click

Rear pre-load:

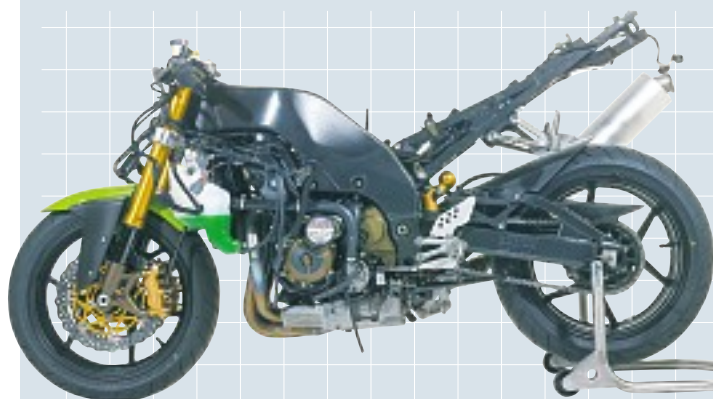
As standard

Rear compression:

Softened off by one full turn

Rear rebound:

Left as standard



THE MotoGP-inspired lightweight aluminium chassis runs over the top of that snarling 998cc in-line four-cylinder engine. This means the frame can be narrower, cutting down on the bike's overall width. This slimline figure assists with aerodynamics and makes it easier for the rider to move around on the bike.

On a budget?

The ZX-9R might seem like a soft-sprung sports-tourer compared to the ZX-10R, but that doesn't mean that it isn't capable. The less intimidating power delivery and stable ride make it a top road bike and handy on the track, too.

2003 KAWASAKI ZX-9R

Existing stock: £5849

Private: £5195

DEPRECIATION

FROM NEW

2001 £7995 **NOW** £4250

2002 £7995 **NOW** £4675

2003 £7995 **NOW** £5195



MCN BikeMart

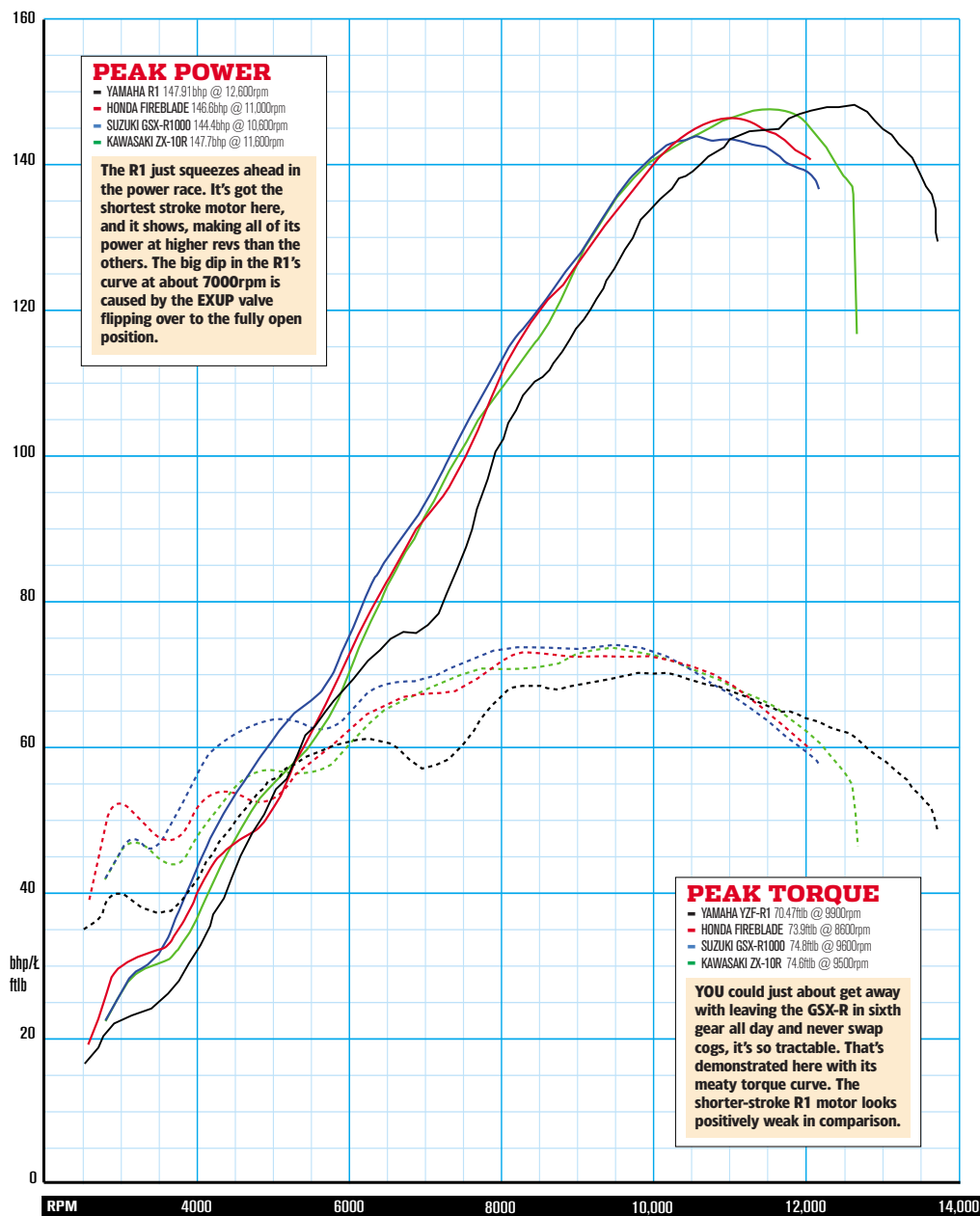
If you want to buy or sell a ZX-9R or any other bike then check out MCN every week, or log on to www.motorcyclenews.com

