

SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS OF MCN

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Feedback On High Sierra Showdown

Regarding your review of the Kawasaki Concours 14, I must say I am quite disappointed in the apparent bias against the bike. No way is the C14 third in every category (for example, brakes too good?). I speak from personal experience riding it thousands of miles on two-lane mountain roads (the only roads around here), comparing it not to other big and bulky sport-tourers, but instead, to my 2007 GSX-R1000 and 2006 FZ1.

The bike handles and accelerates beautifully and has tons of power beyond 4000 (where I keep it). I know it seems to be weak in the low end (same bashing I've heard about my FZ1), but I do not find that to be a negative in either bike—I just keep them at higher rpm. (Weak low end? I sold my ZX-12R to get the *much better handling* C14.)

Also, one tip on the handling your testers may have overlooked—the C14 is extremely sensitive to tire pressure. I

found that if the tires are as low as 38 psi instead of the recommended 41 psi, the handling in the twisties suffers. I keep mine at 41–42 psi (on board gauge reads 43–45 range) and I ride the C14 just as fast and aggressively as my other bikes.

Rather than counter each point in your review, the only other comment I'd like you to note is the obvious bias you displayed for the FJR with repeated statements of "Yamaha said they would take care of that in 2008." If you wanted to give pluses to the 2008 FJR, do it in real tests and *not* on manufacturer promises. In my eyes, at least, your credibility has taken a big hit by this review.

As for the FJR, if it hadn't had such a terrible color this year (2007) and if my friendly Kawi dealer hadn't called me when he got a C14 in July (which I spent my B-King savings on!), I would've had an '07 FJR in the garage now—that's how much I also like the FJR. Sorry to say it, but this time around, the commercial mags

seem to be the least biased by giving the C14 hits where it deserves it (wind, heat, etc.)—not against Yamaha's promises and probable underinflated tire handling.

Lastly, your Fob shot was cheap—all the manufacturers come up with sales gimmicks. And heated grips? Why waste money on that? I've got Gerbing's gloves and warm hands on all my bikes.

No, the C14 is not a BMW—thankfully—I couldn't have afforded it then. Sorry you missed by such a big margin on this one, keep up the other good work.

W. Grant Norman
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Grant, we tried our best to explain it, but we had a definite bias in favor of the C14 before the test started, and it took days to disabuse us of our preconceived notions.

As for unbiased, I can think of one commercial mag that didn't even bother doing a comparison before saying the new Concours was everything it was claimed to be.

Also, we didn't say the Yamaha was better than the C14 because Yamaha said they would improve it, it was already better when we said it was better. Yamaha asked that we inform the readers that we would be testing a 2007 model FJR against Kawasaki's 2008, which was a reasonable request, so we did.

All the tires were set to factory specs, they certainly were not underinflated. But

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we're glad to hear that higher pressures might help.

We were as surprised as all those readers, like yourself, who didn't expect the results we found. But riding them back to back, there was no disagreement.

We would be interested to have the C14 back for a while, to see what would make it handle better. We're guessing new triple clamps.

K12GT Excluded

I was wondering why the BMW K1200GT wasn't included in the "High Sierra Showdown" comparison in the December 2007 issue. Clearly that motorcycle is in the same league as the Yamaha, Honda and Kawasaki.

Pierce Hoover
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Pierce, we tested the K1200GT against the FJR1300AE in August 2006, when the auto-clutch FJR was new. BMW's best offers features you can't get anywhere else (electrically adjustable suspension, Duolover front end, etc.). But when it's fitted will all these popular options, it will then cost approximately 40% more than the Japanese sport-tourers.

It really isn't in the same class.

Praise And Fuel Efficiency

Dave Searle's article on compression ratios and valve timing was one of the best written explanations of fundamental internal combustion engine mechanics I've ever read. MCN has had several of these super-illuminating articles recently.

Rake and trail, and articles on bore/stroke ratios are others subject I'd like to read. There is nothing very intuitive about these metrics, but they are quoted all the time like everybody knows what they mean.

A follow-up article on exhaust valve timing, the effect of tight vs. loose valves, horsepower vs. burned valves, etc. would be interesting. Given the price of gas, I'd also like to see an article on what makes a bike fuel efficient. I rented an 88 c.i. Harley in Hawaii and rode it hard with my wife on the back up to 5000' elevation and back and was surprised to see it get 45 mpg. I used to have a VF700C Honda that was lucky to get 35. My ST1100 averages 41 mpg (winter ethanol gas) to 45 mpg (summer) on my daily commute, but bikes with half the displacement don't beat it by that much, or in the case of sportbikes, get much worse mileage. What are the major engine design factors that impact mileage?

