

Suzuki's Boulevard M109R is a beast on the road

by Jerry Garrett

The high-performance, big-twin cruiser is a child of the 21st century. Before 2001, when the Honda VTX 1800 came out, it really didn't exist. Now, however, it is a fully realized segment all its own.

SUZUKI M109R - The Boulevard M109R V-twin has 109 cubic inches of displacement, which places it among the largest motorcycle engines. The pistons, 4.4 inches across, are the largest reciprocating engine pistons of any production passenger car or motorcycle, Suzuki says. CNS Photo courtesy of Suzuki The VTX 1800 was Honda's first big V-twin cruiser, and quite a sensation for its size at the time. But two years later Kawasaki blew cruiser fans away with its Vulcan 2000, with the biggest V-twin ever made. Yamaha joined the party next with its high-character, streamlined Star Roadliner/Stratoliner models. Then, Suzuki completed the set with its pumped-up Boulevard M109R - it's a relative bargain in this class, starting thousands less than the competition at \$12,399.

A cruiser harkens to classic American motorcycle designs from as far back as the 1930s from Harley-Davidson, Indian and Excelsior-Henderson. The last couple of decades, Japanese manufacturers, with varying levels of success, have brought out their versions of this all-American classic. Most wind up being derided as "Harley knock-offs."

In recent years, though, Suzuki, Kawasaki, Honda and Yamaha have engaged in a serious horsepower-displacement "arms race" for cruiser class bragging rights. The 109 in the Suzuki's nomenclature refers to its cubic-inch displacement; only a few bikes - the Vulcan 2000, Roadliner and Honda VTX among them - have crossed the 100-cubic-inch barrier.

How big is too big for a motorcycle engine? Suzuki engineers struggled with whether to try and trump the Kawasaki in cubic inches race. Ultimately, they decided anything over 109 was overkill, in their opinion.

Still, even at "just" 109 cubic inches, Suzuki claims the M109R's (1783cc for metric-system lovers) V-twin is the most powerful in the world. It is not the largest - the Vulcan's 125-cubic-inch monster continues to hold that distinction - but it is the largest liquid-cooled, dual-overhead-cam engine in a cruiser. The only other engine for cruiser use with a DOHC valve train is the 1130cc unit in Harley-Davidson's V-Rod series of bikes.

The M109R's pistons are 4.4 inches across, which makes them, Suzuki says, "the largest reciprocating engine pistons being used in any production passenger car or motorcycle on Earth."

The wide bores of the cylinders needed to fit those pistons, coupled with a comparatively short stroke. These helped the mighty V-twin, with its sportbike-derived fuel injection, make such an impressive combination of horsepower and torque. Output is listed at 127 horsepower and 118 foot-pounds of torque, which trumps the Vulcan 2000 and the Roadliner by a few ponies (although the Vulcan still has a bit more torque).

Bazooka-sized twin exhausts produce an explosive sound that deepens as the throttle opens. Power is put to the pavement via a five-speed gearbox, a shaft drive (another sportbike touch) and Dunlop D221 radial tires on 18-inch machined aluminum wheels. The rear tire is fatter than most auto tires: 8.5 inches wide.

One might think, with that much power being generated, acceleration would be blinding. But the M109R's performance quotient is tempered by its dry weight of nearly 700 pounds. Load it up with the typical midlife crisis American male (the demographic to which the M109R is aimed), a few accessories and 5 gallons of premium, and it'll easily tip the scales in quadruple digits. There is certainly enough power to take along a passenger. But this bike is set up more for riding alone, even though an aerodynamic cover for the rear fender is easily interchangeable for a second seat cushion.

Though the M109R has many sportbike styling cues, its mostly upright seating position would seem alien to most crouching sportbike riders. Cruiser riders will find the footpegs a stretch. Same thing with the wide-load handlebars. It's like the bike was designed for Paul Bunyan.

The 27.8-inch seat height, however, favors the vertically challenged. For a "stock" seat, it remained surprisingly comfortable through an extended ride. Despite its weight, the bike was easy to balance, reasonably responsive in slow-speed maneuvering despite its wide-load rear tire, and seldom a chore to lift off of its well-positioned and convenient-to-deploy kickstand.

The long-throw clutch was a bear to operate in city riding - and it is not adjustable. The brake lever, however, is in six positions. The large twin-disc front brakes from Suzuki's GSX-R1000 sportbike were impressive. The rear brakes seemed more than adequate, but I had little opportunity to test their performance boundaries on my ride.

One characteristic all Suzuki bikes seem to share is a rigid chassis and a solidly composed ride. The engine is cradled and cushioned inside a high-tensile-steel frame with a cast aluminum swingarm. Up front, inverted 46mm cartridge fork legs provide 5.1 inches of travel. The single-shock rear suspension soaks up 4.7 inches' worth of bumps. The wheelbase, thanks to a fairly compact engine case, is an easy-to-maneuver 67.5 inches.

The styling is clean and aerodynamic, if not particularly svelte. There is a noticeable lack of exposed wires, cables and hoses. Even the LED taillight is nicely integrated into the single-piece rear fender/seat unit.

Brightwork abounds. But the M109R will need all the sparkle it can muster to stand out from the herd in this class of bruiser cruisers. SPECS

Suzuki Boulevard M109R

Engine: Fuel-injected 1783cc liquid-cooled, 45-degree DOHC V-Twin

Transmission: five-speed, shaft drive

Seat height: 27.6 inches

Claimed dry weight: 695 pounds

Fuel capacity: 4.9 gallons

Wheelbase/length: 67.5/96.9 inches

Tires and wheels: 130/70R 18-inch Dunlop D221 front, 240/40R18 Dunlop D221 rear; on cast alloy wheels

Front suspension: Inverted 46mm stanchions, 5.1-inch travel

Rear suspension: One damper, 4.7-inch travel, adjustable for preload

MSRP: \$12,399

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