

Bike The test

Not so much off road as any road. The four best bikes in the world to get lost on. U-turns in rush-hour, 'Italian Job' urban adventures — just don't call them trail bikes

WORDS BY STEVE ROSE PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHIPPY WOOD (ACTION), TOM CRITCHELL (STUDIO)

Road testers



JONATHAN PEARSON, 28
Experience
Off-road expert, equally good on tarmac. Prefers sports bikes and will compromise comfort for pinpoint steering any day.



BEN MILLER, 24
Experience
Riding for four years, owns an RVF400, runs a BMW GS for *Bike*. Getting faster by the day. Yet to be convinced these are his kind of bike.



STEVE ROSE, 38
Experience
Riding for 18 years. As impressed by real world ability as lap times. Has ridden more than 50,000 miles on the R1100GS and R1150GS alone.



DAN WALSH, 30
Experience
Riding for ten years, ex-courier, current adventurer. Rode around Africa on an XT600. Open-minded, opinionated, always entertaining.



Suzuki DL1000 V-Strom

997cc, £7350

Detuned TL1000 engine in a softly-prung alloy chassis with wide bars. Sounds like a bonkers factory streetfighter, but they dressed it up to look like a trailie. Oops, there, we've said it.
Last tested April 2002



BMW R1150GS

1130cc, £7600

Oldest bike in class and the best-selling by miles. The big GS blows BMW's old-bloke image into the weeds by being utterly mad and eminently sensible at the same time.
Last tested Oct 2001

Triumph 955i Tiger

955cc, £7599

Latest version has the full 955cc engine and a host of chassis improvements. Three-cylinder motor is detuned for the Tiger, but still the most powerful engine here.
Last tested Oct 2001

Yamaha TDM900

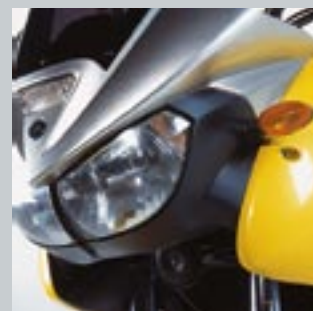
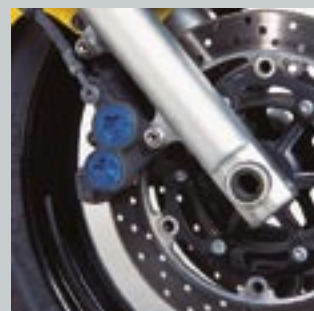
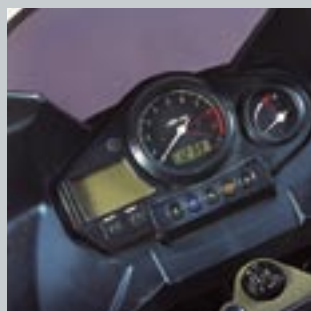
897cc, £6799

Third-generation TDM gets more cc's and fuel injection. The TDM was Yamaha's most changed model for this year, despite the R1 getting all the headlines.
Last tested April 2002

YAMAHA TDM900

Price **£6799** power **73.8bhp** top speed **138.7mph** Average mpg **40**

the test



IN THE DETAILS...
(from left): new instruments now have a clock and an accurate fuel gauge; brake calipers are same as the R1, better than the forks and tricky to get the best out of; great looks, distinctive styling but possibly the worst headlights in biking. Unbelievable on a 130mph bike.

IT STARTS INNOCENTLY ENOUGH. Nipping up a kerb to turn left out of the chaos. Down a side road, rejoin the main drag half-a-mile further along. Before you know it, you're thrashing down cycle routes, across footbridges and generally using everything but the main roads. Illegal? Yes, but small potatoes next to wasting large parts of the Middle East just to please your dad. Let's call it mischievous instead. If any bike sums up the spirit of this test, it's the TDM. For those who ride as much in town as out of it, this is the tool. So easy to ride, so much fun. Traffic-busting needs a low seat, but good visibility and skinny flanks. The TDM ticks every box. Give it some gas and hope you can measure a gap.

Power delivery is instant, perhaps a bit too instant at low revs. Yamaha is a relative newcomer to fuel injection and I'd

say it still has some work to do on the TDM. Occasional low-speed stalling was blamed on the race cans on our bike.

