

## Yamaha FJR1300--A Brief Review After 950 Mile Test Ride

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To be honest, I haven't paid much attention to the Yamaha's FJR 1300. I had seen one in front of a local dealer, and I've scanned the threads here, but not being in the market, I just didn't think much about it. Plus, not being able to test ride them on top of hardly any being available just made me yawn.

Then Chad Hargis, also in Nashville, called me with a strange request. "Want to fly to New York City and get my new FJR? I'll pay all your expenses." His had [been wrecked](#) in an unfortunate low side when a friend was testing riding it, but he decided to replace it with another. The only one he could find was just NW of NYC.

I said "sure," needing a ride to clear my head and always enjoying the process of riding a bike totally new to me. So I flew up Friday, where the seller picked me up at Newark. We drove to his home 45 mins NW, made the exchange, and I saddled up and headed out. I think he might have been a little shocked when I thumbed the starter and just drove off the center stand and out the driveway. I'm sure he pictured this yahoo never making it to Nashville. But hey, a bike is a bike, right? 😊

First stop was [dinner with a bunch of fine folks](#) from BMWsportTouring.com at Giggyboy's restaurant. The purpose was to help Brian in his never ending quest to find friends--we acted like we cared. 😊

Then I rode to the PA line and grabbed a hotel. So, 100 miles the first day. I then took the side panel off that night in the hotel parking lot so that I could power up my accessories. I can't ride that far without a fully-equipped cockpit!



Then 525 miles the second day, 200 of which were in the heaviest rain I've ever ridden in (lightening, cars going slow with flashers on, etc.). Cold, wet, tired, and in the dark, I figured it was time to pack it in. So I finished up the last 325 miles this morning. So 950 miles total, dry and wet, day and night, interstate and twisties. It was a fair test, and here are some thoughts.

Most of these thoughts are in comparison to the K12RS/GT, though obviously it could be compared to the ST1300. I've ridden four different K12's over hundreds of miles, but I don't own one. So keep that in mind if you have a different, perhaps more informed perspective--like you own one. 😊

## A Few Specs to Start

These don't define a bike, but here are just a few.

- Re-tuned R-1 engine, I'm told. This is tuned to produce 145 HP and 99 ft. lbs. of torque. If you don't know what that means, you soon find out if you ever ride one. 😊
- Fuel-injected traditional inline-four.
- Weighs 535 lbs. dry or ca. 580 wet.
- Holds 6.60 gallons.
- Five speed transmission.
- Shaft drive, with center stand, and electrically adjustable windscreen.

It's a sport-tourer with an emphasis on sport.

### Power

Well, let's just say that there's a lot of power. At first I thought my ST4s had more snap, but then I discovered that I wasn't running it in the right range. The motor redlines at 9,000 on the gauge, but the electronic rev limiter doesn't kick in until 10,100 (and it is harsh, unfortunately). It'll pull in any gear above 2,500, but 4,500-8,000 is where it really likes to be.

You see a hole way up there that you'd like to thread? Telegraph it to your right wrist and you are there, and I mean right now. From 80-110 mph takes what feels like 3 seconds, though I didn't time it.

Measured top speed is 168, as I recall (I couldn't find the stat). And I believe it. I popped to 135 on a back country straight before running out of road, and it was still pulling like a tractor.

Now the part that really confused me. How to describe the feeling. To me, the K12 has an engine, and a very smooth one at that. The ST1300 has a turbine, in sound and feeling. It goes whoosh and you start sniffing for kerosene on the airport apron. But the FJR is a motor, and what I really mean is an electric motor.

Have you ever been around big electric motors? There's a distinct vibration. Better yet, picture a golf cart with a 145 HP engine in it. The throttle control on the FJR is very much like a rheostat under your right foot, except with torque and power everywhere--just dial it in. And the vibration, which you feel at every speed, transmits that motor power through the pegs, grips, and seat. It's not a bad vibration, but you feel it. Coupled with the sound of the twin pipes, it's visceral. At speed, it's uncanny, since you can't hear the motor or pipes anymore (with earplugs in), so you stay in touch through your hands and legs and butt. It's like riding a very powerful stallion while deaf.

There's so much power that it can be difficult to modulate while leaned over. In the transition from neutral to positive power (e.g., at the apex), it's easy to get too much power dialed in.

The K12 is built as a package. The FJR is built around the engine, and it's worthy to sit on center stage.

### Stability/Handling

Have you experienced any instability on the K12, especially in the dirty air found behind large trucks? There's none, zilch, nada on the FJR. It was stable at every speed, in every condition (Metzler 4 tires front and back).

I did find that the bike tended to "fall into" lower speed turns, and having lots of miles on these tires, I don't believe it's a tire issue. Above about 25-30 mph, there's is no "falling" or "resistance to falling"--everything is balanced. It felt like the frame geometry assumes a certain gyroscopic effect *above* a certain speed. If I hadn't looked up the rake at 26 degrees and the trail at 4.3 inches, I would have guessed a steeper rake and less trail. Having said that, above that speed, steering is beautifully neutral and very stable, even at very high speeds.

Clearance appears to be exceptional. Since it wasn't my bike, I tried to not abuse it (you reading this, Chad? 😊), but I did wear the front and rear past the tread marks. It would be the easiest thing in the world to run the front and rear all the way to the edges. It inspires loads of confidence, and I didn't come close to a peg feeler, though I touched a boot down several times. The right side is more worn than the left because of those handy interstate exits.

Tight, sharp turns are unbelievably comfortable.



## Ergos

This is the best surprise of the bike (besides the power that rips your arms out of their sockets). The pegs are set back a bit in a very comfortable sporty-ish riding position. I like it very much. Some people won't.