TURN OVER FOR
**PERFORMANCE
ANALYSIS**

ROAD TEST

Performance DATA

POWER AND TORQUE CURVES



ACCELERATION

THE GSX-R's huge low and midrange torque hampers initial progress as the bike tries to lift the front. The Blade has the longest wheelbase and most front end weight bias to give a civilised launch every time, and is never topped all the way to 170mph.

YZF-R1				FIREBLADE				GSX-R1000				ZX-10R			
SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)
10	0.60	119	0.50	108	0.55	110	0.61	117							
20	1.06	4.24	0.97	416	1.08	470	1.08	437							
30	1.53	9.50	1.44	9.53	1.54	9.78	1.58	9.88							
40	1.97	16.40	1.87	16.20	2.01	17.23	2.08	17.72							
50	2.44	25.89	2.33	25.49	2.50	27.09	2.56	27.38							
60	2.96	38.77	2.82	37.62	2.99	39.01	3.03	38.91							
70	3.48	53.63	3.30	51.40	3.48	53.42	3.56	54.61							
80	4.35	83.23	3.84	69.75	4.17	76.80	4.11	72.77							
90	4.86	102.40	4.53	95.49	4.77	99.36	4.81	99.23							
100	5.46	128.05	5.14	121.42	5.41	126.56	5.45	126.62							
110	6.31	167.96	5.97	160.38	6.25	165.28	6.62	181.35							
120	7.18	212.44	6.77	201.49	7.14	211.92	7.41	222.38							
130	8.21	269.81	7.88	264.16	8.40	281.90	8.51	283.58							
140	9.27	334.22	8.93	327.54	9.54	350.43	9.60	349.23							
150	10.77	431.30	10.44	425.41	11.20	457.93	11.14	448.87							
160	12.34	540.81	12.14	543.39	14.05	656.43	12.79	563.49							
170	14.96	734.90	14.43	711.82	16.81	860.89	15.45	759.48							

TOP GEAR ROLL ON 40-120MPH

THE ZX-10R's gearing lets it clear off in top on a first full of throttle. But if you were cruising at a motorway-friendly 70mph and needed to overtake without shifting down, the R1 whips up quickest to 80mph in 1.07sec

