

Living in the Southwest, it's easy to take the climate for granted. Dedicated motorcyclists, though, look at Arizona as a paradise where great roads and an abundance of sunshine mean year-round riding is more than just a possibility—it's a near certainty.

RED ROCK SPORT TOUR

BY JASON FOGELSON
PHOTOS BY BRIAN J. NELSON

Yamaha, the Japanese motorcycle manufacturer with its US headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, used Arizona as the canvas for the rollout of its newly updated sport touring motorcycle, the FJR1300.

The motorcycle market can be divided into classes, just like the automotive market. Sport bikes are the sports cars of the bike world. They're fast and fancy, and sacrifice comfort for speed. Riders contort to fit the bikes with bent knees and toes pointed downward. Kawasaki Ninja, Suzuki Hayabusa, Yamaha R1 and other bikes fill this category. Cruisers are the sedans—low, comfy and old-fashioned, they sacrifice some lean angle for

style and relaxation. This is where you'll find the Harley-Davidson Fat Boy, Indian Chief and Star Bolt. You're more likely to see a rider's toes pointing up on a cruiser. Then there are the adventure bikes—the two-wheeled SUVs. Designed to look like they could be ridden as easily in the rough as on the road, adventure bikes combine dirt bike attributes with an upright seating position. The BMW GS bikes, Triumph Tiger series and Yamaha Super Tenere exemplify the breed. Then, there's the heavyweight touring class, which some riders would compare to the minivan of motorcycles. These are the big bikes, loaded with comfort and convenience features like hard luggage, radios, navigation and communications systems, cruise

control and even air bags, in some cases. The Harley-Davidson Electra Glide, Honda Goldwing and Kawasaki Vulcan are great examples of heavyweight touring bikes. There are more classes, but those are the main ones.

The FJR1300 fits into an increasingly popular class: sport touring. Sport touring bikes borrow features from multiple classes, attempting to compile a bike that is versatile and comfortable, fast and stylish. Riders are freed from the sport bike crouch, with a more relaxed, upright riding position. Powerful engines with tall gearing for highway use motivate the bikes, retaining performance but smoothed out a bit for ease of use. Essential touring features, like hard saddle bags, are usually standard equipment, but the extras like stereos, communication and navigation systems are left to the aftermarket. As a result, a sport touring bike can be a good choice for a wide swath of riders, from sport bike riders looking for a little more comfort and utility, to cruiser riders who want a little more performance, to heavyweight touring bike riders who still want to ride

long distances, but want a nimbler ride for the fun roads. Even commuters often select a sport touring motorcycle for their daily rides. The 2016 Yamaha FJR1300 has received a redesign that attempts to address the needs of each of these groups with refinements and upgrades to a bike that has been in production since 2003.

To demonstrate the capabilities of the newly refined 2016 FJR1300, Yamaha gathered a group of motorcycle journalists for a two-day ride. Day one followed a meandering path through the Tonto National Forest to Payson, then over to Prescott and concluding with an overnight stay in Sedona; and day two took a more direct route back from Sedona through Jerome and the Prescott Valley, then south on Interstate 17 back to Phoenix. The routes provided a good sampling of roads from congested low-speed commuting to wide open highway to twisting mountain passes. Arizona's climate cooperated with temperatures ranging from the low 50s to the low 80s along the

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FOOD AND SNACKS ON THE ROAD

Scoops Ice Cream & Espresso

Coffee culture has truly reached every corner of the state, and is now filling in the middle. The folks at Scoops pour a mean, sophisticated brew, and they make delicious ice cream to boot. A great, friendly stop on our route—and free WiFi, too.

201 W Main St, Payson AZ 85541
PaysonScoops.com | 928-474-3957

Prescott Brewing Company

A motorcycle tour runs on gasoline and food. The Prescott Brewing Company is in the town's vibrant center, and caters to tourists and locals alike. Good pub food and a rustic tavern atmosphere make this a comfortable place to fuel up for the next leg of the ride. Leave the beer alone while you're riding, though—stick to the fried mozzarella.

