

# Minnesota Motorcycle Monthly

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## All Business Jet Yamaha FJR1300



by [Kevin Wynn](#) and [Sev Pearman](#)

by Kevin Wynn

This is your pilot speaking. Please fasten your safety gear; we are clear for takeoff on runway 210 Left. In a few seconds we will reach our cruising speed of (well, never mind). You are flying today aboard the newest, most powerful supersport-touring machine available, the 2003 Yamaha FJR 1300.

Enjoy your trip. I guarantee that when it's over, you'll want to turn around and do it all over again."

And with that, I rolled out of the dealership's parking lot aboard one of the most talked about motorcycles of the past year.

When the FJR 1300 was introduced in Europe in 2000, the clamor started. Motorcycle



Yamaha's cross country silver bullet.

photo courtesy of Yamaha

journalists invited for Euro test rides raved about the power and handling of Yamaha's first purpose-built sport touring machine since the GTS1000. When the details started to appear in U.S. magazines, the letters to editors started becoming strident. Why wasn't Yamaha bringing this machine to America? Internet lists started talking about a letter writing campaign. In February 2001 an online petition and discussion list was started by a Norfolk, Virginia minister named Carlton McCleod. Tired of Yamaha's reluctance to import the FJR, he spurred a letter, phone call and petition campaign that undoubtedly helped change the minds of the right people. The petition list alone had over 500 entries. Thanks Carlton.

So for 2002, still seemingly timid about it, Yamaha decided to bring the FJR to the US as a 2003 model. Using a program they call the Priority Delivery Program (PDP), customers placed \$500 non-refundable deposits to order their machines last March and April. This would be the only way to buy a new FJR. No dealer floor units were to be shipped until 2003, so there was no way to wait and see what they looked like or sit on a bike at the dealership. For dealers it was a no-brainer, especially if the sales department knew how the program worked. Take a deposit, send in an order form and wait for delivery. No flooring costs or risk involved.

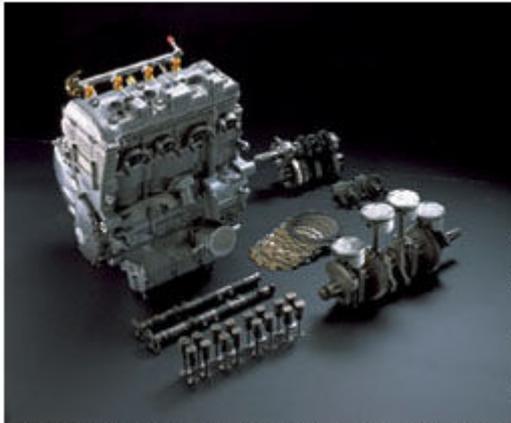
Yamaha vastly underestimated the demand for this bike. They had expected to have approximately 400 Priority Delivery orders, and they'd slated another 1000 bikes to be 2003 floor models. When the PDP period ended they had over 1400 pre-orders and had to pull bikes from other markets to fulfill the orders they were now obligated for.

The excruciating wait for my FJR ended in early October when I finally got the call from my salesperson. Via the internet FJR e-mail list, I'd been hearing other FJR owners take delivery since mid July. I think I have a vague idea what it's like to order a new Harley.

I don't need to spend a lot of time going into the tech stuff. That's been done over the past few months in other publications. From a practical, owners' point of view, here are my observations from the first thousand miles-

The seating position is very comfortable, with a slight forward tilt to keep you in touch with what the front suspension is doing. There is enough room for my knees behind the trailing edge of the fairing unless I move uncomfortably close to the tank, even with my padded riding pants. The pegs are a touch lower in relation to the seat, providing some relief from the knee cramps I've come to tolerate on my Kawasaki Concours. Grip positions feel perfectly placed for me, although many riders are adding bar risers to bring them up about an inch. The controls all feel natural except the turn signal switch. For some reason, I'm having trouble getting used to this one. I'd prefer a push to cancel button like I've had on previous machines, but the Connie didn't have one and that one still felt all right. I'll have to live with that cause there's

no realistic way to change it.



While Kevin wasn't looking, Sev disassembled his motor.

The gauges do the neat little electronic instrument dance when you turn the key, and the LCD display cycles through its test sequence. The fuel injection pump hums for a couple seconds and waits for your next command. Thumb the starter and the big 1300 fires instantly. After a lifetime without fuel injection, it's amazing how cool it is to forget about enrichener levers. There is a slight rough spot in the idle as it warms up but nothing that precludes riding away cold if you need to. The idle drops after about one minute of warm-up.