YZF-R1				FIREBLADE				GSX-R1000				ZX-10R			
SPEED (MPH)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)	DISTANCE (M)	TIME (SEC)
50	1.58	31.77	1.31	26.30	1.58	31.60	1.32	26.41							
60	3.06	68.07	2.72	60.95	2.93	64.86	2.70	60.25							
70	4.24	102.19	3.98	97.49	4.04	95.96	3.88	94.50							
80	5.31	138.10	5.29	141.45	5.13	133.56	5.03	133.35							
90	6.39	179.06	6.48	186.64	6.30	178.13	6.16	176.20							
100	7.56	229.05	7.61	234.66	7.43	226.08	7.22	221.32							
110	8.72	283.33	8.79	289.83	8.65	283.27	8.26	269.63							
120	9.85	341.54	10.00	352.13	9.85	344.96	9.38	327.44							

STANDING QUARTER-MILE ACCELERATION

IF first gear acrobatics and excitement are your bag then look no further than the GSX-R and ZX-10R. Again, the Blade's long wheelbase lets it get the power down. In perfect wind-free conditions, all four bikes could break into sub-10 second quarters.

YZF-R1	146.89mph	10.35sec
FIREBLADE	146.92mph	10.10sec
GSX-R1000	143.20mph	10.40sec
ZX-10R	144.38mph	10.45sec

Terminal speed Time to cover 1/4-mile

TOP SPEED

THE FireBlade just eclipses the others with its clean aerodynamics. But a 25mph headwind dented the top speed figures, but who's complaining when all these bikes manage a true – GPS measured, not an over optimistic speedo figure – 175mph? Snetterton's back straight is surely going to feel shorter this year.

YZF-R1	177.72mph	17.45sec
FIREBLADE	178.15mph	17.05sec
GSX-R1000	175.57mph	17.60sec
ZX-10R	176.25mph	17.75sec

Speed Time taken

BRAKING 70-0MPH

ZX-10R's brakes seem to work best when they're up to temperature. The Kawasaki gives the best feedback under hard braking, hence the shortest braking distance. The GSX-R's radial calipers are good, but are a year behind the rest of the pack.

YZF-R1	51.26m
FIREBLADE	51.73m
GSX-R1000	52.69m
ZX-10R	49.44m

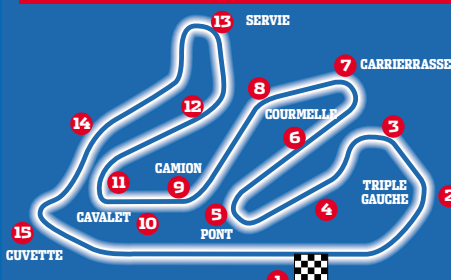
Distance (metres)

Ledenon circuit

THE circuit is about a 30-minute ride from Nîmes in the south of France. We'd have preferred to test the bikes in the UK, but the weather was against us.

And UK track day specialists Byrne-Up Tours were already at Ledenon, so we gatecrashed.

The circuit is a 1.96-mile roller-coaster ride. The Triple Gauche turn is a triple apex with a 150mph entry speed. The rest is just as bananas, as the apex speeds show.



SECTOR TIMES

SECTOR	YZF-R1 (MPH)	FIREBLADE (MPH)	GSX-R1000 (MPH)	ZX-10R (MPH)
1	145.99	143.85	143.05	142.96
2	81.03	81.49	81.86	84.22
3	48.35	47.44	47.40	48.70
4	92.44	95.19	95.22	92.37
5	40.72	40.47	38.17	37.68
6	106.44	101.62	103.59	100.57
7	36.03	35.39	35.90	34.74
8	95.24	98.91	94.14	94.86
9	67.08	66.92	64.32	67.33
10	85.96	82.25	84.03	85.38
11	45.23	44.87	45.86	42.95
12	94.44	94.49	97.65	93.74
13	38.22	38.16	37.60	36.01
14	98.56	97.90	96.30	98.04
15	38.03	39.35	39.43	40.56

FASTEST LAP TIME

TIMES round Ledenon are incredibly close, with bikes lapping well within one second of each other. The R1 bags it – but only by one hundredth of a second. It manages to pull ahead of the other bikes whenever there is a decent bit of straight, for example, at sector 6, 14 and over the start/finish line. Despite setting the best time, the R1 doesn't actually feel the fastest, that honour goes to the quick steering, hard cornering ZX-10R – but it's slowest.

