

**LIFE IN THE LUXO LANE:  
SUZUKI'S CAVALCADE LX**

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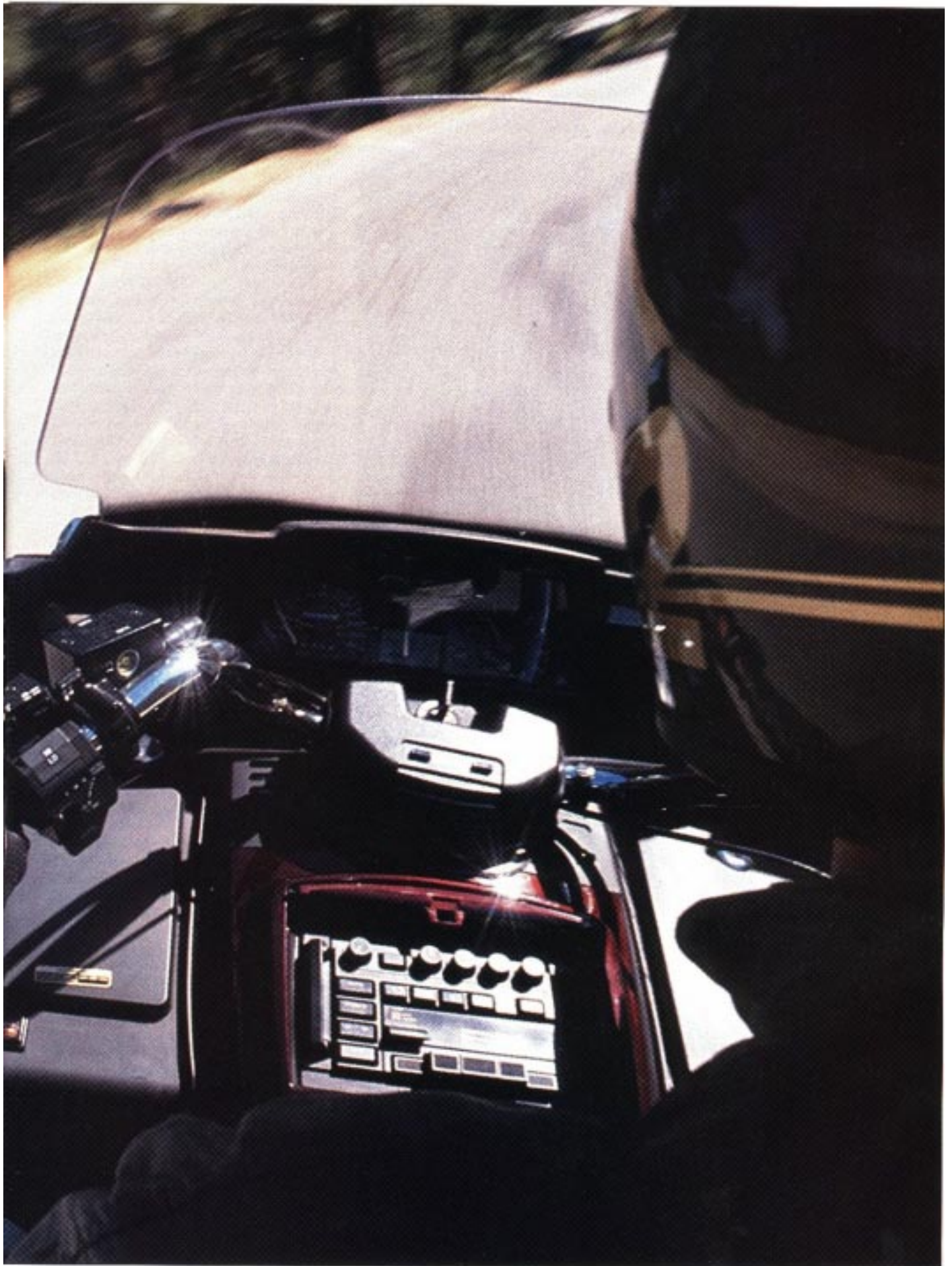




# Big Wheel in Gold Country

Clipper-class comfort makes the 1988 Suzuki Cavalcade LX an ideal mount for a tour of the land that created California's first real estate rush.

