

On the Road in Ohio's Amish Country
Adventure Touring Africa from North to South

Rider®

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Six Bike
LUXOTOURER Comparison!



Suzuki Cavalcade LXE



Honda Aspencade



BMW K100LT



Yamaha Venture Royale

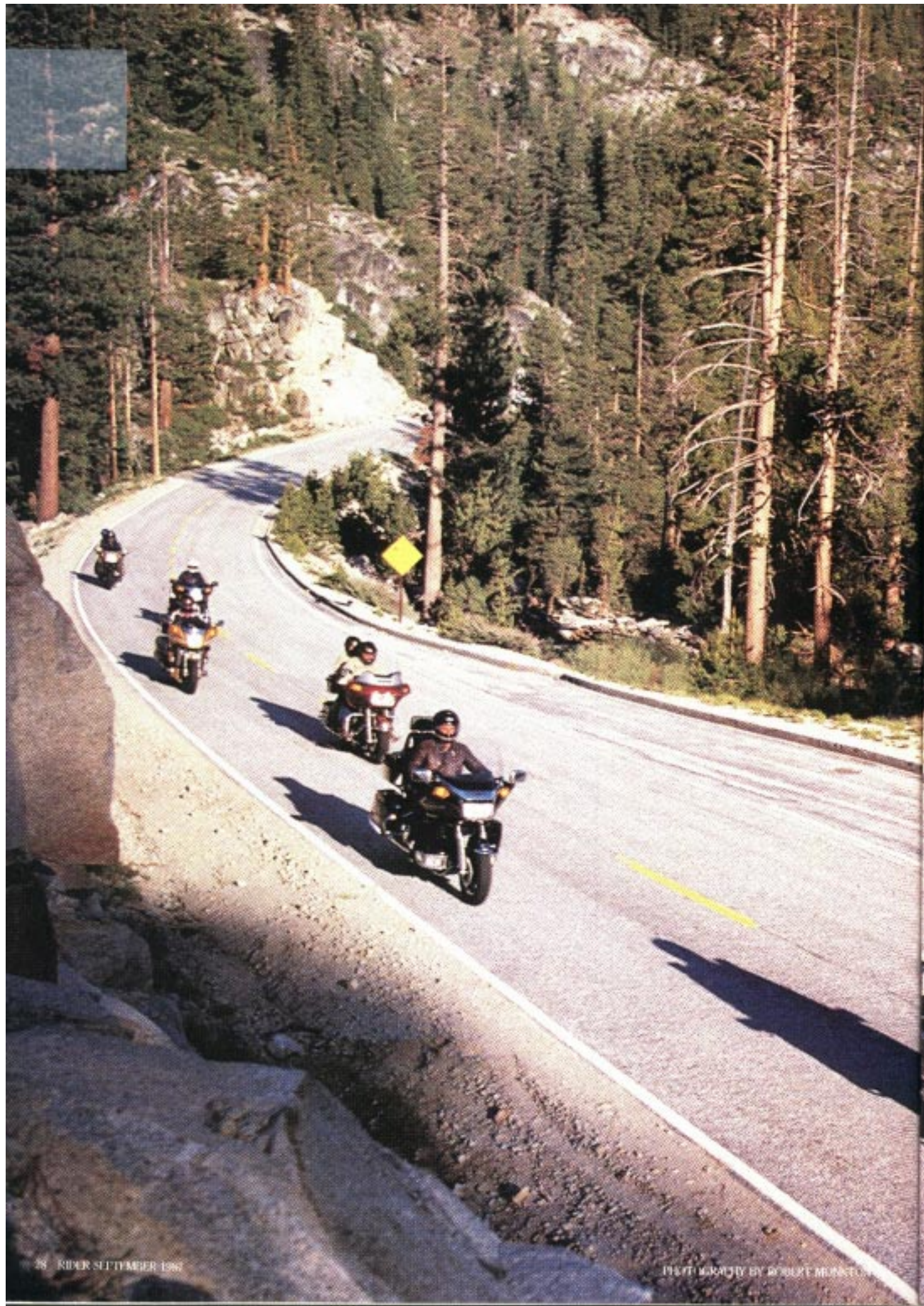


Kawasaki Voyager XII



Harley-Davidson FLT





Moving with the Maximum

These six feature-laden motorcycles from Kawasaki, Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Harley-Davidson and BMW prove that you *can* take it with you.

