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STURGIS FIVE-OH!

SUZUKI'S V-STANDARD

HOW TO AVOID
SURFACE
HAZARDS

TOURING:

- The Alamo
- The Apache Trail
- Oregon's Ghost Towns



SETTING THE STANDARD



Just for the record, Suzuki Motor Corporation, in my not-so-humble opinion, has produced some of the world's most underrated motorcycles over the years. Remember the Titan 500 two-stroker? If you do, that dates both of us, but it was a great, tough, dependable little motorcycle. Then there was the GT750, water-cooled, three-cylinder two-stroke nicknamed the "Water Buffalo." Another sturdy piece of work.

Suzuki went to four-stroke engines and shaft drive simultaneously with the advent of their GS series. There are those, and I'm one of them, who believe the GS650 and the GS850 were two of the best machines Suzuki ever built. Both were excellent machines for comfortable, reliable long-distance touring.

Now there's the Suzuki VX800 V-twin "standard" model.

Philosophically, I have a problem with the term "standard" as it applies to a category of motorcycles. In an industry that has segmented its product line into almost infinitely tiny niches, the term "standard" is sort of weird. It's like the health-store signs advertising "organically grown, natural food." As opposed to what? Inorganic, unnatural food? Does a "standard" motorcycle mean that all the other motorcycles out there should now be classified as "non-standard?"

In fact, based on a couple thousand absolutely delightful miles in the company of the machine, the VX800 is an extremely versatile motorcycle that does a number of things very well. Those who need labels can call the bike a "standard" if they like. For me, any motorcycle that *doesn't* do a lot of things well is the one that needs a label. But never mind.

Maybe we're talking about *setting* standards rather than *being* one. If that's the definition, then my vote definitely goes to the Suzuki VX800.

The basic package is centered on the V-twin engine. For all practical purposes, the power plant is an upgrade of the 700cc engine introduced in the Suzuki Intruder in 1985. The VX800 engine is liquid-cooled with a displacement of 805 cubic centimeters. The cylinders are set at an included angle of

45°; a single overhead cam actuates two valves per cylinder; valves are screw-and-locknut adjustable; fuel mix is delivered through two 36mm Mikuni carburetors.

According to Suzuki's American R&D team, the European version of the VX800 was originally scheduled to appear on North American shores. Unfortunately, it had a crank angle that was set up for a smoother top end, a concession to the higher speeds permitted on the Continent's major highways. The downside, of course, is that tuning for top-end performance tends to result in some fairly "doggy" acceleration from a stop and a noticeable deficiency in mid-range passing power.

At the urging of the American designers, the U.S.A. model was given a crank-angle that produced a stronger

*Suzuki's New
VX800 V-twin Is
A Great All-
Around, Easy-
To-Live-With
Member Of The
Family*

by BOB CARPENTER



Metzeler ME33 Laser tires come as standard equipment on the front of the new VX800; kept inflated to proper pressure they are a delightful choice.



The slim-line design of the fuel tank belies its 5.0-gallon capacity, which gives the VX800 a cruising range of well over 200 miles on a fillup.



Specifications: Suzuki VX800

ENGINE

size/layout: 805cc, four-stroke, liquid-cooled, 45° V-twin
bore/stroke: 83/74.4mm
valves per cylinder: four
valve operation: OHC
valve adjustment: screw and lock nut
compression ration: 10.0:1
carburetion: 2 x 36mm Mikuni

DIMENSIONS:

GVWR: 995 lbs.
curb weight: c. 520 lbs.
carrying capacity: c. 475 lbs.
wheelbase: 61.6 in.
rake/trail: 31°/5.6 in.
ground clearance: 5.7 in.
seat height: 31.5 in.