The TDM has never had the best gearchange and you need to work it hard in town, which exaggerates the snatchiness. Motorway cruising is easy enough at a steady 80-90mph, but 50 miles is enough to encourage a peek at the map for more interesting roads. It's the least like a trail bike – more Bandit than berm-buster. "The perfect hangover bike," reckoned Ben after 80 miles with a particularly heavy one. "Roomy, relaxing and no false knobbly pretensions."

Performance is on a par with a 600 Bandit, too. The TDM accelerates hard but runs out of puff too soon to go chasing Fazers and Hornets, never mind a GSX-R600.

Most owners won't care (have you ever tried to get a



Performance criteria for the test are all out of five:

★ rubbish ★★ average
★★★ good ★★★★★ superb
★★★★★ exceptional

ENGINE & GEARBOX | ★★★

Parallel twin with a funny firing order that feels (a bit) like a vee. Six close ratios replace the old bike's five widely-spaced ones in the smoother-to-use gearbox.

CHASSIS | ★★★

Alloy frame, revised suspension and ex-R1 brakes. Could be better. Smooth riding helps, but soft front end can feel ragged and out of control if you ride it by the scruff of the neck.

VALUE | ★★★★★

Cheapest here and there are deals available. Looks expensive next to a Fazer 600 (never mind the Fazer 1000), which is a better all-rounder. But the TDM is a different proposition.

FINISH | ★★★★★

Much better than the old TDM850. Stainless exhaust, alloy frame and paint appear more robust. Mild steel suspension linkage will rust as quick as the old one.

WOW FACTOR | ★★★★★

Still surprisingly good. Other bikes have caught up with the TDM's radical styling but, as a package, the Yamaha has the edge.

TOTAL | ★★★

Revamp addresses most of the old bike's problems. But the TDM is no longer the leader in a class of one.

GSX-R up a flight of steps?). Performance on a TDM is defined by sharp barks of acceleration, making an entrance, hauling hard on those excellent former-R1 brakes and bugging off, chuckling at another old-enough-to-know-better moment. Measure the 900 by normal performance criteria and it comes up short. Measure it in GPM (grins per minute) or motorists mumbling "I'm gonna have to get one of those" and the story will be somewhat different.

Out in the bends you choose hanging off or hanging in there, while the soft suspension sorts itself out. Ground clearance is just about up to the job and the more gently you can transfer weight on to the front end, the cleaner your boxers will remain. Of course, to anyone who rode the original TDM, this is handling with a capital H. The third-

generation bike feels like it has evolved. Like Honda's VFR, except the original TDM needed more developing to start with. They still haven't sorted the headlights. Dim to the point of being dangerous at night and nowhere near bright enough to scatter pedestrians, prams and schoolkids (only joking) while you turn the shopping mall into a short cut.

Dan loved it, Jon nicked the keys at every opportunity and Ben reckoned it just needed skate stickers and a set of Renthals to make it perfect.

Defining moment of the test? Me and JP stuck at a railway crossing. Been there ten minutes, and trials-rider JP on the TDM is looking at the steeply-stepped footbridge. If the barriers hadn't lifted I swear he would have done it.

Try that on your VFR.

BMW R1150GS



IN THE DETAILS...
(from left): oil-cooled engine has character and torque but uses a bit of oil for the first 6000 miles; latest BMW brakes are superb and ABS works without being distracting. Clever design allows tubeless tyres on spoked rims; clocks are simple and easy to read. Accurate fuel gauge, but speedo overreads by 10 per cent

REMEMBER YOUR FIRST PINT? Aged nearly 13, I hated it. Wasn't too keen on the next eight or nine either, to be truthful. Six months later I couldn't get enough of the stuff. That's how it is with this bike. Most GS virgins look confused. They've read the reviews and expect something mind-blowing. The GS is different. Quirky and, yes, brilliant. But it takes time to get used to – then, you can't leave it alone. "A bike for those who don't want a car," from Ben. "Something to ride every day, all year round, with a stupid grin and still keep up with the fast lads on a Sunday." I'd agree with that. It was the main reason I chose an R1100GS a few years back and why I kept an R1150GS on long term test for two terms on another magazine. Push them to the limits and your mate's GSX-R will squeeze that

bit more goo from your ageing glands. For the other six days a week you'll be laughing.

The speed and precision with which a GS demolishes pretty much any road is phenomenal. Once you come to terms with the size. Tall, heavy and unwieldy for the first half-day. The seat height is adjustable, but it feels like a chopper in the lowest position. Low-speed balance is superb.

