

BIG RED *and* Mr. GRUNT

What do you pick if you want a big-bore sports-tourer that'll do a run to Western Australia without breathing hard, that offers grunt all the way to 200 clicks and more, that allows for spirited bend-swinging and yet won't leave you exhausted after a long day in the saddle? GEOFF HALL and BRIAN CORLEY took two of the best, Suzuki's GSX1100EFF and the new Honda VF1000F11, on the infamous 5000-kilometre, four-day Border Run.

THE fog swirled in, suffocating the landscape and reducing visibility to scant metres. Push the big Suzuki towards the centreline and ease it around the corner, praying that no semi-trailer has pre-booked the space. South Australia is our target and it's getting a little closer with a cruise speed of just 60 km/h. A glance in the rearview mirrors and it's comforting to see the twin headlights of Honda's flagship, the VF1000F11, spearing through the fog — at least Brian's hanging in there.

The world goes white, and the flick of a gloved finger against the visor does nothing to clear it! Where is the road going? Panic! Then relief, as a harder wipe removes the ice from the outside of the visor. Yeah, ice! Time to slow down even further, dreading the next white-out and hoping the road hasn't become a skating rink. Someone said tour testing was fun — stand up that man! A highway patrol car whistles by in the opposite direction. That's the sort of problem you don't need when you're bloody cold and battling to remain alive.

There is no better way to assess the big-bore cruisers than on the open road where the white line is king and you are putting away lots of kilometres every day. You are truly living with the machine, there can be no temptation to take the car today, or not ride at all. The sheer distance to be covered each day reveals the warts of each bike in double quick time.

Both bikes on tour were updates of last

year's machines. The GSX's changes are more cosmetic than those on the VF, which represents a major rethink by Honda. The GSX has always been placed among the best of the big-bore sportsters — even if it's a little raw-edged. It may not have been king for a year or two now, but on the road it has certainly held its head high as Mr Grunt. The EF model gets styling and suspension changes, plus a 10mm longer wheelbase and some small anti-vibration measures. Suzuki has stuck with the GSX mill for five years. Why change when you're on a good thing.

Now-look V

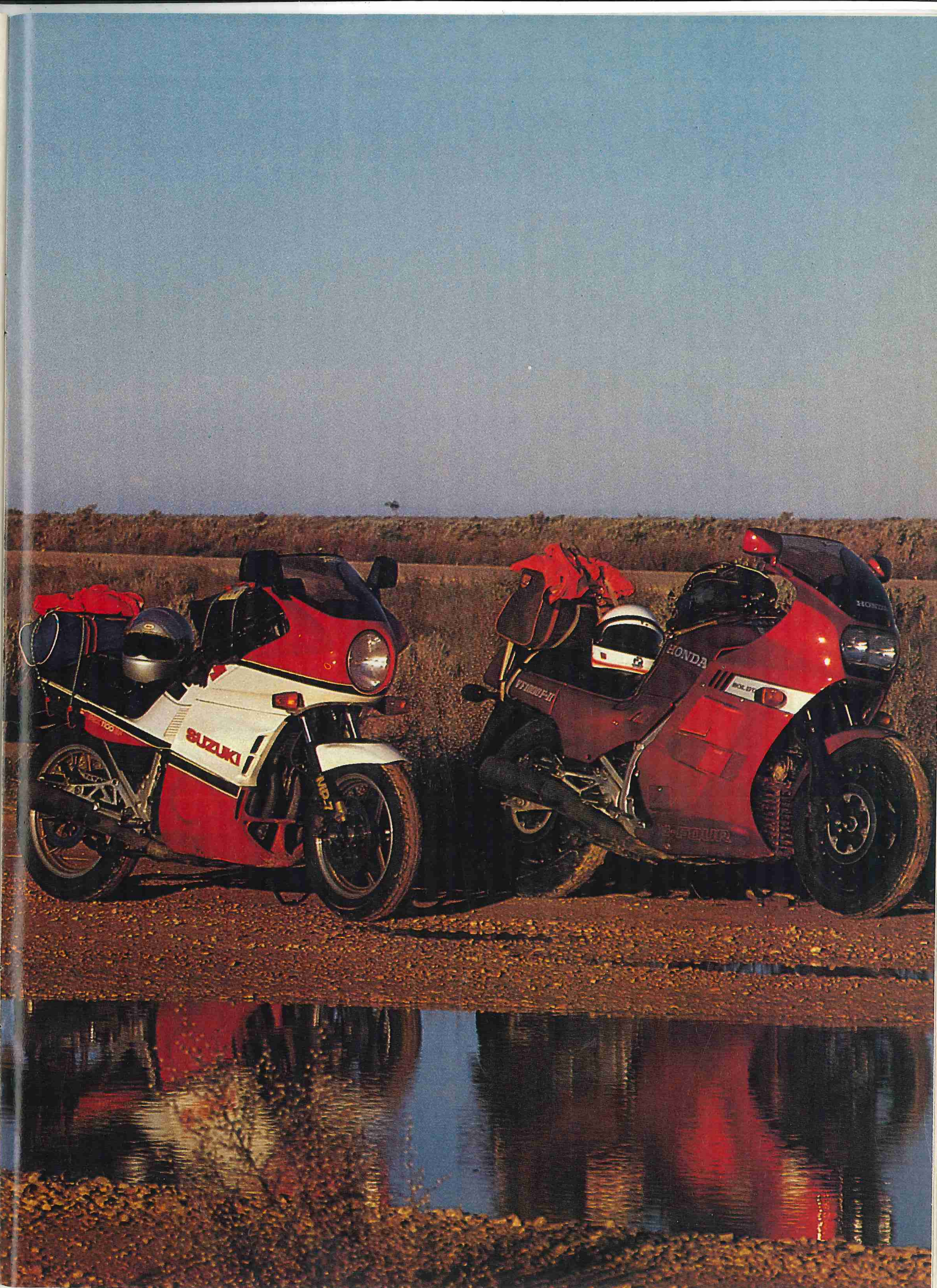
Honda's update of the VF is of a different nature, and it has resulted in a completely new machine. There have been significant changes in the engine department, especially in the top end, where, on the old model, oil feed to the cams at high engine speeds was suspect. We felt our long-haul, high-speed days would reveal if there are any chinks remaining in the new armour. Honda's revamp of the model appears to be based on the endurance racer theme: dual headlights, a full fairing and hefty 23-litre tank plus an 18-inch wheel grace the front end. Despite its sporty looks, though, Honda's latest VF is intended to fill the high-speed, grand tourer supreme role.