● Mark Tuttle Jr.





Far from urban hysteria, Tuolumne Meadows, Bridgeport and Lower Twin Lake prove the Sierras are still pristine.

The beckoning call of the French horns and clarinets in Tchaikovsky's *Andante Cantabile* lift and float me back to California's finest highway, twisting and turning, down through the coastal fog, past the reds, violets and greens of the hillsides covered with ice plant. Suddenly the Venture Royale and I are climbing the precipitous section of Highway 1 above Lucia. Lucia! How wonderful to be here again, and the bass drum agrees, thundering its *forte* rejoinder so as to drown out the crash of the surf hundreds of feet below. A footpeg touches tarmac, and as if on cue the remainder of the orchestra—brass, woodwinds, percussion, strings—begin the *crescendo* leading to the climax of the symphony. The fog thickens in a vertical wall to the left, and the powerful music no longer comes from the bike's stereo, but from the north, from the trees and open sky. Finally, with a crash of the cymbals the song is over, the strings plucking a *diminuendo* close to the symphony, until there's only wind noise and the hum of the bike's engine.

How beautiful, motorcycling, the music, this road. My gosh, this road! I stopped at a pullout on the coastal side of Highway 1 to wait for the rest of the group. When the rest of the bikes and riders on our six-bike comparison tour pulled in, it seemed to me that they, too, had this faraway, glassy look in their eyes, like they'd just bitten into a chocolate-covered cherry, or sunk into a hot, bubbling jacuzzi.

Associate Editor Jamie Elvidge was first on the new Honda Aspencade. Then Publisher Denis Rouse on a Harley-Davidson FLTC Tour Glide Classic, immediately followed by Editor Tash Matsuoka on the Suzuki Cavalcade LXE. Rider Club's Administrative Director Marvin Miller and his wife, Patty, on Kawasaki's Voyager XII were next, and finally, two good friends of the *Rider* staff, Mark and Helen Ferency, aboard a BMW K100LT. Only one person was missing; photographer Robert Monkton. But a few minutes later he blew by on the Harley FXRS-Sp we tested in the August issue of *Rider*, in search of locations on the road ahead.

Nine people in all, aboard seven bikes, six of them the 1987, fully equipped luxury touring machines from BMW, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Yamaha. Though rumors abound of a new Gold Wing for 1988, the current luxotourers seem to have reached a temporary peak in their development this year. What better time to take them all for a ride to see how they stack up against one another? Led by fearless Jamie "I didn't see the off ramp" Elvidge, our tour took us to the Monterey Peninsula that evening, then across central California to Yosemite National Park and June Lake the following day. From there it was a 350-mile straight shot home down U.S. Highway 395. One thousand miles in three days. Admittedly not the longest tour the *Rider* staff has undertaken, but it certainly turned out to be one of the most enjoyable and informative.

At the Highway 1 pullout, I looked for an explanation for that state of roadside bliss we currently shared. It certainly wasn't classical music for all of us; Denis, whose busy schedule often makes him the most appreciative of these short getaways, was listening to Patsy Cline wail *Blue Moon of Kentucky* on the FLTC's stereo. The Tour Glide Classic uses a frame-mounted fairing as opposed to the FLHTC Electra Glide Classic's handlebar-mounted unit, and a slightly different seat. This larger fairing provides a bit more protection than the traditional fork-mounted unit and has two built-in storage pockets. Like the FLHTC, the FLTC comes complete with four analog gauges and the H-D sound system. The powertrains are identical: air-cooled, 1,338cc, OHV, four-valve V-twin Evolution engine, with a five-speed transmission and belt final drive. Other features include air-adjustable suspension with anti-dive and rider and passenger floorboards. Even though it's Harley's most fully equipped model, the FLTC is the most spartan luxotourer of the six we tested. But at 779 pounds when full of gas, it's also second lightest, bested only by the 626-pound BMW K100LT.