R1	1:36.24sec
GSX-R1000	1:36.25sec
FIREBLADE	1:36.60sec
ZX-10R	1:36.90sec

Second OPINION

TESTERS' OPINIONS

OUR road test team ranged from fastish amateurs to ex-racers. Here are their verdicts...



ANDY DOWNES
MCN NEWS EDITOR
AGE: 30
HEIGHT: 5ft 9in
WEIGHT: 12st
EXPERIENCE: MEDIUM-FAST ROAD RIDER, INTERMEDIATE TRACK RIDER



YZF-R1

HAVING seen the Yamaha at the Milan Show in September last year for the first time I wasn't keen on the bike's looks. But my first ride on the sweeping Spanish mountain roads changed that. The engine noise, the way the motor pulls at almost any revs and the fun it was to hustle around the roads made it my favourite overall. It has got character – and the looks grow on you.



FIREBLADE

THIS was the bike I was desperate to like the most. I've always had a thing for the Blade and I own a 2001 CBR600FS track bike. But the blue, white and red paintjob on our test bike instantly makes it look three years older than it is. The Honda does everything so well, which shouldn't be a criticism, but it lacks passion – and that's not what big-bore bikes should be about.



GSX-R1000

I'VE always loved the GSX-R1000 – that raucous bark of the exhaust. It is just so good at being all things to all people without ever being boring. There are loads about but that doesn't take anything away from it being a great motorcycle. And if you want a bike that can be ridden for fun, every day, on the track or across Europe the GSX-R1000 is still a damn fine choice.



ZX-10R

IF my opinion were based purely on looks, the savage ZX-10R would be my clear favourite. The attention to detail, with the petal discs, the beautiful wheels and that gaping ram-air scoop, is visually awesome. On the road though, the bike's a bit of a nightmare. The whole thing buzzes and vibrates with engine revs, it puts a lot of weight on your wrists and the brakes lack feel.



DAVE HILL
MCN ROAD TESTER
AGE: 43
HEIGHT: 6ft 3in
WEIGHT: 16st
EXPERIENCE: EX-WSB AND WORLD ENDURANCE RIDER, INSTRUCTOR AT RON HASLAM'S RACE SCHOOL

For me the R1 is the best of all the road bikes. It's got the most comfortable riding position and the best seat. And the engine is beautifully smooth. I wasn't so keen on it at the track. We'd set up the bike for one of the lighter riders, which made the front feel nervous with me on it. But I loved the bike as a whole, it steers so easily. Not keen on the plain colour scheme, though.

The Blade is just so easy to ride on the road. It's comfortable and the engine produces a really nice spread of power. It's remarkably stable too and it gave me loads of confidence to ride the Blade hard, especially on the track. Everything feels smooth, but I didn't find it very exciting to ride. It feels almost docile and its relatively long wheelbase hampers wheelie action.

LAST year it was the daddy but now it seems dated in this company. That said, it's great around the track, where it feels best when you're really on it. It has loads of low-down stomp, which helps it drive out of corners. It's got a comfortable riding position for the road – you feel like you could ride down to the south of France on it then do a track day once you're there. It's still a very good package.

THE ZX-10R feels so exciting to ride fast. It's got stunning power in the upper rev-range, pin-sharp steering, a raucous exhaust note and stunning brakes. It's a bit too harsh on the road, though. The rear suspension is too hard and there's too much weight on your wrists. But you can forgive it all that for its track manners – it's the most exhilarating bike here and my firm favourite.