Bashford Courts
130 W Gurley St, Prescott AZ 86301
PrescottBrewingCompany.com
928-771-2795

Mile High Grill and Inn

The former ghost town of Jerome will never be abandoned again, thanks to comfortable and welcoming establishments like Mile High Grill and Inn. This cozy lunch counter is decorated with travel and entertainment memorabilia from the middle of the 20th century, and serves a great breakfast, a great cup of coffee and a dose of hospitality that makes you want to move to Jerome and become a regular.

309 Main Street, Jerome AZ 86331
MileHighGrillandInn.com | 928-634-5094

Rock Springs Café

There's always that place off of the main highway with the old-fashioned frontage and a big, bustling parking lot. What's going on in there, and why is everyone stopping? At the Rock Springs Café, it's homemade ice cream, delicious thick milkshakes, a big American breakfast and lunch menu and a friendly staff in a rustic atmosphere. Road food at its best, and the kind of atmosphere traveling motorcyclists love to discover.

35769 Old Black Canyon Highway
Black Canyon City AZ 85324
RockSpringsCafe.com | 623-374-5794

way, with dry pavement at every turn.

Two models of FJR1300 are available for 2016. The FJR1300ES (\$17,990) incorporates Yamaha's electronically adjustable suspension system and LED cornering lights, while the FJR1300A (\$16,390) has a manually-adjustable suspension and does not offer the cornering light feature. The ES model's suspension adjustment features are accessible through a nested menu screen operated by controls on the left handlebar. Suspension adjustments can only be accessed at a stop, for safety reasons. The A model has a tool-free lever to change rear suspension from Hard to Soft—one of the easiest manual adjustments available, and absolutely clear in intent and operation. Bravo. The differences in setup on both the electronic and manual suspension units perform as advertised, within a narrow range. The suspension is always a little firm, just like you want it to be on a performance-oriented bike.

Yamaha's designers spent some energy on the FJR's appearance for this year, redesigning the LED-twin-headlight assembly and converting to all-LED taillights. Available only in Cobalt Blue, the FJR looks like a grown-up's motorcycle, but still has some sharp angles and interesting shapes to

match the sporting character of its performance.

The FJR1300 gets its mojo from a liquid-cooled, fuel-injected 1,298cc inline four-cylinder engine with four valves per cylinder and tuned to produce 101.8 lb-ft of peak torque at 7,000 rpm, up slightly from 2015 specs. (Yamaha doesn't quote horsepower figures.) The engine is smooth and powerful, and the torque delivery is broad. This isn't a bike that requires a lot of sawing through the gears to ride smoothly. It pulls in all of the lower gears, simplifying power delivery on technical roads. Shaft drive performs beautifully, with no driveline lash or jacking. Standard Traction Control (Yamaha's D-Mode), anti-lock braking, throttle-by-wire and cruise control enhance the touring package. Unified Braking, Yamaha's linked braking setup, engages two front brake pistons when the rear brake is activated under certain circumstances, a feature that performs transparently to improve braking performance.

The FJR received a significant upgrade in the gearbox this year with the addition of a sixth gear. In the spirit of refinement, the six-speed gearset fits into the same space as the outgoing five-speed thanks to a new dog setup and a change to helical gears. The gears have been spaced more

evenly than before, and sixth gear is a 0.86 overdrive, which has the effect of lowering revs at highway cruising speeds for a smoother ride. Clutch pull has been reduced by 20 percent, and the clutch is now an "Assist and Slipper" wet clutch with three small springs, as opposed to the single spring of the five-speed. The combination of refinements has resulted in a super smooth-shifting bike that is easy to operate at takeoff with delightfully smooth upshifts and downshifts.

The electrically-adjustable windshield has five inches of travel, and does a good job of smoothing airflow for the rider. The windshield retains its position when the ignition is turned off and back on, so you can find your favorite position and know that it will be in place for the next ride.