If you're going to spend four days on tour and ride 5300 km, your perspective becomes dominated by the seating position of your machine. In this respect the VF and GSX are quite different. Despite its relatively low seat height you

gain the impression that you are climbing onto the Honda. Once aboard you settle into a narrow but quite comfortable seat. The broad fuel tank makes you stretch a little to the wide and relatively high bars, while a car-type dashboard complete with air vents is framed by a neat screen and two wing mirrors. The speedometer (with a rather optimistic maximum of 280 km/h) and tachometer are surrounded by an automotive-style range of warning lights covering oil pressure, high beam, turn indicators, and tail light failure. Two gauges, one for water temperature and the other for fuel, complete the line-up. The latter moves rapidly when you're motoring — the other rarely gets flustered. The overall impression is one of compact, functional gear, positioned so that you are constantly aware of the VF's progress. If you want to know what it's like aboard a big Honda endurance racer, this is probably as close as you'll ever get. Switchgear is simple, functional, and easy to use while wearing heavy overmitts or just light racing gloves. Blinkers are cancelled by pushing the button; lights dipped by a similar action. Simple, effective, practical gear which came through rain, sand and dust without a complaint.

Potent but basic

In contrast, the GSX is somewhat spartan and the finish is not up to the standard set by Big Red. You step down onto the Suzuki's wide seat, finding the 'bars set correspondingly lower than the Honda's, causing you to crouch forward



Photos by Geoff Hall

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and down to settle into the riding position. It's hard on the wrists at low speed — but more of that later. The GSX dash is basic, although its range of instruments and warning lights is as comprehensive as the Honda's, an oil temperature gauge being substituted for the VF's water temperature gauge. A sidestand warning light is also included. There are a number of annoying features of the Suzuki's layout which just shouldn't be found on a machine in its price range. The glass used on the instruments reflects light in the daytime, for example, which means it's almost impossible to read the dials under most circumstances. Then there's the quality of finish. Water bubbled up between the screen and the body of the fairing when the rain came pounding down.

On a slightly different tack, the switchgear is no longer up to the standard required in a very competitive market. The combination blinker/high/low-beam switch is great in concept (one button for the major functions) but unfortunately it's unprecise in action and awkward to use.

So the Suzuki lacks some of the

Honda's attention to detail, but there is no doubt that the GSX is still a top balls-and-all sports-tourer. It may be a bit rough around the edges, but it's a strong machine which won't die easily.

In the engine department the VF and GSX display two quite different design philosophies. The GSX wears the trusty across-the-frame, double overhead cam, four-cylinder four-stroke, with an oil cooler to keep the hard working internals operating at a reasonable temperature. Honda has relied on its water cooled V-four nestling along the frame. Two radiators and a couple of special air vents (to help cool the rear cylinders and carburetors) are employed to keep the whole kit and kaboodle at a reasonable temperature. The air temperature barely scrambled above 18 degrees Celsius at any time during our trip and yet the VF's motor was quite hot after a couple of spirited high-speed blasts; you wonder how well it'll cope on a hot summer's day when you ask it the question. To be fair it didn't consume a drop of oil on tour, while the Suzuki used a very reasonable litre and a half.

