

Honda ST1100

Overall Satisfaction Rating: 9.04



Duane Kinslow (rt.) from Lexington, Kentucky, with his black '91 ST at Mount Rushmore. Center is his friend Sam with the silver ST. Duane says his brother-in-law was riding the Kawasaki in the background, but after a test ride on Duane's bike, went home and bought a new red ST1100.

A very large "Thank you" to our ST1100 owners, who have given us our most interesting model survey to date. Every one of these surveys so far has carried a surprise or two in the results, and the ST owners have continued that tradition, as you will find when you read their opinions and findings after testing the bike the only way that really counts: By riding over 300 models nearly 4 million miles!

The Bikes

Of all the STs being reported on, 86 percent were purchased new and 14 percent pur-

chased used. The average price paid for new machines was \$8969.12, and owners of used machines reported paying an average of \$6995.34.

One of the first very interesting things to come out of this survey was in regards to the popularity of ABS on the ST1100s. According to those responding to our survey, 20 percent of the owners of 1992 models had purchased their bikes with ABS. Among owners of 1993 models, that jumped to 51 percent. Then came the owners of 1994 models, claiming that 95 percent of their number had purchased ABS-equipped bikes! A fairly astounding jump in the popularity of anti-lock braking, and one we wish Honda and all the other man-

ufacturers would pay a little more attention to. To our way of thinking, ABS should be an available option on practically every motorcycle built.

Insurance and Maintenance

ST owners report their average yearly insurance costs as \$365.62. Really not too bad considering the displacement and the sporting characteristics of the machine. Luckily, it seems the fact it carries integrated luggage nudges the marque into the touring category as far as most insurance carriers are concerned. Bikes of similar displacement and capabilities, but without luggage,

invariably suffer from higher premiums.

Unfortunately we'll have to beg off on giving you the maintenance cost figures, as we have discovered an inherent flaw in our survey. Since we did not specify exactly what we considered maintenance, it seems about half of our respondents included the cost of tires, while the other half did not. This resulted in numbers that jumped all over the map, and really don't mean anything. Future surveys will be more exact.

Passengers

Nearly half (49 percent) of all those responding noted that they virtually never carry a passenger on their STs. Understandable, considering the machine's strong performance bias, which attracts the sportier end of the sport touring crowd. However, among the passengers responding, marks for the ST were generally quite favorable, with a few notable exceptions.

Passengers' first complaint was severe wind buffeting at highway speeds, which explains the popularity of aftermarket windshields for the ST. Second most common complaint was the lack of a passenger backrest (now available), and third was the seat. However, we would be remiss if we did not note that among the hundreds of comments sent in by passengers, the majority involved praise for the ST, rather than complaints about it.

(Editor's note: My wife insists that I include her two cents' worth here, as she agrees strongly with the majority of other ladies who wrote in about the ST. During our all-too-brief three month loan of a '93 ST from Honda, she chose it over our own GL1500 for every ride we took, including a couple of four-day, 3,000-mile jaunts. And yes, it was equipped with a passenger backrest.)

Among the passenger comments we ran into a number of humorous ones that were to set the tone for the rest of the survey. Unlike any other model survey we've run, this one garnered a fair share of light-hearted, off-the-cuff remarks from owners and passengers alike. As near as we can tell, these remarks generally stem from a sense of satisfaction in their purchase that runs so deep as to encourage them to joke around about it. For example:

"My butt hurts, and it scares me. But I love it!"

