

A CERTAIN CAPACITY FOR ENJOYMENT

In between the massed ranks of the 125s and the 250s lies a class that almost defies description. This is where you find bikes like Kawasaki's Z200, the MZ TS150 and Yamaha RD200.



Photography Duncan Cubitt

A CERTAIN CAPACITY FOR ENJOYMENT

BETWEEN the 125s and 250s there's a whole range of bikes with weird capacities, different styling and which don't seem to fall into any particular category — call them commuter utility bikes or just plain fun machines. Is there any point, for instance, in buying a 200 when a 250 is just a step — and a few more greenies — away? Or a 150 when a 125 is even cheaper?

So many comparisons can be made in this class that, inevitably, once we'd made our choice of what to test, other deserving bikes would be left out. We've taken MZ's new 150cc Eagle, Kawasaki's single cylinder four stroke Z200 and Yamaha's two stroke screamer, the RD200. Three very different bikes and if you're interested in this class — and price range — then one of the three should suit your intentions.

Kawasaki Z200

JUST WHAT makes Kawasaki's Z200 overhead cam single worth £300 more than the modest little MZ TS150 Eagle? I asked myself for the umpteenth time. And despite long rides on the Kawasaki, flicking through its handbook and prompting opinions from colleagues in search of reasons to justify such a price differential, I was, and still am, unable satisfactorily to answer the question.

Motorcycle pricing isn't a topic which regularly disturbs our emotions. We all know, for example, that BMWs are perhaps a trifle overpriced, but whether their machines cost £2,000 or £2,500 is of little importance to the bloke who can afford such prices in the first instance. Yet with the Z200 we are talking about a machine which, according to Kawasaki's own PR blurb, is a commuter motorcycle and I reckon £579 is a high initial layout for such a machine. Of course, Kawasaki will quite reasonably argue that the Z200's price is in line with products from their more direct competitors, the other Japanese manufacturers. Honda's CD185 retails at £569 and the sportier Yamaha RD200 two-stroke twin costs £31 more than the Z200. Even allowing for the vastly different philosophies and conditions prevailing in Japan and the less intensive motorcycle production at MZ in East Germany, you're forced to the conclusion that in no way is the Z200 £300 better than the Eagle and neither is the MZ the grossly inferior product its amazingly cheap price tag might lead you to believe.

Martin Harrison's knee-in-the-groin road tests have always prompted much response from manufacturers and readers alike, but I thought he'd overstepped the mark after



reading his Z200 report we featured in the July '77 issue. Although he concluded that the little Kawasaki fitted into the commuter category it left him puzzled in several respects and his interest in the bike ranged from mild enthusiasm through indifference to confusion and disenchantment. I'd anticipated the opportunity to write so many nice things about the Z200 following a pre-test jaunt some time ago. But after living with the machine for several weeks it appears that Harrison's disillusionment with the machine was well-founded. And believe me, that's the last thing I expected to discover.

It may seem a harsh evaluation but the beautifully compact Z200 motor — it's just 12 inches wide — reminded me of a pumped-up Honda CB125S. For a 200cc single the Kawasaki's performance is good. Although no changes have been made on the present Z200s our Kawasaki was 4mph slower than the machine we tested last year at 80.21mph. It's still a quick bike but you'll need many of its 9,000 available revs to get the performance. You also have to be prepared to use the five-speed gearbox to maintain revs, especially in windy conditions.

Up to 5,000rpm the motor feels a little lumpy and the rustle of cam chain and valve gear sounded as if the crankshaft was running through a sump full of sand. But once things have smoothed out up around 6,500-7,000rpm and the swishing noises have been replaced by a healthy buzz, the motor feels pretty solid as it pushes you along at 60mph.

For a machine which one would expect to yield high mileage per gallon the Z200 was disappointing. While attempting to make the rain-soaked journey home from Kawasaki UK's Slough headquarters as brief as possible

the Z200 swallowed one gallon every 56 miles down its 26mm Keihin carb. Less vigorous riding returned 64mpg, but I am prepared to believe Kawasaki's estimates of up to 100mpg. Yet anyone who gets 100mpg from a Z200 is treating it like a moped. And if a moped would do the job then why buy a Z200?

