

# REVIEW: Honda VFR 1200



## REVIEW BY HEIN JONKER

I recently had the opportunity to make a trip up to Richards Bay for some Bike Talk business and remembered clearly what happened the last time I went up on a VFR (800); I ended up getting a R2500 speeding fine, only this time I wasn't going to make the same mistake again.

I was really looking forward in riding this bike to find out what the Japs had done to the VFR1200 that was so different from the VFR800.

Approaching the VFR, I noted it's much better looking in 'person' than in pictures. My eyes were drawn to the shapes, angles, contours, paintwork and interesting use of metal accents. It's unique, I'll give it that. The VFR1200 is a sport-touring motorcycle and more likely to go against the Suzuki Hayabusa, Kawasaki ZX14 and BMW K1300S

rather than the sport-touring Yamaha FJR1300, BMW K1300GT and Honda's own ST1300.

The motor pumps out a claimed 172 hp – not class leading, but certainly enough to put a smile on your face. It's quality horsepower too, the 129Nm of torque make for a surprisingly strong mid-range once you're over 3000 rpm. The muffler has an internal servo valve emitting a rather uninspiring tone at idle that morphs into that famous Honda V4 drone as the revs increase. There is no talk yet as to when we will see an automatic transmission option (actually an electronically shifted, dual-clutch six-speed) in the country, but the unit I rode had the standard six-speed manual box. I thought the hydraulic clutch felt a bit on the stiff side – not the light, silky-smooth unit I've come to expect on the VFR800, but the transmission itself shifted positively and without effort. Instead of traditional double overhead cams, the 1,237 cc, V4 engine goes with Uni-cams first found on Honda's four-stroke motocross bikes. The cam sits directly over the intake valves (which are larger and heavier) while the exhaust valves are activated by a rocker system. This reduces reciprocating mass as well as removing some fairly heavy components from the far reaches of the engine. The VFR1200 motor is not only lighter than the 800 version; it's physically smaller, allowing for optimal engine placement within the frame. The rear cylinders are narrower than the front, so sitting astride the motorcycle it's remarkably hour-glass shaped.

Once underway, the throttle response was consistent. The 76-degree V of the new engine, combined with offset crankpins allowed the engine to function without the weight and complexity of any sort of counter-balancers. Just enough "character" seeps through the bars, pegs and seat so the rider knows he's not aboard a refrigerator. The pegs and bar placement seemed pretty close to the VFR800, which is on the sporty side rather than the "sit up and beg" riding position of the more touring-oriented ST1300. A blast up through the gears was a real eye opener, once I hit 3000 rpm and up, it gave me retina-flattening acceleration. The VFR is so refined that it felt as if it was loafing in its own 'happy place'.

The legal cruising speed of 120 km/h comes up at 3500 rpm in sixth making the VFR1200 an effective touring bike, although the 18.5 L tank will mean a fairly limited cruising range. Wind protection from the double-skinned fairing seemed good, and the trip up and back to Durban gave me enough time to fully evaluate the "fatigue factor." Curb weight with a full tank and all fluids is a reasonable 268 kg only 18 kg more than the VFR800. Once underway, it feels like a 600, proving that mass centralization really works. The steering is light and neutral, and even the turning radius is quite reasonable as pulling feet-up U-turns on two-lane roads was no problem. A learning curve for me was that the turn-signal switch and horn-button positions were reversed on the left grip which caused me beeping the horn a few times instead of signaling. Lekka dof!

Riding the VFR1200 after having been on the VFR800 for a year was a real eye-opener. In reality, the VFR1200 is simply much more refined. A mere 20 minutes aboard the VFR1200, left me overwhelmed with an impression that the VFR1200 is extremely solid and a remarkable blend of performance and sophistication.

PRICE: R164 999.00 - Incl. 14% VAT



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