MARC POTTER
EDITOR MCN
AGE: 28
HEIGHT: 6ft 4in
WEIGHT: 14st
EXPERIENCE: EXTREMELY FAST ROAD RIDER, FAST TRACK DAY RIDER

I WANTED to hate this bike. It looks like an Italian got caught up in a Japanese bar, drank too much Saki and got all confused with what he was trying to design. But it's an absolute beauty to ride. It has the most perfect road manners, fantastic noise that makes you feel you'd never want to fit race pipes. It has beautiful steering, clean power delivery and is brilliant on the track once it's set-up.

PULLING up after my first proper road thrash on the Blade, I realised I couldn't remember anything about it. It does everything so well you just don't have to think about it. A great riding position, 600-like chassis, easy-to-use in town, even easier to thrash along a B-road. You barely break into a sweat on track, then you see your lap times and get blown away. It lacks character, though.

ON the road the GSX-R felt big and comfy and it doesn't steer or handle as well as the others. But then you realise that the suspension is first class and copes with bumpy roads as standard or race tracks with a few tweaks. The chassis feels fluid on the track and the motor is arguably the best road bike engine here – exciting at the top-end, yet gutsy at the bottom.

THE ZX-10R was the one I really wanted to like. But I wouldn't care if I ever rode one again, on the road. It hurt my wrists, vibrated, the brakes were wooden and grabby, and the fuel-injection at medium speeds was messy. But on the track I absolutely fell in love with it. I reckon it's the best standard road bike I've ever ridden on track. Shame we ride on roads most of the time.

The verdict

YAMAHA has made unbelievable leaps with the new R1. It's not only head and shoulders better than the old model, it's overtaken the strong competition that had stolen a march on it, namely the GSX-R1000.

But you can't call the Kawasaki, Honda or Suzuki losers in this test. On sticky Pirelli Diablo Corsa control tyres they all lapped our test track well within a second of each other, they'll all wheelie past twice the national speed limit, and with favourable weather conditions should all blast their way past the magical 180mph mark.

The GSX-R1000 and ZX-10R are the hooligan's choice. Their light-weight, pin-sharp handling and mad screaming motors will dish out major-league thrills on every lap of a track day. And the Suzuki is a whopping £850 cheaper than the R1.

The Honda was designed by the team behind the title-winning RCV MotoGP machine. It has an insane amount of power and is blisteringly quick, but is wrapped up in a much calmer, more user-friendly package than the Kawasaki or Suzuki.

But the Yamaha manages to combine the character of all the bikes here. It feels stable, exciting and easy to use, and it is also the fastest and most powerful out of the four. While the Kawasaki feels faster than it is and the uninvolved Honda is faster than it feels, the R1 is stable, exciting and fast.

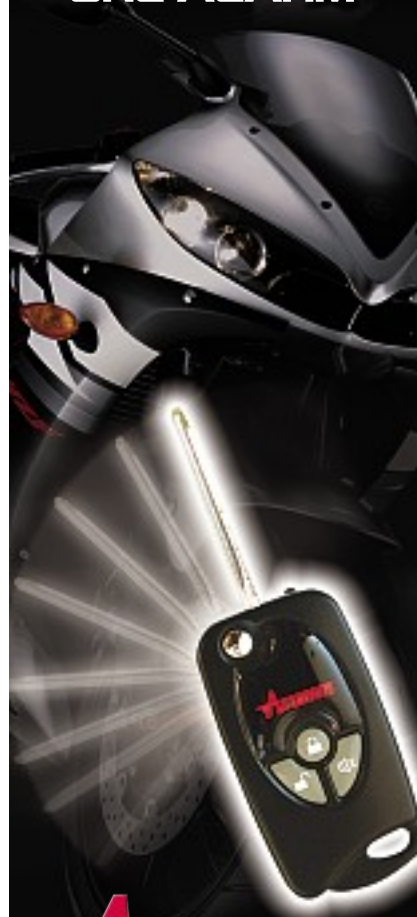


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