Push the starter and think of Biggles. It sounds like a Sopwith Camel. The Remus race pipe bounced dirty, low-down tunes off the countryside. Bump and grind on a BMW? Surely not.

The GS makes the most of its 80bhp. Big-twin torque gives a size ten steel toecap kick up the arse with enough in hand that you don't need to work the (stiff) gearbox too

Price **£7600** power **80.8bhp** top speed **131.4mph** Average mpg **42.13**



Performance criteria for the test are all out of five:
★ rubbish ★★ average
★★★ good ★★★★★ superb
★★★★★ exceptional

ENGINE & GEARBOX | ★★★★★
The most individual and characterful here. Needs the race pipe and Y-piece to really grab your soul. Reliable, cheap to service but vulnerable in a crash. Gearbox needs a good kick for peace of mind.

CHASSIS | ★★★★★
Doesn't really have a frame – front and rear swing-arm bolt to the engine. Suspension is excellent and brakes are best here. Clever rim design takes tubeless tyres despite spokes.

VALUE | ★★★★★
Cheap at this price but very easy to bump up the cost with BMW extras (we'd stick to panniers and heated grips). No discounts anywhere, but depreciation is low – even less than a Harley.

FINISH | ★★★★★
Some owners complain of corroding wheels and front shock absorbers. Other than that, the finish is superb.

WOW FACTOR | ★★★★★
Not so much wow as "What the heck" it certainly gets attention. In this bunch of sharp eyes and sad faces, the GS's monocoloured mush is the most appealing.

TOTAL | ★★★★★
You won't win any track days on it, but anywhere else the big GS is almost invincible.

much to keep ahead (that's right, I said ahead). A tall sixth gear makes 100mph cruising easy until the fuel runs out (150 miles at this speed, 200 is typical). But this a bike for those who prefer their thrills a little slower. You wouldn't buy a 20-litre urn to make a morning cuppa so why buy a 160mph motorbike to do 100?

Especially when it handles this well (the bike that is, not the urn). Like everything else it takes a while. Some say BMW's Telelever front end lacks feedback. I'd say it's just different. Minimal dive under braking or hard cornering makes the GS distracting at first. Your instincts rebel, it doesn't feel right. Once you're acclimatised, its ability to devour roads changes the way you view motorcycle handling. Plus, you can hold the brakes on into a corner way

longer than conventionally-suspended bikes.

The latest Brembo-built BMW calipers and upgraded ABS system are good enough for Dan to declare them the best he's ever used, adding "You forgive it being too fat to chase couriers through Soho the first time you ride to Morocco and back. For those of us too big and fat to look good on a sports bike, the GS's size is an invitation to look right on a bike." He's not alone in that one.

There is no other bike I've ridden that's so much fun on the back roads and so cossetting on a motorway slog. The best here for pillions, a 200-mile tank range, shaft-drive and factory options that don't look like BMF bargains.

Built to last, limited supply means there's a waiting list too. Even then you'll hate it for the first week. Give it time.

TRIUMPH TIGER 955i

Price **£7599** power **80.8bhp** top speed **128.4mph** Average mpg **40**

the test



IN THE DETAILS...
(from left): Triumph's brakes were the weakest here. Braided hose comes as standard; front forks are stiffer than the old Tiger but still soak up bumps. Spoked wheels take only tubed tyres; clocks look good in daylight, awful at night. Ignition switch reminds us of stuff from a cheap scooter.



Performance criteria for the test are all out of five:
★ rubbish ★★ average
★★★ good ★★★★★ superb
★★★★★ exceptional

ENGINE & GEARBOX | ★★★★★

Best mix of power and emotion. Best gearbox, too. Only spoilt by occasional warm-starting problems and a bit of a stutter from the fuel injection at low revs.

CHASSIS | ★★★★★

Competent, but basic steel chassis. Suspension is better damped for road riding than before but it's still on the soft side. Brakes were the weakest of all four bikes.

VALUE | ★★★★★

Pricy considering the inconsistent finish. There are some good deals around and Triumph dealers generally offer excellent back up, demonstrators etc.

FINISH | ★★★★★

Bits of it are gorgeous, but the clock layout, switchgear and minor cosmetics let it down. A bike this fast needs tubeless tyres. Triumph should fit cast wheels or tubeless-friendly rims.