Tash was riding the bike at the opposite end of the weight scale—Suzuki's Caval-

cade LXE. Not seeing that the group had pulled over, our editor rode past the pullout and then had a helluva time turning all 879 pounds of Suzuki's top-of-the-line tourer around. It's easy to see where the LXE gets its weight, though, because the bike fairly bristles with features. And not just for the pilot's pleasure. In addition to the usual luxu amenities, the Cavalcade LXE has adjustable air seats and backrests for the passenger as well as the rider. There's an adjustable headrest with twin rear stereo speakers, and the passenger floorboards tilt up and down lengthwise. Rubber-mounted handlebars and pilot footpegs help dampen vibration from the liquid-cooled, 1,360cc, DOHC, 16-valve V-four engine, which delivers power to the rear wheel through a five-speed transmission and shaft final drive.

Continuing up the coast toward Big Sur, we followed Highway 1 as it moves away from the water and becomes more circuitous, twisting and turning back on itself through dozens of fast, perfectly radiused corners. I had traded for the powerful Yamaha Venture Royale back at the last gas stop, and was enjoying the extra horsepower immensely. The Venture's liquid-cooled, 1,294cc, DOHC, 16-valve engine is by far the strongest of the six test bikes, but the bike is still in the feature hit parade. Unique to the Venture Royale is a CB radio as standard equipment. It also has adjustable air suspension with an on-board compressor that gives the operator a choice of manual or automatic control, electronic anti-dive and single-shock rear suspension with adjustable rebound damping. Last year Yamaha increased the capacity of the trunk and did away with the frustrating clamshell-type saddlebags, replacing them with the standard removable-lid type. This and some other changes raised the Royale's wet weight to 810 pounds, dead even with the Honda Aspencade and within six pounds of the Kawasaki Voyager XII.

Though it enjoyed a brief place in the lightweight limelight last year at 779 pounds, Kawasaki must have felt the need to add a few features to the Voyager XII, with an unavoidable increase in weight.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL STOUGHTON

For additional wind protection, removable flares have been added around the middle and lower sections of the fairing. There's a new cowl on the front of the engine, and a luggage rack and twin rear speakers grace the top of the trunk for the first time. The twin mufflers have dual, turned-down chrome tips, and cruise control is now standard. The liquid-cooled, 1,196cc, DOHC, 16-valve in-line four engine returns unchanged, with a five-speed transmission and shaft drive spinning the rear wheel.

Marvin and Patty were piloting the Voyager XII, and I was pleasantly surprised by the zeal with which the two of them took to their first *Rider* test tour. When you spend your week jumping on and off different test bikes, it's easy to forget that, for some, this process takes awhile to get used to. Each time we traded off, however, Marvin, a Cavalcade owner, attacked each new machine like he'd been riding it for some time. Mark and Helen Ferency, regularly Honda Interstate pilot and co-pilot, were equally as interested and excited with all the test bikes. The BMW K100LT especially represented a big change for Mark, accustomed as he is to the size and spaciousness of his Gold Wing.

We tested the K100LT recently (*Going for the Gold, June, 1987*) and it fared well by itself. By virtue of its price and the presence of a stereo, BMW has brought

the K100LT into the realm of the luxotourers, yet it is the smallest and lightest in this group by more than 150 pounds. Only a little less spartan than the Harley FLTC, the Beemer sports the familiar liquid-cooled, 987cc, DOHC, 8-valve, in-line flat four common to the K100 series. An auto-leveling Nivomat shock handles the suspension duties in the rear, and standard features like a top box, crash bars, alarm and special paint elevate the LT a notch above its RT sibling. Though each of the six test bikes takes its own direction with some unique aspect, the BMW represents one end of the originality scale, with the Honda Gold Wing on the other as the industry standard.