Grunt

Neither layout lacks power — the GSX tops out with a claimed 91.0 kW at 8500 rpm, while with 85.4 kW at 9000 rpm the Honda is no babe in the woods; and despite its slight weight disadvantage, 245 kg dry compared with the Suzuki's 238 kg, the VF stands up pretty well in the performance stakes and it does so with ease. Neither of these bikes requires great fistfuls of revs to get at the power, either. The GSX is a true grunt machine, providing good power from 2000 rpm; and the VF displays the same characteristics. There's grunt from low revs, and great power all the way to redline.

Because the power delivery on both machines is so progressive and strong, gear-changing almost becomes unnecessary unless you are really charging on tight, twisty roads. On a number of occasions we were faced with wet roads, tight railway crossings and smooth tar — conditions which would require a steady hand and steel nerves on "cammy" bikes. Not so with these two. If you remained in top gear and used a

smooth style through the corners it was possible to maintain respectable average speeds no matter how bad the going. We managed West Wyalong to Bathurst (260 km) in two and a half hours through pouring rain.

For a straight-line performance evaluation, there is probably no better place than the wide open spaces of the Nullarbor. Predictably, the GSX had the legs on the Honda, convincingly beating it in roll ons from 80 km/h to 140 km/h and from 100 km/h to 200 km/h. The margin in each case was around 10 bike lengths. But when the GSX was approaching its top speed of 225 km/h (at 8500 rpm) the Honda would gradually attain supremacy, moving on to 230 km/h at 9000 rpm. It's interesting that top speed was achieved at each bike's peak power revs — gearing, in both cases, is spot on.

Not so smooth

There is, of course, a price to pay for the sort of performance these two can deliver. In the case of the GSX vibration attacked through tank, handlebars, footpegs and the seat; at 100 km/h and at

130 km/h the punishment is severe — not that the feet and hands go numb, but it's pretty unpleasant. Although it's difficult to be definite about it, the Suzuki appeared to wear its rider out quicker than the Honda because of vibration. It is however very comfortable at illegal and off the scale speeds of 140 km/h to 160 km/h. There's a smooth ride available, but you have to risk your licence if you want it.

The VF on the other hand behaves like a smoother version of a Ducati V-twin, producing a little off-beat vibration which disappears at engine speeds above 3500 revs. Still there's a price to pay for performance and in the Honda's case it's poor fuel consumption. Ride this machine to its full potential and you'll need more than your bank manager's blessing to pay the bills; but more on that later.

Both bikes employ five-speed gearboxes and chain final drive to transfer the goods to the rear wheel. The clutch on the Suzuki proved to be relatively heavy and a little cantankerous in the early mornings, choosing not to disengage when you pulled the lever to the handlebars. We nearly demolished a

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BIG RED and Mr. GRUNT

petrol bowser in a service station because of this little quirk! The gearbox was sweet to use, though finding neutral proved a chore in some instances. On the plus side the gear ratios were well suited to the engine's power characteristics. Top gear at 5000 rpm gave 130 km/h compared with the Honda's 120 km/h. The GSX's power is so strong over the full rev range that on more than one occasion we went looking for sixth gear, despite the digital gear indicator! Power delivery was very smooth with almost no backlash in the drive train — in contrast to the Honda which emitted nasty clunks if you backed off the throttle abruptly at slow speeds. Apparently this is a result of the VF's one-way clutch sorting itself out. Otherwise the Honda's system was a pleasure to use, featuring a positive gearbox with a light hydraulic clutch.

One pleasant surprise was that the Honda's chain required no adjustment for the entire trip. The Suzuki's chain needed some tightening at the halfway mark. Shaft drive would be nice, but chain drive is not the liability it once was with the advent of modern O-ring chains and easy adjustment systems.

Stopping power supreme

In the stopping department, triple discs on both bikes provided real power, more than most riders will ever need to use. The GSX's system seems to be marginally better, bringing the bike to a halt in slightly shorter distances than the Honda required. The rear brake was over sensitive and prone to locking, and overall the Honda's brakes were more pleasant to use but both machines' braking systems proved extremely capable.

Our performance testing produced one other figure which demonstrates the balance these two bikes possess. Zero to



The best lights you can buy

160 km/h and back to a standstill in less than 16 seconds and in just 400 metres. Who needs more performance than that?

In my opinion Japanese machinery has often been found wanting in the past on long-distance hikes, not through any lack of performance but because of sometimes suspect handling. You don't want to peel off into a blind potholed corner late at night and be caught unawares by over 230 kg of bucking motorcycle. Until a year or two ago that was perhaps a well-founded apprehension. Now, however, the Japanese manufacturers have proved that they can produce machines which are as forgiving in the handling department as their European counterparts, and the Honda and the Suzuki certainly deserve their places among the better current offerings.

