

**Motor Cycle News June 19, 2002**  
**Road Test**

**New Pan takes on its Touring Rivals**

First group test pitches ST1300 against the fast and agile FJR and weather-beating R1150RT in a 1000-mile two-up test to the vineyards of Champagne

They're out of tune but the lyrics crackling through my intercom are particularly apt. One of my touring buddies is bellowing that famous Travis question "Why does it always rain on me?" as the Heavens open up and the tentative trickle becomes an all-consuming downpour.

We're on the M11 heading for Dover to cross to Calais and the deluge has caught me unawares.

Cordura-clad MCN man Dale Lomas and girlfriend Vicky Brierley are tucked behind the new ST1300 Pan European's giant fairing. They're not bothered by the storm.

National 250 class racer and MCN tester Bruce Dunn is on his own and shifts uncomfortably on the seat of the FJR1300. He's already wearing waterproofs but the strength of the rain is forcing moisture where the sun doesn't shine. The FJR could do with a bigger fairing at a time like this.

I'm on BMW's R1150RT and, remarkably, remaining pretty dry, even though I'm only wearing leathers. I stop to put on my waterproofs, then realise girlfriend Sarah Williams has forgotten hers in the rush to get going.

She sits on the back, squirming in anticipation of the soaking she's going to receive. Amazingly, 10 miles on, as the rain eases, then stops, she's still completely bone-dry. She's thin, I'm broad and that, coupled with the BMW's bamdoor fairing, has deflected everything around her.

Relieved, she coos: "This bike's quite good. But I'd rather be touring on a Fireblade." Sarah is sports bike-mad... and brutally honest. But then, you wouldn't want anything less from an MCN pillion.

It's 5pm on Friday, we've hit the M25's rush-hour queues and traffic has slowed to a trickle.

We lower our speed to 40mph and begin a 12-mile filter south to the Dartford Crossing. All three of us slice and squeeze between cars, taxis, lorries, buses and police cars plodding (ho ho) along at 10mph.

We've taken all three bikes as they come as standard, which means the FJR isn't fitted with its optional-extra panniers. Being considerably thinner than the other two as a result, the Yamaha begins to pull out a lead.

The R1150RT and the Pan are roughly the same width with their bulbous boxes in place, though the Honda's, at least, are colour-coded and look like an integral part of the bike. The BMW's look like afterthoughts by comparison.

A couple of gaps simply look too narrow to squeeze through and I get frustrated. Bikes are about progress, not doubling up as a two-wheeled car.

But a quick check with my passenger gets us going again.

"There's at least half-a-foot either side. The panniers aren't

as wide as you think” she informs.

I barrel through the next narrow opening, half-closing my eyes in expectation of a rude awakening and a sudden halt. It never comes and I begin to recalibrate my brain to the size of this leviathan.

The BMW doesn't feel small, nimble or light which is unsurprising, as it is none of the above.

And it has already scored a big black mark in my book by coming with a plastic fuel tank cover, which means my magnetic tankbag won't go on. Neither will a conventional tie-on one. The tank and fairing join so well there are no gaps to slop a tie through – anywhere.

If you want one, you've got to fit BMW's own official accessory at 114.90 (English Pounds).

My tankbag is on the Pan. Lomas and Brierly are traveling comparatively light, so they haven't got one of their own.

As we stop at the Crossing entrance, Lomas whines: “Bloody tankbag's coming off.”

“Why? Are the magnets slipping?” I ask.

“No” he replies. “The tank's too short, which means the tankbag fouls the handlebars every time I turn them. It's a bit of an oversight.”

What was Honda thinking? I've got a relatively small tankbag but anything much bigger simply wouldn't fit on the Pan's tank at all.

Ironically, given its emphasis on sports-touring than touring, the FJR1300 is carrying Dunn's monster tankbag without fuss. It's the only bike capable of such a simple task without complaint.

With no panniers onboard, he's filled his tankbag to capacity, then added a little bit more. It looks like a fabric version of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

The BMW's brakes are driving me mad. They're servo-assisted, which means a resulting noise like a windshield washer motor or hamster in a vice every time they're applied. It begins the instant you apply either the front or rear and continues until you let go.

Holding on to them at a slight gradient like when you're stopped at a traffic lights on a hill is nothing short of a ball-ache.

