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Suzuki's Cavalcade: Last Word in Luxotourers?



Suzuki GV140

Until now, riders in the market for a luxury touring bike usually bought a Honda Gold Wing, for several good reasons: First, Honda invented the genre. Second, thanks to Honda's tireless research resulting in an excellent product that is continually updated and improved, the Wing has won loyal legions of repeat buyers. Today, backed by a huge aftermarket industry and several large Wing touring clubs, Honda owns the luxury touring market.

But that may soon change. The 1985 Suzuki GV1400GD Cavalcade isn't just another attempt to horn in on the lucrative touring market. It's the result of three years of intensive research by U.S. Suzuki's product planners.

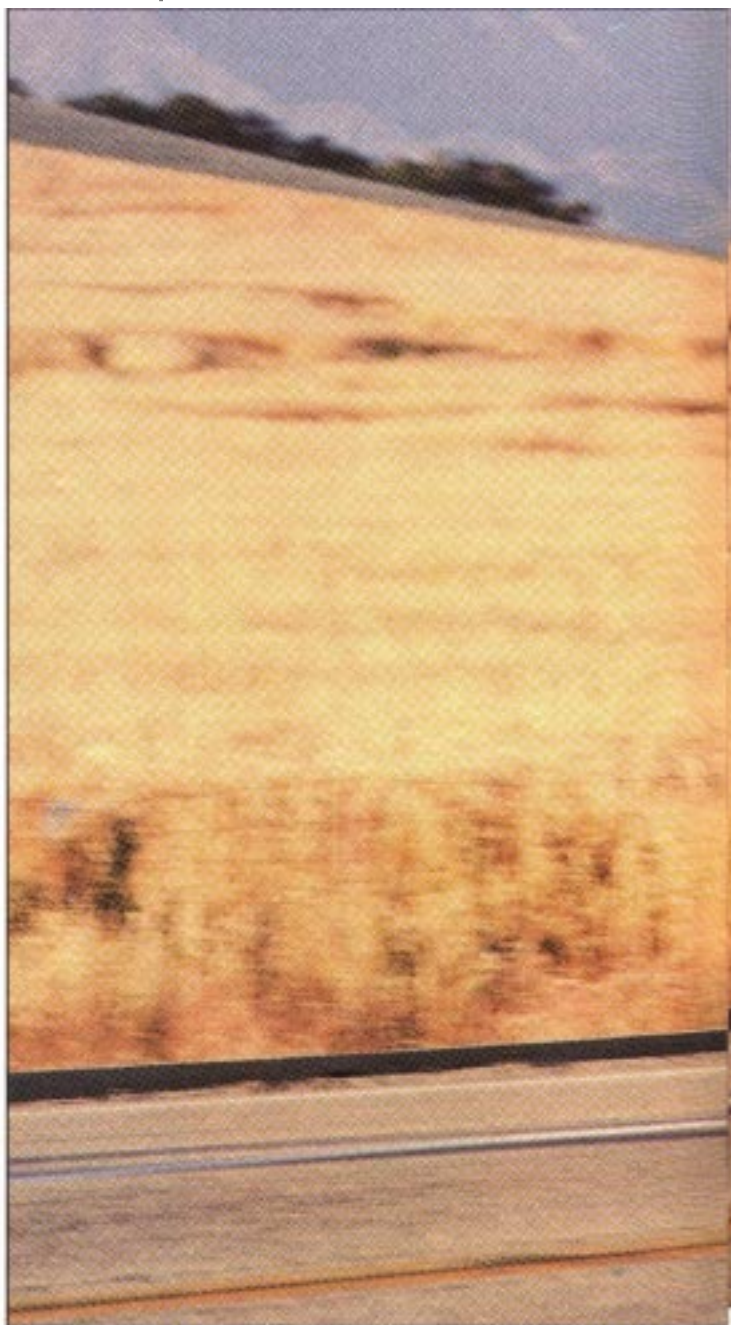
Here's what they discovered: Riders and their "co-riders" (Suzuki's term for passengers) want *comfort* above all else, followed by conveniences, reliability and protection from the elements.

