

2018 Gold Wing Review - 12K mile update

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Last February after attending the Honda the press launch I picked up a new 2018 Gold Wing Tour DCT model for myself, and over the last few months have been able to put enough miles on it, both solo and two-up that I'm ready to release a follow up to my original review article.

My overall impression of the bike is still very positive and I'm still glad I traded up. It has handled everything I've



been able to throw at it, from aggressive riding on twisty roads to riding in colder temps in the rain two-up and fully loaded. The handling of the bike remains stellar, and I appreciate its reduced weight and narrower overall fairing, despite the increase in cockpit airflow on my shoulders and legs. This attribute is actually proving beneficial now that the temperatures are warming up. The Honda accessory air wings that go under the mirrors also provide a huge benefit in cooler weather and allows you to reduce cockpit airflow significantly. I'd love to see Honda make them standard on all Wings.

The engine has performed well and I've had no issues with it of any kind. The only maintenance I've done on it at this point is to change the oil and keep the battery on a charger. I have found that the oil cartridge filter for the DCT transmission is a bit finicky to remove and reinstall and it is easy to pinch or cut the O ring that is on the cover plate for the filter when reinstalling it. It appears to me that this O ring may be slightly oversized in diameter. I have removed all the plastic on the bike to familiarize myself with how the bike comes apart and goes back together. The various panels seem to be much more intricate with a lot of locking tabs and pieces that have to go together in a specific order and need to fit in a very specific way. This does make working on this bike a bit more of a challenge and care has to be taken to get all the panels back on properly.

The DCT transmission has performed well and I'm becoming more and more accustomed to it, and I'm really enjoying the freedom of not having to clutch and shift all the time. It appears to have some adaptive learning in its firmware and has learned how I ride and seems to have adjusted its shifting

patterns to my riding style. This was most noticeable when another owner and I swapped bikes for a day, and he commented on how my bike seemed to shift at different RPM points than his did. I guess maybe I've been teaching my bike some bad habits. On a couple of occasions, I have experienced a momentary glitch with the DCT when riding from stoplight to stoplight in city traffic. On two or three occasions when starting from a stop the transmission appeared to shudder momentarily and made a clacking sound for about a second or two as if it couldn't quite get it into the gear it wanted. I just continued to accelerate and the noise stopped and it rode normally. I'm not sure if the sound was from the modulation of the DCT clutches or if it was actually trying to shift gears. It might be from the clutches getting warm from city traffic riding, as it only happened after riding through several successive stoplights in town and has not repeated since. On one occasion, I had the engine actually die at a stop light when I tried to pull away. I'm happy with the way the transmission shifts in the auto mode 95% of the time though I do find myself frequently helping it to downshift by hitting the downshift button. This might be my only complaint, and I wish it would downshift a bit earlier and more progressive when coming to a stop instead of rapidly going through several gears at the last moment. The only times I've resorted to the manual mode has been on a twisty road where I want the transmission to hold a certain gear instead of constantly up shifting and then having to manually force a downshift before entering the next corner. I have used the Rain Mode and Sport modes a few times, but most of the time I leave the bike in the Tour mode. I like the way the transmission downshifts easier in Sport mode when you roll on the throttle, but I'm not a fan of the throttle sensitivity when in Sport, and it can make doing small throttle corrections in mid corner a bit difficult, and you have to exercise more precise throttle control when in this mode. You also have to be very careful with Sport Mode at lower speeds or in town and trying to do a U turn in Sport Mode can be particularly hazardous. Personally, I'd prefer to just become adjusted to one set of throttle response curves and adjust my riding as needed, so leaving it in Tour mode all the time allows me to do this. It is nice to have the other modes available as an option if you wanted to use them, and the Rain mode is a useful option when riding in the wet, as it seems to help keep you out of trouble and increases the sensitivity on the traction control and ABS systems. So, I guess the other modes do have some value, but I only use them rarely.

After getting some miles on the bike, I started to notice some occasions when riding solo where the rear tire would leave the pavement for an instant when going over heaves in the road. This did not occur on all bumps, but when the speed of the bike and severity of the bump were right, I could feel the rear tire come off the ground and the traction control light would even come on. It almost seemed like there wasn't enough weight on the rear wheel to keep it planted. I suspect this is caused by a lack of rebound damping in the rear shock, which is allowing the rear end to rebound too fast in some circumstances, and then the rebound action of the chassis is carrying the rear wheel off the ground with it, essentially topping out the rear shock. I mentioned in my initial review how much I liked the way the suspension felt like it was just floating over the bumps, but after getting some miles on the bike I found that this same floating feeling was also causing the suspension to become taxed at higher speeds and when pushed harder. This became more evident when two-up and fully loaded as the front



