

# Suzuki Cavalcade LXE

The new Suzuki Cavalcade LXE felt like an old friend when I picked it up for this test. I'd already put 10,000 miles on its more casually dressed sister, the LX model. Over 7,000 miles of this was on a single tour through the South my bride and I took last summer. Shortly after this tour was completed, Suzuki called the *Rider* offices and wanted us to take another ride on a Cavalcade, but this time it would be a prototype version of the top-of-the-line, 1986 LXE.

This second tour was a group ride. There were four gentlemen from Suzuki engineering in Japan, four from U.S. Suzuki and three guest riders along with three charming female co-riders. We rode up the California coast, then east across the High Sierras, where we turned south through the wilds of Nevada and finally

back to Southern California: five days of hard riding.

For this latest trip on the production LXE model, we selected Death Valley as a destination, and spent several days riding and photographing the bike in this desolate, yet beautiful area.

When I first got the production model LXE home, I went over it carefully checking out changes and added features. The most obvious one is the new fairing lowers. While the lowers have a slightly "added-on" look—mainly because the rest of the fairing is so well integrated—they are nicely done and include cornering lights and a workable vent system. The steel housings of the cornering lights also make a great set of forward-mounted floor boards. They offer a different leg and foot position for

long stretches of road. Those covers are chrome plated, but they're rubber-mounted and well-positioned for this kind of use.

In addition to the lowers, there are a good number of improvements and added niceties. The mirrors were moved up a few inches so the view to the rear is more of the road and less of the rider's arms. The degree of convex curve in the mirrors has been reduced for a more realistic view of what's behind. Both are welcome changes. The small pockets on the fairing received an innovative change. The right pocket



**Nowadays, thin is in, even for bikes. But on a tour to Death Valley, this prodigious full-dresser shows us that big can still be beautiful. • DICK BLOM**





cover is a clear map holder, while the left pocket incorporates both a change holder and a spot for three cassette tapes. The rider's portion of the seat now has an air adjustment feature, similar to the passenger's air adjustable seat on the LX model. The LXE passenger also gets a separate

set of speakers and an adjustable headrest. Minor additions include a pair of leash cords on each saddlebag lid and wide elastic straps in the interior of the lids aft of the built-in storage pockets. The helmet locks have also been repositioned.

We started the ride for Death Valley early

in the morning with the temperature in the 40s, and it got even colder up over the 4,200-foot Cajon Pass. When we dropped down into the desert, the temperature increased steadily until it was over 90 degrees on our arrival in Death Valley. This offered a nearly perfect opportunity to evaluate the new lowers. One of the problems with the LX model on our earlier 7,000-mile ride was excess engine heat on the lower legs and feet in hot weather. A big part of this problem is caused by the engine cases: They really heat up on a long ride. Moving your feet out to the ends of the pegs helps a lot. I

Moving your feet out to the ends of the foot pegs still helps keep them cool. More importantly, Suzuki has included a pair of opening vents in the lowers that really work. At first glance these vents appeared to be too small to do any good, but on the road they really made a difference. I tried them in both cold and hot weather and could feel a big difference when they were opened or closed with their remote lever. The lowers clearly improve wind protection for the feet and lower legs in cooler weather without detracting from hot weather comfort.

In addition to the temperature varia-

one lane, intermittently paved back roads. We came into Death Valley from the southwest, through Panamint Valley, then followed a little unmarked two-lane road leading up over the Panamint Mountains. It is a great, scenic ride over a twisting, turning road that follows a creek bed much of the way. This road gets washed out at times, so it can be pretty rough for a touring bike in places, but it is still a fun ride and a great way to check out the suspension and seat. One thing this route required was close attention to a map. The small map pocket built into the right-hand storage cover on the fairing was really handy. While the clear window for the map is quite narrow when compared to a good tank bag map window, it is better than none at all. It certainly will be a welcome addition for the Cavalcade rider who doesn't need a tank bag's extra capacity.

Added to left side of the LXE fairing are separate covered pockets for cassette tapes and toll change. Auto Level control lacks manual override.

LXE passenger accommodations are fit for a queen (or king)—visible are adjustable headrest, dual speakers and controls for stereo and air cushions.



Vents in lowers use remote-controlled guillotine-style doors with infinite adjustability. Cornering light housings do double-duty as forward floorboards.