Suzuki engineers did their homework well: The Cavalcade has the comfort, conveniences, capacity and cubic inches to satisfy the most discriminating touring enthusiast. The Cavalcade isn't perfect, but it's a very impressive first effort.

After searching for a suitably long and varied arena in which to test the Cavalcade, we finally settled on a long ride to Texas and back. I knew from prior experience that the weather in the Southwest during the spring would provide every conceivable climate from hot and dry to cold and wet.

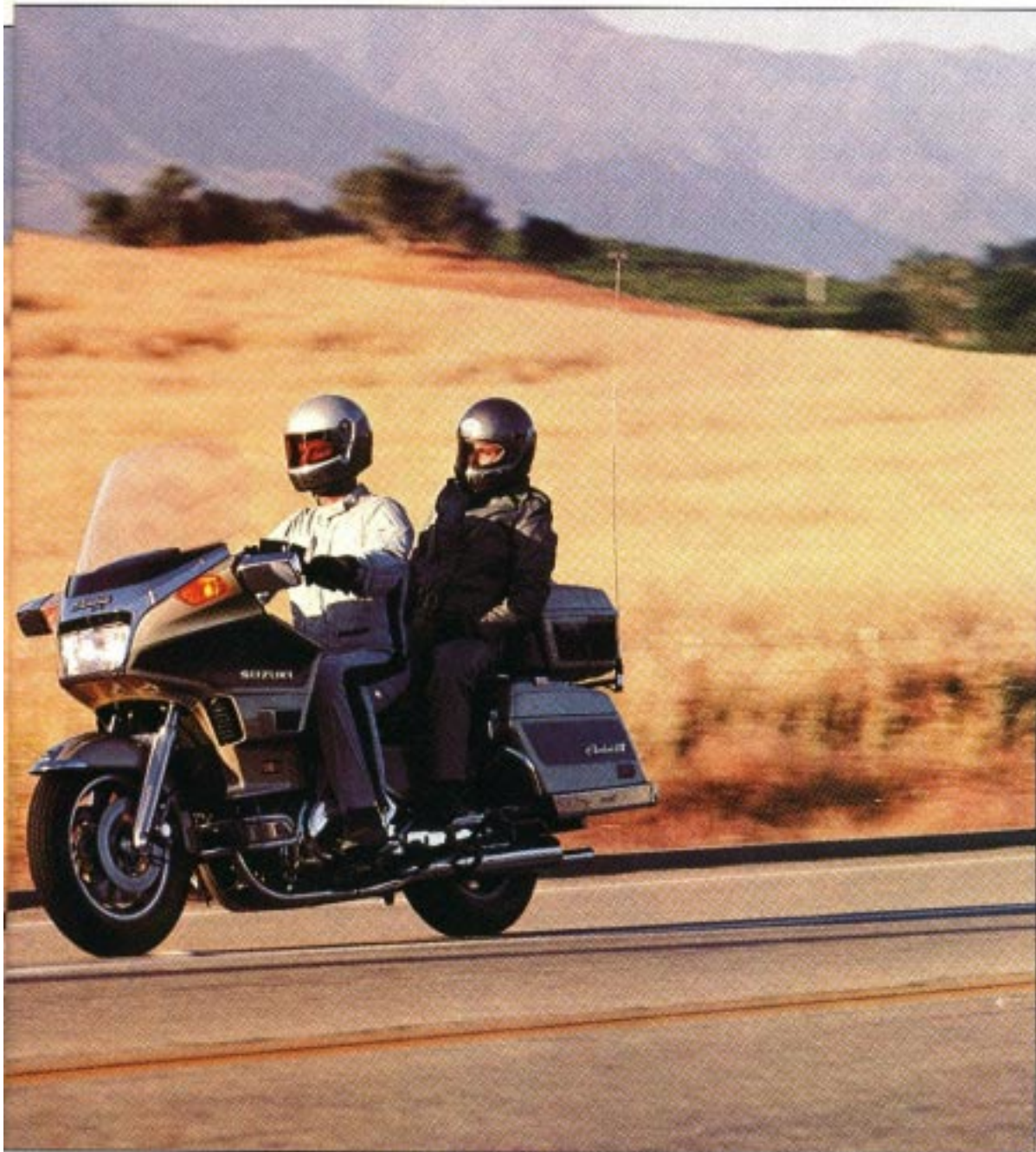
Three days and 1,300 miles later, I pulled into my parents' driveway in Kerrville, Texas, in the heart of the Hill Country. The Cavalcade had performed flawlessly, so flawlessly that I began to worry how I was going to make my road test sound objective and critical. After all, I get paid to wring out these babies, not write ad copy.

