

STANDARD TIME

**SPORTBIKES
TOO RACY?
TOURING BIKES
TOO BIG? DUAL-
PURPOSE BIKES
TOO DIRTY?
THEN STEP RIGHT
UP, YOUR BIKES
ARE HERE.**

BY ALLAN GIRDLER

WE'VE SPENT WHAT SEEMS like weeks climbing on and off what has to be the most-disparate collection of motorcycles ever assembled, and now we're at dinner and Mr. Editor Edwards wants to know, is the "standard" motorcycle still out there, ready and waiting?

Heck no.

Well, maybe.

Okay, yes. But let's not push this thing too far.

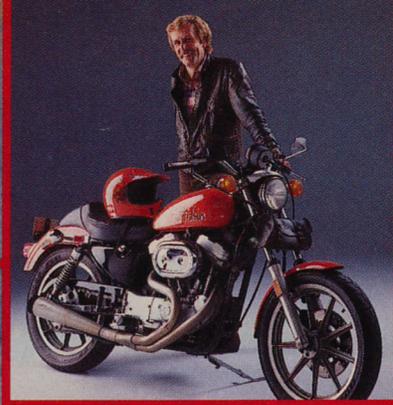
All three votes were cast by yours truly, who was given this job because first, I've been riding since before the arrival of specialized motorcycles; second, two of my own machines are wildly specialized; and third, my daily ride is as basic as they get, namely a Harley-Davidson 883

Sportster as included in this group, except mine has been improved, which, as we'll see, is part of the appeal of standard-style motorcycles.

Why all this description and comparison? Because once upon a time, people bought motorcycles—just motorcycles. There were big ones and small ones, cheap and expensive, imported or domestic, one cylinder or a row of 'em. No matter what the details, you got a bike and you did what all motorcyclists did, which was ride downtown or to school, or across pastures or the continent.

Then we got dirtbikes. Then, dual-purpose bikes, followed by dressers and cruisers and sportbikes and replacers, and the better each of these got at filling its own little niche, the worse it was at doing chores outside that niche. And then, when sales went into the slump from which they have yet to recover, there were those who said it wouldn't have happened if the makers still had, so to speak, standards... which is why the collection and group evaluation of the 10 motorcycles here, and why the questions. Are these the new standards, and do they do the jobs they've been assigned?

This is made more complicated by a definition that works from the negative, that is, a standard bike is one that isn't specialized, just as we used to have guitars, then we got electric guitars and then we had to coin an adjective—acoustic—for guitars that weren't electric. Further, one could



Author Allan Girdler shows us his own idea of a proper standard bike.

claim that the Moto Guzzi defines a basic touring bike, the Harley FXRS the basic cruiser, the Honda CB-1 the basic sports machine and so on.

So we began with arbitrary lines: no bodywork, or racing equipment, or high fenders or anything that would enhance the model in one direction at the expense of another direction. We assembled a cross section, large and small, budget to blow-the-lottery-win. These aren't beginner bikes, although they could serve as such, given the circumstances that could lead a new enthusiast straight to a Harley-Davidson or a BMW of some sort.

Within this middle ground, the standards divided themselves into two groups. The Harleys, the BMW, the Guzzi and the big Suzuki are what I'd call Good Ol' Bikes; roomy and hefty and accommodating. The little Suzuki, the Yamaha, the Kawasaki and both Hondas are semi-sports, with smaller chassis and engines, tighter suspension and controls. If there's a line between the two groups, the Hawk is closest on the one side, the Sportster on the other.

This middle ground is a new middle ground, in that when you went



PHOTOS BY DAVID DEWHURST

from a Triumph Cub to a Tiger, from a Harley Hummer to a Sportster or from a Honda CB350 to CB750, you spent more money and got more motorcycle, more meaning power and speed and room, while the style remained about the same. Now, the standards give a choice of style, space versus sport, you could say, and it's difficult to prove the Radian is better or worse than the Guzzi. As any lawyer will tell you, it all depends.

Next, do they do what they're supposed to do?

The opinion comes from me in the first person because when this project was launched, I was the chap who owned one of the nominees, and the others all asked why.

Easy. I like to ride motorcycles.

I like to restore and maintain and modify, too. But mostly, I like to ride. And I want to just walk into the garage and throw a leg over something and go, like that.

So I have my dirtbike. It's registered and has mirrors and lights and such and even an insurance policy, and I take it across the desert and in dual-purpose events. But it's terrible on the interstate or main highway.

There's my vintage bike, an iron XR Harley dirt-tracker, again with plates and lights and insurance, and it's a delight on graded dirt and winding roads and in races when I have the time and the technical committee doesn't rule against me. No fenders, no luggage, no passengers, and I dare not take it out of town without checking the weather channel.

On occasion, I get the loan of some new sportbike. Nothing compares with being shot out of a cannon on Sunday morning, but after an hour or so, my wrists and back and neck and kidneys ache, my fingers are numb



and I'm still miles from home.

When I worked full-time for a certain world-class motorcycle magazine, I had access to full-dress touring bikes, and they are just right for going from here to Phoenix with your favorite tapes and traveling companion. But wrestling a Gold Wing or FLT around the garage and around the parking lot soon convinces one to go shopping with the other truck, the one with doors and a roof.

Thus, when I went off the payroll and had to pay for my fun, I supplemented my collection of specialized bikes with a standard, my 883.

I couldn't get along without it. Zips around town, eats up the dirt roads on the way to my farm. My Significant Other wasn't told that Sportsters aren't touring bikes, and happily spends Sundays in the saddle.

There isn't a motorcycle in this standard group that couldn't easily handle the same duty.

Sure, the big ones take more care in the fast going, and the smaller ones are crowded two-up, and so what? The fast riders in the group were fast

no matter what they were on, ditto the slower chaps, and by the same token, just as stuff expands to fill available space, so can you get along with just the gear you have room for. Even the semi-sports models are good weekenders.

Two final, related points.

One, my Sportster is mine all mine, with pipes and big tank from an early Superglide (popped right on, by the way), an earlier rear wheel, and custom seat and paint. One of a standard's advantages is that because it doesn't come with everything, you can equip it as you please.

Two, as the photo clearly shows, my 883 is the best, trickiest, finest of its kind ever. You doubt that? Good.

One of the high points of our post-ride dinner sessions was that no two riders had the same opinion. Every machine here was hooted at and every machine was stoutly defended to just this side of step-outside-and-say-that.

Just because we're in the middle doesn't mean we can't become emotionally involved.

These aren't sportbikes or touring bikes or cruisers or dressers.

These are *motorcycles*.



BMW K75

THE GENTLEMAN APPEARED TO be about 50, and clearly he was infatuated with the K75. "Gee, what a beautiful machine," he said to the dismounting rider. "I wanted one back in the '60s, but never got around to it. BMWs, they were always the best."

Besides the fact that it is unfaired, has two wheels and carries blue-and-white, spinning-propeller emblems, the K75 has little in common the old Boxer Twins that the viewer so fondly remembered, yet this new-for-1990 Beemer carries itself with the air of dignity that all BMWs seem to possess.