New color-matched lowers and cornering lights are standard on LXE model, optional on Cavalcade and Cavalcade LX and can be retrofitted to earlier models.

was afraid the lowers on the new LXE would exacerbate this problem, but the amount of heat seemed about the same.

tions on the ride to Death Valley, there was a great variation in the types of roads we used, from multi-lane freeways to little

### 1986 Suzuki Cavalcade LXE

Retail Price: .....\$9,299  
 Warranty: .....2 yrs., unlimtd. miles  
 Service Interval: .....600, then every 3,500 miles

#### Engine

Type: ..... Transverse V-four  
 Displacement: .....1,360cc  
 Bore & Stroke: .....81 x 66mm  
 Valve Train: .....DOHC, 4 valves per cyl.  
 Carburetion: .....Mikuni BDS33SS x 4  
 Lubrication System: .....Wet sump, 3.9 qt.  
 Ignition: .....Transistorized  
 No. of Gears: .....5  
 Final Drive: .....Shaft, 2.67:1

#### Electrical

Charging Output: .....500 watts @ 5,000 rpm  
 Battery: .....12V 20AH

#### Chassis

Frame: .....Tubular double cradle  
 Suspension, front: .....Telescopic  
 rear: .....Dual shocks, Auto Levelling air press.  
 Brakes, front: .....Dual discs  
 rear: .....Single disc  
 Wheels, front: .....2.50 x 16 in.  
 rear: .....3.50 x 15 in.  
 Tires, front: .....130/90 H16  
 rear: .....150/90 H15  
 Wheelbase: .....65.7 in.  
 Seat Height: .....30.8 in.  
 Wet Weight: .....870 lbs.  
 Load Capacity: .....450 lbs.  
 GVWR: .....1,320 lbs.

#### Touring Performance

Fuel Capacity: .....6.1 gals.  
 Gals. to Reserve: .....5 (approx.)  
 Average MPG: .....33  
 Range to Reserve: .....165 (approx.)  
 RPM at 60 MPH: .....Indicated 3,100

#### Instruments

Speedometer, odometer, tripmeter, tachometer, fuel gauge, coolant temp. gauge; indicator lights for turn signals, neutral, high beam, cruise on; warning lights for low oil pressure, sidestand down, battery cond., head, tail or brake light failure; gear indicator, digital clock



It should also be very nice for those occasions when you have to follow written directions to urban locations. On the left, the covered rack for cassette tapes plus the toll change holder can both be operated while wearing gloves. Eastern riders will especially appreciate having toll change so readily accessible.

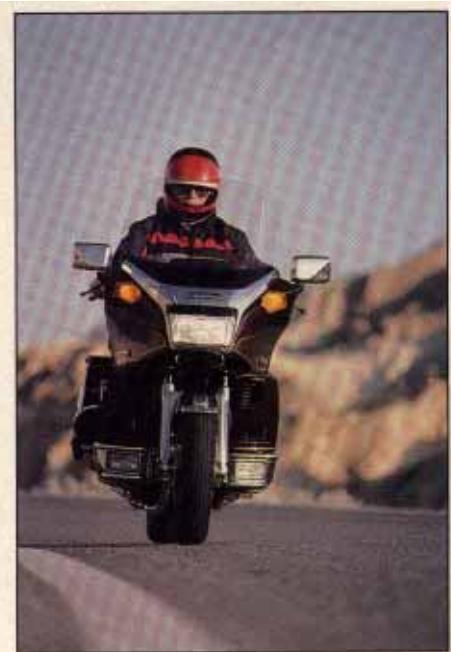
After spending five weeks and over 7,000 miles two up on the lower-priced LX model's seat, we came to the conclusion that it is one of, if not the very best, stock touring seats on the market. This is true for the nonadjustable rider's portion of the seat, and especially so for the air-adjustable passenger seat. Since the LX's passenger seat is so good, it gave Suzuki the idea of adding the air-adjustment feature to the rider's portion on the deluxe LXE model. The rider's seat is still exceptionally comfortable, and now the air adjustment can be used to slightly change your seating position on a long ride, which adds to long-term seating comfort.

The comfort of the passenger's air-adjustable seat is an indication of the time and effort Suzuki put into the design of the Cavalcade to enhance the passenger's comfort and riding enjoyment. Like the wide and supportive seat, the trunk-mounted back rest is air adjustable, too. The trunk moves fore and aft with a lever that can be reached while riding, making it easy for passengers of any size to get really comfortable. The pilot's footpegs are adjustable, and the Cavalcade also has two-position passenger foot boards. They can be tilted back at a 45-degree angle or set flat while riding. In addition, a pair of rear speakers and a height-adjustable headrest really add to the already luxurious passenger accommodations.