It's almost as if Kawasaki were happily designing their Z200 commuter when suddenly they remembered their high performance and stylish image and changed course to make sure people wouldn't forget what bigger Kawasakis stand for. The result is that the Kwacker single consists of too many incompatibilities. Does the average few-miles-a-day rider need a top speed near 80mph and is an electric start really necessary? I doubt it. And I'm pretty sure he would appreciate better fuel consumption, a fully enclosed rear chain and suspension units, which he doesn't get with the Z200. And why use five ratios when four would do the job?

Another extra which proved unnecessary was the hotch-potch of a double-sprung side stand. This is meant to be a safety feature with the prop stand automatically retracting when the machine is pushed upright. In reality, it always needed a slight tap before it sprung rearward. A similar discovery was made in July '77 and quite frankly such a gimmicky demonstration of secondary safety is not necessary.

More important primary safety factors such as good handling and brakes are, however, welcome features of the little Kawasaki. Because machines of this type are physically small and light, manufacturers are rarely troubled to the same extent with braking and handling problems they expect when developing large capacity roadsters. Nevertheless, the Z200 feels superb in traffic



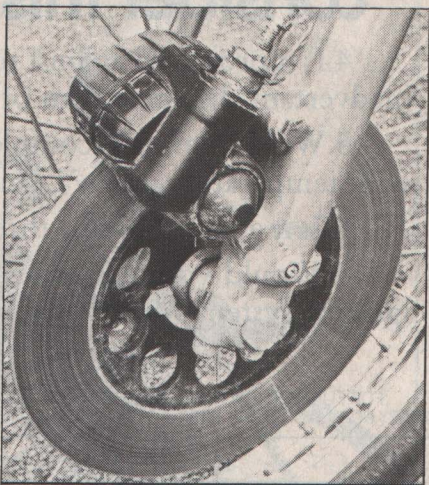
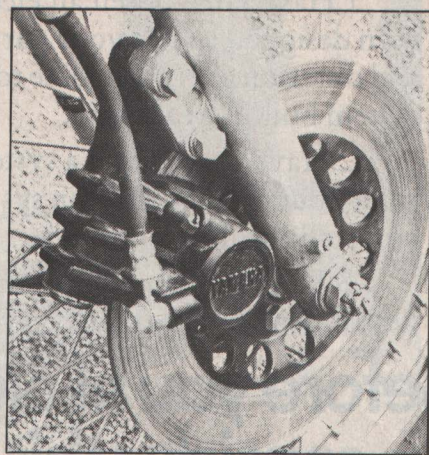
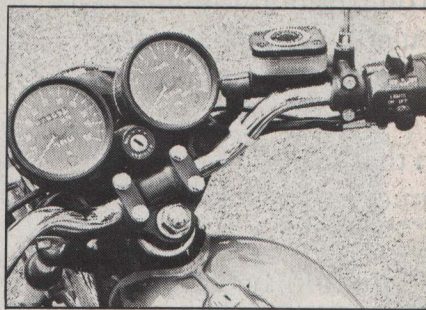
and narrow enough to whip between vehicles in safety and when that pushchair pushin' momma steps out from behind a stationary lorry the cable-operated disc will help prevent a collision, wet or dry. It's equally suited to the open road as well, feeling tight and thoroughly together in the turns. The adjustable rear suspension units also strike that rarely found balance between both firm yet forgiving damping to cut out excessive bouncing around, so common on many small Japanese motorcycles. In a low key sort of way the Z200 gives the rider in you an opportunity to show himself.

If you ignore the fact that the Z200 is supposed to be a simple commuter bike it emerges as a neatly packaged nice-to-have-around iron in its own right. But next time Kawasaki build a commuter I hope they don't get side-tracked. The Z200 is too advanced in price and performance to be regarded as a bread and butter bike. Simultaneously the Kawasaki can't compete with the RD200 on equal terms which rather puts the Z200 into a strange, self-contradicting sports commuter category.