SUSPENSION:

front: telescopic, coil-spring, oil damped, 5.9-in. travel
rear: coil-spring, oil-damped, 5-way pre-load, 4-way damping

BRAKES:

front: single disc
rear: single disc

TIRES:

front: Metzeler ME 33 110/80 x 18 58H
rear: Metzeler ME 55A 150/70 x 17 69H

ELECTRICS:

battery: 12-volt, 16 AH
alternator: 3-phase A.C.
headlight: 12-volt 60/55W

FUEL:

tank capacity (incl. reserve): 5.0 gal; (4.8 gal-CA)
high/low mpg: 55.2/43.1 mpg
average mpg: 45.8 mpg
fuel recommended: alcohol-free, unleaded 87+ pump octane

DRIVE TRAIN:

transmission: 5-speed, constant mesh
top gear ratio: 0.851:1
final drive: shaft
rpm at 65 mph: 4500 rpm

MISCELLANEOUS:

suggested retail: \$4599
warranty: 12-month unlimited mileage
color: dark blue, w/powder flake or maroon, w/powder flake

mid-range performance. This is not only advantageous for American roads and driving conditions, it also produces an exhaust note that is more pleasing to our American esthetic requirements. According to the Suzuki spokesperson, the Euro-model sounds "industrial."

A five-speed transmission delivers power to the rear wheel through the bullet-proof Suzuki drive shaft. Metzeler tires are OE for the VX800: an ME55A "Metronic" on the rear and an ME33 "Laser" on the front.

A note on tire pressures is in order here. When first introduced, the Metzeler Laser ran into some handling difficulties, particularly when installed on heavyweight full-dress machines. It turned out that virtually all of these problems could be traced to low tire pressures.

The Laser has subsequently proven itself to be a good-handling, long-lasting tire... if... the owner maintains the proper tire pressures. On the VX800, the front tire should be inflated to 33 psi; the rear tire should be inflated to 36 psi for solo use—41 psi for two-up riding.

With a curb weight of approximately 520 pounds, the VX800 isn't exactly what you'd call a lightweight motorcycle. A GVWR of 995 pounds yields a theoretical carrying capacity of 475 pounds. In practical touring terms that may be a bit misleading. Though the tire-chassis-suspension system is rated at 475 pounds worth of load, that much weight would definitely have a negative effect on the fun-factor.

So how does it work under actual on-the-road touring conditions? I suspect the go-fast crowd will be less than ecstatic with the performance and handling of the VX800. It isn't all that blazingly fast and it feels a tad "bulky" on a really snakey road. On the other hand it is sprightly enough for all but the most speed-addicted. Acceleration for passing or for punching uphill is readily available at anything that approaches legal speeds in North America.

The VX800 doesn't lend itself to quick, agile maneuvering. But given a nice road that's undecided about where it wants to go next, the machine can do a respectable job of following it back and forth. It goes where you point it with solid, precise, no-nonsense obedience. The effect produced is a rather strange mixture of being perfectly secure on a roller-coaster. Lots of fun, but without getting too close to the edge.

Comfortable? Yes!



The 805cc, SOHC V-twin provides more than enough power for anything legal; the fake cooling fins on the cylinders are unnecessary on a liquid-cooled engine, but it would probably look funny without them.

Of special merit in the comfort category is the overall handlebar to saddle to footpeg relationship. In this respect the bike has to be just about perfect for the mythical "average" rider. On two separate occasions during the test ride, the bike was ridden to reserve without dismounting—about 190 miles per set. At no time during either ride was there any noticeable sensation of cramping or strain in legs, arms or back—even though the bike was being ridden without a fairing. Ergonomically speaking, all of the bike's parts are in the right places. That goes a long way toward keeping the rider's parts in working order.

The saddle is quite good for the long-haul. Saddle shape is about as optimal as it can get without going to extremely elaborate and expensive bucket configurations a la the full-dress mode. Ideally, the foam density could be a bit stiffer. After about 150 miles the semi-soft perch starts biting back. One of those "it only hurts when you stop" situations. On the other hand, stiff saddles in the showroom are very difficult for a salesperson to explain to new buyers, so the compromise is acceptable. The saddle is good enough that the average owner will wear it out before feeling any overpowering desire to drop a bunch of money in the aftermarket.