Clearly, Suzuki took two-up touring seriously when they designed the Cavalcade, starting with the basic riding positions. For the pilot, the ergonomics are very good. The position dictated by the seat, bar and peg relationship is exceptionally comfortable for long periods of time. For the passenger, the Cavalcade has set new standards for both comfort and riding position. The passenger sits a bit higher, plus the 2½ inches of fore and aft backrest travel allows a much better view of passing scenery. With the air adjustability of the seat and backrest, plus the alternate position of the foot boards, the

passenger can not only get comfortable, but stay comfortable over a long day's ride with periodic position changes. About the only bad part of the passenger position is a bit more head buffeting in heavy crosswinds, but even this can be alle-

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## CAVALCADE

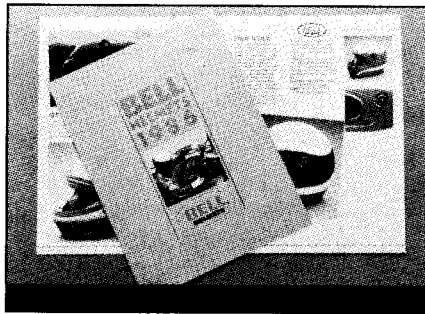
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viated to a degree by moving the backrest forward and closer to the pilot. The new passenger headrest received quite a bit of positive comment from people who saw the test bike, but in our experience it added little to passenger comfort.

This motorcycle drew a lot of attention during several of the photo sessions in Death Valley, and it gave us a chance to talk with a good number of the visitors here. People come to Death Valley from all over the world to see the many strange and beautiful geological formations, enjoy the numerous hiking trails, visit historical points of interest or just soak up winter sunshine at the man-made oases of Stovepipe Wells or Furnace Creek.

From October through March, the weather is usually quite pleasant—clear sunshiny days and cool nights. *But*, thanks to an unexpected cold front bringing 60-plus mph winds and dust storms, our second day in Death Valley assumed disaster proportions. Nothing, however, could detract from the splendor of Dante's View at sunrise. The point towers 6,000 feet above the Badwater area, at 279.8 feet below sea level, the lowest in the Western



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Hemisphere. The sweeping panorama of the 130 miles of Death Valley at our feet and the peaks of the Panamint Mountains opposite were breathtaking. Literally, as well as figuratively, on the morning we visited, the gusting swirls of wind threatened to toss us off those magnificent, sheer cliffs. Spectacular—and scary. But then, the stark beauty of the Valley never has been very hospitable to humans!

At sunset, we visited our favorite spot, Zabriskie Point, named for a leader in the development of the Borox works so important to the area. The light from the sun

as it sank behind the Panamints, combined with the powder-fine dust, created an other-worldly light and gave an ethereal glow to the deeply etched hills formed by the upheaval and erosion of an ancient lake bed. The experience was the high point of the trip and made the grueling day worthwhile. Well, almost.

The Death Valley ride gave us a chance to reaffirm many of the good and bad points of the Cavalcade we detected on our previous rides. One of the major good points is the power and responsiveness of the big 1,360cc, 16-valve V-four engine.

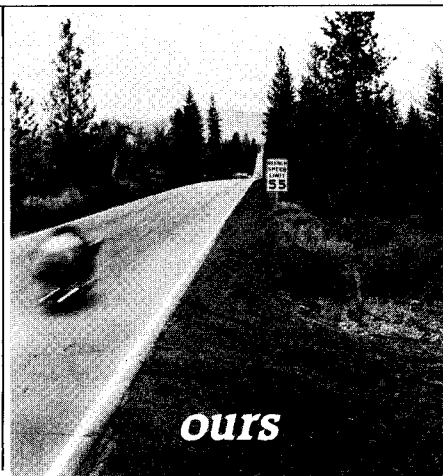
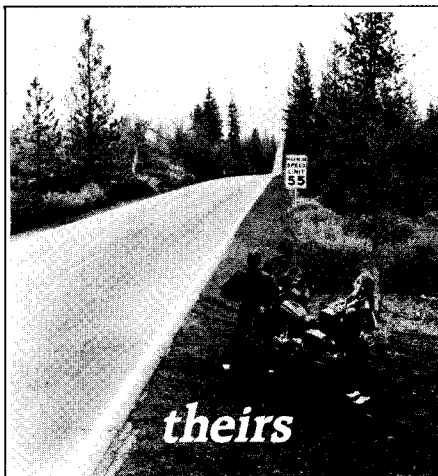
Repeated roll-on acceleration tests with the Honda Aspencade saw the Cavalcade pull away smartly when both bikes were in the same gear. While the Aspencade power comes on very smoothly, above 3,500 rpm the Suzuki responds *right now* to any increase in throttle setting, noticeably expanding the fun quotient of the motorcycle. Not only does the engine offer real punch when it's wanted, but it sounds good doing it, with a nice throaty exhaust note. While the engine starts to produce some mild, low-frequency vibration around 4,000 rpm (about 75 mph in top gear), it is absent at lower, cruising speeds.

