

**BMW F700GS vs.
Honda NC700X DCT ABS vs.
Kawasaki Versys vs.
Suzuki V-Strom 650 ABS**

NO DOUBT THE ALL-NEW HONDA NC700X IS A GREAT MOTOR-cycle, but it wasn't long after the moto-press began throwing around terms like "revolutionary" and "game-changer" and "make mine red" before cooler heads (our readers) began to question the bike's claim to unique fame (read this month's *Hotshots*). Dual-clutch transmission? It's a fancy automatic; seen it. Built-in storage? Meh, the Pacific Coast had more. Great fuel mileage? Other bikes are close—and, of course, their riders love them. All in all, a worthy excuse for us to round up the leading contenders for the Practical Adventure Bike crown (we're all about the labels!). Or should we call it the Affordable One-Bike Solution?





The \$6999 NC700X graced our cover just last November, so this time we're mixing things up by testing the \$8999 NC700X DCT ABS, the model with, that's right, you guessed it, ABS and dual-clutch automatic transmission. This unit is our loaded long-term testbike, so forgive the non-standard tall windscreen (\$150), saddlebag and top-trunk mounts/supports (\$500; add the actual luggage for another \$900), "light" bar (\$150), centerstand (\$150) and more.

The BMW F700GS is a new model for 2013 (the only '13 in the test), and it's either a step up from last year's F650GS or a step down from last year's F800GS, depending on which direction you're coming from. The F700GS has the same 798cc parallel-Twin as the 800 (so did the discontinued 650), tuned down to 62 rear-wheel horsepower from the 800's 74. The 700 gets a cheaper fork, a steel

handlebar, smaller cast wheels and a lower seat (there's also an optional lowering kit). For 2013, it also gets triple disc brakes with standard ABS, all for 10 bucks shy of \$10K. Our testbike has the Premium Package, which includes a centerstand, saddlebag mounts but no bags, heated grips and an onboard computer, which jacks it up to \$10,495. Add another \$350 for ESA/ASC electronic suspension and traction control. And another \$145 for the Comfort seat and \$395 for the alarm. Suddenly it's \$11,385. Resist and you'll save money.

The redesigned Suzuki V-Strom 650 ABS was a new model just last year, with more spacious ergos and a freshen-up of its already excellent Gladius V-Twin engine, which Suzuki claimed would increase fuel mileage by 10 percent. For \$8299, it's a lot of motorcycle, and Suzuki sells many accessories for it,

too, including luggage.

Last and least expensive, the \$7899 Kawasaki Versys got updated in 2010, with rubber engine mounts and revised footpegs for reduced vibration from the 650cc parallel-Twin, an adjustable windscreen, new grab bars and bungee hooks. Let us ride.

Face it: If you had the free time and wherewithal to gallivant to Alaska and Africa, you'd buy one of the upscale adventurers and another one for your manservant. This lot's "adventures" will consist more of slashing through urban jungle with weekend forays into accessible hinterlands.

Suzuki V-Strom 650 ABS

If you *were* going to Alaska, you'd want



there is no atmosphere, and its *Sputnik* interior and cheap black heat-tile plastics make it impossible to escape the fact that you married for convenience. Then again, if you're already equipped with a happy spouse who likes to ride on back, the V-Strom is most likely to keep the peace, with the most comfortable back seat.

It's easy to see how guys who pile on tons of miles and wear socks with sandals love this bike.

Kawasaki Versys

The Versys is the yapping lap dog of the group. It's the lightest bike here and serves up the tautest ride. Its 55.8-inch wheelbase is 4.7 inches shorter than the next-shortest Honda's, and its tallish seat, long-travel

▲ Ups

- ▲ It's the most "exciting" bike here
- ▲ Lightest and most nimbleous
- ▲ 5.0-gallon fuel tank

▼ Downs

- ▼ Not the slickest gearbox
- ▼ Not the smoothest running
- ▼ There's nothing else not to like

suspension and 17-inch tires make it the preferred mount for wheelies, stoppies and late-night yard crossings—things its ABS and traction control won't interfere with, since it doesn't have them.

As for power, it's slightly down vs. the V-Strom and the BMW, with a peakier, buzzy and more rambunctious feel that'll have you shifting more and giving the tachom-

eter needle a bigger workout. For all those reasons, the Versys is the best sportbike of the group—but those characteristics render it slightly hyperactive for everyday and long-haul use.

Having said that, any of the four bikes here are so superior in such a wide range of environments and usages—compared to a Panigale or a Tuono or a V-Rod—that it's sometimes hard to remember they all fall under the *genus* "motorcycle." The Versys is just as capable of a late-night high-speed San Diego-to-L.A. freeway run as it is wheeling through Forest Lawn or dropping off your mom at yoga.

If you're young enough at heart to like its bike-of-the-future looks, chances are you'll like how the Versys rides. A 5.0-gallon fuel tank and mileage in the low 40s is pretty dang good. And Kawasaki is, of course, standing by with all sorts of accessories for its bike also. (Grip Heater Kit: \$229.95. Always our first stop.)