The K75 marks a return to the standard-style bikes that once laced the German company's lineup. It is the only 1990 BMW without a fairing, and it's also the least-expensive K-bike, although only two bikes in this comparison had bigger price tags.

But for his money, the K75 buyer gets some nice pieces. The lay-down, liquid-cooled, 740cc engine was introduced in 1985, when BMW sliced a cylinder off the K100 Four. The result was—and still is—a pleasant powerplant less afflicted by vibration than its 1000cc brother. With just two valves per cylinder and an 8500-rpm redline limiting horsepower to a claimed 70, the fuel-injected engine nonetheless has a rangy, easy-to-use powerband.

In the suspension department, the K75 is served at the front by a fork made stout by 41mm tubes, beefy triple clamps and a brace just above the plastic fender. The fork internals are identical to the sporting K75S mod-



el's, providing a claimed 5.3 inches of travel that is fairly firm in action—not enough to be called harsh, but sufficient to abridge the squishy, quick-to-dive tendencies that BMW forks have become known for. In the rear is a single shock working through a single-sided swingarm that carries the bike's driveshaft. Travel is a claimed 4.3 inches.

No one here cared for the roller-coaster saddle or the rubber apron between the seat and the fuel tank. There is an optional, less-stepped seat available with an inch-and-a-half more padding that we'd recommend for all but the shortest riders.

What we liked about the K75 was its handling and its size. With its fork soaking up whatever a backroad dished out and its Metzeler tires providing good grip, the BMW displayed dead-neutral cornering characteristics, just begging to be leaned over. And at 488 pounds dry, the K75 isn't overweight, but it does feel spacious and substantial. This is one standard-style bike that an owner won't out-

grow; a motorcycle that could easily spend 10 years in the same household. That feeling is enhanced by the longest warranty period of these 10 standards (36 months) and the knowledge that upgrades for the bike, in the form of hard saddlebags, a tankbag or a windshield, are as close as the local BMW shop.

Did we like the K75? A lot. In fact, we'd call it the standard of excellence.

SPECIFICATIONS**BMW K75**

List price	\$5990
Weight:	
Tank empty	488 lb.
Fuel capacity:	5.6 gal.
¼ mi.	12.97 sec. @ 102.62 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	5.3
Measured top speed	115 mph
Average fuel mileage	41 mpg



The K75's instruments and warning lights are neat and easily readable. Those rockers below the ignition switch are dummies that can be replaced with real switches when accessories are added.

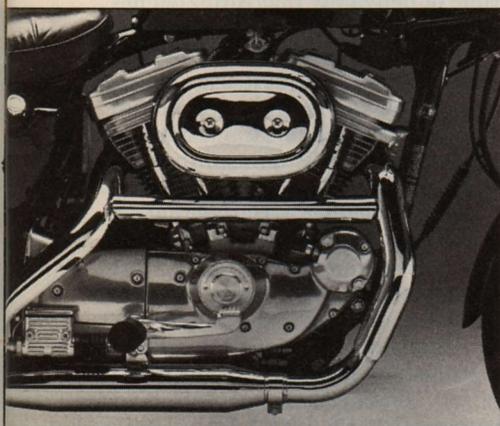


Harley-Davidson Sportster 883

HERE WAS A TIME, THANKS TO Hollywood, when anyone riding a Harley was considered an outlaw. Thankfully, times have changed. Harley-Davidson riders are no longer bad guys. During our time with this test 883 Sportster, people at traffic signals—and even an elderly woman in a shopping-center parking lot—commented on “that nice Harley” and asked about its price and how it compared to Japanese motorcycles.

Motorcycle enthusiasts showed a similar interest, and many were quick to say that they were going to buy a Harley, someday, when they got enough money. Often, these riders were astride Japanese motorcycles that cost more than the Sportster 883.

Despite magazine tests and a fairly extensive advertising program, most people think that a Harley, any Harley, costs at least \$10,000. But Harley's baseline Sportster retails for



The essence of the 883 Sporty is its engine, which, unlike the Big Twins, is unitized with its transmission. It's not a powerhouse, though, as evidenced by the slowest quarter-mile time of these 10 standards.

SPECIFICATIONS

Harley-Davidson Sportster 883

List price	\$4250
Weight:	
Tank empty	476 lb.
Fuel capacity:	2.3 gal.
¼ mi.	14.15 sec. @ 95.54 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.7
Measured top speed	111 mph
Average fuel mileage	43 mpg

DETAIL PHOTOS BY KIRK WILLIS



\$4250, putting it in the middle ground, price-wise, of our 10 standards.

Besides price, the Sportster has its looks going for it. As it has done since its inception in 1957, the Sporty displays the classic Harley image of a simple motorcycle with a large, well-detailed V-Twin engine dominating the proceedings. To many people, the Sportster is just what a motorcycle should look like.

But there are detractions. On the road, even at normal highway speeds, the Harley's booming, shaking, solidly mounted engine sends its power impulses into the rider's body and soul. Its rear view mirrors keep time with the engine's power cycles, turning reflected images into a blur. The bike's fork does a fair job of smoothing out rough roads, but the rear suspension isn't much better than a hardtail—bumps are transmitted directly to the rider's spine. Furthermore, the seat's padding (our test bike was fitted with an optional dual seat) is thin and quickly packs into a

useless butt punisher. Fuel range, topped-up to bone-dry, is less than 100 miles, and the bike's forward-mounted footpegs didn't make too many friends among our test riders.

A touring mount the 883 isn't. But it is a great in-town bike for checking out the local hot spots, or for errand-running and short commutes to work. The 883 is easily recognized as a Harley, and it feels like a Harley. That, plus its relatively affordable price, makes it all the motorcycle some people will ever want.

Harley-Davidson FXRS-SP

THE BOTTOM LINE ABOUT STANDARD motorcycles is that they're supposed to be simple beasts, unencumbered by pretentious riding positions, unadorned by fairings, and fun to ride. The FXRS-SP is all of that.

Not convinced about the “standardness” of any Harley, least

STANDARD TIME

of all this one? Well, okay, neither were we, at least not completely. But apply a variation of the Duck Proof: If it looks like a standard, and rides like a standard, it must be a standard, right?

First of all, what could be more simple than the SP's 1340cc, single-carburetor, two-valve, push-rod V-Twin driving through a separate five-speed transmission that puts its power to the rear wheel through a toothed belt? What could be more basic, or more traditional, than hanging all of this on a simple backbone frame, suspended at one end by air-adjustable fork tubes and at the other by dual shocks?