The road we selected to get into Death Valley was rough enough to point out how good the suspension is on this machine. It reminded us of one of the roads we covered last fall on the group ride. That, too, was a narrow, deserted two-lane road near the California-Nevada border. Although paved, the road is poorly maintained, so the surface was quite rough, and it contained a long stretch of big dips or whoop-de-dos. These could still be covered at speed and really worked the suspension. This road was not only great fun, sort of like a roller-coaster ride, but, like the road into Death Valley, it gave us a chance to explore any limitations in the suspension and ride of the Cavalcade. What we found confirmed our previous experience on the 7,000-mile tour: The Auto-Leveling rear suspension on this bike gives an excellent ride, regardless of the conditions or load. At first, I was a little put off by the lack of manual air-pressure control in the system. But after using it on all types of roads under a great variety of conditions, we came to appreciate its unfailingly comfortable and well-controlled ride.

The Cavalcade's high-speed handling isn't quite as good as its ride, however. The bike sets up a gentle weave in high-speed sweepers above 80 mph on smooth roads. But a weave can be induced at slightly slower speeds if a sharp bump is encountered in a curve. While this never caused any control problems, it was a bit spooky the first time or two it was encountered. The LXE's low-speed handling is on a par with smaller machines, amazing for an 870-pound touring bike.

What isn't so amazing is the Cavalcade's gas mileage and range. I tend to run faster and harder than many touring riders, but even so gas mileage should have been better. Our high figure was 40.5 mpg and our low was 26.3, while the average for all our trips on the Cavalcade was only 33.1. The tank is listed as holding 6.1 gallons, but the fuel gauge drops below empty around the five-gallon mark. Without a reserve switch, it is extremely difficult for this rider to pass up a station with the gauge near empty. This gives an effective range of around 125 to 150 miles.

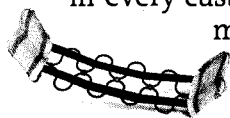
As would be expected, high speeds



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caused most of the problem, but heavy cross or quartering winds seemed to have an especially strong effect on gas mileage. At one point in west Texas, we had to sweat out 20 miles or so, unsure if we would make it to a station or be set afoot by lack of fuel range. We had encountered some fairly heavy, quartering head winds and, as we later discovered, the mileage dropped to 26.3 mpg, so my range estimate was off quite a bit. At around 120 miles, the gauge went below empty, and we still had over 20 miles to the nearest station. This was good for laughs later, but at the time I was hot, tired and hungry, not to mention less than enthused about the prospect of having to walk in the 95-degree heat. All of which is to say we would like to see a bit more usable fuel range.

All our trips on the Cavalcade have been two up with a full load of touring gear, reminding us repeatedly how important a high-load capacity is for a touring bike. The Cavalcade offers a whopping 450 pounds of capacity (GVWR of 1,320 pounds—bike wet weight of 870 pounds), the highest of all the touring bikes on the market, including the BMW RT models. Our testing was done with 325 pounds of rider and passenger (dressed for riding) and 108 pounds of gear which adds up to a 433-pound load. For comparison purposes, this would have been about a 48-pound overload on the 1986 Honda SE-i or the Yamaha Venture Royale. It would have been within five pounds of the maximum load capacity of the new Kawasaki Voyager XII. The Suzuki's realistic load capacity is one of the main reasons the ride is so good, again showing the good planning put into this bike.

The Cavalcade comes equipped with ample storage space. Both the saddlebags and the tail trunk have their own liners. The built-in storage pockets in the saddlebag lids have magnetic latches and make little items needed for the road particularly accessible for the passenger, but they do eat into interior storage space. We solved that by fitting an extraordinary amount of gear into every nook and cranny

in the saddlebag lids, the tail trunk and around the taillight housings where the saddlebags protrude. And we created more luggage room by mounting a tank bag onto the gas tank. Using a tank bag does require you to leave the radio compartment open, and you won't be able to change tapes without releasing the front of the tank bag to lift it up. But the added convenience and luggage capacity of the tank bag more than make up for any of the minor disadvantages it causes.

After living with the Cavalcade for all this time, it's apparent that Suzuki really

did its homework in designing this machine. This is a very easy bike to live with on a day-to-day basis, in addition to being an exceptionally good touring mount. In fact, it has a lot of features that are spot-on for the touring rider—the superb stereo, cruise control and lighting in particular. Basically, the Cavalcade is an outstanding motorcycle for touring, with comfort, power, load capacity and luxury features that make it a new and distinctive choice for the touring rider. The LXE model adds some solid improvements to this already great touring machine. □

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