The bars are forward--just a bit more than an RT without barbacks, and not nearly as much as a K12. It feels wonderful. If anything, I could use a teeny bit more forward lean. The bars are low and wide. Very, very comfortable. I'd never ridden one, and did all those miles with no discomfort at all.

The grips have a rearward sweep that is about 5 degrees too much, in my opinion.

The first picture is from the side in a sport riding position, and the second is in a more relaxed cruising position.



Leg room is excellent. I suspect you'd have to start thinking about running out of room if you have a 34" inseam or longer--in other words, you'd want to sit on the bike first. For reference, I'm 190 lbs, 5'11", and with a 32 inch inseam.

The seat is fairly narrow, and the bike feels a lot lower than the 31.7 inch seat height. And the weight is so low that the bike feels like a toy. Very easy to throw around, at speed or stopped. Seat is comfortable, by the way, just like on the K12.

The tank cutout is too high to "lock" your foot in between the tank and the peg while hanging off.

## Ride

Front is adjustable for preload, compression damping, and rebound damping. Rear has a two-position preload setting and is adjustable for rebound damping. Personally I feel like they should have provided more adjustability for rear preload.

The bike was set up with too much compression damping, but I didn't change it, figuring it would be about right for Chad.

Ride was good to excellent. It handling transition bumps well, but tended to lose it's way at times on high speed edges. It wasn't as compliant as I would have liked, but the suspension is good enough that I'd leave it OEM.

## Brakes

Not much to say about these except that they are excellent. This bike has ABS and no linking (thank goodness). I was able to active the rear ABS easily. I was never able to activate the front on public roads, though I'm sure it would be possible in a parking lot.

You'd be surprised at how little front end dive there is. Maybe they did something to the front suspension, but it's not bad at all.

The [foot peddle is too high](#). I didn't look to see if it was adjustable.

Bottom line: I love the brakes. Very easy to modulate. Always enough stopping power. Great feel.

## Windshield/Protection

They might as well have not put an electric motor on that thing, because I only liked it in the full down position (where it goes every time you shut off the key). And in that position, the airflow is superb. Smooth. No buffeting. Hits you in the perfect place: upper chest. But as soon as you move it up, the buffeting begins, moving swiftly to sucking you forward. I suspect it's because it sits so far ahead of the rider. If I had an FJR, though, I'd have good earplugs and would do nothing to the screen. The airflow is superb.



## Clutch/Transmission

The (hydraulic) clutch pull is a bit hard--they all seem to be.

Transmission is good, though I think it needs a sixth gear. Not because it really does, but because it feels like it does. The engine is turning 5,000 at 87 mph actual, and you keep looking for another gear. (Speedo reads about 2 mph too fast.)



## Gauges/Switchgear



The turn signals are big and bright, which is good during the day, but they are way too bright at night. You almost lose your night vision.

The gauges look great, but the numbers on the speedo are too small.

The headlight needs a high beam flasher thingy. Currently it only has a low/high setting.

## Range

I never got less than 200 miles before the last bar, and cruising at 85-95 mph I got an average of 44 mpg. What a great range that makes, eh?

## Heat?

Heat? What heat? I felt it, but it didn't bother me, and I rode in stop and go NJ traffic with the fans running in the mid-eighties. Another bike issue (like surging) that gets blown out of proportion. I'd never give a second thought to the heat thing. If it bothers you, there are all sorts of after market solutions. In stop and go and 100 degree ambient temperatures, it would be annoying without a shield (which would cost just dollars), but I find that the heat thrown off by the K12 fans to be more annoying than the frame heat on the FJR. Yeah, it shouldn't be there, but it's not a deal breaker.

## Other

Lighting. It's bright and well sprayed. Cutoff is too severe and low, though. When cornering at night it's easy to find yourself in the dark. The headlight is really wonderful, but you'd need auxiliary lighting for back roads stuff.

Throttle. It has too much slop before it rolls on. But the resistance is perfect and once it engages, the pull is smooth.

Bags. Large and very well-built. Full face helmet's fit. The pipes are below both bags, so no space is lost. The latch system isn't hard to figure out, but it seems mickey mouse. Not the solid feel of BMW bags opening and closing. But the bike looks great with or without them on.



Glove Compartment. There's a small one on the side, though the bike has to be in neutral with the key on to open it. Huh? It holds a cell phone and wallet, and it doesn't leak, either. 😊



Mirrors. Perfect. Excellent field of view, and steady as a rock at any speed.



### Why You Might Want a K12 Instead

I think the K12 is a great bike, and in comparing them, here are the things I'd put at the top of the list to sway me toward the BMW:

First, you get to take a test ride. That's cool.

Second, there's a BMW dealer network out there with generally good knowledge and support.

Third, the integrated cruise control is just great. There are after market solutions for the FJR, by the way, but I suspect they are not the same.

Fourth, the K12 is a proven performer. There are no surprises.

Fifth, the build quality on the BMW is probably a tad higher, though the FJR is no slouch.

### Finally

Why is this bike winning awards? Because it should. It's a world superbike in sheep's clothing. It's a better bike than the K12, all things considered. It might not be a better bike for you, but this is a bike that BMW needs to learn from. Light, powerful, comfortable, and thousands of dollars cheaper. This is a bike you could ride 1,000 miles Thursday and still do pushups and situps in your hotel room. You could kick some serious ass in the twisties on Friday. You could take your SO for a ride on Saturday and both of you would be happy. And then smoke two-thirds of the bikes at a track day on Sunday. It's comfortable, it's powerful, and I think it's a new definition for sport touring

Over and out.