So let's start with what's *wrong* with the Cavalcade and get it over with right now. The list is short. The only thing the bike lacks is fairing lowers.



Ventures and Voyagers haven't taken much gold from Honda's Wing. Now Suzuki launches a lavish luxotourer that's certain to ruffle some feathers.

10GD Cavalcade



Photography: Studio 10

Mike Stubblefield

Though most of my Texas Hill Country tour was conducted in hot, humid conditions, there were two or three days of cold, wet riding that made the absence of lowers painfully obvious. Had the Cavalcade and I departed a month earlier, with temperatures 20 degrees cooler and lots of bad weather, I would have been miserable because the big Suzuki would have provided no more protection for my feet and legs than a stripped standard. In that case, I would have been perpetually cold or wet, or both, from the knees down.

The lack of lowers is exacerbated by the contours of the lower trailing surface of the upper fairing itself. Wind whips up between the fairing and the rider's legs constantly. In the warm weather I encountered for most of my trip, this free ventilation was a real plus. But when the temperature plummeted, I was forced to wear a winter riding suit, or freeze. And when spring showers let loose, my lower legs and feet were soaked within a minute unless I pulled over and quickly donned a rainsuit. Suzuki is well aware of its *faux pas* and will have lowers available in the near future.

The rest of the fairing is superb. The generously proportioned windshield is high enough to direct air flow over the top of the rider's and co-rider's heads and low enough so that a rider of my

height (5'11") can easily see over the top in bad weather. Buffeting is virtually nonexistent, and the noise level is so low that it's hardly worth discussing. The Venture and the Wing both offer significantly smaller windshields that produce somewhat higher levels of wind noise and buffeting.

Inside the fairing itself is a variety of LCD (the small display panel in the middle of the dash) and analog (speedo, tach, fuel level and coolant temperature) instrumentation. The display panel has two operating modes. When the ignition switch is turned on, the *check mode* (battery fluid level, side stand, headlamp, taillamp, brake light) flashes for about two seconds. If all five symbols appear in the display panel, you're ready to roll. When the panel switches to its *run mode*, the five indicators above disappear and are replaced by the time and gear-position indicator. Thanks to an uncluttered layout, quick status checks are a snap. At night the instruments are illuminated by crisp, non-glare blue lighting that's easy on the eyes.

Easy on the nerves is Suzuki's excellent cruise control. Setting the speed is simply a matter of turning the power switch on, pressing a set switch when you reach the desired mph, and releasing it. An indicator light on the dashboard reminds you that the cruise con-

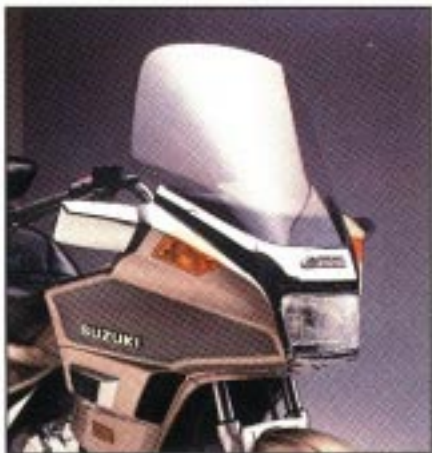


Photography: David S. Smith



*Take one Cavalcade, add
quiet Texas Hill Country
roads and a sunny Spring
day and what do you get?
Touring bliss . . .*