Which brings me back to wondering why anyone should buy a Z200 if the ride to and from work is their only motorcycling requirement. Something like a Honda CG125 at £180 less than the Kawasaki is better suited for such mundane tasks and if you can shake off any scepticism about two-strokes MZ's Eagle offers just about everything you expect of a simple commuter. *Graham Sanderson*

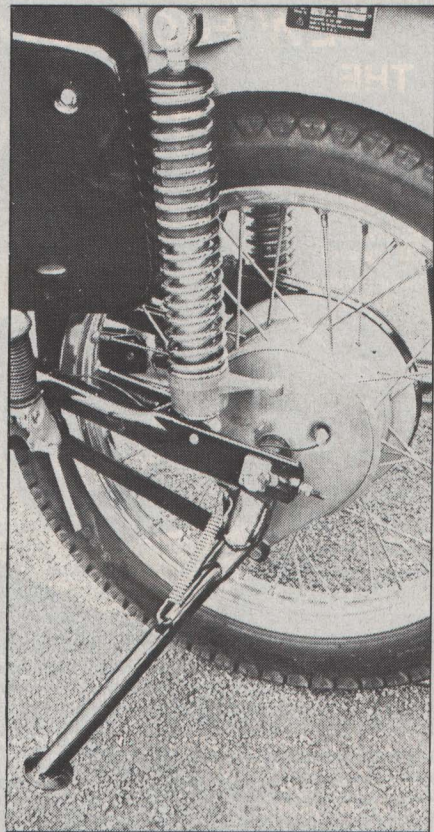
MZ 150

A DOCTOR phoned in recently searching for an opinion which would ultimately decide



Above: Conventional but legible instrument layouts on both RD200 (top) and the Kawasaki Z200 (bottom) attain the usual high Japanese standards in accuracy. MZ Eagle instruments mounted in alloy frog-eye stems look really neat. Note superb alloy ball-ended levers, steering lock on top yoke and headlamp mounted ignition/light switch.

Top right: The new pivoted floating caliper on the RD200's hydraulic disc gave excellent performance and requires less maintenance than the twin piston system it replaced. The Kawasaki's mechanically operated front disc (centre, right) also proved excellent in both wet and dry conditions. **Right,** note the MZ Eagle's unusual position of prop-stand.



A CERTAIN CAPACITY FOR ENJOYMENT

whether he lashed out two grand on a BMW or bought a Ducati Darmah. We launched into our usual series of questions to satisfy such enquiries. How fast do you ride? How far do you travel by bike? What do you demand of a motorcycle? Having helped our medical friend to decide what he wanted the gent thanked us and went off to make his purchase.

This is part of our everyday life except that we're more often advising impoverished bikers suffering with a combination of impossible circumstances. You know, a bloke's at college in Southampton and he needs to visit his girlfriend in Newcastle each weekend. His savings have been blown on baby clothes, his student's grant was devoured four weeks into the term. Pressure of academic studies means that any motorcycle he buys will need little maintenance, so it will have to be a single. A 125 would be too slow when loaded up, but he can't afford a big bike. In the same breath as advising such an unfortunate chap to throw himself from the top of the combined volumes of War And Peace we'd probably steer him in the direction of an MZ TS150 Eagle.

If the sales of commuter motorcycles hinge on one single aspect it is, or should be, value for money. And that's what MZ have always stood for, almost above any other manufacturer. Their tremendous TS250 Supa 5 (*Bike*, December '76) at an unbelievably cheap £440, is a machine which we feel is too often overlooked when folk go shopping for a 250. While the TS125 Alpine we tested in the May '77 issue may look about as modern as Saudi Arabian drink laws, it sells for just £240 and proved equal to, or better than, machines of a similar type tested at the same time. There have always been so many aspects of Motorradwerk Zschopau bikes which made so much sense and I'm pleased this trend continues with the new 150.

Alloy rims and ball-ended levers are standard and so is the tyre pump which slots neatly under the seat. The final drive chain is fully protected by separate rubber gaiters which sheath both top and bottom runs of the chain — not by a huge metal casing which makes an unsightly focal point on several other motorcycles. There's even a puncture repair outfit sharing the compartment in the right hand side panel housing with what has to be one of the most impressive standard toolkits around. The picture on page 78 is one which manufacturers of Japanese and European motorcycles could do well to study. You won't find five open ended spanners, a pair of screwdrivers and a pair of pliers which won't fall apart in your hand, on any other machine in its price range.