Adam Atwell
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Adam, thanks for your comments and suggestions for future columns. I'll try to keep 'em coming. —Dave

Bolt-on "ABS"

We hear a lot about the benefits of ABS on motorcycles, but for many cycles sold in the US, ABS is not an available option. Here is a product that may improve rider safety for a relatively low cost if it lives up to the promise: Lifesaver TCB Total Control Braking.

I hope your talented technicians and reviewers can put this product through some rigorous testing and let your eager readers know if it is a smart and cost effective upgrade to our existing brake systems.

Ted Toscano
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Ted, I tested several of these devices back in 1995, which were then often termed "ABS." We used Keith Code's outrigger-equipped braking trainer, a perfect example for the testing, as one of its front rotors was warped slightly, and the devices claimed to be able to interrupt skidding caused by such factors.

All these things are is a kind of air cushion in the brake lines, separating an air chamber behind a rubber bladder of some type, which, as you would imagine, causes a mushy brake lever. They can also create residual pressure in the line when the lever is released that can cause brake drag and exaggerate brake pad wear.

When a rider found an improvement in his braking using one of these devices, it was because he "believed" the device would help. He would then use greater braking force at the lever and stop faster as a result.

One manufacturer, when cornered, even admitted their expensive gadgets weren't what they claimed to be, and said around the office, they referred to them as a "placebo braking device."

Motorcycle manufacturers go to incredible lengths to provide a firm and tactile feel for brake pressure, and these things spoil that. A nearly identical system to the one you've found was previously sold by BST Enterprises in Gilbert, AZ.

After our report, the government stepped in to charge the companies with false advertising for calling them ABS.

Don't waste your money! —Dave

Maintenance Costs

Thanks for the great article on maintenance cost of bikes! I have attached my personal maintenance log and operating cost for my 2005 Suzuki V-Strom 650 (I just traded it in for a Kawasaki Concours

14). My maintenance costs at 6¢ per mile are a little less than half the 16¢ per mile you reported.

One difference is that I do my own oil changes. I have found the two biggest costs to be tires and valve adjustments. I was able to reduce the cost of tires by switching to Metzeler Tourance tires which gave me a life of about 12,000–15,000 miles for the rear tire and 25,000–30,000 miles for the front tire.

I am looking forward to other manufacturers following Yamaha's lead and going to 26,000-mile valve adjustment intervals. As you can see from my maintenance log, after 72,000 miles in less than three years I only had to change one shim once. So I think the Suzuki 14,500-mile valve adjustment interval is just being overly conservative for the average rider.

Also, you can see what a solid bike the V-Strom 650 is. At the end of 72,000 miles, it was still using zero oil between changes and running just as strong as when it was new.

Sonny Loudon
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Ducati Service Costs Too High?

We liked your approach to comparing maintenance costs on popular motorcycles. However, the Ducati models appeared to be more expensive to maintain than most other brands in your comparison.

While it seems that your methodology is reasonably sound (calling dealers, and using their quotes to calculate averages), do these quotes take into account a wide enough geographical spread to account for variances in cost of living? Did you ask dealers for parts quotes or locate prices yourselves? Setting the finer points of being a statistician aside, the rates quoted for the Ducati 1098 and Monster S2R were significantly different from what we charge as a Ducati dealer. Especially since Ducati lengthened the service intervals.

When we created the same cost matrix that you used in your magazine, we used the same parts, same tires, our highest quality oil, highest quality brake pads, and our hourly rate of \$85. With regard to the 1098, our rates were almost 27% (nearly \$1500) lower than you quoted. The Monster S2R statistics weren't much better; our rates were over 21% (over \$750) lower than you are quoting.

Nick Beck
Parts Dept., International Motorsports
San Antonio, TX

Mr. Beck, I appreciate your inquiry into the methods and conclusions of our service cost comparison. As you stated, the

conclusions reached do paint Ducati in an expensive light. And as you say, the methodology used "is reasonably sound." However, your provided cost table significantly underrepresents the cost of servicing these machines.

First, the method of polling dealers resulted in a geographical spread that included New York, Indiana, Texas, Florida and California. Service cost averages represent coast to coast. Prices for Ducati parts came straight from ARCO, Ducati North America's own parts fiche and pricing system. Within these guidelines, Ducati service times and parts lists were as polled dealers suggested.

While your listed service time in hours is slightly lower than our calculated average, the combination of your higher hourly rate makes this negligible. Your basic services utilized more expensive oil to be sure, but you radically undercut even the most conservative estimates for the parts on each major service. Even if you completely skip replacing filters, belts, and sparkplugs at 7500 miles, you will certainly need those items at the 15,000-mile service. These parts, as a whole, retail at over \$300. Your results are significantly different from what Ducati dealers themselves recommend.