WOW FACTOR | ★★★★★

It's British and that always makes a difference. Green ones draw a much bigger crowd than black ones. People are interested but not enthusiastic.

TOTAL | ★★★★★

Great bike to ride, but let down by poor detailing and split-decision styling.

ANOTHER BIKE that divides opinion. "It looks so much better in green," says Jon. Others were less so. "It appears to have been designed by someone who specialises in bathroom fittings." Ben has a degree in vehicle design.

When we threatened to give Triumph his home number he added that the back end looks good. "Slim, purposeful and the high pipe works well." Thank you Ben.

The latest styling never captured the brutish aggression of the original Hinckley Tiger. Looks aside, this is a great bike.

For a start there's that engine. Not the latest version of the 955, but fast-revving, powerful and flexible. It's the easiest to get on with after a Japanese four and blends the soul of the twins with sympathy for your chain and

sprockets. Triumph has geared the Tiger for relaxed cruising and fuel economy but that doesn't mean it's slow. Pick-up in the lower gears is impressive but you can stick it in top and ride any road, barely troubling the gearbox. Power starts at 2500rpm and carries through to beyond the red line.

It's that memorable journey thing again. Halfway through the test I had to blast home from the east coast. Late (again) for babysitting duties and already in trouble. The Tiger took me 75 miles in well under an hour on pitch-black, catch-you-out twisty roads with barely a wobble or scary moment. It would have been nice to read the clocks (illuminated turquoise on white needs better eyesight than mine), but on those roads, you go faster by watching where

you're going. Ben's description of the instrument layout as "like your Gran's front room" sums up the clutter and apparent randomness of the design nicely. The switchgear has the 'bought-in' feel of those generic Italian scooters.

Everyone was impressed with the Triumph's handling, especially the way the Tiger drops into corners so quickly. Smooth riding brings out the best in the chassis and the riding position helps. Wide bars are low and you feel 'sat-in' the bike, in control and not averse to a bit of that *Italian Job* tomfoolery we spoke about earlier.

Suspension is still on the soft side, but firmer than previous Tigers and more suited to road riding. Pillions might disagree – headbanging is a popular sport among Tiger

tourers. Not that the brakes are that good (Jon complained of irregular fade during speed and brake testing), more that the forks dive too far when you apply them.

It took Guinness to loosen Dan's tongue: "I like riding it, who wouldn't with this engine? But it doesn't feel special or different enough. For this money I'd rather buy a Fazer 1000 than the Tiger (or V-Strom for that matter)."

Good point. For these bikes to work, they have to offer something other than soft suspension and rugged styling. The Triumph's engine just about saves it for me and the Tiger looks a lot more special than the Sprint ST or RS. Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but I didn't get off it and giggle like I did with the BMW and TDM.

SUZUKI DL1000 V-STROM

Price £7350 power 89.2bhp top speed 128.4mph Average mpg 40

the test



IN THE DETAILS... (from left): tidy cockpit, but overdrive light is difficult to see in bright sunshine; enormous silencer covers keep the heat off a pillion's legs but spoil the looks. Huge plastic mudflap adds to the cheap feel; brakes look like ex-RF600 items to us. Forks are set up for road use, finish echoes the GSX600F

SOME BIKES WIN you over in a single ride. Bigger the scientific analysis and datalogged truth, or what the other testers thought. Thrashing back from Cheshire to Peterborough, usual story – an hour late, tired and regretting choosing the twisty route (along with everyone else and his caravan it appears). Two days earlier I'd done the same journey on a ZX-9R and hated it. I should have learned. But where the Kawasaki struggled with poor visibility and clumsy low-speed manoeuvring, the V-Strom was a gas. The rooftop riding position and confident low-speed handling allowed easy overtaking and time to think up a decent excuse. Up the kerbs, along pavements, through what might possibly have been a front garden. Everything about the V-Strom seemed right for fast A to B riding.