The degree of suspension adjustment on both bikes is quite astounding and yet relatively practical and easy to use. There is however no easy way to select the correct combination of settings for a given rider or riding style. It took us at least two days and 2600 km of experimentation before we were satisfied with the compromises which we were forced to make between handling and comfort. The

GSX settled down with its antidive on position 4 and spring preload on position 3 (out of 4). At the rear, spring preload was set on position 4 and the damping on position 2 (out of 4). All adjustments were easy to do, although you need to remove a rubber cap to gain access to the front spring preload adjuster, which is operated by a screwdriver. If anything, the Honda showed even greater sophistication in that both front and rear damping controls could be adjusted on the move (though the latter with difficulty). We ended up with the VF running antidive on 4, front damping on 2, 8 psi in the forks and the rear damping on position 3 with preload on 35 psi. If there is a fault in the Honda system then it is failure to provide a small pump with which to inflate the air-assisted forks and rear suspension unit.

Chuckability

Correctly adjusted, neither bike appeared to have any serious handling quirks despite being forced into one or two tricky situations in the heat of various moments. Even so, quite different riding styles were required to get the best from each bike. The GSX with its 16-inch front wheel demonstrated the quick steering for which the set-up is famous. You could set the Suzuki up for a corner and then change your chosen line at the last moment without too much fuss. In fact, you could steer the bike by hanging a knee out in the breeze. The VF's steering geometry required a more deliberate approach, preferring no sudden changes in mid-corner. The Honda is very stable with its 18-inch front wheel, but it's a slow steerer. Sudden acceleration in a corner tended to push the GSX into a predictable oversteer where the VF demonstrated a willingness to go straight ahead. In the tight stuff the GSX was king, simply because its steering geometry and 16-inch wheel made it easier to chuck around. Clearance was generous on both machines. If you start banging fairings and footpegs on the ground, you'll really be motoring.

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The big Honda started to excel in the open country around Clare in South Australia and in the full bore sweepers west of Penong. When properly and smoothly set up for a corner the VF could be ridden extremely quickly with a minimum of fuss and a high degree of stability. In contrast the GSX would shift around a bit, still feeling very predictable but without the surefootedness of the big Honda.

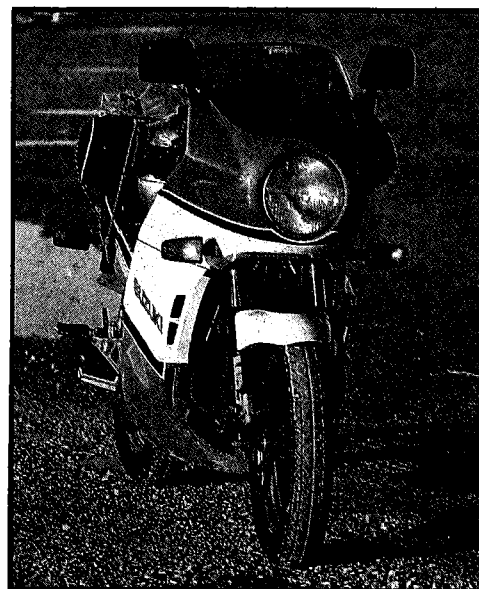
On smooth surfaces the cornering abilities of both bikes were well above average. Once roads became rougher, the situation changed somewhat. Neither bike's suspension is over endowed with travel and it showed. The VF had a tendency to feel as though the front end was tucking under if you hit a large bump mid-corner. Despite this, it didn't do anything unpleasant and was never more than a vague feeling. The Suzuki exhibited none of the self-steering tendencies we've found with some 16-inch wheeled bikes, even on rough surfaces as you would expect, but in both cases the rear suspension would get out of step over very bumpy sections. On quite a few occasions both bikes' monoshocks began to lose their damping, especially when subjected to rough winding roads for any length of time. (BMW's K100RS displayed the same characteristics over the same sections of road last year). But in only a couple of instances were we actually forced to reduce our intended cruising speed because of handling problems.

The right rubber?

Both bikes displayed good stability under brakes even when going hard. If anything, the Honda wanted to "stand up" more than the GSX in these situations, but the latter was inclined to lock its rear brake.

At the other end of scale, straight-line stability was generally very good in both cases. At absolute top whack both bikes moved around a little: the GSX would weave, and the front end became a little light. For its part, the Honda showed a dislike for the Nullarbor's famous side winds, as the full fairing simply provided a very large surface area for a howling north-wester to operate on. The Suzuki maintained its composure to a greater extent, perhaps due to the Pirelli MP7s with which it was fitted, and which are gaining a reputation for enhancing straight-line stability.

