

Model Comparison

Yamaha's YZF600R is still a remarkably good motorcycle despite its aging appearance. At one time a state-of-the-art sportbike, it now feels the most like a sport-tourer with great high-speed stability, seat comfort, relaxed cruising rpm and a plush ride. Its engine, transmission and clutch are a level below the competition's, but its price the best.



Right: The YZF's old style instrumentation isn't particularly easy to read, the speedo (left) is marked to 190 mph and has 36 hash marks in a 220° arc, making for a good eye test. The coolant temp gauge's place (right) would have been better filled with a clock. There's just one tripmeter and it's analog, too, with a roller to reset the tumblers.

Left: The YZF's cyclops-style headlight looks old, but its fairing gives the best wind protection and its handlebars are the widest and marginally the highest in this group—making the Yamaha a great sport-tourer or commuter bike.



Right: With a broad thick seat, the YZF was judged the most comfortable ride. The silencer is bathed in black chrome, which should hold up well, but the rest of the exhaust system is black painted steel which is unlikely to weather as well as stainless.



Left: Sumitomo's excellent monobloc front calipers actually generated the shortest stopping distance in our comparison, despite the Yamaha's 50-lb. greater weight. The tires are Bridgestone B57s and smaller sized than the competitions', a 160/60 rear on a 5.00" rim and a 120/60 rather than a 120/70 front.



TESTERS' LOG

There wasn't any one thing that was really a highlight about this bike, but, then again, there weren't any real negatives either. The bike has fun and ample power at all ranges and it handles really well. The transmission is a little clunky and the gear ratios are wider than the others. Cruising, it seemed like the bike had a whole extra gear at the top end. Even though it is heavier than the other bikes, you don't feel it. If anything, it feels more stable. The front brakes are very good. The rear break is the strongest of the three but it's positioned badly requiring a toe lift to get on top of it. The suspension is comfortable and definitely has the softest seat and most upright riding position. The handle bars are a bit wide for my taste. I really had fun riding this bike and unlike the other bikes, I didn't find myself wishing it had more power (the Honda) or better handling (the Kawasaki). It came in second in almost every category for me (except 3rd in looks and 1st in comfort) but I would probably end up buying this bike if I was forced to choose only one.

—Steven Marks

At one time a cutting-edge sportbike, the YZF is now much more like a sport-tourer, with a wider-ratio transmission that makes for more relaxed cruising speeds (and much better gas mileage) and a suspension that simply irons out bumps that you

feel clearly on the others. Its high-speed handling is the most secure as well, with a composed, effortless quality that you wouldn't expect from a more high-strung 600. It has the same foibles as so many Yamahas up until the latest R1, a notchy transmission and a clutch that lacks feel and shudders slightly. But its monobloc four-piston front brakes were always some of the best in the business, and it is easily the most comfortable long-haul machine in the test.

—Dave Searle

Okay, so it's got a steel frame and an old school wonky sort of looks, but this thing works. Even after all this time, it works. It's one of those rare things in science where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To me, it just feels "right," and that feeling lets me flow faster through a challenging series of corners than I would have expected. I last owned one of these bikes in 2002. There have been many different bikes under me in the intervening years, but few have been as easy to ride this fast, as comfortable when droning on the freeway, or as all-around good at stopping and turning. It's a damn fine middleweight motorcycle that just happens to be the buy of the century—even if it looks like it beamed in from the last one.

—Steve Natt