features

inline four with wet-sump lubrication, built-up crank and roller bearing. Two valves per cylinder are shim-adjusted and spring-closed, camshafts are operated by roller chain.

It's big and heavy and reliable.. It's also pretty smooth, although not as smooth as the 90-degree V-twin Ducati. The Suzuki's gas tank exhibited an annoying buzz at high revs when less than full; the Ducati was more serene.

In addition to the usual instrumentation, the Suzuki has oil temperature and fuel level gauges and a clock. The Sport doesn't have the digital gear position indicator fitted to most other Suzukis, perhaps because it only appeals to the expert rider.

The Suzuki's advantage over other Japanese fours stems from its combination of relatively light weight and stiff, tunable chassis. It also makes a lot of horsepower, how much, the factory won't say. but it's believed to be between 85 and 90.

The standard GS-1000 with wire wheels and single front disc is lightest of all at 227kg. The cast-wheel deluxe weighs 232 and the fairing on our Sport bumped the dry weight up to 238.

It's the adjustable chassis which Suzuki owners particularly appreciate. Armed with an air gauge and a pump, you can make precise alterations in spring rate of the combined air-and-steel-spring fork.

Five possible positions for rear spring preload and four for rear damping rate, plus the possibilities at the front, allow umpteen combinations.

The Sport has an 18-inch cast rear wheel, same size as that of the standard wire-wheel model. The other cast-wheel 1000s, the E and L models, both use a 17-inch rear.

Its 3.25 x 19 and 4.00 x 18 IRC tires are V-rated for sustained speeds of more than 210km/h.

According to Suzuki Canada, few other changes distinguish the Sport from the other three versions. Few are needed. The GS-1000 already stands head and shoulders above most others. The Sport package is icing on the cake.

We had eagerly awaited the track session, for two simple reasons: one, no one could state with finality beforehand which of these two super handling bikes would win and two, you don't get to watch Mike Duff and Yvon Duhamel at work together on the same race track every day.

Shannonville Motorsport Park is club-type road race circuit just east of Belleville, Ont., a little closer to Toronto than to Montreal. Its six-corner, 1.68 km-long surface bears witness to weekly onslaught of rubber from every sort of sporting conveyance. Two moderate-length straights reqard accelerative ability, but good speed through the preceding and following corners is a must.

The rest of the circuit, L-shaped and clockwise in direction, has an array of lefts and rights, ripples and bumps which demands a rider's attention.

Neither man nor machine has any time for the proverbial deep breath, making a hard 10 laps a good workout for both.

Canadian winters don't help, either. The first corner opens with a series of frost heaved transverse ripples which can cost a bike a second a lap if its behavior at racing speed isn't up to scratch.

Terrain is flat and crash barriers are relatively few. Bike racers like it for that reason, especially since most novices quickly come to grief on their first outing there. Duhamel was new to the track, Duff had ridden it once before.

Alterations to the bikes for the track session were relatively few.

The Ducati's Marzocchi rear dampers were pressurized with air to 28 psi. Springs were raised to meximum preload to cure the frequent bottoming which had plagued a staff rider earlier on rough paved roads. The Marzocchi forks had no provision for adjustment, except for damping fluid level and viscosity which we didn't alter from stock.

The Ducati required no other chassis tuning, apart from checking tire pressures, before going onto the track. Duff and Duhamel both said it felt like a racing bike, which of course it is.

The Suzuki offers ample opportunity for fiddling with the front end as well as the rear. We cranked the rear damping rate to its maximum setting at No. 4, and springs to the top setting of five.

Fork legs are charge at the factory to 78 kPa (11psi) as an intermediate setting for average riding. Ours had a slight leak from one leg and, when we checked pressure at the track, was down to zero. We raised both to 16 psi, but Duff complained the front end was chattering so we raised them again to 25, more than what Suzuki recommends but less than the absolute limit of 35.

Both riders were circulating at about 1:05 in the opening laps of their first practice sessions. Duff on Suzuki and Duhamel on Ducati. After five laps, they had knocked off two to three seconds, but were still in the 1:02 to 1:03 range.

As soon as they changed bikes, times dropped to 1:01 on their first lap as they began to learn the track. The Suzuki began backfiring on the overrun going into the slower corners, so Duhamel pulled in and we enriched the pilot settings twice until the problem went away.

While we played with the Suzuki's carbs, Duff trucked around on the Ducati, getting into the low 59-second range. The sound of the Ducati with Conti mufflers has to be heard to be believed. There's nothing else like it on earth, which has to be a Good Thing. It's exquisitely intoxicating on a race track, but uncoscionably loud for any city riding whatever.

The Suzuki is a whisper jet by any standard, including the government's. It will go so fast, so quietly, without an iota of effort that it will tax your perceptions to the limit.

The neo-classic Ducati suited Duff's riding style, and he was regularly in the 58 to 59-second bracket during his second practice period. If ever a motorcycle felt on rails, this is it. The Super Sport is imperturbable.

Duff employs the stick-with-the-machine riding style which pre-dates the megabike era but is as timeless as speed on wheels. The Ducati responds.

Duhamel was breaking into the 59s on occasion and had one 58, but the Suzuki was already showing its limitations. No mortal has battled more ill-handling bikes than Yvon, and he found the GS tame by comparison with some of the camels he has raced over the years.

Still, the first-corner ripples were sending the rear of the Suzuki into gyrations that threw the bike off line for a rapid entry to the following straight and wasted time in the corner. Yvon Duhamel estimated the loss amounted to a second right there.

A sudden misfire on the Ducati bumped lap times up - first by three seconds, then eight, then 17 before Mike pulled in for a look. Harte suspected a fuel problem and increased main jet sizes by two.

More practice laps resulted in more misfiring. Harted pulled off the steel fuel tank and finally found the electrical fault which had caused the bothers. The spring steel strap which holds the horn had swung against and cut the insulation of the low-tension lead to one of the Nippon Denso coils. We pulled off the horn, applied tape and were back on the track in short order.