

Model Comparison

If the object of a second-tier 600cc sportbike is to offer a "kinder, gentler" ride, the F4i is a curious proposition. With the stiffest suspension, least comfortable ergos and the balky fuel-injection typical of first-year EFI efforts, it is not much softer than the latest CBR600RR and only \$500 cheaper, pricing it virtually out of contention in this group.



← Left: The most recent edition of these older 600s, the F4i looks the freshest and raciest. The only fuel-injected machine in the comparison, it suffers from a snatchy throttle action and weak lower range but really flies if the revs are kept high. Sadly, only the left headlight is lit on low beam—less effective.

Right: The Honda's instrument package → was our favorite, the most complete and easiest to read—a big digital speedo and clear analog tach, plus a fuel gauge, although it works only on the "reserve."



Right: The F4i's bodywork carries the flashiest paint and the firmest suspension for the most agile steering feel in the group. The Nissin front calipers deliver tremendous feel for delicious control in the most difficult conditions. Dunlop Sportmax D207 tires are fitted, which supply plenty of traction.



← Left: Although the 2001 F4i had a very abbreviated seat, which we judged a "plank," the '06 model has an earlier style with much better coverage. However, in this group, it is still the least comfortable. The exhaust system is chromed, the alloy frame's finish sparkles in the sun and the overall level of detailing is top notch.



TESTERS' LOG

On the positive side, the F4i is the best handling bike of the three, and it felt the lightest as well. The front brakes were also the best. The rear brakes were average in effectiveness for a sport bike. While definitely the sexiest and most sport-bike-looking of the three, the Honda was lacking in a very key area: Power. If you find yourself running anything less than 7000 rpm you're going to putt rather than rocket through turns. I sometimes found myself downshifting twice in the middle of a hill just to make it up... and I only weigh 150lbs. At high rpm the bike vibrates quite a bit, to the extent that objects in the rear view mirror are not only closer than they appear, they're blurrier. On the freeway, the bike feels light, almost unstably so, but then again, I'm used to the solid feeling of my VFR.

—Steven Marks

Honda's F4i was a dazzling machine when first introduced, and I remember it fondly as the machine that I first learned to drag a knee on. It still favors trackdays more than the other bikes in this comparison, with firm responsive suspension that makes smooth roads a particular joy. However, on rougher pavement, my groin quickly taught me to lift myself on the pegs when encountering bumps. The motor has great top end performance, but clearly suffers from a lean midrange. The transmission is also

fine, but lacks just a little of the ZZR's polished action. However, the front brakes are superb, with a wonderfully tactile feel for the friction. It also has the best instrumentation, with a digital speedo, large analog tach and a reserve fuel gauge. But, only one headlight lights on low beam. My only concern is that Honda has priced the bike so high compared to its competition. Even when it's better, it's not that much better.

—Dave Searle

I have a bit of a history with this machine, I rode it for three days at Freddie Spencer's wonderful school in Las Vegas. My least pleasant memory was that it forced me to spend far too much time teaching myself throttle workarounds. The new CBR600RR, with its dual stage EFI is better in this area. Which brings me to the real deal killer here, price. At only \$500 under the super-trick RR model, this relatively dated looking F4i doesn't really make financial sense. I think I'd either pony up the five Benjamins for the new bike, or go buy a nice, clean, "previously enjoyed" F4i for under \$6000, order up a cushier seat, dial in a Power Commander and call it a day, using the money I saved for track day expenses. Of course, I'd be relying on Honda's stellar reliability record to keep me from going upside down on the thing money-wise, but that's not all that big a risk, is it?

—Steve Natt