BMW F700GS

With this one, BMW does its best to provide access to the GS line for short people

▲ Ups

- ▲ Feels most substantial under way
- ▲ Smooth, revvable powerplant
- ▲ A few battle scars will only improve its looks

▼ Downs

- ▼ It doesn't feel cheap, but it looks it
- ▼ ABS is great; bummer you can't switch it off
- ▼ Why do I have to pay for the lower seat?

the V-Strom. Its torquey V-Twin runs dead-smooth at 5500 rpm and 80 mph. Its reasonably quiet windscreen provides the most protection, its seat is the most comfy. And judging from its stately highway ride, you'd never guess it's the next-to-lightest bike here, at just 442 pounds. That'll come in handy when you're axle deep in the spring thaw in Moose Jaw or wherever.

At 48 mpg, the

V-Strom comes closest to the Honda at squeezing out miles, and its 5.3-gallon tank gives it true 250-mile range. Its trick instrumentation serves up all kinds of useful information including air temp, rate of fuel burn, freeze warning—also a big digital gear indicator. What's wrong with the V-Strom is almost nothing at all. Two items, though: If you do wind up in the dirt, you can't switch off the ABS (not on the Honda, either), and if you're short, its seat is the tallest (optional taller and shorter seats are available for around \$200).

Other than that, it's really against our code to disrespect motorcycles for aesthetic reasons, but we don't picture Peter Egan lovingly contemplating the graceful countours of any of these bikes while sipping a beer in his garage. Like the other machines here, the poor Strom looks like it's designed to travel in space, where



and, dare we say, *chicks*. Replacing the front 21-inch wheel with a 19-incher and shortening the suspension gets the seat down to 33.4 in., and it's possible to go all the way down to 30.1. The seat in question is hewn from BMW's excellent, fleshy-feeling foam and provides superb long-range support for riders on the shorter side of 5-foot-8. Some, not all, on the taller side complain that the bolster the short folks love restricts them and pushes them forward into the gas tank. You can't please everybody, especially Canet.

The ESA option allows toggling among Comfort, Normal or Sport settings on the fly via a handlebar switch. This adjusts only the rear rebound damping, and there's a notable difference between Comfort and Sport. Overall, the GS

▲ Ups

- ▲ Most powerful
- ▲ Sweetest gearbox
- ▲ Short people love its ergos and seat

▼ Downs

- ▼ Kind of appliance-like
- ▼ Loses a lot of the 800's rugged adventure look
- ▼ Are we really seeing so many BMWs on the road?!

and neck with a 650, but that displacement advantage results in the torquiest motor of the group and an engine that's already making 45 foot-pounds at just over 2000 rpm and 52 ft.-lb. at peak; none of the other three engines here ever even *gets* to 45 ft.-lb.

The six-speed gearbox and clutch are likewise low-effort and silky-smooth. Speaking of smooth, there's still a bit

combines light steering with good stability and a generally well-planted feel.

That short flyscreen means there's no turbulence at all, since your head is above its shadow. On a hot day, that's a good thing. On a cold day, shut up and enjoy your heated grips. This engine may have "reduced" peak horsepower that's left it neck

Has the Suzuki V-Strom 650 (left) really been with us for a decade? Development concept for the refreshed 2012 model? "The Comfortable Adventure Tourer." That it is. The Honda NC700X DCT ABS (right) gets a bit of a drubbing in pin-it-to-win-it performance testing. Manual-clutch version launches harder to turn in a 13.8-sec. quarter-mile vs. the 14.3 of the dual-clutch model tested here.

of handlebar buzz, but it's much more subdued than on some BMWs that use this engine (F800R, for example). Brakes are powerful and tactile (the second front disc was added this year), and, as on all BMWs, ABS is standard. Everything's nicely finished, buttoned-down and bolted together. The clocks and dash are comprehensive and modern. Too bad the parallel-Twin looks so industrial down there. Makes us pine for the smaller Boxers of yore.

Overall, you're left with the impression that even though the BMW's the most expensive bike here, it's worth it.

Honda NC700X DCT ABS

The Honda NC700X DCT ABS is not perfect; it won't wheelie. But it will do tremendous smoky burnouts, so it is a legit motorcycle you could ride to Sturgis or Daytona, turning over a steady 4000 rpm and easily getting 60-plus mpg the whole way. It's way down on horsepower: We can't run our DCT on the dyno (the bike's ECU won't let it), but the manual NC we tested for the November issue made just 48 horsepower at 6140 rpm. What makes the NC so rideable anyway is the area under the torque curve. Like the BMW, the NC is already up and working hard producing torque at just above 2500 rpm. Unlike the BMW, it doesn't rev on to make 62 hp on top. Strangely enough, though, it hardly seems to matter. That's because in everyday use, you almost never rev the BMW to its 8500-rpm redline. Or the

V-Strom to its 10,000-rpm max. Or the Versys to its 10,500 max.

