

# Return of the Beast

Light weight converges with extreme power and channels a bit of checkered (flag) history.

BY

**B** **EING A RECREATIONAL RIDER, NOT** a professional racer, I'll admit to being a little nervous when I hopped aboard the GP1800 prior to shooting our test video. I had just taken a 10-minute warm-up run to get a feel for this WaveRunner — the fastest production racing machine Yamaha's ever produced. And now I was going to ride alongside — in close proximity to — our photo boat and engage in aggressive maneuvers while wearing a frightfully expensive, non-waterproofed Sennheiser microphone, just in case I could share a few thoughts that didn't sound like a frightened kid inquiring as to his mommy's whereabouts. Before I do things like this I always give myself a pre-ride pep talk that goes something like this: "Smacking into the side of a boat would really hurt."

Once the run began I realized the genius of Yamaha's creation. While it is designed to be ridden on a closed-course racing circuit by a trained professional, a recreational rider can drive this thing without looking like a fool. During the first ride, people will discover the GP1800's limitations are human-based, not mechanical.

The GP legend began in 1997 with the GP1200, powered by a 1.1L three-cylinder engine that produced 135 hp, the most of any production PWC at the time. Fast forward 20 years and Yamaha has reanimated the GP name — phased out in 2003 — with a machine that has taken a quantum leap into the future with improvements in every facet of its design.

## UNIQUE FACTOR

While Yamaha markets this beast as an out-of-the-box racer designed to dominate closed-course buoy circuits, designers did give it a sense of style. It features a NanoXcell2 hull, which, as the name intimates, is the revolutionary material's second generation. Yamaha engineers combined microscopic nano-clay particles and glass micro-bubbles and put them under intense pressure to create a stronger resin system that reduced the weight of the GP1800 to

769 pounds, which is 22 pounds less than the FZR it replaced. It even costs less, with an MSRP of \$13,999 vs. \$14,799. The NanoXcell2 surface is more dense, allowing it to have a really shiny finish, available in metallic Torch Red or Azure Blue.

It has three storage bins that total 25 gallons. The largest is up front, and then there's a glovebox in front of the seat and a small waterproof under-seat storage tank behind the driver. The information center is fairly Spartan and doesn't include the plethora of info Yamaha's luxury rides have. The GP1800 does have room for three people, a ski tow and a reboarding step.

## PERFORMANCE

Powering the GP1800 is the most powerful WaveRunner engine Yamaha has ever built. With an estimated 270 hp — Yamaha doesn't release exact numbers — it's twice as powerful as the original GP1200 powerplant. The Super Vortex High Output (SVHO) engine, which requires premium gas, starts with a 1.8L block, which is the largest displacement in

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the industry, eclipsing Kawasaki's 1.5L and Sea-Doo's 1.6L. That block helps the in-line four-cylinder four-stroke generate power organically before adding a supercharger and an intercooler that compresses and cools air so more fuel can be mixed, which wrings the most out of this engine. It uses a 160mm eight-vane pump that has a three-blade stainless steel impeller to deliver incredible acceleration.

While preparing for our acceleration test, I hit the down button on the trim system, leaned forward to reduce bowrise

🔴 (Clockwise from far right) Ergonomically correct grip is great for long rides. A tow rope comes standard. Padded rear deck is sloped downward for easy reboarding. Electronic trim on the left handlebar improves performance. The reboarding ladder automatically retracts when not in use.







and squeezed the right trigger as quickly as I dared, and the GP1800 shot off the line faster than any car with a license plate. After blasting to 30 mph in 1.5 seconds, my first thought was one of gratefulness for the racing seat, which was cradling my behind to prevent it from accelerating off the back and revealing my lack of upper body strength. Top speed was around 68 mph — because of the manufacturer/U.S. Coast Guard gentleman's agreement to keep top speed limited to around 65 mph — but the speed with which the GP1800 got there was startling. Thankfully, Yamaha engineers made the power curve perfectly linear, so all that fury rolls on with perfect control.

## HANDLING

Like virtually all Yamaha WaveRunners, the GP1800 has the RiDE system, which is a twin-lever throttle and “shift” system whose benefits begin with unparalleled control around docks: ease on the right trigger to go forward and the left for reverse. Release either and it's in neutral. It also includes “brakes,” which, even when jammed on from wide-open throttle, don't produce a violent event that buries the bow; rather, the brakes deliver a rapid but smooth deceleration that still allows steerage. The hull is what makes this machine, and it features soft forward chines that

allow drivers to roll it into a really smooth turn that will carve harder than most folks can hang on. There's zero slide thanks to the strakes and rear sponsons, so drivers can really generate some Gs.

The GP1800 will appeal to PWC enthusiasts, even non-racers, who want to experience the ultimate in speed and

handling while gradually expanding their driving chops. The most recreational of riders will probably be better off with models such as the FX SVHO, which has more bells and whistles and a more Cadillac-like ride but with more than enough performance to satisfy the need for extreme speed.



## Specs

**LOA** 11 ft. **Beam** 4 ft. **Capacity** 3 passengers **Dry Weight** 769 lbs. **Fuel** 18.5 gal. **Horsepower** 270 (estimated)  
**Price** \$13,999

**Notable Standard Features:** Custom cut padded deck mats, race-inspired seat, cupholders, dual rearview mirrors, RiDE with Traction Control, dry storage compartment, tow hook, bilge pump

**Must-have Options:** Custom cover, pull-up cleats, fenders, anchor, handlebar pack

**Builder:** Yamaha Motor Corp., [yamahawaverunners.com](http://yamahawaverunners.com)

**Financing** \$230/month with 15% down and 6% interest for 5 years