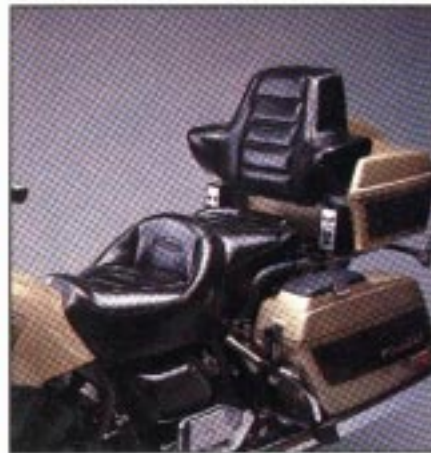




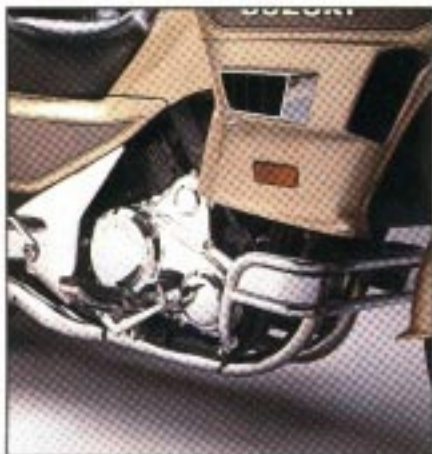
Adjustable windshield offers excellent forward visibility, produces little turbulence or buffeting. Headlight can be adjusted manually from cockpit.



High quality, mini-component modular sound system, protected by day from the elements behind locking hatch, is removable for overnight security.



Adjustable airbags inside backrest and rear seat allow co-rider to readjust seating position. Captain's chair is also comfy enough for all-day riding.



Though upper half of fairing is good, it lacks lowers. Highway pegs on case guards would enhance upright seating position. Note lavish use of chrome.



Uncluttered dashboard is illuminated by non-glare blue lighting. The two lockable storage compartments in the fairing are handy for small items.



Huge travel trunk swallows just about everything a rider needs, and offers conveniences like a vanity mirror, lid light and zippered nylon liner bag.

trol system is activated. To cancel, apply either front or rear brakes, shut the throttle, downshift out of fifth gear, pull in the clutch lever, flick off the cruise control power switch or hit the kill switch. Simple, safe and extremely accurate. Wings and Ventures deviate no more than two or three mph; the big Suzuki holds its speed, period. Its accuracy is probably due to its motorized actuator, which Suzuki claims will maintain a preselected speed better than carburetor vacuum variation activated systems.

While cruising, you should be comfortable. To this tester's derriere the pilot's seat is comparable to the Venture's plush bucket, and it's significantly better after a long day's ride than the saddles of either the Voyager or the Wing. But, good as it is, the front seat is yesterday's news compared to the co-rider's

cockpit.

The Cavalcade passenger is pampered by three adjustable airbags—one in the seat and two in the backrest—that can be inflated or deflated to change the contours of the seat. In an attempt to determine whether this novel idea was truly beneficial or merely marketing hype, I solicited the opinions of five different co-riders. After spending enough time on the back seat to get saddlesore, each of them dutifully started playing with the three sets of buttons (located in a control box on the lower right side of the passenger seat) until, through trial and error, each found the right combination for his or her respective and unique posture, weight and girth. All five passengers unanimously agreed this is a feature that should find its way onto every luxury touring machine, not so much because air is any more comfortable than

foam, but because it allows the co-rider to *re-contour* the seat should he/she become uncomfortable. The final touch is a backrest that adjusts fore and aft to four positions. In sum, the Cavalcade has raised passenger comfort to a new level. Now, if only Suzuki could see fit to provide the *captain's chair* with a similar device in the '86 model. . . .