Despite its stunning good looks the VF's fairing isn't quite up to the mark in terms of protection. It is set well forward of the rider, which allows wind and rain to tumble over the short screen onto your chest and the dash. The hands aren't kept dry even in light rain, which is a pity because a small aerofoil on each side would have achieved the desired effect.



The Suzuki lost a middle fairing panel due to vibration soon after this shot was taken.

High on the screen two car-style rearview mirrors provide excellent and almost blur-free pictures of the action behind you; their only drawback is at high speed when they cause a noisy turbulence around your visor which eventually sends you round the twist. At legal speeds (or even 20 km/h over) the fairing works well, and shorter riders may get the best of it in that they'll not be affected by the high-speed buffeting.

The Suzuki's fairly bulky fairing works very well. The screen is close to the rider and deflects the wind to a point high on the visor. Hand protection is good (except in downpours) and, in general, protection is better than the Honda. But there are drawbacks: the rearview mirrors vibrate so much that they are useless at most speeds; the actual fairing construction also leaves a bit to be desired; and at high speed both middle panels started to detach themselves from their securing rings and one section blew clean off the bike. At low speeds the fairing took so much wind off the chest that the rider's weight was well onto the wrists. In slow going this can be uncomfortable unless you have a tankbag to lean on. Under the heading of miscellaneous shortcomings, various nuts and bolts shook themselves loose and water found its way up between the screen and body of the fairing. Some of the problems can only be caused by the engine's excessive vibration.

The acid test

The Honda gives every indication that it could be pretty hot in summer, thanks to the heat from the rear cylinders being channelled back over the rider's legs. The vents in the fairing lowers appear to be designed to cool the cylinders rather than the rider. Overall though, protection offered was in both instances as good as

you'll get from a top-line sports-tourer.

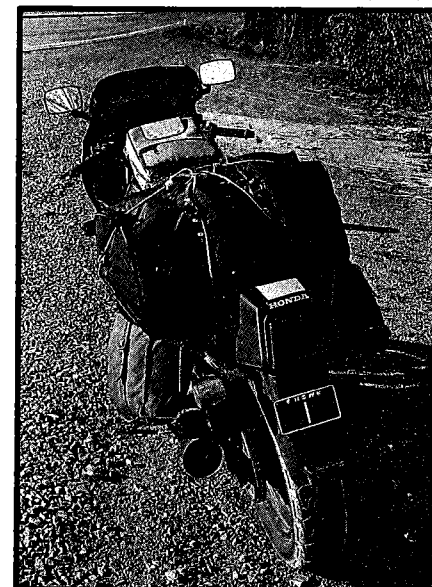
The run to WA involves some pretty serious cross country blasting. Our aim was to spend only 10 to 12 hours on the road each day, which meant quick fuel stops, and perhaps a break of 15 minutes every second stop. Half an hour was allocated for breakfast, with dinner after we stopped for the day. As a consequence our backsides spent a long time in the seat, with very little respite. Under normal circumstances, I use a sheepskin draped over the seat to ward off the "numb bum" syndrome on long rides. This was a test, so no sheep skins and the possibility of some pretty painful times ahead. We were to be pleasantly surprised. In the initial stages Suzuki's wide stepped seat seemed a much more desirable perch than Honda's narrow and apparently less well-padded number. Early impressions aren't always the truest and by about the third day the Suzuki's accommodation began to reveal its limitations. It wasn't the seat that caused the problems so much as that wide tank and its ribbed "crotch" protectors. To put it bluntly, they spread your legs which in turn puts your weight on the edges of the seat. Result — a sore bum. Under normal circumstances this plight may not set in but long distances mean pain. Perhaps part of the Suzuki's problem was that you couldn't move around on it easily. And as for those crotch protectors, they must be there to protect you from the vibration which hammers at you through the tank.

Honda appears to have got it right, and even on day four the seat felt pretty comfortable, if a tad narrow. The knees fit snugly into the tank recesses, and you could move about on the seat quite easily to maintain circulation. The Suzuki's footpegs were too high and a little too far to the rear — showing its sports heritage. Although a little high, the VF's were well positioned.