As always, looks are a matter of personal opinion. I happen to like the way the Suzuki looks. It's understated, but

functional. The entire engine is visible. For me, that's a major esthetic consideration. I'll also confess that the only thing I like to look at better than a V-twin engine is a single, so the Suzuki's power-plant is appealing.

The exhaust note of the VX800 is pleasingly audible without being obnoxious. A pleasant burble with just a hint of anti-social conduct in the harmonics—more Brit twin than Harley Vee. Vibration is well-damped, but enough throb comes through to make the rider aware that there is an internal-combustion engine down there rather than a sewing machine motor.

The dark blue paint job on the test bike is what I call a "personal" color. That is, from more than four feet away, it's just a general bluish color. Up close, however, in the direct sunlight you can see some pretty metal flake in the undercoat. Too subtle, maybe, but I like it.

From a mileage standpoint, the VX800 is way ahead on points. On the open road, the V-twin consumed a miserly 49.07 miles per gallon, with a high tankful (downwind, flat surface) of 55.2 mpg. As a commuter bike it earned an average of 45.8 mpg, with a low tankful of 43.1 mpg. Put that together with the capacious 5.0-gallon tank (4.8-gallons for the California model) and you have a motorcycle that's nice to have in your garage in a time when the economy is falling and the gas prices are rising.

How does the Suzuki VX800 stack up as a fellow traveler? Quite well, thank you. Actually, test reports, such as this one, don't do the machine justice. To appreciate the VX800 you have to get past a mere reciting of facts and opinions and live with it for a while.

About three weeks into the test period, I realized that I had stopped thinking about the machine as a temporary test vehicle scheduled for 2000 words and a few photos in the November issue. Instead, the bike had sort of "moved in" with us. A quick check of my record book indicated that I was riding it to work almost daily. It was easy to pull out of the garage for short trips around town—it didn't require a major exercise in logistics to get it on the road, as do most of the two-up platforms. It was easy on the purse-strings where fuel was concerned. And it was just kind of *there* anytime I wanted to go someplace.

The more I thought about that, the more I liked it. Too often these days motorcycles are viewed as recreational