Another feature sure to impress co-pilots is variable-position floorboards that can be angled from horizontal to tilted with the flip of a lever. Not so impressive are pilot's pegs that can be adjusted fore and aft by about two inches. As a big fan of the Yamaha Venture's superb ergonomics, I found myself wishing that the Cavalcade's pegs could have been adjusted farther back so that I could place more weight on my feet and inner thighs and less weight on my tailbone. Highway pegs, not available at the time of testing,

1985 Suzuki Cavalcade

Retail Price • \$7,999
Warranty • 24 mos., 24,000 miles
Service Interval • 600, then every 3,500 miles

Engine

Type • Transverse V-4
Displacement • 1360cc
Bore & Stroke • 81 × 66mm
Valve Train • DOHC, 4 valves per cyl.
Carburetion • Mikuni 33mm × 4
Lubrication System • Wet sump, 3.4 qt.
Ignition • Transistorized electronic
No. of Gears • 5
Final Drive • Shaft

Electrical

Charging Output • 500 watts
Battery • 12V, 20AH

Chassis

Frame • Double cradle
Suspension
front • Telescopic
rear • Single shock, adjustable air press. and Auto Level
Brakes, front • Dual discs
rear • Single disc
Wheels, front • Cast, 2.50 × 16 in.
rear • Cast, 3.50 × 15 in.
Tires, front • Dunlop, 130/90 H16
rear • Dunlop, 150/90 H15
Wheelbase • 65.9 in.
Seat Height • 30.1 in.
Wet Weight • 840 lbs.
Load Capacity • 460 lbs.
Total (GVWR) • 1300 lbs.

Touring Performance

Fuel Capacity • 6.1 gals.
Gals. to Reserve • 5
Average MPG • 36.6
Range to Reserve • 183 miles
RPM at 60 MPH • 3300

Instruments

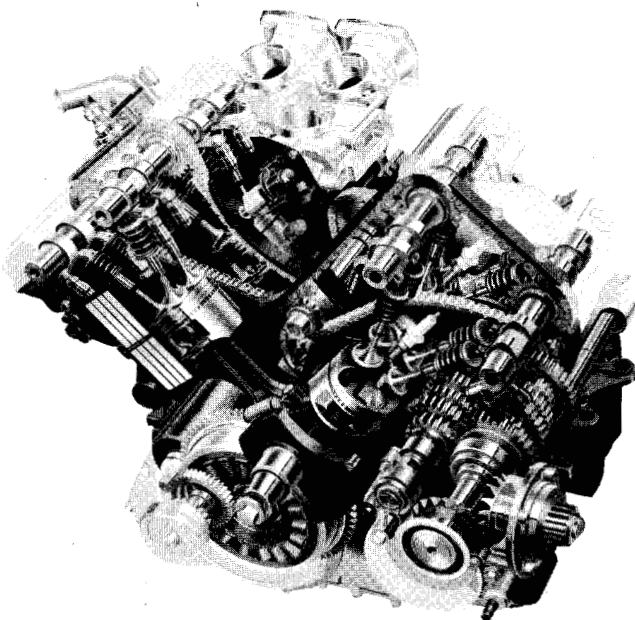
Tachometer, speedometer, odometer, tripmeter; Gauges for fuel level and coolant temp.; Indicators for turn signals, high beam, neutral, gear position; Warning lights for oil press., electrolyte level, side-stand, head, tail and brake lamps; Clock

would help by adding an alternative position.

Help is something you may need to unload the Cavalcade, too. A voluminous trunk and huge saddlebags hold more stuff than any other touring machine I've ever tested. The nylon-liner-bag-

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Cavalcade Motor Tech



To touring riders, reliability means a fuss-free motorcycle that goes the distance without a whimper. Reliability is usually equated with a large-displacement, liquid-cooled motor that chuffs along all day at modest rpms. Because luxury liners weigh a lot and carry a lot, they must be equipped with a motor powerful enough to effortlessly propel the bike, its occupants and cargo down the road for many miles.

