

Honda's VFR1200F-DCT

by Don Gomo

So here's something a little different, the resident Harley dude is going to write about a *Honda*, and a sport bike to boot. Believe it

or not, even though I have been primarily a H-D/Buell rider for years, I've ridden and even owned several other brands during my



riding career.

So, what was I doing on a Honda you may ask? Well, the folks from Honda actually invited me and several other riders to come to Killington, Vermont to test ride the new VFR1200F DCT and give them feedback about the bike; pretty

cool. I must say, those people from Honda were without a doubt great hosts, and we were presented a press-style overview of the bike and all its new innovations after a delicious dinner (yup, they fed us, too). Now, I am not a tech head, but I was able to understand

the major points discussed.

Not only is the new VFR pumped up to a 1237cc Unicam-head V4 from the previous 800, the new motor is loaded with tons of tech that can't be seen, but you sure can notice it with a twist of the throttle. The motor, although larger in displacement, is physically not much different in size than the 800 version. The bike itself has been totally redesigned and sculptured, using wind tunnel testing to give the rider plenty of wind protection. Far more than I would have suspected. The paint was

beautifully done via a new process - the reflection was crystal clear and flawless - certainly the best paint I've ever seen on anything. Along with a lot more upgrades such as hidden fasteners, a seat that one can actually find comfortable (even for long journeys), and more; the big thing everyone wanted to know about is the new Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT) with the automatic approach.

Although I listened to what they explained, the techno stuff involved with this transmission is more advanced than I can



write about. So I'll go through it with a basic review. The bike has no clutch lever or shift lever to start with, but it does have a parking brake to hold it in position when parked. The brake is a small lever on the handlebar that is thumb activated to release and simply lifted to engage. The

bike will start in a neutral setting, and when you are ready to roll there is a thumb switch by the throttle to press it into drive mode (an indicator on the dash will display a "D" when engaged). There are two modes via the switch in auto position; D for normal drive and S for sport mode,

which runs the rpms a bit higher and for a slightly longer duration.

There is also a switch by the throttle that you use your finger to switch the transmission into manual mode. How can you have a manual mode without a clutch or shift lever is the first question you may ask. Well, you shift gears via paddle shifters on the left handgrip; use your thumb to shift down and your finger on the upper paddle to shift up. You can also go into manual mode just by hitting the paddles but you will need to engage via the switch on the right side to go

back into automatic mode if you should desire.

Sounds confusing? Well at first I thought so too, until we headed out for our ride. Honda brought both versions, which includes the standard clutch and DCT of the new VFR for us to ride. We headed out on one version and at the halfway point of the ride would switch to the other. I started on the standard VFR - the bike handled great, rode smooth, had tons of torque and power, and like I stated before had far more wind protection than I would have guessed. Plus the seat was a joy



to be planted on. We rode a combination of more traveled roads with long sweeping curves and straight sections and a bunch of twisties to get a better feel for the bike's handling. The ride to our half way/bike switch point was a good combination to

explore the new bike. When we got to switch our rides from standard to DCT models, or vice-versa, I was slightly concerned about remembering all the controls on the automatic style bike. I was pleasantly surprised at how easy and almost natural using

the switches came to me.

Our return trip consisted of just riding the opposite direction we came, this way we could test the difference on similar pavements. On the regular roadways the automatic drive mode worked fine, even though the shifting was extremely smooth you

were still able to notice when the bike switched gears. You can tell all Honda's research and testing was at play because the bike shifted right where I would have done it myself – either up or down in gear. Once on the twisties I went into Sport mode and this is where the bike really shines. The higher rpm

run made the torque through the turns right where you wanted the powerband to be. The bike shifted effortlessly and spot on as we carved our way up through the curvy runs. I opted to test out the manual mode while buzzing the turns and the switchover was once again smooth and easy to use. After a short bit I realized that the automatic sport mode was doing just as I was manually, perhaps at some points a little faster, and certainly smoother; so I just switched back to that mode for the rest of the route. Why do the work and thinking

when the bike was doing it fine for me? The only "habit" I carried over from riding a standard model was when I came to a stop I automatically reached for a clutch lever that wasn't there. It took a couple of times to get over that. The starts from stops were just as everything else about the ride; smooth and effortless.

When we returned to the Honda camp, they crew was very inquisitive of our impressions of the bike, I almost forgot that's why we were there. They could tell that we enjoyed the ride, as we all came back with big grins on



our faces. So, beyond that fact that we enjoyed the ride, here are my thoughts of the bike; the DCT version was certainly fun to ride and extremely easy to adapt to. Power, handling, comfort were all there as well. I found the styling attractive, lines were smooth, color rich and for me not a supersport

track-looking bike. It looks like something you could ride for long rides and enjoy it in style, which you can. For me, it's everything that you would expect from a Honda.

There are also a boatload of accessories you can add to the bike from hardbags to a trunk to heated handgrips, windscreen



extenders and more. When Honda was asked if this bike was a competition for the sport-touring market they answered "no," even though it could be set up for it. One problem with using it as a sport-tourer is its low range capabilities,

which between the tank and mpg's equals about 150 miles. The market is for riders that are maybe a bit older than someone that rides superport bikes. I'm assuming the over-40 crowd, that still wants a sportbike as well as appreciates



new technology. Another thing to consider is the weight; the bike with the DCT is around 600lbs, slightly heavy for a sportbike. One other clincher is the cost, as the DCT version is about \$17,500. Perhaps the combination of the more relaxed ergo's, weight of

the bike and of the cost is why their target market is an older rider; they are the ones that could afford it and enjoy it.

Everything considered, the VFR1200F DCT is an amazing motorcycle and unquestionably a new direction for

motorcycling. I could see the application of an automatic transmission in future models, such as the Gold Wing, to make a good thing even better. One thing we can count on is that Honda will always be pushing the envelope to test and improve

what we know a motorcycle to be. Granted, many may not find the idea of an automatic transmission to be their slice of pie, but it is certainly worth a taste.

-- Gomo