My sentiments are later echoed by Dunn, who wants to remove the motor and go back to the days of putting a stick between the spokes to slow down.

“It's driving me barmy” he says.

Lomas looks perplexed after his ride. “It's so intrusive, I can hear it for ages after I've let the brakes off” he says. “It's like when a police siren goes screaming by and your brain still thinks you can hear it long after it's gone out of range.”

The idea is extra braking power, in tandem with BMW's proven anti-lock system. And it's fair to say the bike is over-braked, particularly at the rear.

A small dab on the brake pedal can catch you unawares at low speed in town, turning 20mph into a near stop, instead of the 10mph you were aiming for. It makes rear brake-controlled feet-up U-turns difficult, too. The feel at the lever is wooden and bague despite all the stopping power.

The FJR's brakes, in contrast, offer loads of feel, much like a sports bike's. They're also powerful and predictable, though not ABS-assisted.

The Pan's are the best in this company, offering precise, strong control, ABS, little fade, and a predictable, functional rear brake. The linked brakes, which have the back partially operating the front and the front bringing the rear into play, too, suits this kind of bike far better than some of the sportier models it has adorned in Honda's range.

We reach Calais after an uneventful crossing on the P&O ferry (details of MCN, p52) and swap bikes.

The Pan's in disgrace. It needs a bump start after the battery's gone dead.

Lomas blames a low charge to begin with, though night riding and headlights to get here can't have helped.

The bike starts first push and I resolve to up my cardio gym work from five minutes a week to at least an hour.

The French peage a few miles down the road is utterly deserted and we set about recording top speeds.

As a cop once said to me: "Speeding isn't the problem. Inappropriate speeding is. Gatsos can't catch drunk drivers."

Quite right! A wide open two-lane motorway without slip-roads or traffic is ideal for letting loose.

The FJR, with Lomas and pillion onboard, wastes no time pullin out a significant lead. Rolling on at 80mph gives it a 70 metre advantage over the Pan by the time 135mph appears on the speedo. The Pan is another 150meters ahead of the BMW, which noticeably lacks power in this company.

We later coax the FJR to a best indicated speed of 162mph two-up with the electrically operated screen fully down. Pillions struggle to hold on. With the screen up, there's a lot of wind-buffetting but it's not overly uncomfortable for rider or passenger. The bike manages an indicated 155mph in this mode.

The Pan, screen down, shows 154mph and is hitting the rev limiter in top. Screen up, it clocks 144mph.

The BMW is struggling. With only Dunn onboard, it clocks 141mph screen down and just 130mph screen up. With a pillion onboard, it won't best 135mph and 125mph respectively.

On the motorway, the Pan is king, thanks to its huge screen, wide fairing and a riding position that's better than the BMW or FJR's.

But it's the only bike to weave at speed, too. Lomas first noticed it at 100mph, as his passenger tightened her grip and urged him to slow down.

I got a repeat performance two-up several times at 120mph.

It's not dangerous, it's too gentle for that, but it shouldn't be there. A bit of experimentation showed it only occurs when the screen's up, a passenger's onboard and the panniers are full. Removing any one of the three solves the problem.

Whether a change from the stock and superbly grippy Bridgestone BT020's will help, and whether or not the problem will get worse as the tyres wear flat from high motorway miles will be addressed in the coming weeks and months in MCN. We've got a long term test Pan and it's one of the first things we'll be looking at.

We arrive in France's Champagne region, three refills, three hours and 300 miles later. It's 11am and the sun is baking the vineyards which surround us in every direction.

The Pan and FJR will cruise happily at 120mph, the BMW at closer to 105mph.

After hours of straightline no-braining, we're rewarded with 180-degree bends taken at 90mph, hairpins, kinks and esses. Best of all, there's still no traffic. Everyone must be watching the World Cup.

I score the first goal, decking the underside of the FJR out in a shower of sparks around a long, uphill, right-hander.

To be fair, the suspension could do with a tinker. The front is spot on and the Metzeler MEZ4 adorning it is showing signs of scrubbing up.

But the rear is struggling for grip, not because of it's compound, but because of the settings on the shock.