suspension felt like it was nearly bottomed out sometimes and didn't have much travel room left. Some riders may like this softer suspension feeling, but I opted to replace both front and rear shocks with ones from Traxxion Dynamics with stiffer spring rates and increased rebound and compression damping. This resulted in a significant improvement that eliminated the rear wheel hop I was experiencing and also improved front end handling and control. It also made the bike ride much better when ridden in a sportier manner, and improved the ride when two-up and fully loaded. The overall handling and suspension of the bike, even in stock form, is vastly improved from the old bike, and gone is all the harshness from the old fork legs and anti-dive system. The new wishbone front suspension is a huge improvement in every way, the bike holds a line much better in corners and is easier to handle at both high and low speeds. The Bridgestone tires that the bike came with have performed really well, and I have never felt them loose grip in the wet. The only complaint I have with them is that the initial tread depth on them seems not to be as deep as some other brands (4.8mm as measured at the tread bar), and hence the rear tire is worn down to the tread bar indicator at only 6,900 miles - I had hoped for a bit better mileage out of them.

The Navigation system on the bike is taking some getting used to since it does not operate in the same way as the Garmin based units I have used in the past. I did manage to find a way to build a route using Garmin's basecamp program, but it first must be converted using GPSBabel in order for it to import and work properly on the Harman navigation systems. Routes created in Garmin's old MapSource program seem to work fine without the need for this conversion to be done on them. All routes are currently limited to 8 waypoints, if you use any more than this, it will just truncate the route. Honda says they are working on a fix for this, but I haven't heard when it will be available. The voice prompts for the Nav system also seem to stop working sometimes, and it seems like if you have an active route running and shut off the bike, when you restart you lose the voice prompts. If you create a route with a waypoint in it and then miss that waypoint, the system will try to perpetually route you back to the waypoint you missed instead of going to the next one. This is a significant problem, and also seems to prevent you from restarting a route in the middle of a route, as it will always try to route you back to the beginning of it. The best way I have found to work around these problems is to just do simple go-to commands right on the bike from one city to the next instead of making a route, but this means I have to stop several times a day to program in the next "go-to" point. Another complaint I have is that the colors of the medium sized roads displayed on the screen are nearly the same color as the background with only two tiny border lines on them, and this makes it difficult to see them, especially in the bright sunlight.

The background colors also change depending on zoom level and what part of the country you are in, and this further complicates being able to see all the roads against the background. Zooming out past about the 1 mile scale makes nearly all the medium and small roads disappear which also make it hard to see where you are in relation to other towns. I have the SiriusXM weather subscription activated and this allows the weather screens to be displayed right on the map. Unlike on the previous generation bike, you no longer have to change screens to see the radar, it is always displayed on the main



navigation screen, and the radar image seems to be fairly accurate and reliable. This is a feature I use often and I'm glad to see Honda kept it. And while I like having a built in Navigation system on the bike, I feel that it needs some more refinement, especially with regards to the routing functions and background colors. I'm also noticing a significant amount of glare from the entire instrument panel, which I suspect could be fixed by simply changing the angle of the plastic cover panel on it.

The new Bluetooth system seems to be working good for the most part. I had to give up on the Sena 30K units, I was never able to get the intercom to function properly on them even after numerous calls to Sena and software updates. I purchased a set of the older Sena 20S and they have worked much better. Occasionally, one or both of the units doesn't pair with the bike when I power on the ignition, and this causes the Apple Car play function not to work, so I have to pair the headsets and then unplug the phone from the bike and plug it back in to get the Car Play function working again. Most of the time, everything pairs fine and I don't have to do this, but about 1 out of every 5 times I cycle power on the ignition one or both of the headsets doesn't automatically reconnect. At this point I'm not certain if this problem is due to the Sena headsets or the internal Bluetooth transmitters in the bike. Once everything is paired and I have Car Play working, I'm able to pull up Siri and use my phone for navigation, music, text messages, phone calls etc. When it's all working, it really is a great aid, however a significant amount of care has to be taken so that you don't get "target fixated" on navigating through menus when riding. The navigation button on the left handgrip is also a bit hard to use because Honda programmed the left and right buttons to control the music track or XM channel, so it becomes very confusing when you try to use this control to navigate through the menus. I'd prefer to see the music track/channel be changed in some other manner and allow the navigation button to work in a more intuitive manner when navigating menus. I had thought that the passenger audio controller would allow the passenger to listen to a different audio source from the rider, but after purchasing and installing it, I discovered that when the passenger changes the source, track, or volume that it impacts both headsets, not just the passengers. Apparently, the only way for the passenger to listen to a separate source is for them to pair their Bluetooth headset with their own phone instead of pairing it with the bike. I've also had a couple occasions where the setting in the bike for Car Play somehow gets reset to Ipod, which disables the Car Play function. I'm not sure what is causing this to happen, but it only happens once in a while, so I've just learned to keep an eye out for it.

