



## Owner Survey: Honda GL1000

**H**onda's GL1000. "Is it competition for the Harley, or is it in a class all by itself?" we asked when we first tested it (April, 1975). And what about BMW and Moto Guzzi? Tourers can choose an inline V-Twin with chain drive, a transverse V-Twin with shaft drive, an air-cooled, shaft drive opposed Twin or the Honda's water-cooled, shaft drive, opposed Four. "Ya pays yer money . . ."

Two hundred nineteen *Cycle World* readers chose the GL1000 when they put their money down (One plunked down a lot of money and bought nine of them!), and they have some things to say about Honda's big tourer. Eighty percent were bought new and predictably, touring tops the list of uses at 90 percent. Not only is this the highest percentage of owners who tour (BMW is second, at 76 percent), but it

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**Smoothness  
and  
Quietness  
Please  
Gold Wing  
Owners,  
but Not the  
Suspension.**

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is also the highest percentage of owners who use their bikes for any one purpose, narrowly eclipsing the 89 percent of Suzuki owners who use their bikes for pleasure riding. Pleasure riding is also a favorite sport of 80 percent of the Gold Wing owners, while 59 percent use their Wings for commuting and transportation. Two riders drag race, two do street racing, one rides on police duty and the owner of nine GL1000s uses his fleet for funeral escorts.

In their various roles, the new Gold Wings have accumulated an average of 17,200 miles (the highest was over 106,000) while the used bikes have an average of 8000 miles on the odo with their present owners, giving an overall average mileage of 15,300. Added up, the bikes in this survey have covered over 3,335,000 miles.>

If Gold Wing owners strike you as more sedate and less frantic than the owners of some other motorcycles, you're right and the riding styles reflect this. Only 3 percent ride very hard and 39 percent ride moderately hard, but almost half (49 percent) have an average riding style and 9 percent ride gentler than average. These figures represent the gentlest riding style of any bike we've surveyed. As one rider said, "It's not a road racer, but I don't need any more broken bones."

Each year the average GL1000 owner rides 9500 miles, though some cover as many as 45,000. Typical of the high-mileage types is the Marine who commutes every weekend from Camp Lejeune, N.C. to Youngstown, Ohio and back. Even with the gentle riding style and carb jetting that some riders say is too lean, fuel economy figures average out to a moderate 41.5 mpg. Individual figures went from a low of 27 to a high of 52.5 mpg. Opinions on the right fuel range from unleaded only to leaded premium to a mixture of two parts unleaded to one part premium. One rider told us, "So far I can use anything except JP4 (jet fuel). Maybe that's next trip." For the record, Honda says low-lead or regular (at least 86 pump octane) or even unleaded can be used, but a higher octane fuel should be used if any pinging is heard.

For ease of maintenance, the Gold Wing is second only to BMW. Forty percent of the owners find it very easy to work on, 54 percent say average and only 6 percent call it difficult. The owners are almost evenly split among always doing their own main-

tenance (31 percent), usually doing it (33 percent) and sometimes doing it (29 percent). Seven percent of the owners never work on their Hondas.

For all its complexity, the GL1000 has few maintenance problems. The points/coil ignition system is the chief offender (The 1980 models have pointless ignition) with 16 percent of the owners complaining of rapid points wear, difficulty in setting the timing or weak spark. Seven percent of the owners say the rear tire wears out too fast or is difficult to change, 5 percent had carb problems and 3 percent had problems with the driveshaft. Sixty five percent said they had no problems maintaining their Gold Wings.

The GL1000 doesn't do especially well on reliability, an important facet of any touring bike. According to the owners, 12 percent of the Gold Wings broke down or stranded their owners. This is the second worst figure we've seen, only slightly better than the Yamaha 750 (13 percent) and nowhere near the Suzuki GS750 (5 percent). As with all our surveys, this percentage excludes flat tires and failures of aftermarket accessories.

Worn driveshaft coupling teeth was one of the two most common problems (five reported failures). Early Gold Wings had no grease fitting on the driveshaft for the splines, which must be greased every 6000 miles. The grease fitting installed on 1976 and newer Wings can be retrofitted to earlier models at a total cost of about \$50 for both parts and labor.

