



THE FASTEST DAY

In early 1986, American Honda debuted its new-generation Interceptor — the 1986 VFR750F — in a unique and staggeringly risky way: by attempting to smash a fistful of FIM world speed records with a group of journalists and racers at a 5-mile asphalt circle near Laredo, Texas. Brash, crazy and hugely exciting, ‘Laredo’ remains a high point in my moto-journalism career.

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It was a *very strange feeling*, and I remember it as if it happened yesterday – not in April of 1986.

My *Motorcyclist* compatriot Nick Ienatsch and I had just gotten off the plane at LAX, lugged our gear to the parking garage, strapped our bags to the passenger seats of the two Honda GL1200 tourers we'd left there a few days before, and jumped aboard, heading for the 405 freeway and the 20-minute trip to our home in the San Fernando Valley.

Just being *on* the GL felt weird. But what elevated the funkiness to a whole new level was the freeway ride. There we were, piloting a pair of 800-pound, high-handlebar touring motorcycles at a safe-and-sane 62 mph. "Wow," I yelled to Ienatsch, who was riding next to me after we'd merged onto the 405, "this is *really strange!*"

"It is!" he yelled back.

See, just 24 hours earlier, we'd been riding another pair of Hondas in Texas. But we hadn't been riding tourers, and we definitely hadn't been riding this slowly. In fact, we'd ridden faster over a 24-hour period than *anyone ever had...* fast enough, in fact, to break a handful of FIM world speed records.



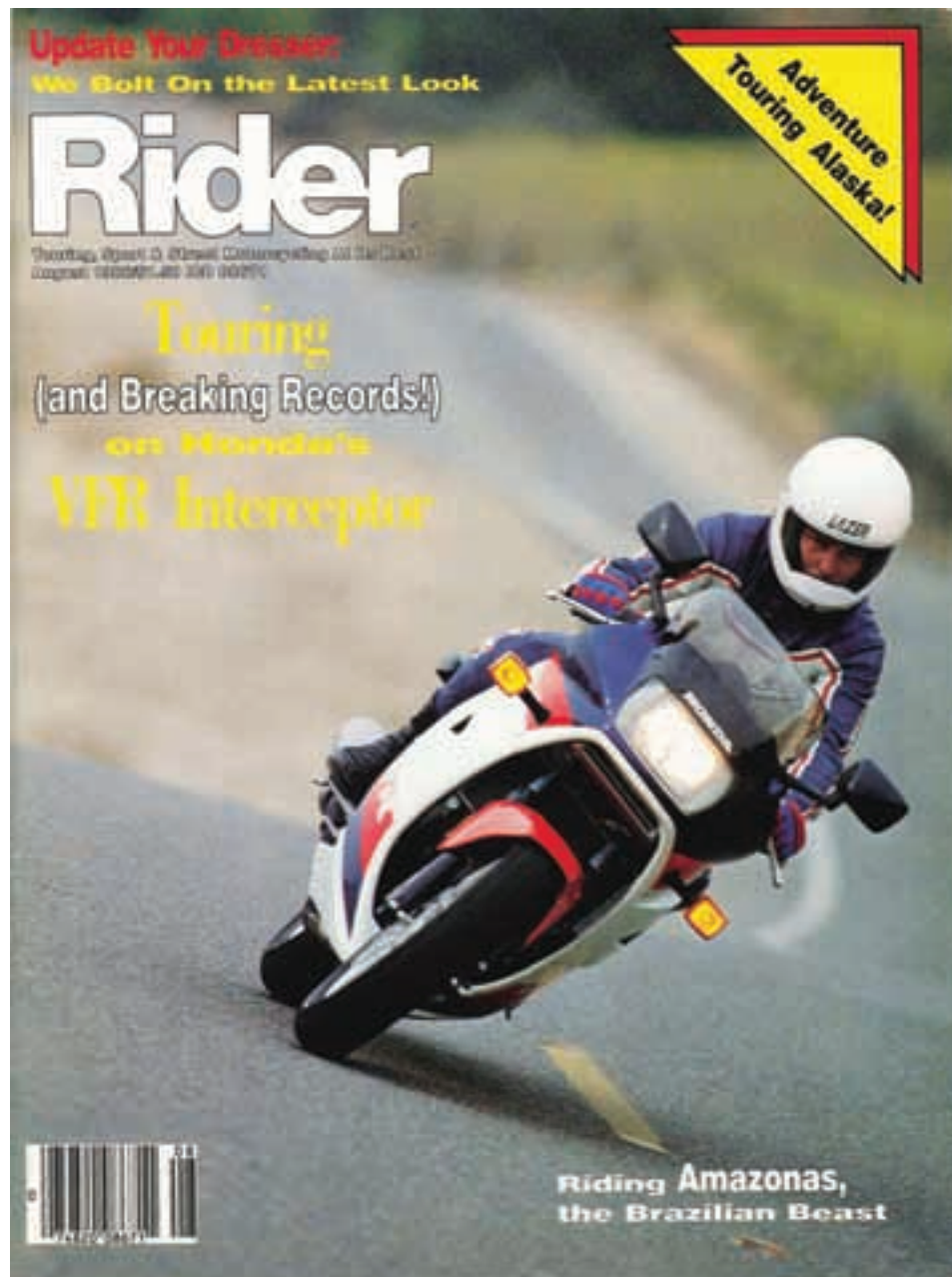
But first, a little history. Nineteen hundred and eighty six was a significant year in motorcycling, a year smack dab in the middle of one of the biggest sea changes in motorcycling history. Much was happening in the early and middle 1980s — technologically, demographically and foundationally.