We measure the travel and static sag – two determining points for the spring preload. They're fine. The rear also feels like it has too much compression damping. It's kicking off bumps. Ironically, given the fact the FJR is the most adjustable bike here – you can tinker with the front pre-load, as well as compression and rebound damping – the rear is only adjustable for pre-load via a sliding hard-soft remote lever, and rebound damping, with the aid of a screw driver. The crucial compression damping is sadly lacking.

I do the next best thing and stick my pillion back onboard. At seven stone (98lb), she's ideal for compressing the rear just that fraction more without over-powering it.

The skitting disappears and my best speed through the sweeper rises from 90mph solo to 98mph two-up. Many owners feel the rear spring isn't strong enough for two-up on the FJR, but for me, the real solution would be to reduce the compression... If only I could prove it by giving it a try.

The Pan and BMW offer much less adjustment. There's none at the front, which isn't a problem as both feel fine on all types of road, and only a spring pre-load and rebound damping at the rear (like the FJR).

The Pan just beats the BMW because it's got a large, remote adjuster for the pre-load, making fine-tuning effortless. Rebound damping comes courtesy of pushing a flat blade screwdriver through a hole in the bodywork, into a slot in the shock's body. On the BMW, it's screwdriver through holes time when adjusting both.

The move to country roads resulted in the BMW shedding its front mudguard. Three of the four bolts holding the front portion vibrated loose. The mudguard began to breakdance

around its fourth bolt. We removed it using the standard tool kit.

Suddenly streams of traffic joined us highlighting a major Pan deficiency – massive blindspots in the mirrors.

The problem is the taper on the lower outside edge of each mirror. It's overly steep, which means a big lump of what would be handy rear view isn't available. It's presumably been done to curtail the overall frontal width.

The BMW is a touch wider and a touch better at offering weather protection to the rider's body as a result. Honda could widen the Pan an inch either side, improving protection and introducing a proper rear view, too.

Honda needs to reposition the hazard light switch too (all the bikes have one). It's set off by the back of the rider's glove almost every time he resets the trip meter above it on the left side of the fairing.

And, in fully extended mode, there's a small gap between the electrically-operated screen and the top of the fairing. Wind blast gets through and causes chin-piece buffeting for those in the 5'7" tall ballpark. That's a shame as the screen is the best of the three otherwise.

Yamaha could widen and raise its screen, too. It's more than a token effort but not enough for serious all-weather touring.

A ride through town highlighted a small problem with the BMW. Low speed roll-ons in top gear caused the engine to ping and detonate. It suggests the fueling isn't quite correct. A change to 98 ron unleaded instead of more conventional 95 cured it, but the bike shouldn't need it.

The trip back to England ended as predictably as it began – with a massive downpour 100 miles from Calais.

This time I was on the FJR and my passenger did get soaked. The difference between the weather protection, as well as the capabilities of these bikes is immense.

### **The Verdict**

Nothing is perfect, our three contenders are no different.

The BMW needs 10 more horsepower. It goes noticeably better solo and struggles a bit two-up, especially in this company. The bike also needs an inch or two more on the screen. It has the best body protection thanks to the wide fairing but it's not the best for the facial area. We also reckon it would benefit from a better riding position.

The three-position seat adjustment is a great idea and putting it to the highest setting gave me an ideal bum-to-leg differential. The only problem was, I can't touch the floor when it's like that. The seat is so wide, anyone with a sub-31 inch inside leg will struggle. Lowering to either of the other two settings meant my leg was bent just a fraction too much – something all our riders remarked on. It's okay for 150 miles at a time, but 1000 miles in two days, like we did, highlighted the shortcoming. At least I could put both feet on the ground again.

The stretch between fifth and sixth (economy) gear is also a bit wide. It does wonders for fuel consumption (24mpg flat out, 44mpg at legal speeds), but means a change down is in order for some overtakes. The digital readout relaying what

gear you're in is a nice touch. None of the others have one.

The FJR is in another league in performance terms and is certainly the most exciting bike of the test. But the rear's too firm and the fairing and screen aren't up to a serious touring role. It's more pan-country than pan-european.

Widen the fairing three inches, fit bigger mirrors, a four-inch taller and three-inch wider screen and Yamaha would be far more in the ballpark. An ABS option would be nice, as would panniers as standard.