A one-liter storage compartment is tucked into the top left side of the fairing. It can only be opened when the ignition is on, and hides a convenient 12-volt outlet for GPS or cellphone charging—a very nice feature. Heated grips are standard, as are manually adjustable side wind deflectors. Seat height is adjustable by 20mm up and down without tools, and there are three positions of adjustment for the handlebars (with tools).

A few details let the FJR down a bit, unfortu-

nately.

The flat seat is too hard, causing discomfort after about 60 miles. For a bike that is a candidate for long rides, that's a crime. The aftermarket will come to the rescue here.

For some reason, Yamaha has not equipped the FJR with self-cancelling turn signals—a flaw that is not easily remedied by the aftermarket. Some riders don't mind this, but riders from other brands will have to adjust.

Then there are the saddlebags. Hard bags are standard, and have good capacity at 60 liters combined. They are clamshell style, opening with a keyed latch. An extra-large full-face helmet won't fit. Even when using Yamaha's fitted accessory saddle bag liners, it's a struggle to close the bags. The bags do remove from the bike quite easily without tools, which is a nice feature. The bike gets a single good-old-fashioned key for ignition and bag locking, putting it at a slight disadvantage with competitors that offer electric locking and key-free operation. A top box from

Yamaha's accessories catalog would make everyday use easier, allowing owners to leave the saddlebags in the garage between touring rides.

The gold standard in sport touring is the BMW R1200RT, which comes in at least \$1,000 higher than the FJR when comparably equipped. The Kawasaki Concours 14 ABS starts at about \$1,000 lower, but doesn't offer traction control or electronically-adjustable suspension options. Don't overlook the Ducati Multistrada or Triumph Trophy SE for additional inspiration.

Overall, the FJR1300 is a fast, fun and smooth sport touring bike that can be even better with a few easy tweaks and personalization. With a big 6.6-gallon gas tank and a rational appetite for regular 86-octane or higher gasoline (estimated at 36 mpg), it begs to be pointed toward our gorgeous roads and ridden—briskly. ■



ACCOMMODATIONS

Phoenix Marriott Tempe at the Buttes

The Phoenix Marriott Tempe at the Buttes was the starting point for our tour of Central Arizona. Located just three miles from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, the hotel is conveniently located and unexpectedly beautiful. The multi-level hotel is built into a hillside, and takes full advantage of gorgeous views. Resort-like features include waterfalls, two pools, a full-service spa and multiple restaurants, including the lovely Top of the Rock Restaurant.

2000 W Westcourt Way, Tempe AZ 85282
Marriott.com | 602-225-9000

Amara Resort and Spa, a Kimpton Hotel

An overnight stay in Sedona should be relaxing and serene, and Amara Resort and Spa does its best to help riders achieve those states with cool modern design, a saltwater infinity pool, a restaurant with healthy choices and an onsite spa. Located in the middle of town, the Amara is walking distance to shopping, dining and psychics. A secure enclosed parking garage protects resting motorcycles from the elements and from prying eyes.

100 Amara Lane, Sedona AZ 86336
Amararesort.com | 928-282-4828 ■



JASON FOGELSON is a freelance automotive journalist. Currently in his second term as president of the Motor Press Guild, he has covered cars, trucks, SUVs and motorcycles for a variety of print, web and broadcast media, including *AOL Autos*, *Autotrader*, *CNN.com*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *Mazdasport Magazine*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, *Maximum Drive Magazine* and *Fine Living Network*. Jason also writes music, theater and film criticism, in addition to the occasional screenplay. Jason is a contributing writer for *Forbes.com* (luxury automotive, motorcycles and lifestyles), an expert for *About.com* (SUVs, crossovers and minivans), and he writes a weekly column about motorcycle travel for Best Western Hotels' travel blog. His first book, *100 Things for Every Gearhead to Do Before They Die*, is available at BooksForGearheads.com.