Riding position? Well, we're in a little trouble with that. The SP's lowish, flattish bars are standard in feel, but they pull the rider forward while the shape of the seat and the position of the footpegs want to roll him back. Exacerbating this positioning conflict, especially for riders who are long of leg and large of foot, is the right footpeg. Because of the peg's close proximity to the exhaust sys-



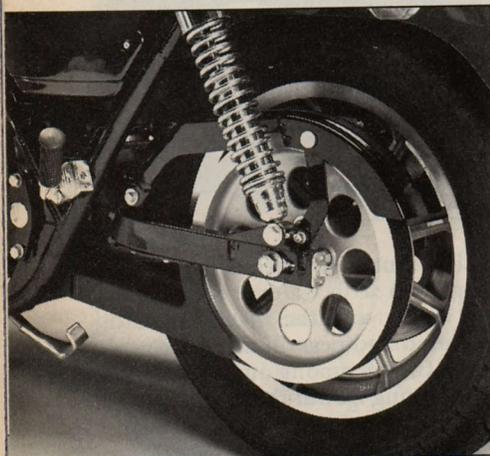
PHOTO BY KINNEY JONES

tem, and the intrusion of the air cleaner, some of our test riders had trouble finding a comfortable cruising position.

While that inconvenience will only be bothersome to a few riders, the manner in which the big Harley moves down the road can be appreciated by all. A rider thumbs the V-Twin's starter button, uses the long, heavy gearshift lever to slide what feels like a 15-pound gearwheel into place, rolls in a little throttle, and releases the clutch. All, then, becomes joy, as the SP reveals itself as smooth, effortless and composed.

Okay, so call us too used to the weather protection of fairings. But the SP, like the rest of the bikes in this class, isn't terribly pleasant at higher speeds because of the unimpeded buffeting the rider takes from the wind. But get the SP on a road endowed with twists and turns, and the

rider soon forgets about everything except the great time he's having. Two things elevate the FXRS-SP above the basic (and \$15 more expensive) FXRS Low Rider to a level capable of delivering that fun: 2 inches more suspension travel fore and aft, along with spring and shock rates designed to make the best use of that extra travel, and twin disc brakes up front. Those two items transform the standard, relatively uninspiring single-front-disc FXRS into a different machine altogether, a Harley that's a blast to ride in corners. Sure, if you corner hard enough, you'll start scraping things, most especially the kickstand, even with the shock preload cranked up. But it's the quality of the experience, rather than speed by itself, that makes a great ride. And based on that, the FXRS-SP not only is a great standard, it's a great motorcycle. Period.



Who-Sez-Harleys-Ain't-High-Tech Dept.: The FXRS-SP eschews a nasty, greasy old chain in favor of a clean, quiet, toothed-belt final drive.

SPECIFICATIONS

Harley-Davidson FXRS-SP

List price	\$9775
Weight:	
Tank empty	571 lb.
Fuel capacity:	4.1 gal.
1/4 mi.	13.17 sec. @ 100.11 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	3.9
Measured top speed	114 mph
Average fuel mileage	41 mpg



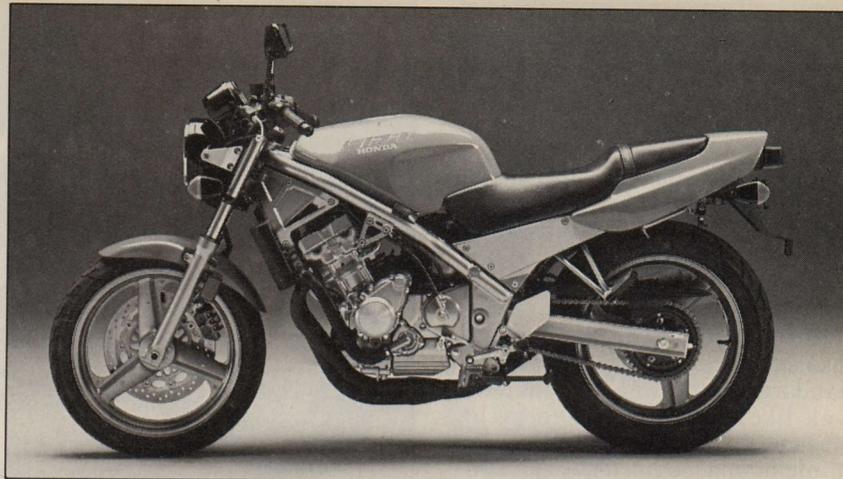
Honda CB-1

WHEN THE CB-1 USED IN THIS evaluation showed up in the cinder-block shrine that is the *Cycle World* garage, much coffee-besotted bench racing ensued, with this little blue bolide as its object. The consensus? Mostly that the CB-1 is just about a perfect model of a real motorcycle.

The multi-day, all-singing, all-dancing standard-off, in which all 10 of the bikes seen here were flogged so hard their little tongues hung out, over all kinds of roads, in drizzling rain and in pouring sunshine, resulted in a somewhat modified opinion: The CB-1 is a real motorcycle, it's just in three-quarters scale.

That is by no means an indictment of this bike. Small isn't necessarily a negative attribute. As it happens, in spite of its 53.9-inch wheelbase and 30.5-inch seat height, the CB-1's smile-per-mile quotient is right up there with the best of them, thanks to its taut suspension, a riding position comfortable for all but the tallest riders, and an incredible little engine that just begs the rider to turn on the throttle.

In fact, in order to extract any sort of performance from the CB-1, its throttle must be twisted with some vigor. The liquid-cooled, four-valve-per-cylinder, short-stroke engine's rev limit is a spine-tingling 13,500 rpm, and it doesn't really get into the fattest part of its power curve until about 10,000 rpm. If you have any mechanical empathy at all, turning any engine into five-digit rpm numbers takes some getting used to, both in terms of seeing those big numbers on a tachometer dial, and in terms of hearing the exhaust note such speeds



yield. After a bit of time, however, the CB-1's test riders found themselves assured that the engine not only could tolerate such speeds, but that it thrives on them, and they felt less concerned about zinging the tach needle around to redline. Once that happened, and once they got used to using the bike's clean-shifting six-speed transmission to keep the engine where it made max horsepower, they discovered that the CB-1's brakes and chassis are every bit a match for its willing little engine.

The bike's frame is of steel tubes bent in perimeter style, its steering head aligned to provide a sportbike-like 25.1 degrees of rake and 3.9 inches of trail. Its non-adjustable fork uses 41mm tubes, and its single-shock rear suspension allows only spring-preload adjustment. Both ends provide a kind of Everyman's spring/damping compliance designed to work with the most-common riding denominator. Which means it's a bit soft on both ends, especially for backroad honking.

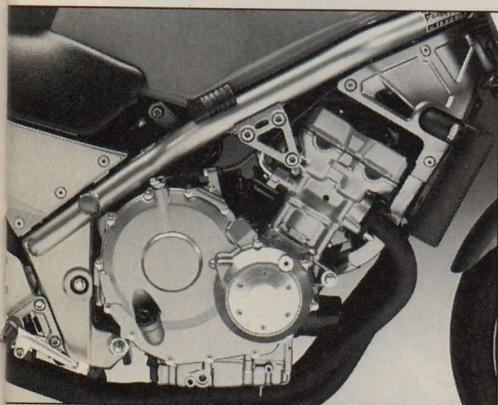
Nevertheless, handling is quick and direct, with no surprises. Braking performance is, by virtue of a twin-piston caliper that grips a 12.2-inch vented rotor, excellent, and in keeping with the general overall fine balance this bike provides.

