

## Editors' Picks

**T**HIS BEING THE FIRST issue of the new year, it seems appropriate to look back at 2010 and name a few of our favorite test bikes.

The BMW S1000RR certainly set the pace for Technical Innovation, not to mention sheer power in the already oversexed liter sportbike segment. Race ABS and traction control give it a kind of mechanical forgiveness that can prevent a rider's little sins from turning into Shakespearean tragedies. We can't help wondering if its success—a major wager on BMW's part—hasn't inspired the Japanese to mount an all-out assault on BMW's bread and butter motorcycle, the R1200GS. Still, it's a win-win situation for riders.

And BMW wins two categories in our estimation, the second being Best All-Arounder for 2010, the R1200GS. The latest refinement for 2010, the DOHC radial four-valve cylinder head, has transformed the big GS' once cautious persona into a full-fledged rooster of a motorcycle. The new engine is great fun to ride and a treat for the ears, while the rest of the package makes the complete bike magic. It can act convincingly like a long-distance sport tourer, it can give chase to a pure sportbike on a twisty road and can be made to cover rough ground and ridiculous obstacles like a mountain goat. There's no question it's expensive, but it also defines its owner's taste in a way few other motorcycles can. It's a Swiss Army knife on two wheels.

Aprilia's Dorsoduro 750 V-twin is so much fun to ride and such a definitive expression of the Italian roadster that it almost deserves its own category, but Naked Bike of the Year works well, too. With its engine set to "stun"—Sport mode—it makes 750cc seem like the perfect engine size. Its greatly improved suspension, state of the art brakes and dramatic styling make it a two-wheeled art object that threatens whiplash in onlookers as it passes.

The Kawasaki Concours 1400 claims the Ballistic Sport-Touring crown. A land-bound executive jet, it makes covering long distances easy and loves to rail high-speed sweepers. The thought that police officers will also have them should send shivers down the spines of scofflaws everywhere.

If dirt trails are your favorite roads, the Suzuki DR-Z400S takes the Dual-Sport Value prize. Its longevity has provided a wealth of aftermarket support if you're inspired to refine the basic package, but its essential qualities: its light weight, responsive motor and top-quality suspension give it the ability to raise your game off-road while supplying enough street performance



that your searches for new terrain needn't be kept close to home.

This month's issue has another standout, the Kawasaki Ninja 1000. I won't spoil the test, but this one's near perfection. It has to rate as our Favorite Streetbike of 2010. With comfortable ergonomics, a great motor and good wind protection, it can be factory equipped for sport-touring and has such fine balance on its excellent suspension that it would make a fun track-day tool as well.

If an as-yet-not-fully-tested model could be included as Most Promising, it would have to be the Yamaha Super Ténéré. A comparison test between the BMW R1200GS, KTM 990 Adventure, Moto Guzzi Stelvio and the Ténéré promises to be one heck of an adventure.

Our final category, Best Commuter/First Bike goes to the little DR200SE Suzuki. Giving the highest average gas mileage we've yet recorded, 63.8 mpg., achieved in conditions that were anything but optimal, including rush hour commuting and exploring dirt roads, the little DR is as big on fun as it is small on displacement. The simple joy of mechanical propulsion, its effortless weight, and the satisfying sound of its internal combustion seemed to constantly put a big smile on our faces. They say riding a slow bike fast is more fun than riding a fast bike slow, and that's so true. If you thought your first infatuation with motorcycling was something that had to surely fade with time, perhaps you've been riding bikes that substitute power and weight for the qualities that made your first riding experiences so memorable.

Better yet, the little DR is an equal opportunity motorcycle, able to take you back-road exploring as eagerly as it can deal with commuting at freeway speeds.

If you've never ridden off-road, make correcting that situation one of your New Year's resolutions. You won't know what you're missing unless you do. And because the rider of a small bike is fully responsible for its progress, the sense of satisfaction that a machine like the DR200 provides is in direct measure to what you put into it.

In case the new year finds you shopping for a new ride, it might be worth mentioning a few of the qualities that separate the good from the great, at least in our eyes.

Great handling feel is the result of almost endless factors, but when a bike has it, you know it. Good tires, good suspension, good steering geometry, weight distribution (vertically, horizontally and side-to-side all matter), rider placement, ergonomics, control layouts and sufficient adjustability to match variations in personal sizing all contribute. But when a bike feels awkward for one or several reasons, the result is a disconnect, preventing the intimate bike/rider bond that allows control to become intuitive.

Brakes are becoming better all the time, and really good brakes are critical for safety and control. Radial-mount calipers and radial-pump master cylinders really do improve control feel. Lightweights can get by with less sophisticated equipment, but the heavier and faster the bike, the more it matters. And don't underestimate the importance of tires. Those dazzling images of racers with their knees skimming the pavement, or braking so strongly at corner entry that the rear tire lifts free of the track are only possible because their tires are so sticky. If knee-down cornering strikes you as impossible, you haven't yet ridden on the right rubber.

As engine controls continue to improve, lurchy fuel-injection and potholes in power delivery become rarer and rarer. If you've been a carburetor hold-out, unwilling to suffer these maladies, you don't need to wait any longer. Although we did have a few below-par examples of fuel injection this year (the KTM 690 Enduro, for instance) the best systems have reached a level of perfection that we can no longer fault.

And with the breaking news of all-new models from BMW, Honda and Triumph, 2011 promises to be a banner year.

Cheers!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DAVE SEARLE". The letters are bold and somewhat cursive, with a prominent "D" and "S".

—Dave Searle  
Editor