• Bob Price



**GOLD!** The first glimmer of the precious stuff in the American River brought fortune seekers to Sacramento from all over the world. In 1849, it was a tough journey. Those in the East had their choice: uncharted over-

land routes fraught with danger from the elements and Indians, a fast clipper around the stormy tip of South America or through the jungles of Panama.

Considering the hardships of those that went before me, I felt a little guilty as I headed toward the gold fields. I took the

freeway. Outside of the occasional pothole, the only hazard facing me was boredom. Ordinarily I avoid the interstate highway system, but I had the fever. Not gold fever. It was get-out-of-Los Angeles fever, and my transportation was a modern, road-going equivalent of the clipper ship, a 1988 Suzuki Cavalcade.

The Cavalcade made its debut in 1985 and quickly made a reputation for itself by setting new standards of comfort. Comfort is what luxotouring is all about, and it wasn't until the 1988 Honda Gold Wing was introduced that any other manufacturer even came close to Suzuki's plush example.

Knowing that the pilot would get an earful about defects in long-range comfort from his companion, Suzuki really concentrated on passenger accommodations. There are two airbags in the backrest and one in the seat which can be inflated or deflated with the onboard compressor by simply touching the control buttons on the lower right-hand side of the backrest. The trunk and seat back slide fore and aft on rails as well. This adjustment is made by pulling a lever under the seat inflation controls and releasing when the trunk is in the desired position. Armrests complete the passenger seat. Also, the passenger floorboards can be tilted up by pulling a lever on the left-hand grab rail. Springs then snap the floorboards up to a 45-degree angle. Another pull on the lever and the floorboards can be pushed back down to level.

I had a chance to try out the rear seat with Technical Editor Mark Tuttle Jr. at the helm. I played with the adjustments until I had them just right. As testimony to passenger comfort (as well as complete trust in my pilot) I was soon fast asleep, waking only when I heard the pegs scrape as we turned into the *Rider* parking lot. Any passenger who still complains about comfort ought to stay home!

Unfortunately the pilot does not get the same consideration. No airbags, no adjustment, no floorboards. Air adjustment for the front was standard on last year's LXE model, but the LXE isn't available in 1988. Even without these adjustments, I found the pilot seat to be at least the equivalent of the 1988 Gold Wing's captain's chair, if not a little better. Seating and peg position is good, as long as the rider is kept busy with shifting. But once settled in for a cruise, some highway pegs would be nice. The LXE featured cornering lamps mounted to extended crash bars and covered with a chrome nacelle. They were a dandy place for your feet on the long haul, and I miss that footrest more than the cornering lamps. The cornering lamps and extended engine case guards retail for \$179.95 and \$72.95 respectively. I recommend them highly.

Due to a late start, I decided to take advantage of the new 65-mph speed limit on Interstate 5. I aimed north and set the



cruise control to the flow of traffic, which was around 70 mph, the speed these roads were designed to handle anyway. The Cavalcade's cruise control is the best I've ever used. It sets the speed precisely when engaged and holds it without surge or hesitation. Honda and Yamaha's vacuum-actuated cruise controls have a tendency to hunt a little bit, and I usually end up canceling them when going up or down hills. The Cavalcade's motor-actuated cruise control required cancellation only on the down side of the steepest grades. Otherwise I didn't have to touch the cruise control unless traffic called for disengagement. Use any hand or foot control or roll off the throttle, and the cruise control is

canceled. Touch the resume switch and the Cavalcade accelerates smoothly back up to the exact speed as before. If you accelerate to pass, the cruise control is not disengaged. Just release the throttle when the pass is complete, and it settles back to the preset speed. It's easy to use and easy to get used to.

**T**here isn't much good to say about I-5 except that it's fast. Between the Grapevine and Sacramento there is no scenery and few curves. The California Central Valley is agricultural so there are a lot of insects and an occasional herd of malodorous cattle. Fortunately the Cavalcade's ample fairing protected me from the insects. The fairing lacks lowers

though, and my shins took a lot of wind-blast. If I tried to stretch my legs, the air was channeled up my legs to my face. This problem is improved by the cornering lamp option. The huge mirrors serve two functions. Besides providing a panoramic view of the rear, they protect the rider's hands from the wind. With everything from my knees up in a pocket of still air, fatigue is kept to a minimum. Stopping only once in 400 miles, I made great time and was in Sacramento by sunset.