Heavy drinkers

Regular fuel stops offered some relief from the aches and pains. The natural thirst of these beasts meant that fuel stops were pretty frequent despite the Suzuki's 20-litre tank and Honda's long range 23-litre item. The figures tell the story:

It's 185 km between petrol stops at Nullarbor Station and the SA/WA Border, and we certainly wouldn't like to rely on



A good sports tourer should have better gear carrying facilities than this. Some ocky strap hooks, a la GPz900R, would be a start.

getting the Suzuki there at high speed without a bit of pushing. (And it isn't that easy to push.) These fuel consumption figures reflect just what happens when you ride a performance motorcycle towards its limits.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

	Honda		Suzuki	
	Consump- tion	Range	Consump- tion	Range
Cruising speed	km/litre	km	km/litre	km
100 km/h	14.0	322	15.8	315
120 km/h	13.3	306	13.8	276
150 km/h	10.3	236	11.6	232
Fast!!	8.8	202	9.3	186

Whenever we've headed west of Ceduna, there's always been that nagging doubt. Will it all hang together until I get back to civilisation? We have known modern motorcycles to break down. We also know that there's bugger all you can do about repairing something out there on that plain unless it is basic — *real* basic. If we had to start major surgery we'd prefer to nominate the GSX as our patient, as its mechanical complexities are quite straight-forward compared with the VF's wizardry. The GSX motor has been around for years and it's known to be bloody near bulletproof. Suzuki's confidence in the motor is reflected in the toolkit which is pretty poor. In the VF's

case, the problems caused by the complexity of its motor are compounded by a lack of access. Quite honestly, if the motor stopped a lot of people just wouldn't know where to start the dismantling process. Honda doesn't give comprehensive toolkits either, so it's pointless to worry. Early VFs had a few engine problems but we had no worries in 5300 km of hard riding.

In ancillary gifts, the Suzuki wins with a security chain. Neither bike has the level of accessory equipment offered by BMW's K100RS which provides a first-aid kit, a comprehensive toolkit and a puncture repair kit. With the advent of tubeless tyres and the inherent problems of repair, it should be mandatory that a puncture kit is provided, because without one you have bugger all chance of fixing a flat west of Ceduna or anywhere else.

A mixed bag

The Suzuki was easy to live with as far as on-the-road maintenance goes — tools/battery areas were easy to gain access to. Not so with the VF, which had a seat that was very difficult to remove. Its tray area housed a toolkit but there was room for little else. To get under the sidecovers to check the battery and coolant a phillips head screwdriver is required. I kept one in my pocket rather than battle with that seat. A small coin or screwdriver is also necessary if you are to remove the cover in the fairing which hides the dipstick. It's all very secure, but honestly, it's a bit of a chore.

It's rare to get an opportunity to follow the bike you have just been riding for a large number of kilometres. When you do get the chance to do just that, you can observe some interesting things. For example, despite all its style, the Honda's tail light/blinker assembly is pretty small and difficult to see in fog or at night. Simply the blinkers aren't very good attention getters. Small matters, but very important in terms of safety, especially when you are on a long trip in difficult conditions. On more than one occasion the Honda was lost in the gloom. Suzuki has got it right with a huge tail light assembly (looks like a set of teeth) and a set of big blinkers.

At the other end of the bikes the situation was reversed. The VF's twin

Continued on page 86

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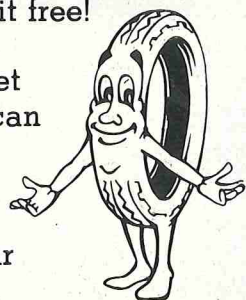
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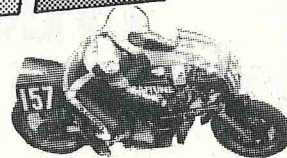