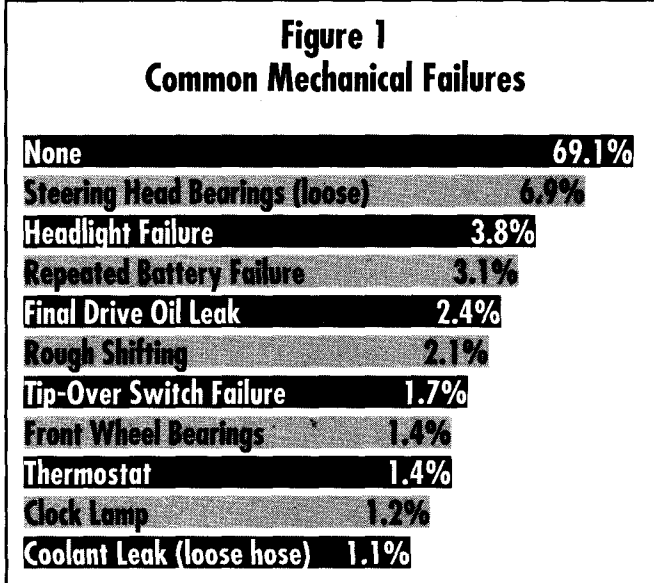
"I hate that bike. Ever since we got it my husband never comes home—and I want to ride it!"

"Ever since we got the ST, none of my housework gets done. Darn!"

Mechanical Problems

For the first time ever, responses to the "Mechanical Problems" category threw us for a loop. The overwhelming majority of ST owners agreed with Mark Garrett of Hernando, Mississippi, who wrote, "What mechanical problems?"

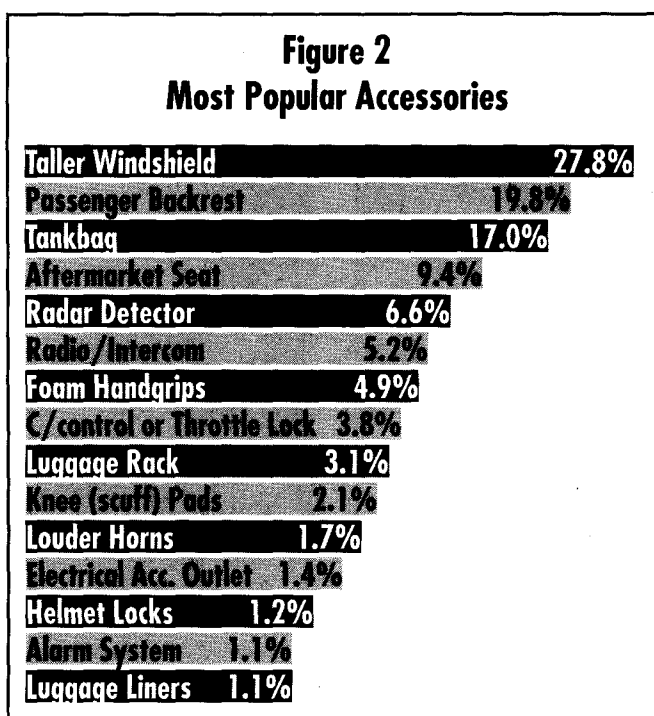
Over 69 percent of our survey forms carried comments in this section like, "Zero,"



"Never" and "Are you kidding?" There may not be such a thing as a mechanically perfect motorcycle, but Honda appears to be hitting closer to the mark with the ST than anyone ever has before.

Still, among the problems that were listed there are some unusual ones that have never cropped up before, and which might be worth the Honda engineers taking a look into. The obvious problems—the ones that crop up

on almost every motorcycle—were highly noticeable in their absence. Things like clutch failures, fork seal leaks, and the biggest monkey Honda carried on their back for so many years—stator failure—were virtually never mentioned. Yet nearly four percent of the ST owners reporting noted problems with repeated headlight failures. Bulb burnout. Go figure. It may sound minor, but have you priced a halogen



motorcycle bulb lately?

The highest reported problem was with steering head bearings loosening up on a fairly regular and too-often basis, a leaking oil seal in the final drive, and the bike's tendency to go through batteries at the rate of about two a year.

The ST earns some kind of award here for coming up with the most original and unusual complaint to ever affect more than one percent of its owners: A clock lamp that flashes on and off intermittently. Sounds silly, but we can see where it could get really annoying on a long night ride. Especially if you just paid over \$10,000 for the bike.

Accessories

Since one of the biggest complaints ST owners have is the brevity of the stock windshield, it stands to reason that the most popular aftermarket accessory installed by our survey respondents was a taller and wider windshield. The most popular model noted in the survey was the Rifle windshield, though we should mention that Hondaline now offers two optional windshields for the ST also.