The following morning I took Interstate 80 from Sacramento to Auburn, and headed south on State Route 49 (making me a 49er of sorts) to Coloma, where gold was first discovered in California at Sut-

## Handling Hot Weather



The helmets Managing Editor Donya Carlson and I are wearing on the 1988 Cavalcade LX are **Bell M-2s**. The helmet of choice for many racing professionals, the M-2 makes a lot of sense for the touring rider as well. Two features racers and casual riders demand are comfort with maximum protection. The M-2 delivers both.

The shell is made of fiber-reinforced thermoset resin with an expanded polystyrene foam liner, and the strap is secured with square aluminum double D-rings. The M-2 is certified by DOT, Snell 85 and ANSI 90. The terry cloth interior, vented chin bar, removable ear cavity pads and neck roll ensure comfort. The price is comfortable, too. A single-color M-2 retails for \$209.95 at this writing and is available at most accessory dealers.

Our jackets are **Hein Gericke California IIs**. The weather was very hot when the photos were taken, but the patented full-length zippered front vents made the seemingly endless photo session bearable. The lower part of the front vents provide access to the handwarmer pockets, and there is an inside breast pocket as well.

If the weather turns cold, the snap-in lining will keep the wearer snug. The California II's removable long sleeve Thermoliner® lets the body heat-reflecting aluminized Mylar® warm your arms as well as your torso (unlike vest-type removable liners). This makes it a great choice for touring regardless of the climate. The California II is available in men's and women's sizes in a choice of black, gray or red. Suggested retail is \$279.95 for the men's California II and \$259.95 for the women's. To find a Hein Gericke dealer near you contact Intersport, 201 West Bastanchury Road, Suite E, Fullerton, California 92635; (714) 738-6262.

Our hands kept their cool thanks to **Arthur Fulmer Sporting Gloves**. Stretch panels between the fingers provide ventilation and a comfortable fit. The elastic wrist straps are secured with hook-and-loop fasteners, and the thumb and palms are reinforced with an extra swatch of leather. The only drawback I found with these open-back gloves was a strange-looking tan on the backs of my hands after a long day in the sun. The Fulmer Sporting Gloves retail for \$21.95. To find a dealer near you contact Arthur Fulmer, 122 Gay-

oso Street, Memphis, Tennessee 38103; (901) 525-5711.

**Black Georgia Boot Company Touring Boots** complete my touring outfit. Expanding side panels secured by Velcro® ease slipping the Touring Boots on and off, and the interior is lined with Cambrelle®, (a soft, comfortable synthetic fabric). Oil resistant non-marking soles bottom out this quality footwear. And heavy duty? The Touring Boots are built like a brick-you-know-what. The boots sell for around \$110. Write to Georgia Boot Company, P.O. Box 10, Franklin, Tennessee 37065-0010; (800) 251-3388 or (615) 794-1556 in Tennessee, to find your local Georgia Boot dealer.—*Bob Price*

The **Ladies' Western Boots** I'm wearing are made by **Brooks Leather Sportswear**. Although it took a couple days to break them in, they're now very comfortable to wear both on and off the motorcycle. The boots come in sizes 5½-10 in black only and are made of oil-tan leather. They're available at your local dealer for around \$100, or contact Brooks Leather Sportswear, 14511 West 11 Mile Road, Oak Park, Michigan 48237; (313) 548-8633. □

—*Donya Carlson*

ter's sawmill. This was the first time I had the Cavalcade off the freeway, barring gas stops and the motel the night before. I was concerned about the size of the Cavalcade when things got twisty. The Cavalcade is a huge motorcycle, with a 65.7-inch wheelbase, and weighs in at nearly 900 pounds fully gassed and loaded.