What we really wish is that the CB-1 was a 750, and that it was bigger overall. Nevertheless, it's an entertaining piece, a pint-sized standard that delivers quart-sized fun.

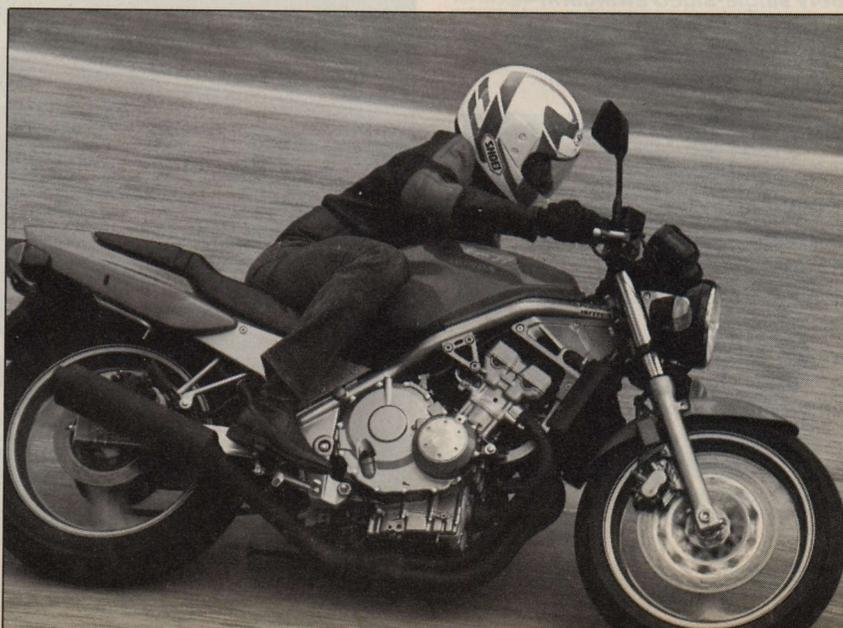
SPECIFICATIONS

Honda CB-1

List price	\$4298
Weight:	
Tank empty	394 lb.
Fuel capacity:	3.3 gal.
1/4 mi.	13.16 sec. @ 102.15 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.3
Measured top speed	119 mph
Average fuel mileage	42 mpg



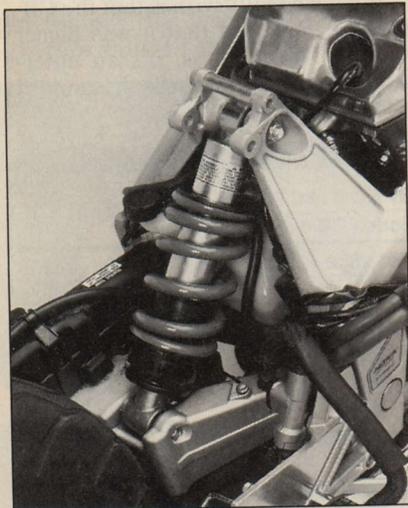
The CB-1's engine thrives on very high revs, and makes its best forward progress if kept between 10,000 and 13,500 rpm.



Honda Hawk GT

WHEN THE CRY FOR STANDARD bikes finally reached Japan, Honda reacted by producing a new motorcycle that combined modified existing parts and newly designed—some would say futuristic—components. Then they named it the Hawk, the third Honda model to carry that name.

Introduced in 1988, and unchanged since, the new Hawk is a standard motorcycle that doesn't look like a standard motorcycle. Much of this look results from using an aluminum perimeter frame, single-sided aluminum swingarm, in-board rear disc brake and spacey-looking alloy wheels. To power the Hawk, Honda chose a liquid-cooled, ohc, three-valve-per-cylinder, 647cc V-Twin, derived from the 500cc V-Twin that was used in the '83 Honda Ascot.



Suspension loads from the Hawk's beefy single-sided swingarm—known as a Pro-Arm, in Honda-speak—are fed into the bike's deCarbon-type single shock.

SPECIFICATIONS**Honda Hawk GT**

List price	\$4198
Weight:	
Tank empty	394 lb.
Fuel capacity:	2.9 gal.
1/4 mi.	12.88 sec. @ 101.35 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.6
Measured top speed	115 mph
Average fuel mileage	41 mpg



Riding the Hawk further demonstrates that it is, indeed, something more than an ordinary standard motorcycle: The footpegs are mounted high and to the rear, more like a sportbike than a standard, and its handling is sharp, accurate, quick and responsive. Its suspension—a single shock rear and conventional fork—provides excellent control until near-racetrack speeds are reached, and it does an above-average job of isolating the rider from bumps.

While acceptable for short rides of an hour or so, the Hawk's small size, sportbike tuck and thinly padded, stepped seat don't make for comfortable rides of longer duration. But that's okay, the bike's smallish 2.9-gallon fuel tank will need to be topped off every 150 miles anyway.

During those 150 miles between stops, the Hawk rider will find little else to complain about, and a lot to praise. The engine is responsive, has

a powerband a mile wide and is vibration free. The transmission shifts smoothly and positively, and the bike's disc brakes are strong and progressive.

The Hawk's mildly tuned engine is surprisingly quick, too, with a 0-to-60 time of 4 seconds, a quarter-mile time in the high 12s and a top speed of 115 miles per hour.

Commuting on the Hawk is a pleasure, its crisp-running engine, easy-to-operate controls, small size and agility makes it a natural for splitting lanes and darting through traffic jams. And, surprisingly, the Hawk is extremely stable at highway speeds.

With so many nice qualities, we have to wonder why the highways aren't jammed with Hawks. Maybe the bike's price of \$4198 discourages potential buyers. If so, that's a shame, because the Hawk, a thoroughly modern standard, is worth every penny of its asking price.



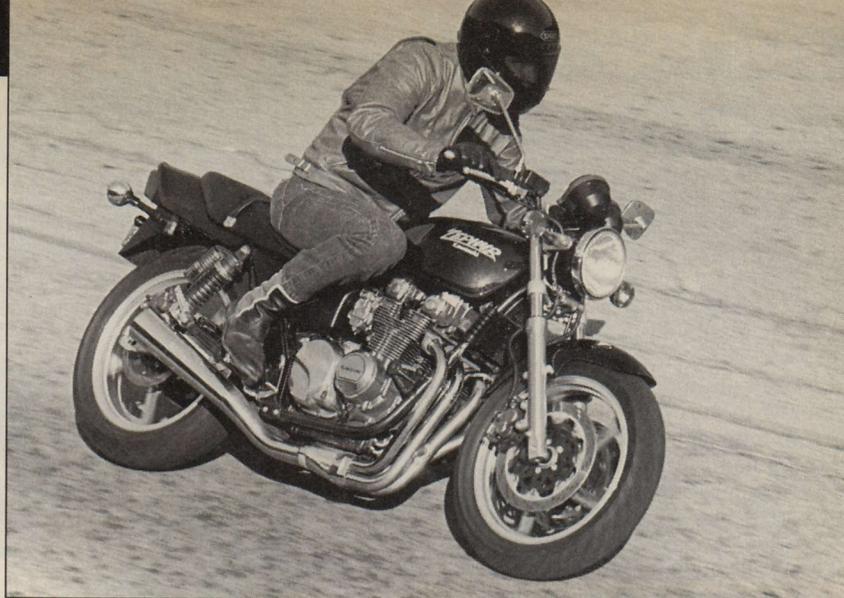
Kawasaki Zephyr 550

PRETEND, FOR A SECOND, THAT you've just ridden a 1990 Kawasaki Zephyr 550 into the time tunnel and gone back to 1979. You proudly wheel the machine onto the floor of a Kawasaki dealership and proclaim it "the standard bike of the future." What kind of reaction would you get?