The other problem was caused by the

cam pulley bolt backing out, releasing the toothed cam drive belt and causing extensive internal engine damage. Honda fixed this problem in 1976 with a stronger bolt (Honda Code 44751, part number 90021-371-000), that can be torqued tighter (36-40 lb. ft. vs. 24-27 lb. ft. for the earlier bolt). The earlier bolt can't be tightened further without breaking it. Owners are cautioned not to use the bolt to turn the engine over (for tuning or valve adjustment) as this can loosen the bolt, but should use the generator bolt on the rear of the engine.

The transmission was the only other problem area mentioned by three or more riders, with four reports of various transmission failures.

Four areas were listed by 5 percent or more of the Honda owners under other than routine maintenance. Leaking fork seals (10 percent) were the most common problem, followed by (5 percent each), broken throttle and clutch cables, starter or starter relay failures and driveshaft problems.

We received more hints from the Honda owners than we could possibly print. Everything from, "Hide yer stash in the air cleaner." to "Keep the S.O.B. out of the hands of p . . . poorly trained and incompetent mechanics." Among the most useful hints are: use Hot U sparkplugs to reduce fouling, change the cam belts as soon as any wear is detected, run the forks slightly low on oil to soften the ride, make the 1978 mufflers quieter by punching a hole in the rear baffle, use 1975 main jets for better driveability and refer to the Gold Wing Owners of America publication, "Bits of Gold." One rider suggested removing the rear axle to change the tire could be done, "without special tools or loss of religion" by lifting the wheel with a bungee wrapped around the luggage rack and through the wheel. Four riders said they had good results with synthetic oil (Mobil 1 and Eon 10W-40).

Parts availability isn't a problem according to 93 percent of the owners who say parts are always (53 percent) or usually (40 percent) available. Six percent say they are sometimes hard to find and 1 percent always have trouble finding parts. These figures are better than for the BMW (48, 44, 6 and 2 percent, respectively), but more Honda owners (15 vs 6 percent) had their bikes idle while waiting for parts. The waits were from one day to two months, averaging only 18 days, the shortest of any of the bikes we've surveyed.

Honda dealers get a mediocre rating from the Gold Wing owners. Twenty nine percent are very good, 31 percent are good, 20 percent are fair, 12 percent are poor, and 8 percent get a very poor rating. These figures are almost identical to the Kawasaki dealers (31, 31, 20, 9 and 9 percent) and well below the ratings for Yamaha, BMW and Suzuki dealers. As with other brands, attitude and competence of the

## HONDA GL1000 OWNER SURVEY IN BRIEF

Bought new .....	80%	Dealer rating	
Bought used .....	20%	Very good .....	29%
Average mileage .....	15,300	Good .....	31%
Types of riding		Fair .....	20%
Commuting .....	59%	Poor .....	12%
Touring .....	90%	Very poor .....	8%
Pleasure .....	80%	Ever broken down .....	12%
Riding Style		Had to wait for parts .....	15%
Very hard .....	3%	Average wait .....	18 days
Moderately hard .....	39%	Maintenance problems	
Average .....	49%	Ignition .....	16%
Gentle .....	9%	Rear tire .....	7%
Miles per year .....	9500	Carburetor .....	5%
Fuel Economy .....	41.5 mpg	Driveshaft .....	3%
Serviced by owners		Best features	
Always .....	31%	Smoothness .....	66%
Usually .....	33%	Quiet .....	36%
Sometimes .....	29%	Reliability .....	32%
Never .....	7%	Comfort .....	20%
Ease of maintenance		Shaft Drive .....	20%
Very easy .....	40%	Worst features	
Average .....	54%	Weight .....	21
Difficult .....	6%	Suspension .....	17%
Parts availability		Cold blooded .....	17%
Always available .....	53%	Handling .....	16%
Mostly available .....	40%	Seat .....	10%
Sometimes hard to find .....	6%	Buy another Honda .....	94%
Always hard to find .....	1%	Buy another GL1000 .....	81%



mechanics are usually the reason for a dealer's rating, good or bad.