Amazingly, the bike seemed to shrink a little as I hit the switchbacks below Auburn. The big fellow handles well for its size. The suspension absorbed the additional stress with little sway or steering head shake. But this is no sport bike, and its tremendous weight was very evident if I got too aggressive. The front end includes no means of adjustment, and the air shocks in the rear have only an auto-leveling switch on the dash to control the air pressure. The auto-level helps by compensating for different loads, but not for changing riding conditions. Also, this adjustment can be made only when the engine is running and the bike is in neutral. However, you can increase the pressure in the rear by fooling the system. If you're riding solo, just have somebody sit on the back seat and hit the switch. When he gets off and you go on your way, the rear suspension will be set for a heavier load than you are actually carrying. That's not much of an adjustment, but it's better than nothing. Also, there isn't much ground clearance so the pegs touch down easily.

The switchbacks gave way to rolling country with gentle, sweeping turns, and soon I was pulling into Coloma. The town and surrounding area are now a state park dedicated to the discovery of gold 140 years ago.

Actually that discovery was an accident. John Sutter, a Swiss immigrant, received a 48,000-acre land grant from the Mexican government and wanted to build a fort to defend the land. For that he needed finished lumber, so he contracted James Marshall to design and build the sawmill at Coloma. The sawmill was to be water-powered, so a portion of the American River was diverted to the mill, then returned to the river. It was in this return section, or tailrace, of the mill that Marshall found the gold in January 1848. He tried to keep it a secret, because he didn't think there was much gold there, and he knew the mill would not be completed if the area was overrun by fortune seekers. Word got out though, and within a year there were a quarter-million new inhabitants in the river valley. The sawmill was out of business by 1850, but the course of California history was set. A replica of the sawmill now stands near the site (the original washed away in 1856).

I continued down State Route 49 through Placerville, called Hangtown during the gold rush because of a quick system of necktie justice. The ride through Placerville, with its fast-food establishments and traffic, brought me back to the 20th century. The Cavalcade is cumbersome in

traffic and engine heat goes straight to the rider. I was glad to get out of Hangtown and back on the road.

More rolling hills and gentle corners carried me into Angels Camp, the site of Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." I would have stayed and talked to the residents about bloodlines and other important aspects of frog flesh, but I wanted to reach Sonora and the adjacent town of Columbia before dark. State Route 49 tightens up just before you reach Sonora, with a series of uphill right turns. This kind of road puts pressure on an engine, and the Cavalcade's powerplant really came through. I had to intentionally put the transmission two gears above the proper gear for my speed before the engine started to complain.

The Cavalcade engine is based on the big 1,165cc Madura engine. Like Sutter's mill, the original Madura mill is gone now, leaving only the Cavalcade to carry Suzuki's V-four standard. Like the old Madura, the Cavalcade engine is nearly maintenance-free, requiring only oil, filter and spark plug changes to keep it rolling. The Madura had an 82/278-degree crankshaft to give it a loping feel, similar to that of Harley-Davidson cruisers. For touring, Suzuki felt an engine with less vibration was needed, so that crank was replaced with a more conventional 180-degree unit. Other changes include smaller carbs and a five-speed gearbox instead of a six. The engine was then bored and stroked to give it a 1,360cc displacement, and the combustion chamber was enlarged to lower the compression ratio. The result is still not silky smooth, since there is an imbalance in the 82-degree V-four configuration, and Suzuki chose to rubber-mount the engine rather than use counterbalancers. The idle is rough, but get it above 3,000 rpm, and the engine sounds wonderful and the vibration that isn't damped out is minimized by the rubber-mounted footpegs and handlebars.

All this rubber leads to the main drawback of the Cavalcade. The pilot is so isolated from the road that he no longer feels like he's a part of the machine. I got used to that detached feeling, but some of the other staffers don't like it.

I found a room in Sonora and realized then that I had overpacked. My rain-gear was unnecessary this time out, and I had emptied half the contents of my tool chest into one of the saddlebags. Also, I had far more clothes than I needed for a three-day trip. Fortunately there was still room in the Cavalcade's luggage for souvenirs. In fact, there was enough room for me to have taken the other half of my tool collection. The Cavalcade has a huge cargo capacity, with soft inner luggage in the saddlebags and trunk to speed up packing and unpacking. (The new Honda Gold Wing edges the Cavalcade slightly in the luggage-volume department, but not by

Retail Price	\$9,689
Warranty	2 yrs., 24,000 miles
Service Interval	600, then every 3,500 miles