Assuming that Billy Bob behind the counter knew what the term "standard" meant, he probably would just stick his thumbs under his suspenders and laugh. "Heck, that ain't no standard," he'd say. "That there is a full-on sportin' machine." And he would be right. In fact, Kawasaki would roll the KZ550 (the bike on which the Zephyr is based) into its dealers' showrooms for 1980, and it would be the wildest ride of the year, a rough equivalent to today's ZX-6. Even though the 1990 Zephyr and the 1980 KZ550 aren't all that different, the way we think of motorcycles is.

Of course, techno-types will note that the Zephyr is actually quite different from the old KZ. Many of the new bike's features are compromises between Eighties and Nineties technology. It has a twin-backbone frame—not quite a perimeter frame, but then not much like the KZ's single-backbone frame, either. It has piggyback reservoir, adjustable-rebound-damping shocks, but there *are* two of them. The heart and sole of the machine are very much the same as the KZ550's.

The Zephyr exists because Kawasaki researchers did a little homework, visiting all the motorcycle hangouts in the country and taking notes on what people were riding. They saw a lot of KZs and GPzs mim-



icking first-generation Superbike racers, with cut-down Corbin seats, oil coolers and 4-into-1 exhaust pipes. So the company built just that: a slightly modified early-Eighties sportbike. And surprisingly enough, the Zephyr fits into 1990 quite well. It handles almost like a modern sportbike—few motorcycles can make a 10-year leap into the future and feel so good. The bike turns with precision and has acceptable ground clearance. And its twin-shock suspension delivers an excellent ride.

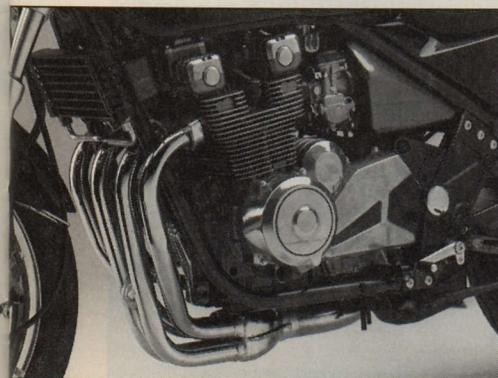
But when you twist the throttle on the Zephyr, the reality of the early Eighties hits all too hard. The 553cc, air-cooled, eight-valve engine seems almost gutless by today's middle-weight standards. As the revs climb, power takes its time to make it all the way to the rear wheel. At high rpm, the Kawasaki finally gets going, but by that time, the rider has all but lost interest. The engine has the thin powerband of an all-out racer, but without the peak power to justify the sacrifice.

Is that enough to condemn the new Zephyr? That depends on your priorities. The motorcycle is smooth and comfortable (even though the Corbin-copy seat isn't as good as the real thing.) It has excellent brakes and good suspension. There was a time when those credentials would be enough to proclaim the Zephyr as the greatest motorcycle on the road.

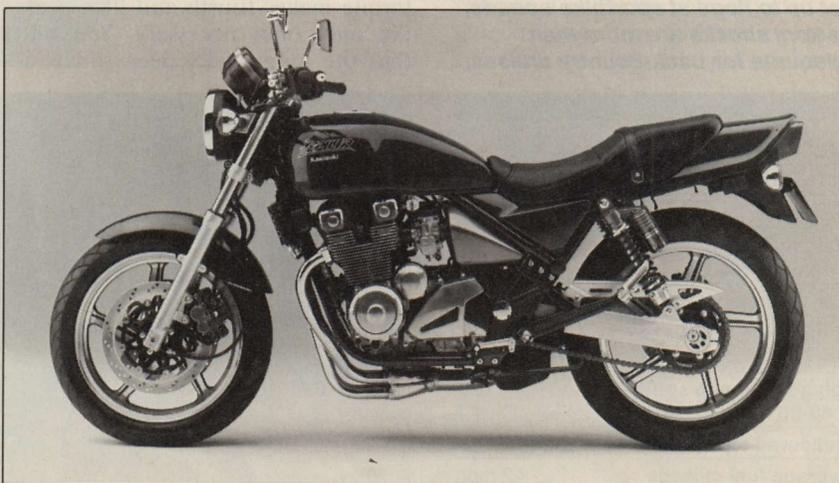
But that time was, after all, 10 years ago.

SPECIFICATIONS

Kawasaki Zephyr	
List price	\$3999
Weight:	
Tank empty	419 lb.
Fuel capacity:	4.0 gal.
1/4 mi.	12.66 sec. @ 102.62 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.4
Measured top speed	120 mph
Average fuel mileage	44 mpg



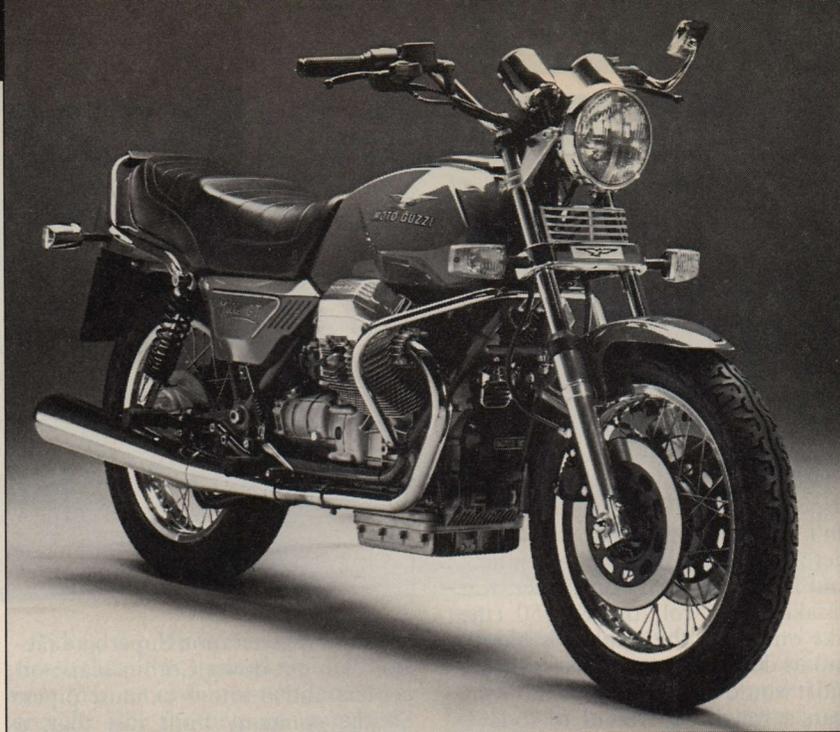
The Zephyr's 550cc engine, a not-too-distant relative of the old KZ550 motor, is air-cooled and has but two valves per cylinder.