Second most popular accessory was a passenger backrest and/or luggage rack combination, which are also items recently added to the Hondaline list of ST accessories. Third was a tankbag of some sort, and fourth was a radar detector.

Though Honda has obviously been on the ball with providing several new accessories that appeal to ST owners, they also seem to be missing the boat on a couple. Most notably, in the area of radios, intercoms and cruise

Figure 3
Things To Love About It

Power, Performance	29.1%
Comfort	24.3%
Looks, Styling	21.5%
Handling	20.1%
V-4 Smoothness	11.8%
Range and Mileage	7.6%
ABS	7.3%
Luggage	7.3%
Reliability	5.5%
Versatility	3.1%
Crash Damage Resistance	2.2%
Mirror Placement	1.3%

controls. And despite years of carping by every motorcycle magazine in the business, the ST, like virtually every other Japanese motorcycle, still carries a pitifully anemic horn. Hence the popularity of aftermarket items like the twin-tone Fiamms that are so popular among ST owners.

Among the owners who noted having added an aftermarket seat, the overwhelm-

ing favorite was the Corbin "Dual Canyon" model.

Things To Love About It

Power, performance, comfort, handling, and stylish good looks. That just about says it all in a nutshell. Make no mistake about it, the overwhelming majority of ST owners

absolutely love their bikes—for these reasons. In a survey report several months back we made the statement that the Kawasaki Concours virtually defined the term "sport touring." Now we feel safe in saying that if the Concours defined it, the ST1100 refined it.

Typical owner comments in the survey went like this:

"It just does everything well."

"The first motorcycle that truly seems designed with the rider in mind."

"If it were a watch, it would be a Rolex."

"Finally, the perfect marriage of sport and touring!"

Things To Hate About It

Judging from the responses, the word "hate" is probably too strong a term to be using here. "Minor annoyances" would probably be more like it. But since we used it in all our other model reviews, it will have to stay.

It would have been no great surprise if the ST owners' number-one complaint about their marque was the stock windshield—but that wasn't the case. Actually, the windshield came in second after their concerns for the overall weight of the bike. This seems a bit strange after their requests for more and more weight-adding accessories, but we suppose it's only natural for most of us to wish for a bike that carried all the amenities of a Gold Wing SE in a package the size and weight of a CBR600.

Here again, the ST owners displayed a sense of good humor that reflected their overall delight in their machines, voicing complaints like:

"It gets dirty too quick."

"It tempts me to ride when I should be working."

And, "They came out with the red one after I already bought mine!"

Still, there seem to be some very legitimate complaints here about the difficulty and

Figure 4
Things To Hate About It

Weight	19.1%
Windshield Height	16.3%
Seat Uncomfortable	9.3%
Maintenance Difficulty/Expense	8.3%
Handlebar Position	5.6%
Lack of Radio	4.9%
Helmet Locks (inaccessible)	4.1%
Tire Life	3.9%
Vibration at Handgrips	3.1%
No Elec. Acc. Outlet	2.4%
No Cruise Control	2.4%
No Hydraulic Valve Lifters	2.1%
No Self-Cancelling T/S	2.1%
Exhaust Note Benign	1.2%



Edmund Kehoe is the President of Kehoe Chrysler, Inc., in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Needless to say, he can have his pick of any new Chrysler on the lot, any time. Care to guess what his favorite form of transportation is?

expense of standard maintenance on the ST, the accessibility of its helmet locks (a joke), and its innate ability to eat a \$250 set tires for breakfast. Of course that last item would have to be at least partially charged off to riders being sucked into a more-aggressive-than-normal riding mode by the ST's seamless powerband (we know, because it's happened to all of us).