Most Gold Wing owners keep their machines very close to stock mechanically. Fifty nine percent have made no modifications and only seven modifications are listed by 2 percent or more of the owners; handlebars or set-backs, 12 percent; boots, air caps or internal fork mods, 11 percent; carb jetting, 4 percent; dual filament bulbs, extra rear lights or four-way flashers, 3 percent; air filters, drilled discs and exhaust headers, 2 percent each. One rider told us of his dual-purpose modification, "Front discs have my name drilled in them. Let someone steal that!"

Mostly stock or not, the GL1000s carry more accessories than any bike we've surveyed. Nearly all (92 percent) carry fairings (compared to 70 percent of the BMWs), 59 percent have saddlebags and custom seats were fitted to 50 percent. Luggage racks (47 percent), crash bars (44 percent) and travel trunks (36 percent) are also popular.

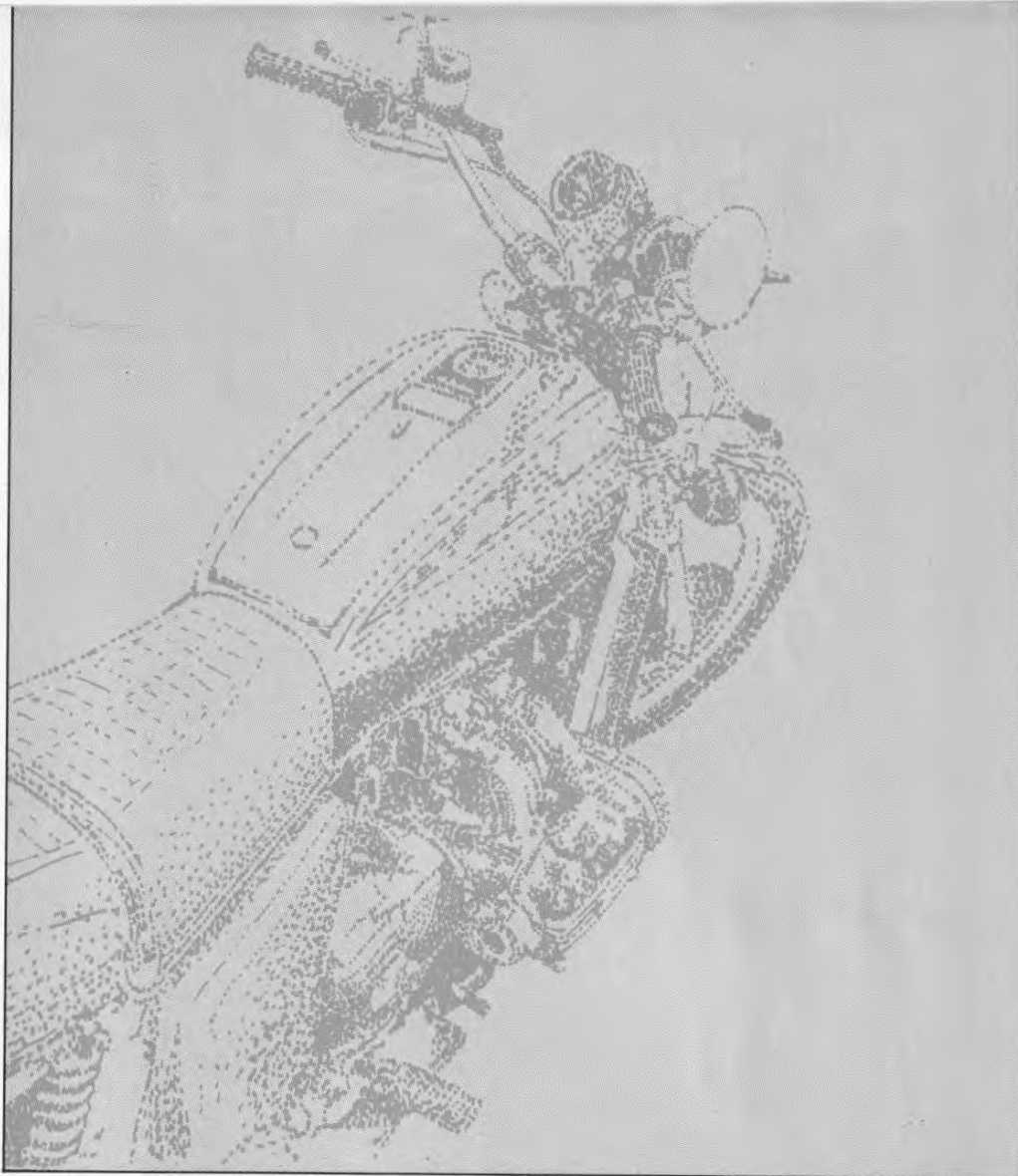
Other common add-ons include radios (30 percent), cruise control (23 percent), shocks (22 percent), driving or fog lights (16 percent), quartz-halogen headlights (14 percent), horns (11 percent), sissy bars (10 percent) and floorboards (9 percent). Smaller numbers of riders listed many other accessories, from travel trailers to a TV set.