Two months earlier, Jamie had completed a test of the bare-bones Honda Interstate (see *Battle of the Basic Biggies, July 1987*). When the group stopped at Big Sur, we discussed some of the changes that have been made to the Aspencade. Since the SEi has been dropped, the Aspencade is once again the flagship of the Honda lineup. The list of improvements is short, however: a redesigned seat, new fairing lowers, and cruise control. Otherwise the bike remains surprisingly unchanged, retaining all of its familiar features. The venerable liquid-cooled, 1,182cc, SOHC, eight-valve opposed four still powers the machine, mated to a five-speed transmission and shaft drive. LED

instruments grace the instrument panel, and the air suspension settings can be changed with a manually controlled on-board compressor. Though the Gold Wing is still at the top of the touring bike sales chart, its engine performance is now close to the bottom of the luxo class. Perhaps the short list of improvements this year is a sign of things to come.

By the time we rolled into Monterey, both the BMW and the Harley had burned-out headlight bulbs. Replacing the Harley's wasn't critical since it has two, but the BMW doesn't share this luxury. The following morning we had no trouble finding bulbs for both bikes in Salinas, and pressed on for Yosemite. The temperature began to climb as we moved closer to central California on State Highway 120, making the smaller fairings of the BMW and the Harley the ones to be behind. This was not the case back on the coast, where the lower temperature made those two machines a chilly ride. The two fairings lack coverage in opposite respects, however. The Beemer has a small windscreen that is too close to the rider (our test bike came equipped with the shortest of three available windscreens for the K100LT), and the Harley lacks fairing lowers. The four Japanese bikes have venting in their full-coverage fairings to help alleviate some of the heat build-up behind them. This seems to be the best compromise. The



Honda's once-dominant Gold Wing failed to capture a single first place vote, but still managed a solid second overall.

Venture Royale has the best ventilation, with the rest about equal to one another.

With the coastal highway behind us, we had to drag the freeway for a while to reach scenic country again. In this environment two aspects rate above all others in importance: comfortable ergonomics and a quality sound system. Since my opinion of the first usually varies greatly from what Tash or Jamie like in a touring bike, I passed out questionnaires before we left to get the opinions of everyone on the tour. Analyzing the results proved interesting. Judging the rider's seat alone, most of the group picked the Harley-Davidson's, with the Suzuki's and Kawasaki's tied for second best. But when the question was lengthened to include the handlebars and footpegs, the Kawasaki easily trounced the competition. This is interesting for several reasons. While the BMW and Yamaha share seating positions well-suited to faster riding, the short seat-to-footpeg distance of each becomes somewhat cramped compared to the other bikes after extended time in the saddle. In addition, anyone with a longer inseam than myself—which was almost everyone on the tour—found themselves hemmed-in behind the fairing lowers of the BMW. Jamie, in particular, had difficulty getting her long legs out from behind the fairing at stops, bashing her knees against the outer lip as she swung them outward and down. The Honda's seat gets low marks because, although a brand-new design, it's hard and thin and lacks sufficient thigh support. Thanks to its comfy seat, short rides on the Harley are very comfortable. But since it has the most forward foot position and pullback handlebars, all but the tallest riders are constantly having to push themselves back in the seat to rest their arms.

The majority of the riders felt that the Kawasaki and Suzuki have the two most comfortable seats and seating positions for the pilot, the big Cavalcade losing points probably because of the sticky, vinyl material used in covering the seat and the tall seat height. Our two full-time passengers were divided on just which pillion was the plushiest, though judging by their verbal descriptions along the way, the Suzuki's air seat and backrest, adjustable headrest, floorboards and backrest was the favorite combination. The Yamaha was second, and though the Harley lacks any adjustability, its passenger seat and backrest came in third, followed by those on the Kawasaki, Honda and BMW.