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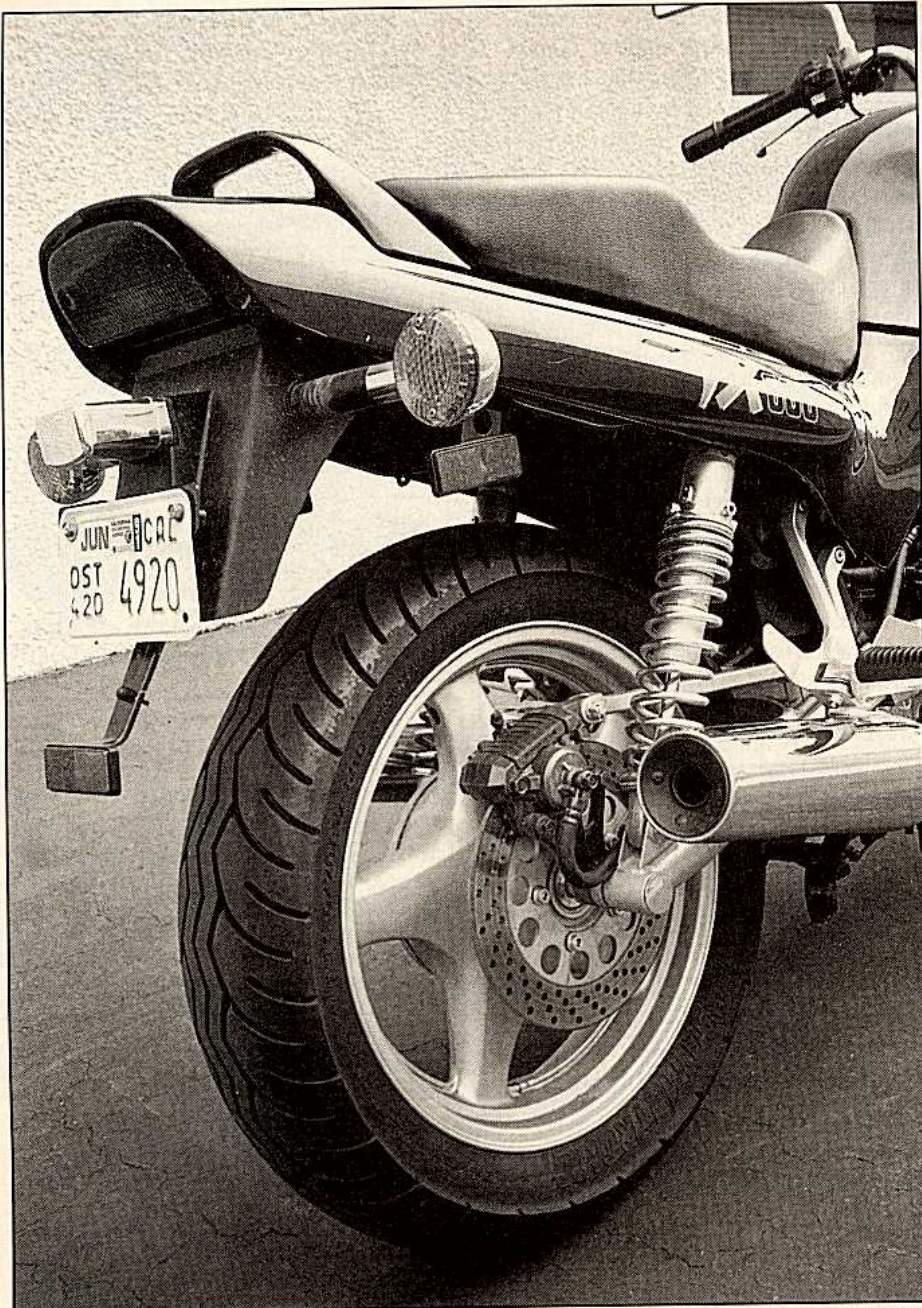
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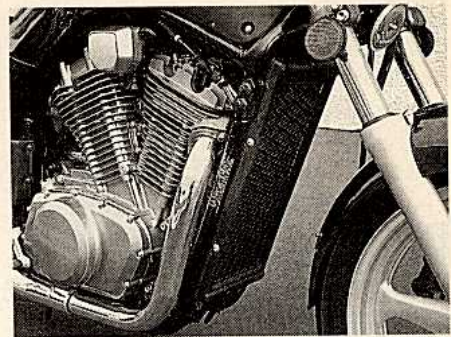
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Saddle configuration is satisfactory for serious travel; bungee-cord hooks are located under the rear fender; the tool kit is stowed in a small compartment in the taillight assembly.



Slim-line radiator hides unobtrusively between downtubes.

vehicles or leisure-time hobbies or specialized tools for special occasions. I prefer to consider them in a more personal and permanent light. For me a motorcycle has to be much more than merely a weekend toy or a vacation vehicle. It has to be a constant, integral aspect of my day-to-day lifestyle. Part of the family, if you don't mind being anthropomorphic about it.

The VX800 is that kind of motorcycle. If I had to make a comparison, the Suzuki VX800 comes as close as any machine I can remember to the old Yamaha 650 vertical twin. Not in configuration, of course, but in character. Trust me, that's intended as a sincere compliment. My Yamaha 650 miles are fondly remembered.

For more than a few years now, consumers, magazine scribes, industry pundits and assorted gurus have been telling the marketing and design departments of the Big Four that they should build a stripped, no-frills, basic motorcycle with a low-dollar price tag attached. It's already obvious that the 1990s are shaping up in exactly that direction. All four Japanese motorcycle companies have introduced or will soon introduce machines that meet those requirements.