Another pleasing aspect is that MZ seem to be paying more attention to the styling of their machines. Now in a country where free-thinking citizens are closely watched and individual expressions kept in firm check it



can't be easy for the East Germans to gauge fickle western tastes in styling. They are, however, making the effort and in a pretty wise move they've given the Eagle the same cosmetic treatment which helped to make the Supa 5 such an appealing machine. Along with the Eagle's handlebars and headlamp the speedo and revcounter, mounted separately in frog-eyed alloy stems are the same units as fitted to the 250.

The petrol tank, although smaller than the 250's, still carries a sensible 2.75 gallons and retains the styling of the larger model complete with chrome panelling and kneepads. The Eagle's side panels spoil the machine's looks, giving its conventional but neat lines a somewhat ponderous feel.

Paintwork on the single down tube frame and cycle parts is quite superb and obviously finished to withstand harsh east European winters. The same can be said of its chrome which lacks the grainy, pitted look too often seen on other motorcycles.

Cynics, or course, will point out the rough-cast underseat mudguard, the unnecessarily hefty centre-stand, the fact that MZ owners still have to hand mix two-stroke — 50:1 petrol in the 150 — and mutter something about MZs being old fashioned. Certainly, the Bantam-like engine would benefit from the same attention MZ gave the Eagle's styling. I'm not bitching about its modest power output, a mere 12.5 bhp, but more the way it delivers. The motor feels underdeveloped

A CERTAIN CAPACITY FOR ENJOYMENT

rather than crude, but judging by the vast improvement of the Supa 5 motor over their previous 250s I look forward to changes on their next 150. The clutch, although light, sounds really gravelly when operated and the four speed gearbox needs more patience and tolerance than you'd give the ratios on any Jap bike. Long lever travel means that it's almost obligatory to lift your whole foot from its rest if comfortable and positive gearchanges are to be made.

Starting was no problem thanks to the cold start lever mounted on the handlebar. This lever is not a choke; it opens a valve in the 24mm carb allowing neat petrol into the crankcase. Two prods on the kickstart with the headlamp-mounted ignition switched off guaranteed first time starting when the key was turned on.

Predictably the MZ performed as you might expect. It would cruise comfortably at 50-55 mph, but mainly because of its low mileage, our test bike didn't like anything more than 6,000 rpm. A slightly higher mileage would almost surely have seen the Eagle through our timing lights at 70mph instead of the 66.08mph we eventually obtained.

Narrow, flat bars, an upright seating position and a petrol tank you can grip with your knees make the 150 a good ride. The plank-like seat is also more comfortable than it looks and there's plenty of room for a pillion passenger without the rider being continually pushed into painful conflict with the gas tank.

Because of the machine's modest power characteristics handling and brakes performed with apparent anonymity. Drum brakes front and rear are perfectly adequate even if the front unit did need a disproportionate amount of pressure before the forks dipped in response. Rear suspension was possibly a little harsh, and had difficulty in absorbing series of bumps. But I cannot really complain about brakes, handling or suspension.

British MZ importers Wilf Green say that the 125 Alpine is a commuter and the 150 Eagle satisfies a different market. But in our book the improved styling of the Eagle, its price tag — just £40 more than the 125 — and a top speed barely 3 mph quicker than the Alpine does not rid the 150 of the commuter label. It merely makes it a better commuter than its smaller stablemate, particularly when you consider its startling fuel consumption of 84mpg overall.

Criticisms I've made of the Eagle become less important and its good points assume greater significance when you realise that the 150 costs just £279. That's less than half the price of the Kawasaki Z200 which is by no means twice the machine MZ produce. In this price-conscious section of the market you'd only be cheating yourself if you ignored the MZ.