Moto Guzzi Mille

LOOKING FOR A NEW MOTORCYCLE just like those old motorcycles, are you? Then direct your gaze towards the Moto Guzzi Mille, a giant, red, Latin V-Twin anachronism of a motorcycle. If our mail is any indication, some of you out there in Motorcycleland have been pining away for the basic standard motorcycle of yore. Well, pine no more. The Mille is it.

There is no way that the designation "standard" is synonymous with the words "bland," or "dull," at least not with respect to the Mille. It's a bike as full of character and flavor as a dish of *gnochi*. First of all, there's that engine, a great, whomping 948cc lump, longitudinally situated in the bike's semi-double-loop, single-backbone tube frame. This is a motor that speaks with a wonderful *basso profundo* exhaust note and which injects a considerable dose of personality into the process of moving the bike. Its handshake reveals very heavy throttle-return springs in the bike's



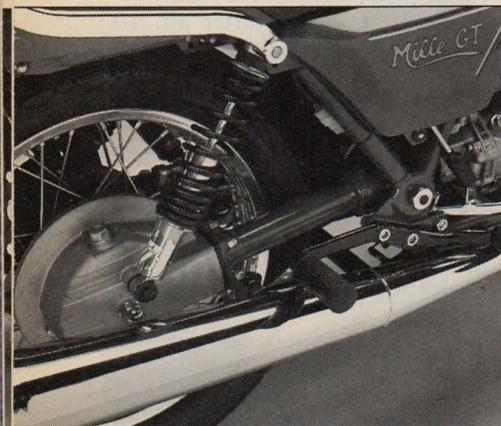
twin, 30mm Dell'Orto carburetors, though our Italian connections tell us the cure for that is simple and cheap. And, as you rev the engine, the torque reaction from its beefy crankshaft and 12-pound flywheel rocks the bike to the right, but this is more an oddity to be noticed at stoplights than a problem that causes handling glitches, at least at the speeds the Mille likes best.

And it does have speed preferences: It's most happy at the national speed limit or below. Its smooth clutch and light shifting combine with the engine's 78mm stroke and millstone-like flywheel to make smooth departures a snap. Indeed, those factors make the engine almost impossible to stall on getaway. Once at speed, feet firmly in the reality of life with a standard bike, you find that the engine's seamless supply of torque makes fourth and fifth gears the only ones necessary. You find that the long, wide, deep saddle is

amazingly comfortable, and you find that the high, wide bars are perfect for the sort of backroad cruising that allows you to drink in the smells and the scenery.

Just don't be fooled by the Mille's ride, which is Euro-firm, or by its powerful front/rear linked brake system, into mistaking it for a bike with sporting pretensions. Because of the bike's relatively slow, lazy steering, it is not sportbike-flickable, and when cornered hard at high speeds, the bike's 35mm fork tubes just give up and allow the bike to wobble-wobble.

But hey, this is a traditionalist's ride, not a racer; it's a brand-new motorcycle, with all the considerable virtues and charm of a fresh piece of equipment, that looks, and indeed, feels, just like a freshly restored old motorcycle. It's an instant classic, and with its shaft drive and simple, push-rod engine, it's a bike capable of providing a lot of satisfaction.



The Moto Guzzi retains that firm's characteristic shaft drive. Though not up to flogs at sportbike speeds, its Koni shocks are more than adequate for back-country cruises.

SPECIFICATIONS

Moto Guzzi Mille GT

List price	\$6995
Weight:	
Tank empty	519 lb.
Fuel capacity	5.7 gal.
1/4 mi.	13.41 sec. @ 99.66 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.1
Measured top speed	110 mph
Average fuel mileage	42 mpg



Suzuki GS500E

REMEMBER WHEN DAVID MET Goliath? Everyone thought it was a big deal because little David won. The truth was that he couldn't lose. Or at least, Goliath couldn't win. It's like that whenever an overwhelming underdog goes up against the favorite: If the underdog beats the odds, he's a hero, if he loses, it doesn't really count.

That's the Suzuki GS500E's advantage. Nobody expects much from the little 487cc Twin. After all, the engine isn't all that different from that of the GS450E that Suzuki introduced, to a deafening lack of fanfare, 10 years ago.

So anyone who rides the GS usually comes away with a big grin. It's sort of like biting into a Whitman's chocolate and discovering your very favorite piece. The most-dramatic surprise is the engine. The list of what the powerplant *doesn't* feature is quite long: It doesn't have liquid-cooling, it doesn't have any more

than two valves per cylinder, it doesn't have gear-driven cams, hydraulic lifters, or anything else that a 1966 Honda CB450 didn't have. And yet the power is very satisfying. Low-end torque hits with a healthy surge at about 4000 rpm, and even if the bike is through making power well before its 11,000-rpm redline, a six-speed gearbox lets you continue

without missing even a half-beat. Of course, it's still a 500 Twin; if you wave your pink slip and a challenge in the face of a hardened street racer, chances are you'll be walking home. Nonetheless, the GS is a satisfying all-around ride.

In road manners, too, the little GS is pleasing, though that really shouldn't be all *that* surprising. Its chassis has all the credentials of any modern middleweight. It uses a steel perimeter frame and single-shock rear suspension. It weighs only slightly more than a Schwinn Varsity, and its vital statistics are right where a modern motorcycle's should be.

The GS handles like a champ, dropping into turns with the ease of a full-on repli-racer, but it isn't a racebike. It fits into the standard-bike category as well as any of the bikes here. The riding position, while not as spread-out as Suzuki's own VX800, is looser than many 750 or 1000cc sportbikes on the market.

Still, the GS does have its faults. The seat isn't particularly substantial. And if your ride is short, then chances are that the cold-blooded engine still won't be carbureting quite right by the time you get wherever



Just because the GS500 is the least-expensive standard, don't count it out. Its frame is semi-state-of-the-art, and rigid enough to deliver superlative handling.

SPECIFICATIONS

Suzuki GS500E

List price	\$3099
Weight:	
Tank empty	392 lb.
Fuel capacity:	4.1 gal.
1/4 mi.	13.44 sec.
	@ 97.71 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	6.5
Measured top speed	112 mph
Average fuel mileage	50 mpg



STANDARD TIME

you're going. The engine takes a good 10 minutes to warm up.

If that seems too hard to live with, then maybe the \$3099 price tag will make it go down easier. The GS500 is the least-expensive bike of all the standards we have gathered here. Suzuki originally marketed the bike last year as an entry-level motorcycle, and to the company's corporate delight, it was quite successful. Market research shows that a large percentage of GS owners are first-time buyers. That trend is especially encouraging, because it means that for a whole generation of new enthusiasts, the first taste of motorcycling will be a good one.