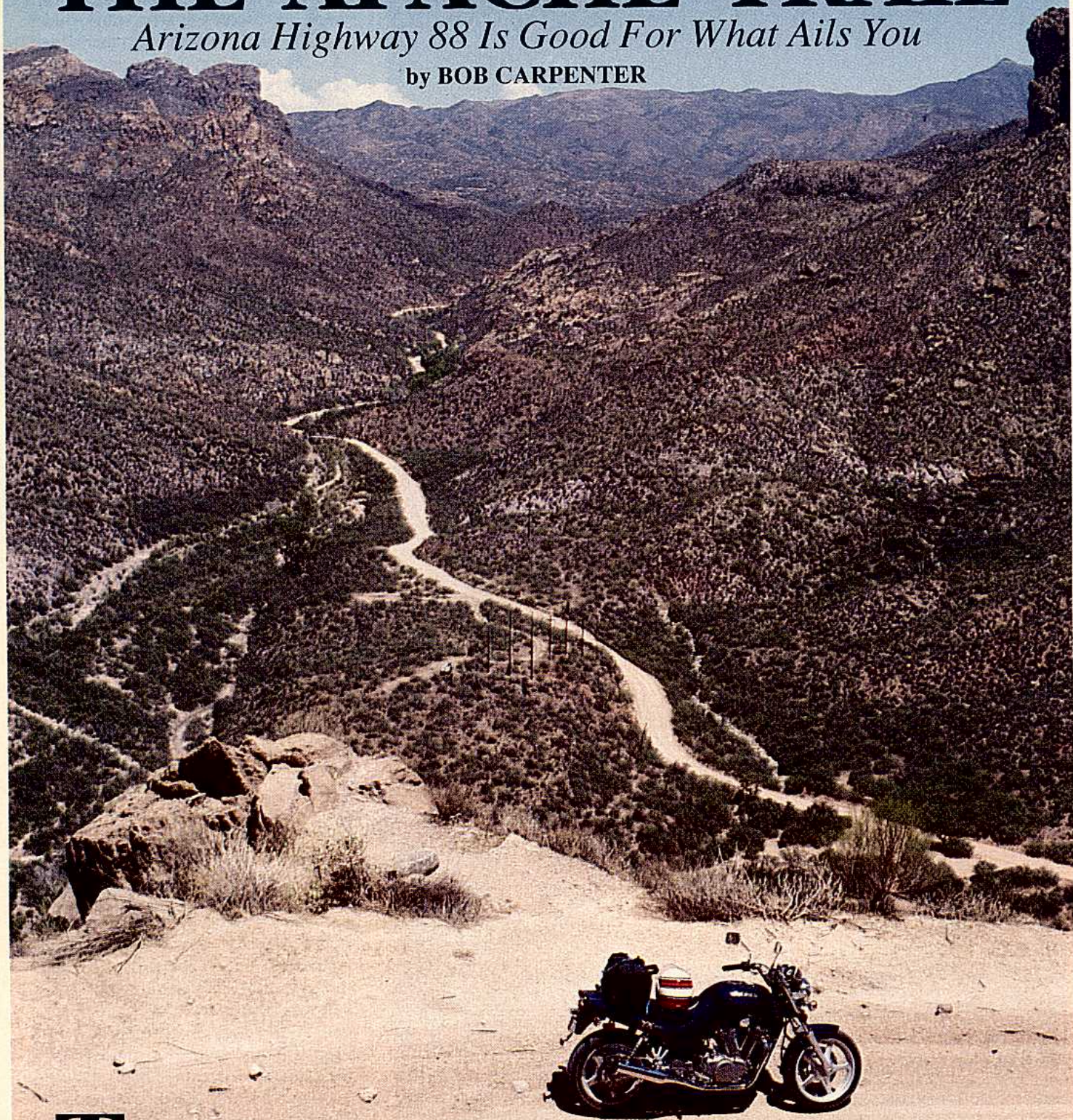
The VX800 is Suzuki's entry in the category. It's a very nice all-around, easy-to-live-with, go-almost-anywhere motorcycle. It's fun to ride, owner maintainable, and its suggested retail price of \$4599 represents an outstanding value. All things considered, the Suzuki VX800 sets some fairly exacting standards. Now all we need is several thousand consumers that recognize a good deal when they see one.