Passengers on the Suzuki and Kawasaki are also treated to rear speakers this year. With the fader control set to divide the sound half-front and half-rear on each of these bikes, the available volume is cut in half at each pair of speakers. The effect on the Kawasaki is minimal, since it has plenty of available volume to work with. But on the Suzuki when the music's split neither rider nor passenger can hear the

FEATURES LIST

STANDARD FEATURES	BMW	HARLEY- DAVIDSON	HONDA	KAWASAKI	SUZUKI	YAMAHA
AM/FM stereo cassette:	●*	●	●	●	●	●
CB radio						●
Rear speakers				●	●	
Automatic volume control		●	●	●	●	●
Mute switch			●	●	●	●
Intercom/headset wiring			●	●	●	●
Passenger remote for all above				●	●	●
Hydraulic valve lash control		●	●	●	●	
Anti-dive		●	●			●
Self-canceling turn signals	●		●	●	●	●
Turning lights			●		●	
Cruise control			●	●	●	●
Auto-leveling rear suspension	●				●*1	
Adjustable air suspension		●	●	●	●*2	●
Manually controlled suspension air compressor			●			●
Computer-controlled suspension air compressor					●*2	●
Auxiliary air outlet			●			
Adjustable rear suspension rebound damping				●		●
Adjustable pilot seat (fore & aft)			●			
*3 Adjustable pilot backrest (fore & aft)				●		
Adjustable passenger floorboards					●	
*3 Adjustable passenger seat (fore & aft)				●		
Adjustable passenger backrest (fore & aft)				●	●	●
Adjustable air seats & backrests (pilot & passenger)					●	
Adjustable headrest (passenger)					●	
Adjustable windscreen			●	●	●	
Trunk light			●	●	●	●
Trunk vanity mirror			●	●	●	●
Clock	●	●	●	●	●	●
Alarm system	●					

* Receiver/cassette player optional but included in price as tested

*1 Must be activated by operator

*2 Rear only

*3 Adjustable separately from pilot seat

SUZUKI CAVALCADE LX

Retail Price:	\$10,699	Wet Weight:	879 lbs.
Engine Type:	Liquid-cooled DOHC transverse 82-degree V-four	Load Capacity:	441 lbs.
Displacement:	1,360cc	GVWR:	1,320 lbs.
Wheelbase:	65.7 in.	Fuel Capacity:	6.1 gal.
Seat Height:	30.8 in.	Average MPG:	37.5

KAWASAKI VOYAGER XII

Retail Price:	\$8,099	Wet Weight:	804 lbs.
Engine Type:	Liquid-cooled DOHC transverse in-line four	Load Capacity:	437 lbs.
Displacement:	1,196cc	GVWR:	1,241 lbs.
Wheelbase:	63.8 in.	Fuel Capacity:	6.1 gal.
Seat Height:	29.7 in.	Average MPG:	45.0

HARLEY-DAVIDSON FLTC **(TOUR GLIDE CLASSIC)**

Retail Price:	\$10,395	Wet Weight:	779 lbs.
Engine Type:	Air-cooled OHV transverse 45-degree V-twin	Load Capacity:	401 lbs.
Displacement:	1,338cc	GVWR:	1,180 lbs.
Wheelbase:	62.9 in.	Fuel Capacity:	5 gal.
Seat Height:	29.6 in.	Average MPG:	42.1

BMW K100LT

Retail Price:	\$9,455	Wet Weight:	626 lbs.
Engine Type:	Liquid-cooled DOHC longitudinal in-line flat four	Load Capacity:	432 lbs.
Displacement:	987cc	GVWR:	1,058 lbs.
Wheelbase:	59.7 in.	Fuel Capacity:	5.5 gal.
Seat Height:	31.9 in.	Average MPG:	43.7

HONDA ASPENCADE

Retail Price:	\$8,498	Wet Weight:	810 lbs.
Engine Type:	Liquid-cooled SOHC longitudinal opposed four	Load Capacity:	385 lbs.
Displacement:	1,182cc	GVWR:	1,195 lbs.
Wheelbase:	63.4 in.	Fuel Capacity:	5.8 gal.
Seat Height:	30.7 in.	Average MPG:	36.9

YAMAHA VENTURE ROYALE

Retail Price:	\$8,799	Wet Weight:	810 lbs.
Engine Type:	Liquid-cooled DOHC transverse 90-degree V-four	Load Capacity:	358 lbs.
Displacement:	1,294cc	GVWR:	1,168 lbs.
Wheelbase:	63.4 in.	Fuel Capacity:	5.3 gal.
Seat Height:	30.9 in.	Average MPG:	39.8