Suzuki VX800

SUZUKI'S VX800 IS PROBABLY the most-specialized motorcycle on the market today. And its specialty, of course, is not having a specialty.

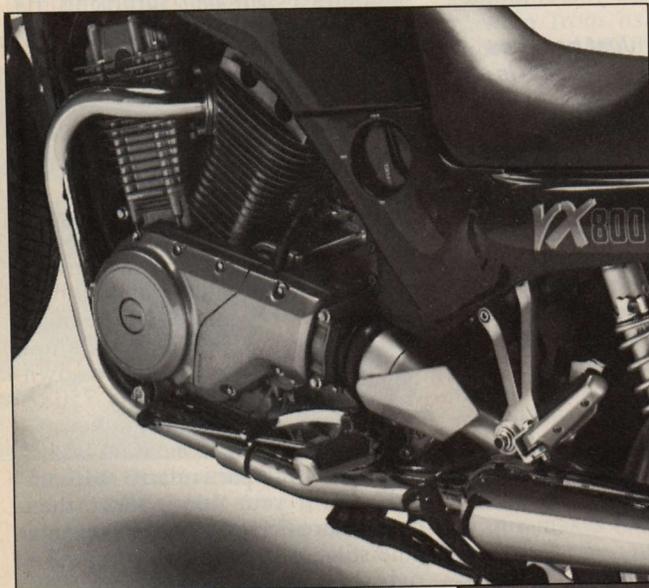
Doubletalk, you say? Not at all. Of



all the bikes gathered for our 10-way, standard-bike roundup, the Suzuki VX is the only new-for-1990 motorcycle that was designed from the ground up specifically to fall into the standard-bike category. The others

are either upgraded reincarnations from an earlier time or bikes that have been available all along, right through the so-called era of specialization.

But the Suzuki VX800 is the most-dedicated undedicated bike yet. From the time when the first VX-related memo was passed between department heads at Suzuki, the idea was to make a modern standard. Oh, sure, the eight-valve, V-Twin engine was borrowed from Suzuki's VS750 Intruder cruiser, but the rest of the bike is absolutely new. The route that the VS engine took to find its way into the new bike is interesting, though. First, Suzuki gave it a 3mm-larger bore to bring the displacement from 747 to 805cc, and then came a larger radiator to handle the cooling chores of the larger engine. At some point in the motorcycle's development, the company changed the



V-Twin purists should be tickled by the smoothness and power of the VX800's engine, which delivers its urge through a slick-shifting five-speed transmission and a shaft final drive.

SPECIFICATIONS

Suzuki VX800

List price	\$4599
Weight:	
Tank empty	494 lb.
Fuel capacity	4.9 gal.
1/4 mi.	12.95 sec. @ 101.46
Top gear time to speed, sec.	
40-60 mph	4.0
Measured top speed	114 mph
Average fuel mileage	40 mpg



crankpin offset from 45 to 75 degrees in hope of creating a smoother-running motor. But just as production began, American Suzuki engineers decided that the new offset resulted in less mid-range power, as well as a too-sanitized exhaust note, one that didn't sound very V-Twin-like. Presto, now the U.S. models come with the 45-degree offset, while the rest of the world gets the 75-degree staggered crankpins.

That crankpin offset might be the culprit behind the fact that the U.S. model's engine does produce some vibration. But the buzzing only gets intolerable above 6000 rpm, and that's well above the cruising zone for the torquey motor. The big Vee pulls well from low revs, and at 60 miles per hour, it's barely turning 4000 rpm.

The VX's handling feels strange initially, especially to riders accustomed to quick-steering sportbikes. The machine is large, with a long wheelbase and more rake (31 degrees) than anything this side of Peter Fonda's star-spangled Hog. So, naturally, the VX800 handles deliberately, just as a middle-of-the-road bike should. Likewise, the suspension on the VX is exactly what it's meant to be: versatile. The twin-shock rear end looks like a throwback to the early Seventies, but it has adjustable rebound damping and spring preload, just like most modern single-shockers. The VX has a rare capability to provide a smooth ride on the freeway as well as handling bumpy backroads with grace, at least at the paces that are expected of standard-style bikes.

To many of our testers, this motorcycle's most endearing feature is that it's comfortable. The rider has room, lots of it. Bigger riders in particular will appreciate the ample space from the wide seat to the footpegs. Plus, the handlebar doesn't force a bent-over riding posture, but it's still fairly flat, so the rider doesn't catch a lot of wind. And if that's not good enough, Suzuki also offers two accessory fairings to cut down the wind blast.

Of course, a VX with a fairing is no longer a standard, right? Maybe, maybe not. Part of the appeal of standards in general and the VX in particular is each one can be personalized to suit its rider. After a few years on the road, it's unlikely that any two VXs will look alike. Perhaps that, more than anything else, is what makes the Suzuki VX800 special. It's a delightfully well-finished starting point.



Yamaha Radian

NEVER HAS ANY MOTORCYCLE changed so much by changing so little. Yamaha's Radian is the incredible changing standard. Back in 1984, the Yamaha FJ600 was the king of the middleweight sportbikes. It had the motor and the handling to dominate official box-stock racing as well as any other kind of less-official racing that it might get into. Then the FJ disappeared, leaving the Radian as its closest living relative. In 1986, the Radian was a budget bike, and it used the same engine and a round-tube frame similar to the old FJ's. But its motor was considered outdated by then, and the Radian seemed destined to be a commuter for the rest of its days.

Now come the Nineties, and the Radian is suddenly one of the new standards. The sportbike-turned-budget-bike has become a budget-bike-turned-standard. And, weirder still, in this third life, the Radian is once again a performer.

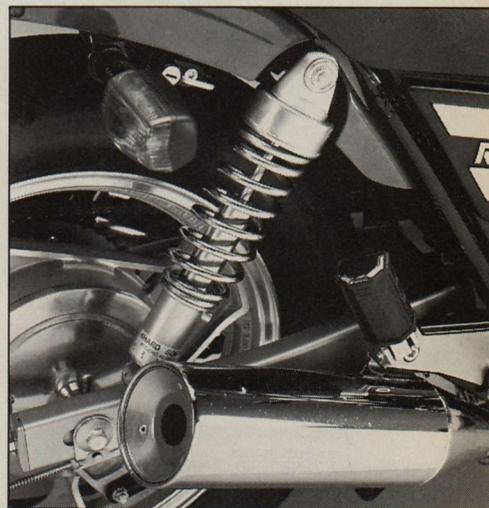
Of all the motorcycles gathered in our standard-bike extravaganza, the Radian has one of the sharpest-feeling motors. Its quarter-mile ET of 12.32 seconds makes it the quickest of the group. Of course, compared to a modern 600cc sportbike, such as Yamaha's own FZR600, the Radian is a real dog, so how good the air-cooled, 599cc, eight-valve motor looks depends upon the company it keeps.

Compared to the other standards, the Radian chassis feels rather small. It has one of the most-cramped seating positions, and our larger riders wasted no opportunities to gripe

about that fact. And beyond that, the motorcycle *looks* small. Its wheelbase, at just under 55 inches, is a touch on the short side, but not enough to account for the overall impression of smallness. That feeling comes from the narrow handlebar, the slender seat and the small fuel tank, as much as anything else.