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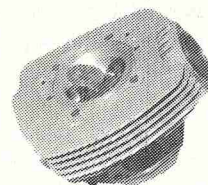
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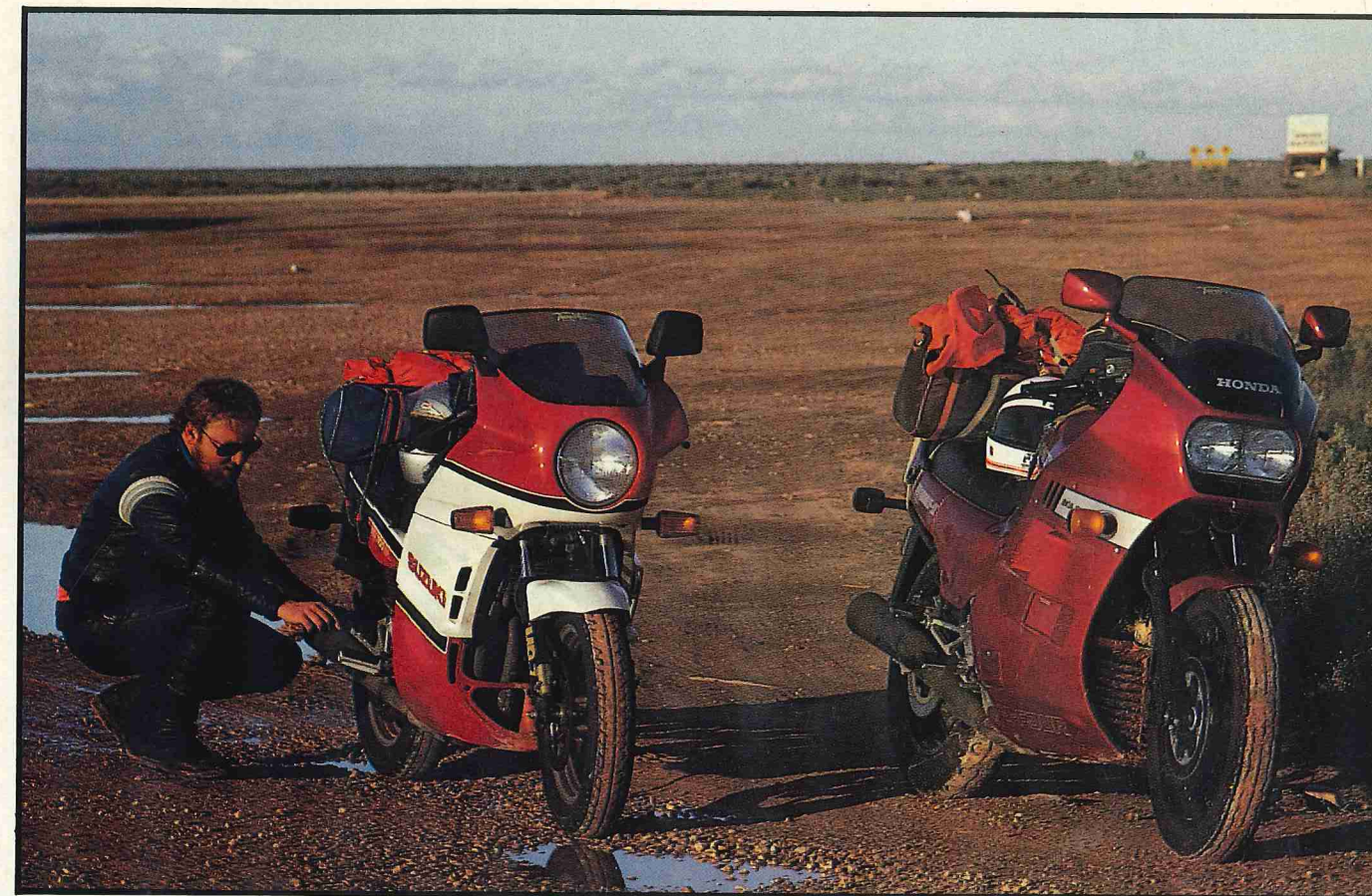
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SUMMARY

○ VF1000F2 vs ● GSX1000EFF

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
RATINGS					
ENGINE					
Responsiveness			○	●	
Smoothness	●			○	
Bottom end power					●
Mid range power			○	●	
Top end power			○	●	
Fuel economy		○		●	
Starting				○	●
Ease of maintenance		○		●	
Quietness			○	●	
Engine braking				○	●
TRANSMISSION					
Clutch operation			○	●	
Gearbox operation			○	●	
Ratio suitability				○	●
Drivetrain freelay		○		●	
HANDLING					
Steering			○	●	
Cornering clearance			○	●	
Ability to forgive rider error			○	●	
High speed cornering				○	●
Medium speed cornering			○	●	
Bumpy bends			○	●	
Tossing side to side			○	●	
Changing line in corners				○	●
Braking in corners			○	●	
Manoeuvring				○	●
Top speed stability			○	●	
SUSPENSION					
Front			○	●	
Rear			○	●	
Front/rear match			○	●	
BRAKES					
Resistance to fading			○	●	
Stopping power			○	●	
Braking stability				○	●
Feel at controls				○	●
CONTROLS					
Location of major controls				○	●
Switches			○	●	
Instruments			○	●	
TWO-UP SUITABILITY					
Passenger comfort		○	●		
Stability with pillion		○	●		
Cornering clearance two-up			○	●	
GENERAL					
Quality of finish			○	●	
Engine appearance			○	●	
Overall styling			○	●	
Seat comfort			○	●	
Riding position			○	●	
Touring range		○	●		
Headlight			○	●	
Other lights			○	●	
Stands			○	●	
Rearview mirrors			○	●	
Horn			○	●	
Toolkit			○	●	
VALUE FOR MONEY					
			○	●	



The Suzuki's vibration caused the odd nut to come loose. It's particularly severe at 100 and 130 km/h.

Continued from page 77

headlights are impeccable examples of what should be standard equipment on any long-distances, high-performance blaster. Each light is easily adjusted (that phillips head again) to provide the coverage you require. We settled for penetration of around 1.2 km (on straight roads) with a spread that reached 20 metres either side of the road. No need for additional lights — the rider of a VF

can indulge in high-speed night cruising in relative safety. But if the Honda's lights are the best around, then the Suzuki's big headlight is somewhere at the poor end of the range. It offers a reasonable spread, but poor penetration. In some instances 100 km/h cruising was a very borderline proposition. It is a pity that such a potent machine can be limited by such a basic piece of equipment.

