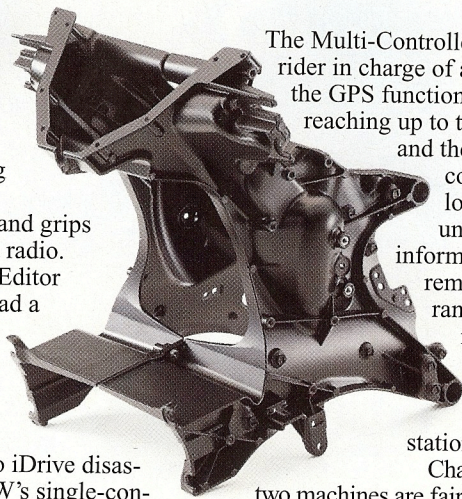


switch is fitted just inboard of the left handgrip. It works with the 5.7-inch LCD panel by the instruments, allowing control of everything from the heated seat and grips to the GTL's standard radio. According to Senior Editor Blake Conner, who had a chance to play with the display and controller at the press intro, "I was impressed with how intuitive it was; it's no iDrive disaster," referring to BMW's single-control automotive menu-system with a learning curve as steep as Yosemite's El



Medieval-looking structure (above) is cast in magnesium and carries the upper fairing, headlight, dash and rearview mirrors. It is both highly rigid and lightweight, weighing about four pounds, and helps to concentrate the K1600's mass nearer the center of gravity.

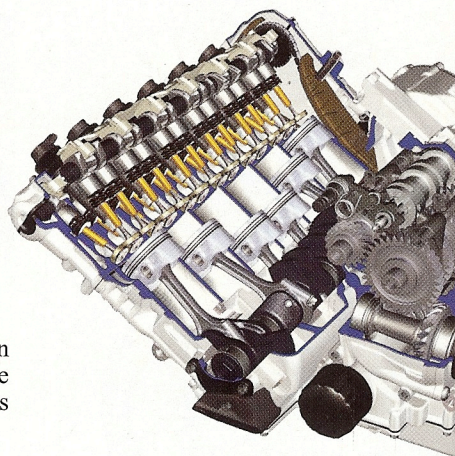
Capitan, and the best gift to Mercedes salesmen ever. Perhaps BMW has learned that control systems requiring two weeks of intense study and practice are off-putting both to potential new owners on test drives and journalists who rarely have enough seat time to learn their full intricacy.

Similarly riding a wave of technical progress, the optional navigation system relies in part on the rapidly growing and healthy GPS aftermarket. The BMW Navigator IV is a removable Garmin-made unit that mounts in a customized receptacle in the dash. Because it's not built-in, over the life of the bike, either BMW or the owner may upgrade it with newer technology or even an aftermarket GPS system.

The Multi-Controller places the rider in charge of a number of the GPS functions without reaching up to touch the unit, and the customized connection allows the GPS unit to extract information on remaining fuel range from the motorcycle's ECU so it can show you the reachable gas stations if asked.

Chassis-wise, the two machines are fairly standard BMW, with the shaft-drive well controlled by the Paralever swingarm, and the front suspension a Hossack-style design with the wheel carried in an upright supported by two A-arms above tire level. The front suspension offers almost complete anti-dive and should allow a comfortable ride with only 4.5 inches of total travel. Optional is the ESA II electrically adjustable suspension, allowing damping, preload, rear suspension spring rate and suspension profile (Sport, Normal, Comfort) to be set by using the Multi-Controller and the dash panel to pick a combination such as "Solo Sport" for mountain roads or "Passenger with Luggage Comfort" for two-up down the freeway.

The GT and GTL differ mainly in feature content and riding position, with the GT intended more as a Luxury Sport Tourer, and the GTL as the Sporty Luxury Tourer; the differences are subtle but real. The GTL comes with a complete sound system featuring a one-year Sirius satellite radio subscription, Bluetooth interface for cell phone use with BMW's optional speaker-equipped helmets, and iPod compatibility. In addition, it gets the rear top case as standard equipment along with a broader, lower one-piece seat replacing the two-piece seat of the GT,

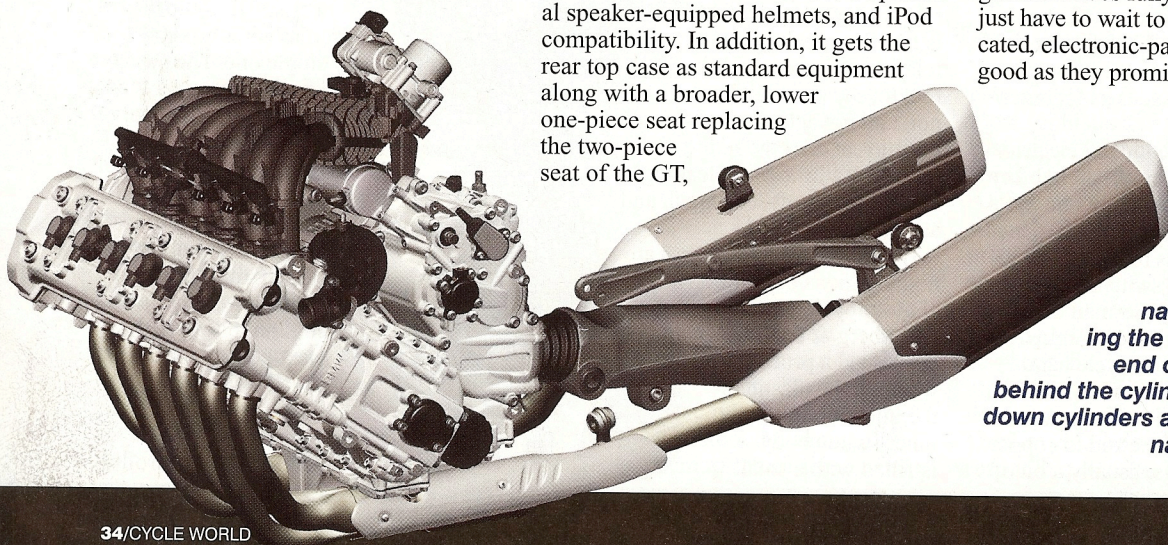


and a larger windshield. Rear suspension damping is softened, footpegs are moved an inch down and forward, and the handlebars reach back almost two inches for a more upright riding position. Still, BMW emphasizes that the GTL is something new and not a direct replacement for the more Wing-like and discontinued K1200LT.

The K1600GT, however, is a direct evolutionary replacement in the company's eyes for the K1300GT. It all comes down to the marketing department wanting to tell you that the GTL is a sportier, more performance-oriented machine than the K1200LT.

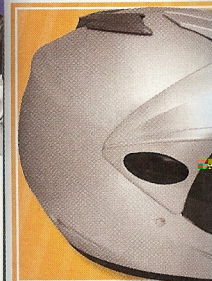
The unanswered question that remains is the price of the two machines. While they certainly will be expensive, especially as the dollar sinks against the Euro, BMW is hinting that the S1000RR sets the new standard of BMW pricing competitiveness: BMWs will no longer have a huge premium compared to competitive Japanese motorcycles. While BMW figures out the final pricing and gets the 1600s fully into production, we just have to wait to see if these sophisticated, electronic-packed machines are as good as they promise to be. □

Skinny bores (just 67.5mm) and tight cylinder spacing keep the 1600cc powerplant narrow, as does moving the alternator from the end of the crankshaft to behind the cylinder block. The lay-down cylinders allow the bike to be narrow at the knees.



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