Handlebar-to-saddle-to-footpeg relationship is perfect for the "average" operator, though the 31.5-inch seat height might prove a bit tall for short legs at stop signs.

Great Destinations: **THE APACHE TRAIL**

Arizona Highway 88 Is Good For What Ails You

by BOB CARPENTER



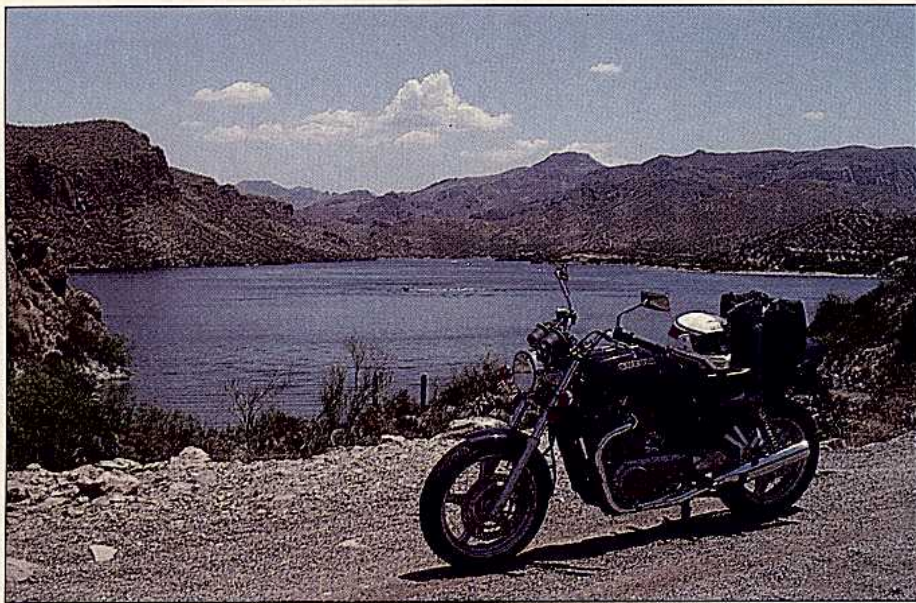
The gent staring back at me from the bathroom mirror in the Best Western motel in east Mesa, Arizona, looked like somebody had dragged his face over 40 miles of bad road!

I knew exactly how he felt. He'd been up most of the night trying to beat the fierce summer heat by riding across the desert while the sun wasn't looking. It was now 10:30

the morning after, this boy's eyes resembled what was left after the witchdoctor died, and the sun was lurking outside the air-conditioned motel room waiting to get even.

I sympathized with the fellow. It was obvious that he needed some perking up, so I gave him my standard advice.

"You," I told him, "need to go for a motor-sickle ride." He nodded in agreement, rinsed the toothpaste out of his



The bottom section of the Apache Trail is a lovely, snake-bit two-laner leading to the recreation area of Canyon Lake.



Tortilla Flat is a great place to pause for a cold drink and some photos.



mouth, brushed the hairs lining three sides of his face, went outside, threw a leg over the saddle of the Suzuki VX800 and headed east toward the Apache Trail.

I'd been right. He started feeling better right away.

Arizona's Apache Trail—State Highway 88—is a medicinal road for motorcycle travelers. It's been a favorite detour of ours since we first wandered into the Superstition Mountains some 20 years ago.

There's a lot of history hidden in these craggy, mysterious hills. Legends of conquistadors, Indians and hard-rock seekers of gold. Tales of the Lost Dutchman and Old Peralta mines. Stories of intrigue, murder and buried treasure. All of it played out in the forbidding nooks and crannies of the parched, inhospitable upthrusts of granite that rise like dragon's teeth from the desert floor only 30 miles east of metropolitan Phoenix.