Funny then that Dan and Jon hated it. "Too damn wide for hard-fought gaps in London chaos." Dan wasn't finished. "Ugly name, ugly bike. The limpest ever TL engine in the fattest ever platform." Jon was more measured: "Imprecise, wobbly and built like a GSX600F." I'd agree on the last point. The finish is poor for a seven grand bike – feels like a cheap car interior. But I'm nervous of slating it because the V-Strom makes me feel like a winner. Put it this way. If you, like me, come away from track days glum at not being the fastest (or even tenth fastest) in your group, then you'll appreciate a bike that makes you feel this superior every time you venture out in traffic. How many other vehicles can make a 20-mile commute through town feel so fired-up that you'd happily turn around and do



Performance criteria for the test are all out of five: ★ rubbish ★★ average ★★★ good ★★★★ superb ★★★★★ exceptional

ENGINE & GEARBOX | ★★★★★ Smooth delivery, enough oomph to make you smile and the best gearbox here. Always seems to have 1500rpm in hand on the others.

CHASSIS | ★★★ Alloy beam frame hints at sporting pretensions. The suspension is conventional (no more rotary rear damper) and works well at all speeds. But steering geometry is more tour than sports.

VALUE | ★★★ Cheaper than the BMW and Tiger, but nowhere near as well put together. Yamaha's Fazer 1000 costs less and has the V-Strom beat on just about every count.

FINISH | ★★ More GSX600F than GSX-R600. Too much cheap-looking plastic and the paint lacks the sheen of an expensive bike. Reminds us of the interior of a Japanese family car.

WOW FACTOR | ★★ Parked up in Skegness, it was the bike that drew the least attention – from riders and non-riders alike.

TOTAL | ★★ Better than the styling and finish suggests. But it could have been a belter.

it again? I made at least 200 motorists feel sick this morning on the way into work. Track days? You can keep 'em. Maybe the others would have liked it if Suzuki had built a streetfighter instead of a trailie. The bare bones are there – mad engine, strong chassis and wide bars – all it needs is different bodywork and GSX-R wheels. I like the loose feel, the extra effort on those wide bars and, of course, the TL1000 engine. It's been detuned for the V-Strom. Heavily. Making almost 30bhp less than the 1997 original. But still enough to raise a grin and cruise at 100mph with a good few revs to spare. It feels strong, understressed and altogether more manageable and economical – 200 miles to a tank – than before. Ease of use is a major selling point (cue sound of TL1000S

owners fainting). The seat is well padded and broad but not too tall. Three out of four riders complained of eyeball-jarring turbulence from the screen. Other than that, the Suzuki proved surprisingly unmemorable for a softly-sprung TL1000 powered motorbike. Ben's comment of "Alright to ride but..." as he tailed off into nothing sums up the performance away from a good queue of traffic. Steering and brakes are predictable and consistent and the suspension is a decent compromise between fast road riding and defying the potholes. Side by side with the TDM, there's a striking similarity. The V-Strom is bigger, bolder and has headlights that justify their name. Lead me to it blindfold and I'd love it. Ask me to look one in the eyes every morning and I'd struggle.