We covered much of this in issue #4's 1983 VF750F Interceptor feature, but it's safe to say that wild new technology and innovation was lighting up the entire motorcycling landscape each and every year during this era. By '83 we'd seen perimeter frames, 16-inch wheels, V-fours and liquid-cooling on production-based sportbikes that looked more like racebikes than ever before. A year later this technological rush had morphed to the open class in the form of the ground-breaking 900 Ninja and FJ1100 — and in 1985 to the 20-valve FZ750 and shockingly radical GSX-R750. Just 24 months after the original Interceptor, all four Japanese OEs offered dramatically improved and thoroughly competent sporting machines. On the sportbike front, competition was white-hot.

And it had to be, really, because as the '80s wore on, the Japanese manufacturers were fighting for an ever-smaller customer base. And if you couldn't offer the latest and greatest, you couldn't compete. Many baby boomers were busy doing other things during the '80s — making livings, starting families, paying mortgages. The very group that had fueled the crazy moto-growth of the late '60s and '70s was taking a two-wheeled break of sorts, and though they'd come back with a vengeance in the mid '90s and '00s, driving the unit-sales numbers to record highs, the market free-fall they left in their wake during their '80s sabbatical (and the irony of it all... the availability of the coolest bikes ever but not nearly enough customers) was real and tangible.

And so it was into this semi-caustic market mix of diminishing sales numbers and detrimental dollar-yen valuation that Honda introduced its second-generation Interceptor — the much-vaunted VFR750F. Designed to better the original Interceptor in every area of

Honda's 1986 VFR750F was a performance and aesthetic revelation, a sportbike so fast, smooth and wonderfully appointed that it could actually make you forget the ultra-light GSX-R750 and bullet-esque FZ750 — at least momentarily. Left: Motorcyclist's Nick Ienatsch samples the VFR at Honda's early-'86 press intro at Willow Springs. Above right: Rider's Brent Ross road-tested the VFR in the magazine's August, 1986 edition.



performance, styling and durability, the VFR featured a host of snazzy technology, including gear-driven camshafts in its totally redesigned V-four, an aluminum spar frame and swingarm, wider wheels, beautifully styled wraparound bodywork featuring gorgeously classic red/white/blue paint, and what was arguably the highest level of fit-and-finish ever seen on a production Japanese motorcycle.

For the new VFR to be a sales success, however, it would have to be *great*, as by 1986 the aforementioned 750-class competition was intense — the track-ready and ultra-light GSX-R750 on the race-replica side of the

equation, and the 20-valve, Genesis-engined FZ750 on the other.

To help light the VFR's fuse as brightly as possible with the public and press, American Honda devised a rather unorthodox introduction plan. First, it held brief, one-day riding impressions in early '86 with individual magazines at various locales. But in March the company threw everyone a curve ball. Instead of distributing test bikes to the larger magazines (the normal course of events with a new motorcycle), Honda announced it would hold a special event in Texas starring the new VFR — and that qualified magazine staffers would be