Five of our six pilots gave the number one ranking to the Kawasaki Voyager XII.

music with a helmet on at any speed above 30 mph or so. It's best just to set the faders so that the front speakers get full power; at least that way one person can enjoy the sound. Judged with just the two front speakers, the Kawasaki is the clearest, best-sounding unit, but for sheer volume the Harley also takes high marks. When the Honda's system was working—it gave us some intermittent trouble shortly after the start of the ride—it and the Yamaha are about tied for sound reproduction. This is where I have to draw the line between serious stereo and *poseur*, however, because the BMW and Suzuki just aren't putting out the kind of sound you'd expect for the money.

Another aspect of freeway comfort important to some is cruise control. All of the Japanese luxotourers are so equipped this year, and all of those—with the exception of the Suzuki—have an accel/decel function that allows you to increase or decrease your speed in small increments. The Suzuki's must be reset at a higher speed once it's reached, or cancelled and reset at a lower one. The Honda and Kawasaki cruise controls work the

most smoothly, with little jerkiness as the units self-adjust for hills. The Yamaha's often varies by as much as five mph in either direction, and does it with big jerks as it slows and speeds up. If you favor minimalism, you'll like the Harley; it has a simple screw that locks the throttle in position or puts some tension on it to take some of the effort out of holding the throttle on.

As we neared Yosemite, the terrain became more hilly and forested, and the weather cooled a little from the 90 degrees or so that we had been enduring all day. By this time I had taken a stint on all six bikes, and even though I've ridden them all many times before, it never ceases to amaze me just how different they all are. Each engine, for example, has a distinct personality, enough so that an experienced ear can recognize each bike by its sound alone. As is appropriate for a touring bike, each pulls well down low. It isn't until the revs start to climb that the power disparities begin to show. The hot-rod Venture Royale is the quickest and fastest of the bunch, but the smooth, turbinelike in-line four of the Kawasaki is strong

enough to place it just shortly behind. The Suzuki could hold this spot if it weren't for the bike's enormous weight; its V-four, an enlarged version of the 1200 Madura motor, is also very strong. After these three the BMW stands alone in fourth, though the autobahn burner probably trounces all the other luxotourers in top speed, a contest we chose not to hold on this trip. Slowly, but doggedly, bringing up the rear are the Honda and Harley, in that order. Though certainly the slowest in this comparison, the Harley's loping V-twin would easily win any personality contest among the group.

Even after you take away the powerplants, however, there are still many differences among the six machines (see the features breakdown on page 32). Take luggage, for example. The BMW's detachable saddlebags and top box are considerably smaller than those on the five full-sized bikes, so packing for a longer tour could prove difficult. Though all six have some form of built-in storage pocket or pockets in the fairing, only the Japanese machines have convenience pockets for the passenger. Triple disc brakes are standard on

all six, but only the Harley, Honda and Yamaha have some form of anti-dive control. Features limited to the Japanese machines include a mute switch for the stereo, intercom/headset wiring, a trunk light and trunk vanity mirror. The BMW and Yamaha lack the hydraulic valve lash control of the other four, but only the BMW has an alarm, and only the Yamaha a CB radio.

A careful look at the features of each bike and their prices should tell the conservative rider which is right for him. And if power is a concern, than this will help by narrowing the field even further. But what about handling? Or even more importantly, overall *balance*? Here no questionnaires were needed. Thanks in part to its light weight and smaller size, the BMW is easily the best handling of the six machines, at any velocity except walking speed, where its soft front suspension does a sharp nose dive every time the brakes are applied. At lower speeds the Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki and Harley are about on par, with excellent low speed maneuverability and predictable steering and suspension reaction. In fact, the only thing that really separates those four bikes at speeds up to 60 or so is their available ground clearance, a comparison of which puts them in the above best to worst order. The Suzuki is just fine as long as the pace is sedate, but put some verve in your riding style and its weight makes it a ponderous perch. Its rubber mounting at the handlebars and footpegs and a seat full of air also give the handling a vague feeling, like the rider isn't connected to the bike in any way.