The road itself turns north from U.S. 60 at Apache Junction and winds through the surrounding foothills. Passing the popular water-sport recreation area at Canyon Lake, the Apache Trail follows the contours of the canyon walls in a wonderfully crooked sort of way that can turn any self-respecting motorcyclist into a grinning idiot.

Approximately four million curves (and 18 miles) later, you top out over Apache Gap and drop down abruptly to the Trail's landmark tourist trap: Tortilla Flats. It's a great place to take a break, take photos or take a long gulp of iced tea. Inside the cafe-and-bar the walls are papered in a unique fashion: hundreds—make that *thousands*—of one-dollar bills are tacked to every vacant inch of siding.

The joint burned to the ground in 1987. Reportedly, some ten thousand-plus dollars in "wallpaper" alone went up in the conflagration. The place was rebuilt almost as soon as the embers cooled and, due to customer demand, the tradition of nailing dollar bills to the wall was reinstated. Today the board walls and the bucks may be new, but the hospitality, the good grub and the Old West atmosphere (you can straddle a genuine Western "easy chair" at the bar) is the same as it was when the

(Left): The unpaved section of the Trail ends at Roosevelt Dam, about 40 miles from Apache Junction.

Dutchman first brought his wayside restaurant to the canyon.

Back on the road north, the pavement quits about five miles out of Tortilla Flats. Don't worry. This is prime, graded road, suitable for any two-wheeler, up to and including the full-dress, two-up, trailer-tugging variety. Between pavement's end and the return to hard surface just beyond the Roosevelt Dam lies 22 miles of unpaved Gorgeous!

The Apache Trail maneuvers its way up and down across a series of saddles, switchbacking over each rise. Along the way the standing rock is splashed with bright lichen, turning the scenery into gaudy, random lime-green patterns that would have Jackson Pollack standing up to applaud.

The Trail now softens its curves as it ascends one last rise, giving you an eye-filling view up the Apache Lake Gorge. The road turns downhill and plunges through a couple of sharp turns to the canyon bottom, crossing the Fish Creek Bridge and straightening to run alongside the narrow waters of Apache Lake. The lake will be in view, or close by, all the way to Roosevelt Dam.

During the summer of 1990, quite a bit of construction was underway at

Roosevelt Dam (they were raising the height of the dam 77 feet). The movement of heavy equipment up the Trail had resulted in some washboarding. Other than that, the surface was in good shape.

Forty-five miles is a relatively short distance for most touring motorcyclists these days. Add a bit of dirt, some excellent scenery and the ever-present aura of yesterday's evil deeds, however, and you have a marvelous half-day detour. If you want to make it a full day, keep going. The official Trail—which returns to asphalt just past the dam—turns south and heads back down to Globe through some admirable scenery that skirts the northern edges of the Superstition Mountains. Alternatively, you can stay on graded road, turning north along the shores of Roosevelt Lake for a beautiful ride up through Punkin Center and back to Arizona Highway 87.

Accommodations are available along the Trail. Campgrounds are located at Canyon Lake and Burnt Corral. The Apache Lake Resort offers full services, but reservations are advised since this is a popular "boater" hangout, especially during the season.

In terms of weather, late fall and winter are the best times to visit the Apache Trail. In recent years, however, the Trail has become the stomping ground of the Snowbird crowd and can be bumper-to-bumper Winabago on winter weekends.

Believe it or not, if you can stand the heat, the best time to have the Trail to yourself is on a weekday in mid-summer. Yes, it can be pretty warm. But this is the time when you can wick it up a bit on the paved corners near the bottom of the Trail, then kick back and poke along through the lovely scenery on the unpaved bits without sucking up someone else's dust.

According to Arizona Department of Highways personnel, there are no plans to pave the upper reaches of the Apache Trail. Pray that they keep it that way. There are too few places in the Lower 48 these days where the adventurous motorcyclist can get close to the land, close to the mystery of yesterday, close to the reasons why he or she rides motorcycles in the first place.

The Apache Trail is one of those places. It's a fine road, with some excellent "fringe benefits." Try it and see if it doesn't make you feel better.