So what's it like to ride? After the past three years and multiple long distance rallies on a '87 Concours, it should be obvious that the FJR1300 is a vast improvement over my old bike. But that's the reserved, unemotional answer and what I really want to say is this: This bike ROCKS! It fits me exactly as I expected it would, and it's got such incredible, usable power that I can't help but act the hooligan once in a while. First gear power wheelies require no prompting whatsoever. In any gear, from any speed, just roll on the throttle, hear the transmission whine in the first couple gears and feel the turbine-like power, like the hand of God pushing you up to speed. After 4000 rpm the afterburners are lit and I can't stop myself from grinning like a fool inside my helmet.

The handling is neutral at most speeds and the entire bike feels smaller and lighter than it really is. The foot pegs touch pretty easily with the rear suspension in the "Soft" setting. I haven't made contact with preload set to "Hard", but I know that riders with more advanced Tilt-O-Meters think it needs a shock with more adjustment. The front brakes have serious two-finger power and I'm still adjusting to having a rear brake that really grabs.

To me the FJR represents everything the Concours would be if it were updated. Fuel injection, shaft drive, roomy sport-touring ergonomics, state of the art looks, quality saddlebags, and incredible torque and power. It really is the perfect machine for me.

While a matter of personal preference and opinion, there are a few nits to pick. For me, the seat material and shape needs changing. The seat cover has a slightly grippy surface and doesn't allow me to move around without picking myself up off the seat. Also, the shape is good for sport riding, narrower at the front, but with my bony butt I need the seat pan to come a little farther forward and provide a bit of a bucket for long distance work. I've seen pictures of seats other FJR owners have had built, from Rick

Meyer, Sargent, Corbin, Russell and others, so I know I'll have no problem getting the work done when I'm ready.

The windscreen is effective and electrically adjustable, so I'm pretty happy with it. I'll try a taller screen to see if I can smooth out the airflow a bit more with the shield in the upper position and gain a little more hand protection with a wider base. On the move with shield down, the air coming over the top of the screen is hitting my gangly body just below the shoulders. Raising it to its upper limit puts me a calm pocket, with just the top of my head getting some minor buffeting. It's better than the Rifle screen on my Concours and for shorter riders might be ideal. This is a really minor complaint.

The last thing, and this is the most irritating to me, is the access to the battery. It's located inside the upper right fairing, which I don't have a problem with. The "stacked" transmission likely used up the usual under seat storage battery space. But getting to it requires removing several screws and one other special fastener, then carefully bending and maneuvering two delicate looking plastic panels. At least it's a sealed battery, so this should be a rare exercise, but installing wiring for accessories would best be accomplished with a separate junction box under the seat.

When I bought the Concours, it was partly out of a need for a bike with longer legs for the type of riding I was doing, touring and 24 hour/1000+ mile rallies. I also needed something that fit my 6'3" frame and 36" inseam. Test sits on BMW's and ST1100's showed a shortage of knee room. The Concours was my best choice for comfort reasons.



Who's that riding two-up with Kevin?

The FJR vastly exceeds the Concours in every category except acquisition price, at least for the first year. I spent an afternoon on a Honda ST1100 while Sev was testing the FJR. Truth be told, I rather prefer the Concours to the ST1100, which was quite efficient, but too thoroughly without character. I'd like to feel like I'm actually riding a motorcycle and the ST felt more like a two-wheeled appliance. Compared to either bike, the FJR is the star of the show, with heart of really big bore sport bike, enough comfort to criss-cross the country and the ability to do some serious sport riding when the opportunity presents itself.

I purchased my bike based on magazine reports and comments from overseas owners on discussion boards. If you want one for next year, you can probably find someone around who'd let you at least sit on one before you commit. For next year it's likely

that some minor upgrades will be done. The models at the European bike shows have ABS, some built-in fairing storage pockets and flush mounted turn signals. Whether Yamaha, USA sees fit to make the ABS model available here is still a mystery. Maybe another letter writing campaign? Hopefully they've learned from this experience. I've received a customer survey from Yamaha in the mail in the past couple weeks, and they plan to send another in the future. That's a good sign, as long as they ask the right questions and pay attention to the answers.