Type	Liquid-cooled, transverse 82-degree V-four
Displacement	1,360cc
Bore & Stroke	81.0 x 66.0mm
Valve Train	DOHC, 4 valves per cyl.
Carburetion	Mikuni, 33mm CV x 4
Lubrication System	Wet sump, 3.9 qt.
Ignition	Transistorized electronic
No. of Gears	5
Final Drive	Shaft, 2.666:1

Charging Output	500 watts
Battery	12V 20AH

Frame	Double cradle
Suspension, front	41mm stanchions
rear	Dual shocks with compressed-air auto level
Brakes, front	Dual discs
rear	Single disc
Wheels, front	Cast, 2.50 x 16 in.
rear	Cast, 3.50 x 15 in.
Tires, front	130/90-H16
rear	150/90-H15
Wheelbase	65.7 in.
Seat Height	30.7 in.
Wet Weight	842 lbs.
Load Capacity	478 lbs.
GVWR	1,320 lbs.

Fuel Capacity	6.1 gal.
Gals. to Reserve Indicator	5
Average MPG	37.1
Range to Reserve	185.5 miles
Indicated RPM at 60 MPH	3,100

Speedometer, odometer, tripmeter, tachometer, fuel gauge, temp. gauge; indicator lights for turn signals, neutral, high beam, cruise control engaged; warning light for low oil pressure; L.C.D. battery check, head, tail and brake light check, sidestand check, gear position, clock
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much.) Two additional cargo pockets are in the fairing, and the saddlebag lids have snap-open pockets on top for the passenger. When you open the saddlebag lids, they swing down and dangle from cords, so you don't have to put them on the ground or on the seat, and you won't lose them if the latches fail. This is a nice touch. We've had more than one saddlebag lid with road rash at *Rider*.

The next morning I left for Columbia, just five miles from Sonora. Today, Columbia is a restored gold-rush town for tourists like me, but 140 years ago it was the site of the biggest gold strike in the area. In March of 1850, the Hildreth party found gold. By the time the ready supply gave out in 1858, around \$87 million worth of gold had been shipped out of Columbia. And that was at the San Francisco market price of \$12 an ounce! Compare that to the current market price of over \$400 per

ounce. Whew! Needless to say, Columbia was a thriving community with a population of over 20,000. The boom town had California's second school, as well as 67 saloons, 143 gambling halls, 185 fandango halls and five breweries to serve the miners. All this cash flow was enough to carry the town into the 20th century. It may sound like the miners were doing well, but all supplies had to be shipped in, and there was incredible inflation. The ones who got rich were the merchants and mining equipment suppliers. After the gold played out, Columbia never became a ghost town.

Today the merchants serve the tourists instead of miners, providing good food, homemade ice cream, candy and local folk art. The movie industry also uses Columbia for filming westerns. It felt funny to swing open the same saloon doors as Gary Cooper had in *High Noon*. Yep. It's not a tourist trap though. The townspeople seem sincere and the history is real, not an illusion. Columbia is worth the stop.

Back on the road again, I continued south on State Route 49 through Chinese Camp (the site of California's first Tong war) to State Route 120, and headed east. In spite of the fact that it was getting to be mid-afternoon and I knew I had to be back at the office the next day, I just couldn't resist a run through Yosemite National Park. I had never gone down into Yosemite Valley to the village before. There I received the first disappointment of the trip. There were campers everywhere. So many, it looked like an entire city had exchanged its wood and brick homes for canvas and nylon. There was even a pizza parlor down there! In spite of the grandeur of Yosemite Falls and El Capitan, I had to get out. It just didn't seem right to do this to John Muir's wilderness.

I exited the park over Tioga Pass and turned south down U.S. Highway 395 for Los Angeles. The sun was setting when I saw the mileage sign: Los Angeles—339 miles. I couldn't have timed it better. I would be crossing the blistering Mojave Desert in the dark.

**N**ow I could check out one of the most important parts of a luxotourer: the stereo. Like the new Honda Gold Wing, the Cavalcade carries its stereo in the false tank instead of the dash. This is a more convenient location because you don't have to reach in front of the handlebars to change tapes or make tone adjustments. Also, a lockable panel that swings out and slides into the tank keeps the stereo out of the sight of thieves. If that isn't enough security, the whole unit unplugs and can be carried indoors. Like the other stereo-equipped bikes, a mute switch and station changer are located near the left grip.