the test

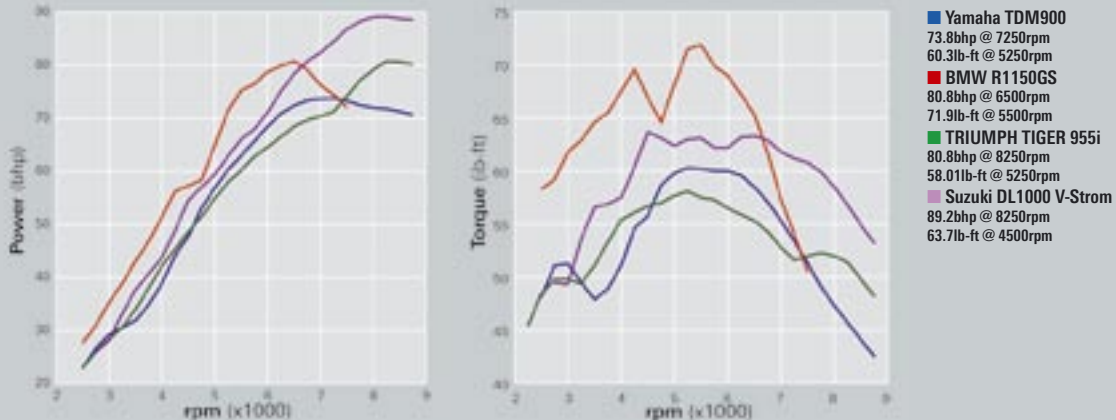


	Suzuki DL1000 V-Strom	BMW R1150GS	Triumph Tiger 955i	Yamaha TDM 900
Price	£7350	£7600	£7599	£6799
Top speed	128.4mph	131.4mph	128.4mph	138.7mph
Standing 1/4 mile	12.57s @ 112.2mph	13.01s @ 101.1mph	12.6s @ 106.0mph	12.71 @ 103.8mph
0-60	4.25s	4.45s	3.9s	3.95s
0-100	9.3s	11.1s	10.5s	10.6s
0-130	n/a	n/a	n/a	30.5s
Braking 100-0	4.95s, 326.14ft	4.95s, 324.86ft	5.00s, 354.90ft	4.25s, 296.41ft
Top gear roll on 60-90	6.45s	7.05s	6.2s	6.45s
Top gear roll on 80-120	11.45s	14.75s	15.85s	10.55s
Fuel consumption Best	44mpg	46mpg	42mpg	46mpg
Worst	31mpg	40mpg	40mpg	32mpg
Average	40mpg	42mpg	40mpg	40mpg
Engine	996cc, dohc, 8-valve 90° V-twin	1130cc, a/oc, 8-valve flat twin	955cc, 12-valve, in-line triple	897cc, dohc, 10-valve, parallel twin
Bore/stroke	98 x 66mm	101 x 70.5mm	79 x 65mm	92 x 67.5mm
Compression	11.3:1	10.3:1	11.7:1	10.4:1
Fuel system	fuel injection	fuel injection	fuel injection	fuel injection
Transmission	6-speed chain	6-speed, shaft	6-speed, chain	six-speed, chain
Frame	aluminium twin-spar	tubular steel space	tubular steel perimeter	aluminium twin-spar
Front suspension	43mm telescopic forks	Telelever fork, swing-arm, damper	43mm telescopic fork	43mm telescopic fork
Adjustment	preload	preload	none	preload, rebound
Rear suspension	monoshock	Paralever swing-arm, monoshock	monoshock	monoshock
Adjustment	remote preload, rebound	remote preload, rebound	preload, rebound	preload, rebound, compression
Brakes front; rear	2 x 310mm discs/4-piston calipers 250mm disc/2-piston caliper	2 x 304mm discs/4-piston calipers; 276mm disc/2-piston caliper	2 x 310mm discs/2-piston calipers; 285mm disc/2-piston caliper	2 x 298mm discs/4-piston calipers; 245mm disc/2-piston caliper
Tyres front; rear	Bridgestone Trail Wing 110/80-R19; 150/70 R17	Metzeler Tourance 110/80-H19; 150/70-H17	Metzeler Tourance 110/80-V19; 150/70-V17	Dunlop Sportmax 120/70-R18; 160/60-Z17
Wheelbase	1550mm	1509mm	1550mm	1485mm
Rake/trail	23°/109mm	64°/115mm	28°/92mm	25.5°/114mm
Dry weight (claimed)	207kg	219kg	215kg	190kg
Seat height	830mm	840-860mm (adjustable)	840-860mm (adjustable)	825mm
Fuel capacity	22 litres	22 litres	24 litres	20 litres
Warranty/mileage	two years/unlimited	two year/unlimited	two years/unlimited	two years/unlimited
NU insurance group	13	13	13	13
Service intervals	4000 miles/one year	6500 miles/one year	6000 miles/one year	6500 miles/one year
PRACTICALITIES				
Spares prices				
Indicator	£19.85	£20.50	£21.29	£26.15
Mirror	£30.04	£24.15	£32.55	£44.42
Side panel	£409.60	£680	£355.40	£468.88
Living with it...	No centrestand and the chain takes the strain of that TL1000 motor. Useful flat luggage rack adds versatility. Colour-matched factory luggage (made by Givi) is available.	Centrestand and shaft-drive might not be sexy but you miss 'em when they're gone. BMW options look like factory fitments, not aftermarket add-ons. Clocks dour but easy to use, speedo reads 10% over.	White-faced clocks look nice but are difficult to see at night. Layout is a bit cluttered, too. No centrestand, but good range of factory options. Wind protection from fairing is better than it looks.	No centrestand, appalling headlights and checking the oil level was beyond any of us (it had been a long day). Regular chain adjustment is essential to minimise transmission slop.
And your pillion...	Grab handles are okay but not brilliant. Seat comfy but there's turbulence off the screen.Remote rear preload adjustment makes it easy to set up for solo or two-up.	Best here. Loads of room, comfy seat and no headbanging on the brakes thanks to the Telelever front end.	Footpegs are a bit high but the seat is slightly higher than the rider's and has plenty of room. Grab rails at the back.	Huge sculpted grab rail is a pleasure to hold on to and the view is good from the perch. Least comfy seat here, but still better than any sports bike.