Raise the speed somewhat, like we were tempted to do most of the length of sweeping Highway 120 through Yosemite National Park, and more differences in handling among the six emerge. The Bimmer is still clearly out in front, but the Honda isn't far behind, remaining surprisingly stable and easy to steer up to speeds that would get me all kinds of hate mail if I mentioned them. The rest of the motorcycles begin to act more like pickup trucks at those velocities, weavin' and a wobblin' and dragging solid parts on the pavement with all kinds of noise and bother.

As we made our way home from June Lake on Highway 395 on the last day of our ride, I think it was pretty obvious to all of us which bike had earned the top spot. While the BMW K100LT is an able handler, it is still better suited to the speed, shorter distances, aggressiveness and perhaps lighter loads of the German touring rider. If you don't mind working a little harder to stay with the pack, the Harley-Davidson FLTC is, in Tash's words, "antiquated but adorable." Most of us felt that it needs some well-integrated fairing lowers before it can be judged further. The Suzuki Cavalcade LXE is certainly the king of the Interstate, a Cadillac on two wheels, if you will. But like that road-going vessel,

the LXE is not so friendly when the highway has to make directional changes, or it comes time to park. Though it may seem like a minor point, the Yamaha Venture Royale is probably only relegated to third because of its cramped seat-to-footpeg distance. The chassis still needs some stiffening to handle the upper-limit abilities of the sporty engine, but it handles as well as the first and second place bikes in normal touring conditions.

On the long, hot ride home, then, it came down to a nit-picking contest between the Honda Aspencade and Kawasaki Voyager XII. While the poor seat on the Gold Wing can't compare with that on the Voyager, the Wing has an alternative resting place for the rider's feet on the cylinder head crash bars. The Voyager lacks the Gold Wing's on-board compressor for the suspension, so its suspension must be adjusted with a hand pump and gauge when

your load changes. But once adjusted, the Voyager's ride is better than the Wing's. The Wing has more ground clearance, the Voyager more power. But wait a minute—something's happening here. The Voyager's stereo is better, its trunk adjusts fore and aft and there's a passenger remote for the stereo. Its saddlebags detach, the rebound damping in the rear shocks is adjustable and it doesn't have integrated brakes like the Honda, which most experienced riders despise. Finally, the Voyager got the best gas mileage of the trip—an even 45 mpg—while the Honda got the worst: 36.9. Oh, yeah, and I almost forgot—take a quick look at the retail prices of the bikes on their specification charts. Perhaps the 1988 Honda Gold Wing will be good enough to warrant a rematch, but for now the superior features and lower price tag of the Kawasaki Voyager XII earn it the title of champion luxotourer. □



Helping Hands

Motorcycle testing isn't all glamour and glory. Sometimes, the motorcycles threaten to become just machines and the tours merely tests. An activity that is usually a beloved pastime erodes into another one of those things that has to get done before the next deadline. For the busy staff at *Rider*, taking a tour with four enthusiastic non-testers was just the right medicine.

Long-time motorcycle tourer, Marvin Miller, recently took the helm at Rider Club. His wife Patty devotes an astounding amount of her free time and energy to last-minute *Roamin' Wyoming Rally* preparations. Marv was the only rider who didn't agree that the Kawasaki was the best of the biggest, "It just doesn't have any intriguing qualities." The Suzuki Cavalcade owner was instead attracted to the Venture Royale for its sporty character.

He picked the Cavalcade second, by the way.

Also joining us on the test were Mark and Helen Ferency. When the duo isn't riding two-up on their 1983 Gold Wing, Mark uses it to commute to his job at Universal Studios. The easygoing Ferencys jumped from bike to bike like old pros, and their entirely unjaded opinions proved invaluable. "Changing bikes every couple of hours like that was kind of tough at first," Mark said. "But after the first day, I really enjoyed it." Though they enjoyed their examination of the latest and greatest, their toy Tazmanian Devil will remain on the antenna of their Wing.

Riding with this quartet gave the 1987 version of the luxotourer comparison test a new and valuable dimension. And it made for a tour the *Rider* staff will fondly remember for a long, long time. □