If you'd like to learn more, I suggest visiting the FJR website at Micapeak.com ([www.micapeak.com/bike/fjr1300](http://www.micapeak.com/bike/fjr1300) or [www.FJR1300.info](http://www.FJR1300.info)), Joining the e-mail list is the best way to ask questions of any of approximately 140 FJR owners who subscribe. The FJR web site contains more useful information than I can detail, from specifications and a maintenance checklist to factory owners manual data and how to mount fuel cells or just about any other accessory.

The FJR combines everything I want in one motorcycle and it's a thrill every time I climb into the cockpit. See you on the road. I'm going flying, er, riding.

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by Sev Pearman

Why a sport-tourer? Aren't they all piloted by boring old farts wearing matching gear? Aren't they the El Camino of motorcycles combining the worst of both worlds? An uncomfortable tourer and a sportbike that's heavy? Well I'll let you in on a secret; sport-tourers simply rock.

Don't think of them as gentle bikes for the mild-mannered rider. They are the logical choice for the committed rider. What can you do when responsibilities start cutting into your riding time? What do you do when you can no longer cut out on any nice day? Here lies the beauty of a sport-tourer: when you can no longer 'ride only when it is nice,' ride a nice bike when the weather is poor. Effective fairings deflect cold air and rain. Real world amenities like centerstands and shaft drive reduce maintenance chores and free up riding opportunities. Fancier options like heated grips and 12V outlets (for electric vests!) further extend your riding season.

Long after the sport bike riders move onto watercraft, sport-tourer riders are still out there getting over in corners. While others complain that it is too cold and/or wet to ride, ST riders laugh warm and dry, behind their full fairings. Sport-tourer owners enjoy riding. They want to ride. Hell, they need to ride.



The well designed instrument cluster of the FJR.

Today's sport-tourers are no barges either. With fuel injection, wide modern rubber and 100-odd rear-wheel horsepower, riders can keep many big-bore sportbikes in their sights and return after a 600+ mile day in comfort and style. They truly are the most versatile models to own and enjoy.

Yamaha has called a smack down with their contender, the all-new

FJR 1300. No parts bin collection, this was designed from the ground up to be the best sport-tourer on the market.

The motor is cousin to the flagship YZF R-1; a 1300cc inline-4 featuring fuel injection and Yamaha's latest 4 valve-per-cylinder architecture. It puts out a staggering 120(!) rear-wheel horsepower with 88 foot-pounds of torque. Wheezy? These are serious numbers that will satisfy the most demanding rider.

The vertically stacked 5-speed transmission also borrows from the R-1. This design permits a longer swingarm and centralizes powerplant mass in the frame. The former aids in chassis stability while the latter increases flickability.

The aluminum frame is engineered for this role as well. Strong, simple castings form the headstock, while a beefy perimeter envelopes the motor to the swingarm pivot. The aluminum sub-frame is robust enough to support both a passenger and loaded hard bags. Fueled, with bags and attitude, the FJR weighs in at 635-odd pounds

Like all good sport-tourers, power is delivered to the rear wheel via the silent no-maintenance shaft drive. Feel free to laugh at your buddies who stay behind on overcast mornings to adjust, clean and lube their chains. Your gone, baby.

OK, that's all on paper, but what is it like to ride? Yamaha's engineers have obviously applied their race knowledge to the FJR. Mass-centralization combined with judicious use of lightweight materials make the 1300 feel like a 900cc sportbike. While the motor can easily overpower the bike's mass, the frame simply erases it. Its 600+ pound bulk mysteriously vanishes. Side-to-side transitions are ridiculously easy. Tight swerves are initiated telepathically. Mid-corner line changes are now yawners. My "King of the Road" ST 1100 has suddenly become the Queen Mary...

Wheels and brakes are current sport-bike spec. The front 3.5in X 17in is stopped by

twin 298mm rotors coupled with Yamaha's unique one-piece four-piston calipers. Claimed to be both stiffer and stronger than conventional calipers, the brakes are very efficient. We like the blue anodized caliper plugs. They look butch.

The rear is a 5.5 in X 17in with a 282mm rotor, pinched by a two-piston caliper. Both brakes have tremendous power. MMM lunch toady Kevin Wynn reports that the rear is well equipped to handle trail-braking into corners. I prefer to limit rear use to parking lot maneuvers and quick stops. In either case, the brakes are powerful and dependable.