Other wanna-haves include a lockable fairing pocket, gear position indicator and a fractionally wider seat. The riding position is fine.

It's a great bike as it is but if Yamaha wants to tempt would-be BMW and Pan owners a shift in focus towards touring could pay dividends.

The FJR managed 18mpg flat out and 45mpg at legal speeds, which ain't bad for a 145bhp bike.

The new Pan has been a long time coming and has created more interest in the form of letters and e-mails from readers than any bike we can remember.

People have been asking when it would finally go on sale, how much it would actually cost and... how it ranked against rivals. We know the interest is going to stay and that's why we've got one on our long term test fleet.

And Yes, in this company and in this arena, it is the best bike, just as the outgoing ST1100 was. But Honda needs to sort those mirrors and high speed weave, reposition the hazard light, close the gap between the fairing upper and screen lower, and make the panniers as easy to remove and refit as the BMW's. Only then will the Pan be everything could be. Buyers might need to be well-heeled, though. The fuel consumption of 17mpg flat out and 42mpg at legal speeds is the worst here. One run up the peage had the Honda diving for the nearest petrol station after just 80 mad miles – not good for a continent-crossing tourer.

Sarah Williams is seven stone and just five feet tall. She loves sports bikes but has ridden pillion on a wide variety of bikes. Vicky Brierly is our second pillion. She is 5'6" and weighs around 12 stone. She's also been on the back of a wide range of machines. Here's what each had to say of their time on board on the 1000 mile trip through France.

### **FJR1300**

Sarah: There's a bit of vibration at middle revs and it's almost impossible to hold on to the grabrails when the screen's down at 150mph. In fact, it almost ripped my head off after Farr forgot to put the screen up and went haring down the peage in search of a GSX-R1000. Weather protection is crap but the seat and the sitting position are both comfortable.

Vicky: The seat was too small for me. I didn't find it comfortable and it's hard work to hold on. It's fine as a sports bike but below par as a tourer. Weather protection is poor.

### **R1150RT**

Sarah: It's got amazing weather protection and it's exceptionally comfortable but it does need heel plates to compliment the footpegs. The others have got them. The

fairing is so wide I didn't even get wet in a downpour. There's a bit of vibration at town speeds and it's hard to climb on to gracefully because the panniers are so big. I got bored though because the engine lacks power. There's no snap to it.

Vicky: I thought the seat was actually too wide, splaying my legs like a trainee gynaecologist, which wasn't comfortable. I noticed low-speed vibrations and was a bit disappointed with the performance.

### **Pan European**

Sarah: This has the best combination of protection, comfort and performance but, after being on the FJR, it felt a little slow. I wasn't happy with the weaves. A couple of them were very noticeable on the back. The fairing could be wider - it's noticeably colder sitting on the back of this than the BMW. Then again it is on a Blade, too.

Vicki: I loved it. It was virtually vibration free and very comfortable. I had no problem doing hundreds of miles at a time. But I got very nervous when the bike went into a weave and did want Lomas to slow down.

### **European Price** (in British pounds):

BMW: 9550

FJR: 9599

ST: 10599/11599 w/abs

### **Top Speed:**

BMW: 135 indicated, 125 True

FJR: 162 indicated, 150 true

ST: 154 indicated 140 true

### **Fuel Mileage/Range:**

BMW: 44mpg, 230 miles

FJR: 45mpg, 235 miles

ST: 42mpg, 250 miles

### **Engine**

BMW: 87% Twin without grunt

FJR: 94% Power and torque galore

ST: 94% V4 big bore smooth

### **Handling**

BMW: 85% Slow turner

FJR: 89% Overdamped rear shock

ST: 89% Fine bar that weaves at speed

### **Braking**

BMW: 89% Rear can be too fierce

FJR: 92% Brilliant stoppers in R1 style

ST: 91% Great control and power

### **Comfort**

BMW: 92% amazing and dry

FJR: 88% screen could be higher

ST: 92% A hit with you and your pillion

### **Grin Factor**

BMW: 92% Old ones aren't always the best

FJR: 96% Loves back roads

ST: 95% Tour-ific

### **Overall**

BMW: 86% Still Capable

FJR: 88% Sporting Option

ST: 90% Best in Class

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