Neither machine is well equipped for

carrying gear on cross-country hauls. Both are difficult/impossible to fit tankbags to and there is no carry rack of any kind over the rear tailpieces. In each case there are sturdy rear frame rails which could be used for attaching soft or hard luggage, but neither manufacturer provides the accessories to take advantage of the arrangement. It's a pity that the

Continued on page 90
Second opinion overleaf

How long has
Ric been involved
with BMW?

Steady on!
I'm not as old
as I look.

**Ric
Andrews**

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Phone 4776111.



SECOND OPINION

TO put it bluntly I've never had much time for most large-capacity Japanese motorcycles, preferring instead the perhaps dubious delights of riding a rather antiquated European twin. I don't know why but for some strange reason I've just come to love the combination of low power, no brakes, riding in the knowledge that the old girl will go forever — and if she doesn't you can fix her with a piece of four by two and a set of wire strainers. So when Hall suggested that we once again tackle the Border Run, this time mounted on a Suzuki GSX1100EFF and Honda VF1000F-IIF, I gleefully accepted. I fully expected that my slightly biased view of Japanese motorcycles would be confirmed and that I would be able to bore the crowd at the local watering hole for months to come with tales of "I told you so" and endlessly extolling the virtues of pushrods, overhead valves and flexible subframes.

Well, you can imagine what a shock it was when halfway through the damn trip I found myself enjoying the ride and thinking that these new-fangled devices aren't so bad after all. I wouldn't go so far as to say that I was being converted to the Japanese cause, but I was beginning to see the attractions that motorcycles such as these hold for so many riders. To put it in a word, I was beginning to fall in love with the "power". The sheer unadulterated power and acceleration of both bikes began to occupy my every thought. In fact at one stage I found myself ridiculing the VF because it wasn't as quick as the Suzuki. How stupid! Let me say here and now that both machines are able to unleash enough horses to ensure that any rider gets the required hit of adrenalin at regular intervals.

Another aspect of both bikes that was pleasantly surprising was their rideability. Sure, each machine has power to burn and more than enough to get the unwary into trouble, but the power is delivered smoothly and totally predictably, allowing the rider to use the throttle with confidence and without having to worry about nasty little surprises. The brakes on both bikes also deserve applause, showing the ability to quickly haul rider and machine back from supersonic speeds. The only criticism here concerns the Suzuki's rear stopper, which showed a tendency to lock and in most situations was best left alone, particularly in the wet.

On a trip like the Border Run a rider's attitude towards his machine can change as quickly as the weather and can depend as much on what was had for breakfast as on how the motorcycle is performing. After little more than 500 kilometres of this year's run I was convinced that the VF

was a dog and protested whenever it was my turn to ride it. The GSX on the other hand was pure joy.

The Suzuki's riding position felt just right. Its fairing offered better protection. Its engine was more powerful. It was handling better than the Honda and generally it felt a more stable package on the road. Sure it vibrated at 100 km/h but it was almost silky smooth at 100 mph. A large part of the credit for my attraction to the GSX must belong to the Pirelli MP7 tyres fitted to the bike. They performed brilliantly throughout the run and inspired a degree of confidence when riding in the wet that I had previously believed impossible.

Strangely enough Hall was developing a similar relationship with the VF, so there was never any argument over which bike each of us rode. As the trip progressed however and the 4000-kilometre mark rolled around, my affair with the GSX was becoming decidedly unstable. The riding position became sheer agony with the forward lean to the low handlebars placing too much weight on the wrists, and the vinyl mouldings on the fuel tank digging into my thighs. The fairing started to loosen on its mountings and the continual vibration gradually took its toll. Suddenly the virtues of the VF's more upright riding position, more comfortable seat, incredibly smooth engine and better overall quality of finish became irresistible. All I wanted to do was get off the GSX, like an unfaithful lover. Even a last fling across the Bell's Line of Road failed to rekindle the flame.

How many of you out there believe that you need a large-capacity motorcycle to cover long distances quickly? Well, you don't. This point was rammed home to us by a CX500 jockey we passed outside Hay while travelling at highly illegal speeds. This guy was just cruising at the speed limit. Yet some 400 kilometres later, as we were refuelling for the second time since passing him, up he trundled only five minutes behind and to add insult into injury he didn't stop for petrol but just kept on going.

Perhaps the most disappointing thing about the VF and the GSX is that while they do most things well they don't do anything brilliantly. There are many riders who already appreciate that other motorcycles can match anything that these have to offer and do so with more style, economy and versatility. That's not to say, however, that it isn't good for the soul in times of depression, insanity and just plain recklessness to climb aboard one of these rocketships and take the trip, if for no other reason than it's just downright good fun!

— Brian Corley