OK, it's got sport, but what about touring? The fairing and ergos of the FJR are equally refined. You sit in a comfortable rider position. Knees are slightly bent, torso canted forward, arms in a martial arts response position. This allows your body to respond to any road input as well as change position. Best of all, it is very comfortable. Most riders we know find they can easily add 100 miles to their day when jumping from either a full-on sport bike or cruiser.

The hand grips are on cast risers mounted to the triple clamp. While non-adjustable, we saw no need as they bring your arms to a perfect position. Peg placement was low enough to remain comfortable for one 250-mile stint. New tires and wet 40 degree roads prevented my test from exploring max lean. It is safe to say that the FJR has enough cornering capability to satisfy all but the most hardcore racer guy or gal.

The seat is simply the best stocker I have ever planted my 230 pounds upon. It is firm, comfy, broad and flat. I felt neither pressure points nor frame parts. It is the perfect balance of being wide enough to support your body for 260(!) mile tankfuls and incorporating enough taper to permit body lean in corners and get your feet down at stops. The aftermarket seat guys are gnashing their teeth over this one. It is that good. Bravo to Yamaha!

The fairing is a mixed bag. Those coming from a sport bike will revel in the calm quiet bubble of air. Those who jump from an older sport-tourer will secretly wish the fairing to be 15% bigger. You stay dry, but continually buzz the edge of the air envelope. It's a matter of perspective.

Much has been written and whined about the electric windshield. Yes, it is noisy. Yes, it could stand to be a taste larger. Yes, it requires earplugs. Big deal. Look to the aftermarket, buy what you want and deal with it. The bottom line is that the fairing is



Sportbike grade brakes adorn the FJR

photo by Kevin Wynn

effective. After 200 miles in spitty rain, only my gloves and toes were damp.

One lament was the lack of heated grips. Now before you young bucks start snickering, remember this option is to keep you comfortable when the mercury dips below 40. Our advice is to spring for the optional grips and start riding in April instead of June.

The Yamaha is saddled with a host of real-rider features. The integrated and color-matched hard bags are great. They are intuitive to use and lock, are easy to install and remove, are waterproof (important now that you will cheerfully ride in poorer weather) and easily hold my 'tater sized helmet. For those with a poseur complex, the bag mounts are discreet when exposed. Hanger holes are covered by two discreet panels.

The bike is rider-friendly. It comes equipped with a ridiculously easy to use centerstand. Oil changes are a breeze. There are no fairing panels to remove, and the spin-on filter lives in front of your left toe. The rear suspension is quickly adjustable via a lever mounted behind your left foot peg. No tools required.

The instruments are big, tidy and easy to read. If you can't see your turn signal indicators flashing, you are probably legally blind. There are two trip meters in the digital cluster. Take a tip from Paul B. and dedicate one to oil-change intervals.

The twin headlights are of airport runway caliber. The low beam pattern is both wide and deep. The brights are dazzling. Talk about your "See and be seen." This is another FJR success. Yamaha has provided a machine with real-world, all-weather nighttime capability.

If you like to run 150 miles one-way for a meal, you'll appreciate the 6.6 gallon fuel capacity. Big tanks permit you to spend less time fueling, and more time riding. Despite the weight, size and horsepower, we achieved almost 40 mpg during our test. This is simply amazing. No doubt this will further improve as the motor loosens. This is simply amazing. Do the math &ndash; that is over 260 miles per tankful.

The short wheelbase and race-bred motor scream sport bike performance, while the protective fairing, all-day ergos and nap-worthy seat deliver touring bike comfort. This is a well-developed motorcycle that you will love to ride and be able to ride all day, any day. You can have it all in a sport-touring motorcycle and Yamaha's all new FJR 1300 is arguably the best of the bunch. This is one excellent machine.

*Encores:*

Holy freakin' motor!

Handles like a 900.

Simple, intuitive, watertight bags

*Boos:*

Goofy windshield

Where's the battery?

N-n-no h-h-hand w-w-warmers

*Wife's First Reaction:*

"It looks like 'Robo Cop'"

*Selected Competition:*

BMW R1150 RT & K1200 GT (forthcoming); Honda ST 1300 (forthcoming);

Kawasaki ZZ-R 1200 & Concours; Triumph Trophy 1200 & Sprint ST

**M.M.M.**

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\* This review originally appeared in the [Winter 2002/03](#) issue of Minnesota Motorcycle Monthly.