All prices are on-the-road, including the pre-delivery inspection (PDI), number plates and a year's tax

Dyno graphs explained

The V-Strom makes the most power, but is almost 30bhp down on the 118bhp the original TL1000S made at the back wheel. Suzuki's fuel-injection is as good as ever. No glitches, no bumps. Maybe that's why it feels a bit bland. The TDM's race cans add 3bhp to the peak figure of the standard bike we tested in April, but it's still the least powerful one here. That dip in the torque curve at 3500rpm probably explains the problems we had with poor low-speed running. The R1150GS has a full race system, which only adds a couple of top-end bhp but gives a big boost in the midrange. The dip at 4750rpm can be adjusted out in an hour or so on a dyno. The Triumph doesn't make the same impression on the dyno as it does on the road but the canny choice of gear ratios saves the day.



* Bikes are measured using the EEC power standard, which gives figures approximately one per cent lower than *Bike*'s previous standard (DIN).



(left): We can only guess what's happening as well. Best suggestion wins a roll of Sellotape and half a pack of chewing gum.
(below): "Simon says 'Fold your arms.' Steve loses again.
(below left): Riding on public footbridges is illegal, just like wearing a dark visor, siphoning millions from your employees' pension fund, crossing when the red man is showing and carpentry in a public place. Sorry, made the last one up.



(right): Jon loses a point for putting a foot down on the 'run over a sleeping northerner' section. Dougie Lampkin cleaned it easily, of course
(below right): Road tester caught emerging from sleazy hotel after night of passion with a Tiger. Paparazzi give chase. Mr Al Fayed claims it was an MI5 set up
(below): Jon and Dan try to find something good to say about the Suzuki. Ten minutes later, they were still trying.



Road testers say...



Jon Pearson



Ben Miller



Steve Rose



Dan Walsh

The GS is sturdy, quirky and hugely versatile, making me a big fan. The Tiger's lovely engine is culled by average build quality. Suzuki's V-Strom is a disappointment. It's the ugliest of an ugly bunch, poor brakes, uncomfortable... The nippy TDM makes you think it's a superbike yet swaggers like a VFR and it's the cheapest. I'll take it.

Shared honours for TDM and R1150GS. Young Ben says the TDM – cultish, distinctive and packed with attitude. Old Ben says the BMW. All of the above plus a comfy seat, 200-mile tank range and decent build quality. The Triumph feels five years older. Fine to ride, I just don't like looking at it. The V-Strom is bland and that's criminal.

The GS is the only one I'd buy. Year-round lunacy in a grown-up bike. Of the others, the Triumph is the best all-rounder, spoilt by bug-eyed, sad-faced styling and inconsistent finish. The V-Strom would have been better as a factory streetfighter and the TDM, while brilliant fun, does nothing the Fazer 600 doesn't do for £1500 less.

My winner is the capable, classy and charismatic GS. One of maybe only three bikes in the world that can carry hard luggage and still be hip. The sleeker, younger TDM gets second. A VFR with attitude? Not quite, but close enough. The Tiger gets third despite being tatty put together and the V-Strom is last – too tubby for traffic-twatting.



Bike verdict

RAC

■ On all our road tests and European adventures, we're covered by RAC breakdown and European assistance. Phone 0990 722722.
■ BSD Motorcycle Developments (01733 223377).
■ Thanks to On Yer Triumph (01296 632025) for the last-minute loan of a mint 51-reg Tiger. Cheap at £5999.

From day one of the test, there was only one bike that we all would consider buying. BMW's R1150GS is fast becoming a cult bike and with good reason. Your first few miles might prove difficult but stick with it and you won't be disappointed.

The TDM comes second. Forget the preconceptions, forget the top speed figures, just get out there and ride it. Less practical than the GS, but £800 cheaper. The only problem is that Yamaha's own Fazer 600 is possibly as good for much less money.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and if you like the Triumph's looks, you'll be getting a great road bike to go with it. For us it came third. Had this been a touring test, it (and the Suzuki) would have thrashed the TDM into last place.

Which is where the V-Strom finishes. As a road test bike (thrash for two weeks and then give it back) I liked it, but I still wouldn't buy one. Nobody else even got that far.