Nobody can seriously argue that any Japanese luxury touring bike needs more horsepower. Some could use more torque. But, how to get it? When you're talking touring torque, "there's no replacement for displacement." So, Suzuki equipped the Cavalcade with an awesome 1360cc, DOHC, 16-valve, 82-degree, liquid-cooled V-four—the largest motor ever shoehorned into a touring bike.

The Cavalcade's V-four first saw life as an 1165cc mill in the mighty Madura. That motor has a lot going for it: It is powerful, relatively compact and narrow, requires zero maintenance and has a low center of gravity.

To modify the malevolent Madura motor for touring, Suzuki engineers made several significant changes. First, they hogged out the bore and stroke from an already generous 78 × 61mm to a whopping 81 × 66mm. Then they lowered the compression ratio from 10.5:1 to a slightly milder 9.5:1 and replaced the Madura's thirsty 36mm

Mikunis with a quartet of parsimonious 33's.

The result is a V-four that pulls like a bulldozer, purrs like a fat cat and produces gobs of roll-on, passing power.

Another distinction is the gearbox. The Madura sports a six-speed with five closely spaced ratios and an overdrive top gear. The Cavalcade gets a five-speed box with an overdrive fifth. Even though the final-drive ratios are close, the Madura motor turns over slightly slower—3225 vs. 3300—than the Cavalcade engine at 60 mph in top gear. A Suzuki spokesman assured us that the Madura's extra gear was unnecessary on the Cavalcade, which was designed for top-gear, interstate cruising.

Interestingly, the macho sound and feel of the Madura motor are conspicuously absent when you fire up the Cavalcade. The two engines have totally different crankshafts: The Cavalcade's more conventional 180-degree crank replaces the Madura's unusual staggered crank that produces firing pulses spaced 82 and 278 degrees apart. The Cavalcade's creators felt that touring riders would prefer the smoother operation afforded by an orthodox design.

But even a 180-degree crankshaft exhibits a perceptible secondary imbalance when mated to an 82-degree V. Suzuki's engineers could have installed a balancer shaft, à la Yamaha

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equipped top-loader saddlebags are easy to pack and unpack, the lockable latches are first rate and nothing leaks even in the heaviest downpour. Ditto for the travel trunk, which is fitted with a small vanity mirror and a handy light that flicks on automatically when the trunk lid is opened. There are also two small glove boxes—one in each saddle lid—for small stuff. They're especially useful for storing items frequently used by co-riders. I crammed enough cassettes in these two storage wells to provide non-stop

music all the way to Texas and back.

Ah, music. The compact, component-like Clarion stereo, which is cleverly integrated into the shelter under a lockable hatch, is—to these ears—the clearest and most powerful sound system ever offered in a touring bike. As good as the speakers are, I suspect that the powerful amplifier is primarily responsible for the big sound. FM sensitivity is especially impressive: I am still amazed at the radio's ability to pick up not-too-local stations that on other systems sound like so much ham radio operator static. Though it lacks some of the glitter and geegaws of Honda's top-of-the-line Limited Edition, the Cavalcade stereo has

unparalleled sound quality. And the Suzooks's stereo system offers one feature unavailable on *any* other touring bike: A remote station scan and volume control knob, situated to the lower left side of the passenger seat, allows the co-rider to have a say about programming. Should the Cavalcade buyer purchase the optional helmet intercom system and CB radio, the co-rider also gets CB channel scanning capability. With the addition of lowers and a concomitant expansion of the quiet air envelope behind the fairing, the Cavalcade sound system should prove to be the most desirable in all of motorcycling.