In that remote part of California the only station I could pick up was in Bishop, where they were interviewing a local celebrity, so I loaded a cassette. The sound from the Cavalcade's cassette deck is weak.

When I used commercially available tapes, the volume and automatic volume had to be turned up almost all the way before I could hear the music clearly over the wind noise, and even my homemade tapes (which are recorded at a much higher level) had to be turned up quite a bit. If you want to switch back to the radio, you better turn the volume back down before you do it, or the sound will blast you out of the seat. The sound quality is good, but not great. I couldn't turn up my rock tapes enough for my taste before distortion set in. I stuck to Oscar Peterson's quieter jazz piano for the rest of the way home.

As I re-entered Los Angeles County, I got into the rain grooves again. The bike began to sway disconcertingly, but the

heavily ribbed Dunlop Qualifier front tire, rather than suspension defects, is probably responsible. There's no rain groove danger with this bike.

Although my tour of the Gold Country was brief, it was one of the best tours I've taken. I didn't just ride through towns and scenery, I rode through history. And the Cavalcade was a big factor in my enjoyment. U.S. Highway 395 and I-5 are two of the dullest roads a motorcyclist can navigate, and the Cavalcade made my journey not only bearable, but pleasant. In spite of the advances made in the luxotouring class by the 1988 Gold Wing, for long-distance eat-up-the-miles riding, the Suzuki Cavalcade LX is still a serious contender. □

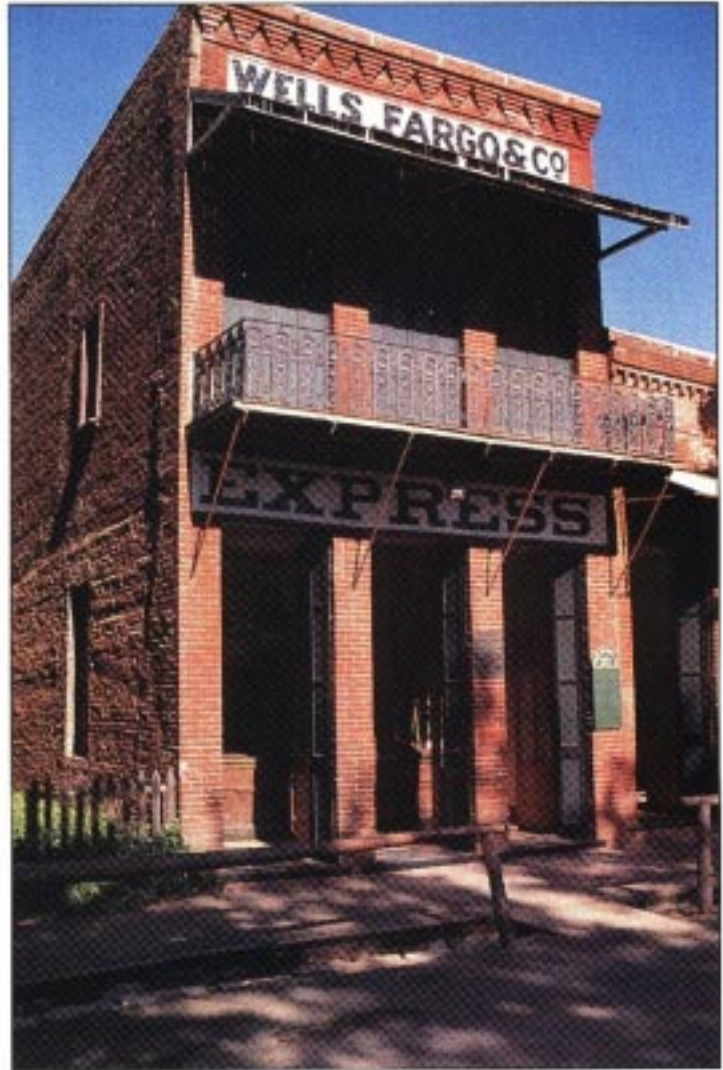


PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

**This Wells Fargo office was opened to ship massive quantities of gold from Columbia. The brass scales (partially visible inside) are accurate enough to weigh a signature on a piece of paper!**