However, the one key element is the replacement of clutch plates. Most dealers polled recommended a new clutch pack for the major services. At \$280, this is quite a chunk of change. But since it was recommended, the clutch made the cut.

Finally, the other large differences in pricing come from your quotes on tires and brakes. I assume you are using either a parts-only price or are discounting the tires, as my tables call for retail pricing and a full 1.5 hours of labor for the set's installation. And on the brakes, the retail price for a full set of Ducati pads is just over \$300, plus labor. How you came up with \$116 installed, I do not know.

I stand by the belief that the prices set forth in the article accurately represent the real world costs of owning one of these motorcycles. Even forgoing one Ducati clutch replacement, your estimates are over \$1000 cheaper than the averages discovered over the course of researching this article. —W. Bruce Steever II

Re: Lying With Statistics

The Contact Patch column in your December 2007 issue was one of the most cogent analyses of the fallacy of statistical dissection I have ever read. Fred Rau has been one of my heroes for years and now I know he is not only a talented writer and avid motorcyclist, but also a gifted analyst.

His column is the most insightful description I have ever read. He describes how we, as motorcyclists, are fed a litany of misinformation by our government. I have studied statistics and I know if I want to arrive at a particular conclusion, I can select statistics to support my ideas. The bureaucrats at NHTSA have a conclusion: they want us off the road!

Mr. Rau's conclusion is that the "government," in the form of these bureaucracies, will not decide how, what and where, we ride. This is not what we want.

Mike Vercruyssen
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Battery Prices

In his *Consumer Tips on Batteries* letter, MCN contributor Moshe K. Levy stated that the Odyssey by Enersys battery could be found online for around \$65. I have been unable to find them anywhere near this price. I wonder if Mr. Levy would let me know where I might find this battery at an affordable price.

Ed Ward
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Ed, our company buys these batteries in bulk (of hundreds) wholesale. You can find them on eBay, (or search battery wholesalers) in small quantities for about \$120 each for the typical PC680 model used in BMWs and Harleys.

Be aware that the price of lead has been skyrocketing. Two months ago, I could buy one PC680 for about \$85 on eBay, or \$65 in bulk at work. Now, it's \$120 on eBay, and not much less for me in bulk. If this trend continues, even the \$120 quote I give you today may no longer be true.

—Moshe K. Levy

New England Riders

I had to laugh at Fred Rau's description of some of his riding experiences while living in New England. While his descriptions were accurate and the weather here can be frustrating, sometimes you just have to keep riding.

Fred did make me feel good about one thing though. I started riding seven years ago, and except for this year, I have averaged a little over 5000 miles a year. I lost August and most of September due to back problems. I used to feel embarrassed by my meager mileage until Fred, a rider for many more years than myself, said he averaged about the same.

He is wrong about one thing though: I have no trouble staying enthusiastic about riding when snow is piled high outside. I wait for the first of April like a 6-year-old waits for Christmas. I just keep thinking about all those great little roads I have rid-

den and those I have yet to discover.

I do envy your year-round riding. Maybe someday I will make it out to California permanently. I love the Santa Barbara area. As I write this, it is 33° not 83° outside, and April is a long way off.

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Annoying Motorcycle Quirks

I have a couple of annoyances with modern motorcycles which I feel the need to vent about.

Why is it that modern motorcycles can't show the odometer and tripmeter at the same time? I first noticed this with my 2007 Victory Vegas and then with my 2005 Yamaha R6. These modern motorcycles with digital displays actually provide less information than the analog displays on my 1982 Yamaha Maxim.

My second annoyance: why can't the manufacturers put the mode switch for the digital displays on the handlebars? Particularly when you have a digital unit that can display a half dozen different pieces of information but only one at a time?

I ended up moving the mode switch on my Victory from the instrument cluster to the left switch gear and it was easy. Having to let go of the handlebars to push a mode switch strikes me as an incredibly stupid idea. Particularly if you're switching from the odometer to the tripmeter to check how much gas you have left while nearing a gas station, which tend to be high traffic situations.

Hugh Caldwell
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Corrections

- The first Victory motorcycle on page 32 in the December 2007 issue was misidentified. It is a Hammer.
- Concours 14—Kawasaki reminds us that in case the "Fob's" battery dies, users can simply hold the Fob close to the ignition switch, and the bike will still start. Not to worry.
- G-Zero Gas Tank Foam: We are disappointed to report that the product steals a great deal more volume from the gastank than suggested by the company. As our DR650SE now runs dry at 2.5 gals. rather than 3.2, we conducted a test. The foam displaced 8.7% of the liquid, and when stuffed into the tank as recommended, took away nearly a quarter of the volume. Although it does improve handling noticeably, both at trail-riding and freeway speeds, that's a high price.