Vetter fairings have done well in each of our surveys, but Honda owners are particularly enthusiastic. Ninety six of them called the Vetter fairing an "especially good accessory," far more than have praised any other fairing or any other product in our surveys. Calafia (praised by 4 riders) was the only other fairing company rated well by three or more riders.

Other well-received products (followed by the number of riders giving them thumbs up) include S&W shocks (17), Vetter saddlebags (11), Bates bags (10), Samsonite luggage (9), Honda luggage (4), Krauser bags (3), Vanda-Cruise (10), Hang 2 seats (8), Ez Berg seats (5), Corbin Gentry seats (4), Prestolite ignition (8), Gerex ignition (5), Martek ignition (4), Cycle Sound (7), Lester wheels (5), Vetter trunks (5), Bates trunks (4), Rack Factory racks (4), KG racks (3), S&W fork springs (4) and Goodyear tires (3).

Calafia saddlebags were praised by three riders, but we've listed them with the "unsatisfactory" accessories because they were panned by 10 riders. Most like the design and appearance, but complain of flimsy construction and leaks. Five riders had problems with their Cycle Sound installations, four dislike their Vetter fairings, citing vibration and broken mounts and three riders weren't satisfied with their Bates saddlebags.

One attribute stands out on the Gold Wings. The smoothness was rated a best feature by 66 percent of the owners. Quiet is next with 36 percent, then reliability (32



percent), comfort and shaft drive (20 percent each), power (19 percent), ride quality (16 percent), fuel economy (13 percent), water cooling and appearance (12 percent each) and handling (11 percent). The owners also liked the speed (8 percent), ease of maintenance and lack of maintenance needed (6 percent each) and the stability (5 percent).

Now the bad part. The GL1000's suspension is rated a worst feature by 17 percent, 16 percent aren't satisfied with the handling, 7 percent dislike the rear shocks and 6 percent just call the ride in general a worst feature.

Other least-liked items are weight (21 percent), cold-bloodedness and hard starting (17 percent), the seat (10 percent), points wear (9 percent), driveline snatch and cornering clearance (7 percent each), tire wear (6 percent), the centerstand, shifting, front wheel shimmy and fuel economy (5 percent each). Ten percent found no worst features.

What would they change? Twenty six percent would change the suspension, 14 percent want electronic ignition, and 12 percent can't stand the seat. (Honda changed all three items on the 1980 models.) Eight percent each want better forks, or better carbs and carb jetting, 6 percent think the gearing should be different, or

the handlebars should have a different curve and 5 percent each want a larger fuel tank, less weight or a better riding position.

Some riders are willing to change just about anything on the GL1000. Suggestions included chain drive, a V-Four, a three-speed automatic transmission with reverse, and "200 more cc or two more cylinders." One rider said to put the drivetrain into a Ducati chassis while another said to put it in a Harley Sportster.

Like the rider who told us the "Honda GL is my baby," most owners are satisfied with their machines and 94 percent said they'd buy another Honda, putting it ahead of Kawasaki and BMW but behind Yamaha and Suzuki.

One rider said he'd buy a Harley . . . if they came out with a shaft-drive, water-cooled touring bike. Another said, "I've driven FLH 80s, Saki's, etc., but the Honda wins hands down. No contest!"

Most (81 percent) said they'd buy another Gold Wing. After two accidents (driver didn't see him, etc.) one rider told us he is on his third GL1000 and praying. Another satisfied owner said he wouldn't get another Gold Wing because, "By the time I get this one worn out (1990?), I'll be ready for the new two-stroke diesel-electric model." ■