Another common complaint centers around the twin-shock rear suspension. It's not very good. The ride is bumpy and harsh no matter where you adjust the spring preload. There are a number of aftermarket companies that love the Radian because of this.

On the plus side, the bike is an excellent handler on tight roads. There, the small-feeling chassis is an asset



Twin shocks may be the rage on some born-again standards, but those on the Radian just don't work very well, and therefore deserve instant replacement with quality aftermarket parts.

STANDARD TIME

and the Radian is a confidence-inspiring handler. It has good ground clearance, excellent steering and powerful brakes. The Radian might be a standard bike these days, but it still can't avoid letting some of its sportbike heritage show through.

And its days as a budget bike aren't over, either. The machine retails for \$3699, which means that, in addition to being the most powerful of these

10 bikes, it is the second-least-expensive (the price champion is the Suzuki GS500E).

Of course, when the Radian was introduced back in 1986, it sold for \$2399 and was virtually the same

bike. Now, that doesn't mean that the Radian is a bad deal now—far from it. You'd be hard-pressed to find as much performance for the dollar.

But, man, was it a great deal back then.

SPECIFICATIONS

Yamaha Radian

List price	\$3699
Weight:	
Tank empty	418 lb.
Fuel capacity:	3.3 gal.
¼ mi.	12.32 sec. @ 106.88 mph
Top gear time to speed, sec. 40-60 mph	3.8
Measured top speed	123 mph
Average fuel mileage	46 mpg



Conclusion

WE'VE NOW DUMPED 10 motorcycles, as many days and as many riders into the blender with the selector on "puree." And you probably expect us to pour something that resembles a conclusion into a perfectly clear glass. But the issue of standard motorcycles is a particularly muddy

one to start with, and because they are jacks-of-all-trades, masters-of-none kinds of bikes, coming up with a neat, no-loose-ends conclusion is a particularly prickly task.

So, no.

Come again?

No. We aren't going to play. We don't want to give you no stinkin' conclusion.

Why? Ah, there it is. Why, indeed.

Because we can't, and here's why we can't. Don Canet, one of our guest testers, said the conclusion was that the Harley-Davidson FXRS was the best standard. Ron Griewe said the conclusion was that the Suzuki VX was the best standard. Camron Bussard said the Moto Guzzi was the best standard. Ron Lawson, the Zephyr; David Edwards, the BMW, and so on. Each of us knows the conclusion. The problem is that they're all different conclusions.

We knew this job was trouble when we signed up.

The truth is that if you're looking for the best standard here, there is no truth. If you like sportbike riding, we could list them in that order, starting with the CB-1 and ending with the Guzzi. But if you *really* like sportbike riding, you really shouldn't be looking here in the first place. If you like cruising, then we could flop that order, and if you like touring, we could make a whole new list. But in those cases, you should be looking elsewhere, too.

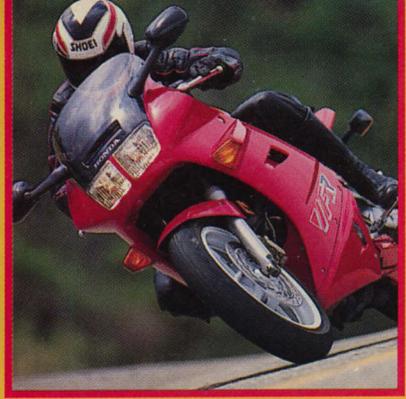
So, to list these machines in order of preference, you first have to list your riding, in order of preference. We can't do that for you. Wouldn't want to. That leaves you with no conclusion, but rather with enough information to make your own conclusion.

Our guess is you're happier with that, anyway. ☐



STUNNING! Honda's Super 750

CYCLE WORLD®



Honda VFR750

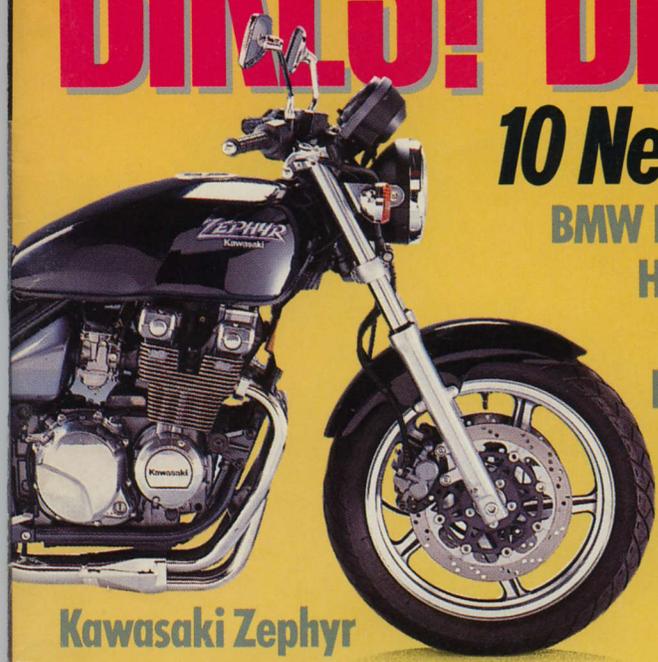
JULY 1990

USA \$2.25 CANADA \$2.95 UK £1.95

BIKES! BIKES! BIKES!

10 New Standards

- BMW K75 ♦ Harley Sportster
- Harley FXRS-Sport
- Honda CB-1
- Honda Hawk 650
- Suzuki GS500
- Suzuki VX800
- Yamaha Radian



Kawasaki Zephyr



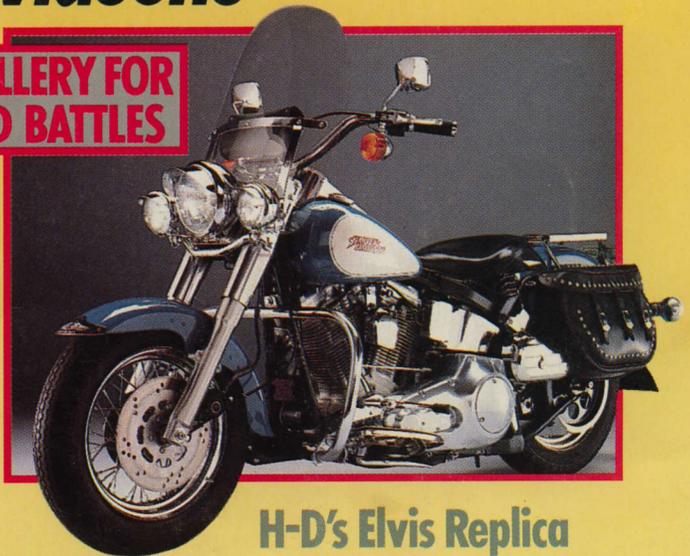
Moto Guzzi 1000

4 Custom Harley-Davidsons

HEAVY ARTILLERY FOR BOULEVARD BATTLES



White Bros. Low Boy



H-D's Elvis Replica