Of course, a Cavalcade is still a motorcycle, not a living room, so on-the-road behavior must be considered. The most critical component of any luxotourer's performance parameters is its *ride quality*. No matter how well it goes, stops and handles, a heavyweight luxury touring machine must offer a ride plush enough to rival a Buick Riviera, or it won't win many fans. On this count, the Cavalcade scores high marks. Its pneumatically controlled suspension system is controlled by an integrated circuit that has been programmed to give the correct ride height in the rear for any combination of rider or cargo weight within the rated GVWR. Simply load up the bike, hop on, start the engine, leave it in neutral and hit the button on the left side of the fairing. Sensors transmit load data to the IC, which commands the on-board compressor to start pumping up the rear shock. When the correct ride height is attained, the system shuts off. It's simple and removes all the guesswork that intimidates many touring riders. My only complaint is that, unlike the competition's bikes (and Suzuki's own GT model), the GD offers no manual override for the occasional fast blast up a twisty road (presumably because Suzuki assumes the typical buyer could care less about such antics). Finally, the front fork offers *no* suspension adjustability, and it doesn't feature an anti-dive system. While the latter is hardly missed, the former would be useful.

Also missing is an integrated braking system like that of the Wing and Venture, where the brake pedal operates the rear disc and one front disc. Theoretically, independently operated front and rear brakes allow more precise control, especially on surfaces afflicted with gravel, oil, mud or other detriments to traction. As a result, independence is preferred over integration by traditionalists. (In reality, the integrated systems of the Wing and Venture are extremely well-balanced and controllable.) While the Cavalcade's stoppers are nothing to get excited about, they do an effective job of hauling down 850 pounds of machinery from speed quickly and safely.

The Cavalcade tracks well up to about 85 or 90 mph. Push it beyond that speed

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Venture, but they elected instead to rubber mount the motor, handlebars and footpegs. The result is a not unpleasant low-frequency vibration that reminds you this is, after all, a *motorcycle*, not an electric turbine.

Fortunately, none of the minimum-maintenance features of the Madura have been sacrificed in the transition. The same hydraulic valve-lash adjusters and self-adjusting hydraulic clutch make the Cavalcade highly desirable to touring enthusiasts who want to ride instead of wrench. Add shaft drive, automatic cam chain adjustment and electronic ignition, and you have a maintenance-free motor that could become as popular as Honda's highly respected opposed four. Which is exactly what Suzuki's solidly engineered new motor deserves to be. □

—Mike Stubblefield

AUGUST 1985

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RIDER

and it will begin wobbling a little. The reason, I suspect, is that immense trunk poking into the airstream.

Sometimes the Cavalcade also shakes its head over less than ideal road conditions, but only if I don't have a firm grip on the bars. Nowhere is this peculiarity more pronounced than on our infamous rain-grooved Southern California freeways, where the big Suzuki's front end tries to follow all those squiggly lines. The ribbed Dunlop Qualifier up front could be the culprit. Another reason might be weight distribution. In any case, neither of these handling idiosyncrasies is pronounced or dangerous.

When the road turns twisty, the Cavalcade performs reasonably well for a bike this size. Its handling is best described as slow—it's got a 66-inch wheelbase—and stately. In big sweepers and medium-fast corners, the Cavalcade comports itself in an acceptable manner. But like all big touring bikes, it's a handful in really tight stuff. If I had to put the Cavalcade's handling in comparative terms, I'd say it's far better than a Voyager, but not quite as good as a Wing or a Venture. However, should Suzuki equip future Cavalcades with the manual suspension adjustability of the other two, the Cavalcade might be right in there with the competition.

In fact, the Cavalcade is right in there with the competition in just about every conceivable category. It's not as sporty

as a Venture but it sure carries a lot more cargo. It's not as gadgety as a Wing, but it sure has all the stuff that luxury touring riders really *need*. It has a motor (see sidebar) that should quickly become a favorite of the heavyweight crowd. And it's got a sensible combination of com-

ponents and features that will please even the most demanding long-distance enthusiast. In short, the Suzuki GV1400GD Cavalcade is the alternative to Honda's famous flat four that no other manufacturer has been able to build. Until now. □

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