The seat on the new bike is much flatter and harder than the old bike and has a smaller surface area for both rider and passenger. The angled backstop on the rider's section of the seat presses against my tailbone and causes pain after a few hours. My passenger also complained about the hardness of the seat and backrest. My solution was to have the seat modified by WingSoft. They replaced some of the foam in both the seat and passenger's backrest and reshaped the riders backstop. This resulted in allowing the seat to have more give in it and allows us to sit more "in" the seat instead of on top of it. My passenger continues to complain about not having anything to hold onto and not being able to reach the grab rails. We are still waiting on the aftermarket to provide a solution to this issue.

The adjustability of the electric windshield has proven its worth on the trips we have taken. The ability to raise the shield up to reduce airflow on the fly is a huge advantage and in the rain I can lower it so that I'm not looking through a rain soaked windscreen. The position of the control is easy to find and intuitive to operate. I still might like to have the windshield a couple inches wider to provide more coverage, but overall, I'm pleased with how it works on the road. The new location of the horn button has also been a little bit hard to become accustomed to, and I find myself having to look down to locate it. In an emergency situation, this can be frustrating. The location of the Hi/Low headlight switch has

taken some time to adjust to, and I miss the ability of being able to easily adjust the headlight height. I'd love to see Honda bring back the electric headlight height adjusters on this bike.

My average gas mileage over 12K miles has been about 42mpg. Overall range is close to the same, but I did have to put the bike into the Eco mode when traveling between Caliente and Tonopah Nevada, and even then, I came into Tonopah with the reserve light on and the range indicator saying I had about 12 more miles until I ran out of gas. I miss the extra gallon they removed from the tank and find myself stopping for gas more often now.

The reduced luggage space has required us to rethink some of our packing strategies. We have taken a total of 7 separate two-up trips on the bike, one of which was a two-week long 6K mile trip out west. I purchased the Honda luggage bags that go in the saddlebags and we use these for our clothes. They are smaller than the old bags we used to use, so we are pretty much limited to 4 days of clothes each in them, and just have to do laundry at a hotel every 3 or 4 days. The right saddlebag has a large hump in it for the final drive and this makes getting a full bag in it a challenge. Add in two sets of rain gear and heated liners and the other various things that go in the trunk, and result is that every bag is stuffed totally full by the time we are ready to go, with no room left over for anything. Of all the complaints I have with the new bike, I'd have to say the reduction in luggage space has been the one that has impacted us the most. It has made two-up travel more challenging. During our last long trip out west, we stopped by Dixon Y Machine in California and installed a Pakit Rak. This has totally solved the space



problem when packing and we now feel we have more than enough room for any trip we would go on.

The helmet lock on the bike is significantly harder to use than on the old bike, and you'll need a cable if you want to lock two helmets to it at once. My solution was to purchase a set of the old helmet locks and fabricate brackets so that I could hang the helmets on the back of the bike like I used to. I'm not sure why Honda didn't do this from the start.

Keeping this bike clean has proven to be more work than the previous generation Gold Wing. The bike has many more angles and crevices that trap dirt, and the openings on the rear fender really cause the back of the bike to get dirty. Electrical Connection has already made block off plates for the rear fender gaps that I have installed and this has helped keep the back of the bike cleaner. They also have made cover plates for the top of the head where the cavity seems to continuously trap dirt and is difficult to clean. A coat of Rejex wax on the windshield has helped with bug removal, but now since airflows up the back side of the windshield, you also will have to clean the back side of it as well as the black panel behind the windscreen. I would not want to ride this bike during Love Bug season in Florida. I've also

noticed that the black panels on the side of the bike will scratch extremely easily. A simple swipe of a finger nail on them is enough to leave a permanent mark on them. Honda should go back to a textured surface that doesn't show marks so readily on the black panels.

As I stated in the beginning of this article, my overall impression of the bike is still very positive, despite the complaints I have listed. The bike is much more nimble and responsive than the previous generation Gold Wing, and the torque from the engine makes it pull like a freight train in all seven gears. The DCT transmission greatly reduces rider workload and is a joy to operate. The electronic package and wireless headsets and Apple Car play function work well and enhance the ride. Yes, the navigation system could be improved and I have had some glitches here and there, but for the most part, it all works like it is supposed to. I just wish someone would make a set of tires for this bike that I could get 10K miles out of, maybe Metzeler or Michelin will step up.