In the real world, it's all about grunting away from stops and right-now mid-range—and the Honda has that covered. Accelerating from zero is a hoot; whether you're in Drive or Sport (the right-thumb switch lets you toggle between them instantly), DCT knows you're in a hurry if you whack the throttle open and spits you away like Shirley Muldowney

▲ Ups

- ▲ Built-in stowage
- ▲ Eager beaver tree-chewer fuel-efficient engine
- ▲ Clean, crisp styling that doesn't look cheap

▼ Downs

- ▼ Maybe hold off on DCT 'til next year
- ▼ 1000 more rpm wouldn't be a bad thing
- ▼ ABS should be its own option

in slow-mo, grabbing instant upshifts at the perfect time every time.

What DCT is less good at is deceleration; once below about 20 mph and coming to a stop, there's enough jerkiness to induce helmet tapping with your passenger as the gearbox shifts to second then first and you wish there were a clutch to pull in. And you don't want to be going balls-out around big,

fast sweepers in Sport mode: Halfway round, you *will* get an unwanted upshift that will widen your trajectory. (No worries: Use the other right-bar button to go from "AT" to "MT." Then use the thumb/trigger shift paddles on the left bar.) It all works great, but with the brain cell you use to master all that, you could learn to use a clutch and save yourself \$2000. On top of that, the DCT

Face it: If you had the free time and wherewithal to gallivant to Alaska and Africa, **you'd buy one of the upscale adventurers and another one for your manservant.**

ABS model (replete with our added long-term gear) gains 51 lb. compared to the base model. At 502 lb., it's the porkiest bike here by a big margin.

Just as with the base model, though, the NC doesn't *feel* that heavy when you need to push it around or zip through a gap in traffic. At the same time, it has a nice hefty stability when you're cruising at 80, on suspension that's soft enough for a smooth ride while being stiff enough

torcycle you can do long days on, provided you stand up once in a while.

In this awesome foursome, picking the Affordable One-Bike Solution for shopping to sporting to commuting to adventure-ish touring was incredibly tough. The Versys is the most pure fun but it's a bit harsh and almost too skit-tish. Kudos for the price, though. The BMW feels as refined as old money, which you may need to afford it. If you

of wine, a severed head... Maybe you need to carry a helmet across town to give somebody a ride. Maybe you'd like to supplement your income importing things from Mexico. The auto-trans NC may be a brilliant move on Honda's part if it really does pull in new riders. No motorcycle is as dead-easy to operate or better as a pure work-a-day conveyance. But if you already know how to work a clutch and if Affordable is the word that drew you in here, then this little comparison mainly serves to drive home what an even better choice the lighter, more fuel-efficient, \$6999 standard NC700X is. For the enthusiast rider, the manual makes more sense, and you have to (ahem) shift your values from high-rpm power to total tractability and exceptional efficiency. It



Feel silly? The Kawasaki Versys (above) is your bike. Front and rear 17s and a snappy, yappy engine make it the pet-trick, wish-I-were-a-motard machine. Is the BMW F700GS (right) winking at us? Maybe it's winking about the fact that it isn't actually a 700—it's powered by the same 798cc parallel-Twin as the F800GS. Great motor and the "big-block" in this comparison.

for reasonably serious sport riding under a wide size range of riders. All four of the bikes here provide stellar ergonomics; the Honda's firmish seat and slightly more rearset pegs move it just a smidge to the sportier side of the dial, but it's still a mo-

can, it's an admirable choice that is likely to impress your neighbors.

We almost went with the Honda for that genius storage compartment alone. How many times do our daily adventures include picking up a loaf of bread, a jug

is a revolutionary game-changer but it's playing a slightly different game.

As it is, the V-Strom takes it here for its all-around goodness. Its 649cc V-Twin has mega spirit and delivers nearly 50 mpg. It feels solid and planted without undue heaviness. It's got the best wind protection and the finest seat. Dings against it? All that not-nice black plastic that's always right there in front of you. And, well, that's about it. Moose Jaw or the market, it is one exceptional bike. ☐

SPECIFICATIONS	BMW F700GS	HONDA NC700X DCT ABS	KAWASAKI VERSYS	SUZUKI V-STROM 650 ABS
Base Price	\$9990	\$8999	\$7899	\$8299
Dry weight (as tested)	463 lb.	502 lb.	426 lb.	442 lb.
Wheelbase	62.3 in.	60.5 in.	55.8 in.	61.9 in.
Seat height	33.4 in.	32.0 in.	33.2 in.	32.9 in.
Fuel mileage	46 mpg	58 mpg	41 mpg	48 mpg
0-60 mph	3.8 sec.	5.4 sec.	3.9 sec.	3.5 sec.
1/4-mile	12.56 sec. @ 102.58 mph	14.34 sec. @ 90.77 mph	12.74 sec. @ 100.73 mph	12.43 sec. @ 101.77 mph
Horsepower	62.1 @ 6910 rpm	48.0 @ 6140 rpm	58.0 @ 8665 rpm	62.4 @ 8770 rpm
Torque	52.3 ft.-lb. @ 5565 rpm	43.7 ft.-lb. @ 4680 rpm	40.9 ft.-lb. @ 7180 rpm	41.2 ft.-lb. @ 6480 rpm
Top speed	118 mph	100 mph	114 mph	113 mph