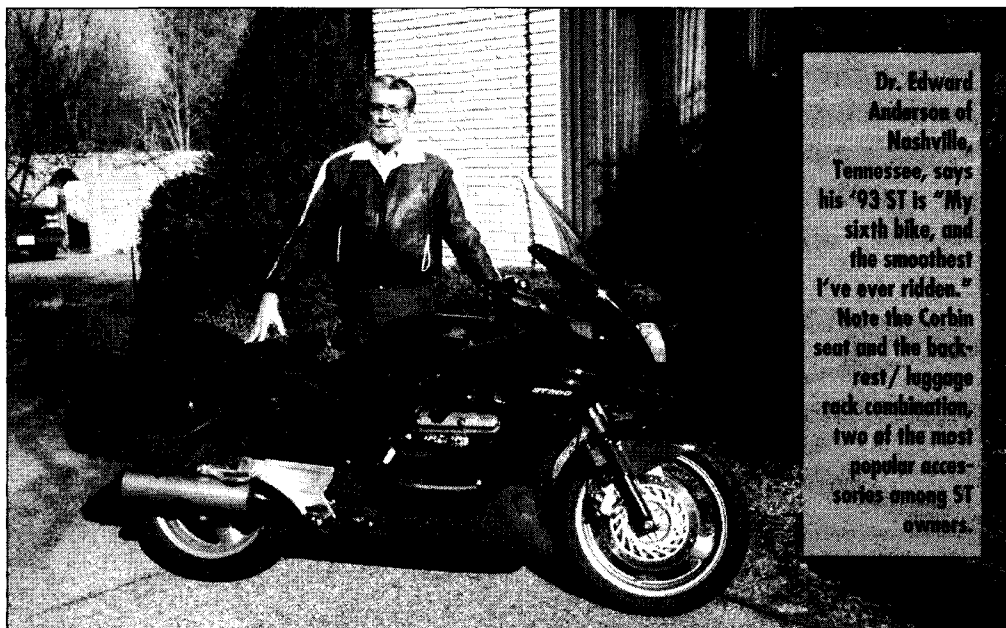
Tires

Among tire brands favored by ST1100 owners, Metzeler scored first with Dunlop running a fairly close second. Within the six most popular brands listed, these were the favorite models: Metzeler - ME33 Laser (front), ME55 Metronic (rear); Dunlop - Arrowmax; Avon - ST Radials; Bridgestone - Exedra; Michelin - 89X Radials; Pirelli - ZR17 Radials.

The Buying Decision

As has been the case with every motorcycle model surveyed so far, owners report that magazine reviews were far and away the number-one factor that influenced their buying decision. However, Honda should take note that in the ST1100's case, demo rides at rallies and dealerships also exerted a very strong influence on final sales.

It is also worthy of note that two selling factors which have never scored high enough to make the graph on other models surfaced here for the first time. These are the manufacturer's reputation (4 percent) and the availability of ABS brakes (2 percent).



Rating The Bike and The Dealers

We don't want this article to come off sounding like a commercial for the ST1100, but the truth is the final overall rating given to the machine by hundreds of riders after literally millions of miles is the highest we've seen to date. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being perfect, ST1100 owners gave their marque the outstanding score of 9.04. Despite some minor, fixable glitches, Honda seems to have created the most-nearly-perfect sport touring machine on the market to date.

Traditionally, the overall scoring for dealership service and support rates somewhat lower than the bike itself when scored on the same scale. Such is also the case for Honda, though here again the ratings are higher than those received by any other manufacturer to date, posting at 7.85 overall. The number-one complaint about dealerships was that their mechanics were not always up to speed on diagnosing and repairing problems with the ST.

Speaking To Honda

As always, our final item is asking the owners what they would like to say to the manufacturer about their bikes. One more time, the ST1100 owners surprised us a bit by not listing a possible improvement as their number-one comment. Instead, the most frequent statement they wanted passed along to Honda was, "Keep up the good work!"

The second place comment was a tie between "Cut the

weight" and "Redesign the windshield," followed by "Make a better seat" and "Offer more accessories." The fifth most common comment was a complaint—"Train your mechanics better"—but the sixth was a simple, obviously heart-felt statement:

"Thank you, Honda." 🍌

Steve Fowler of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, pretty much sums up the opinion of the majority of ST1100 owners with his "thumbs up."