Graham Sanderson

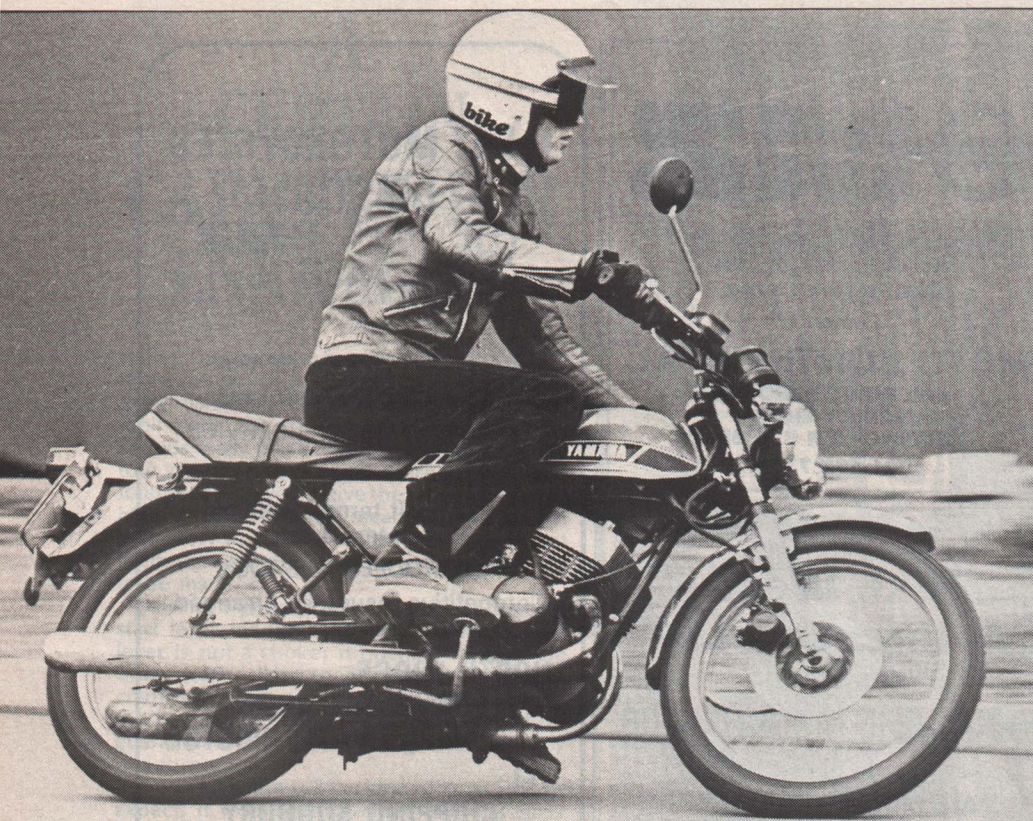


Yamaha RD200

TEN days into the Yamaha RD200 test, a hibernating ulcer started complaining. Then neuralgia gripped my left, gearchanging, foot. Cramp seized my throttle wrist and my brain hurt bad. Ears that had been subjected to an unceasing, punishing buzzsaw banshee tingled for minutes after the motor was cut . . . as

yet another drama-filled ride to work was over. There's no way the RD200 can be ridden slowly, and in that respect, it's completely different from the other two bikes tested, the Z200 and MZ150. Well, you didn't expect us to be logical, did you?

With a seeming 47 million revs available from the reed-valve twin cylinder two stroke, the RD200 has got to be the thinking man's escape route, or speed obsessed boy racer's



A CERTAIN CAPACITY FOR ENJOYMENT

doom. That harsh exhaust note which cuts right through you as engine rpm hits the power band, somehow encourages full use of the six-speed gearbox forcing you ride at a lunatic pace. It *could* be used as sedately as the MZ or the Kawasaki, but if that's what you want then you're better off buying just that.

No, the RD's for someone who wants to ride, really ride and is prepared to put up with the inconvenience of poor passenger carrying ability, regular servicing to maintain top tune, high insurance premiums — and high fuel consumption. Our ridden hard mileage figure tells a story — 39mpg; and since it was ridden hard most of the time, the overall figure is also low. But that's the price you have to pay for a power band just 3,000 revs wide and which peaks at an incredible (for 200cc) 22bhp at 7,500rpm — and that's where the two 20mm Mikunis are working most of the time. Fortunately, the RD's blessed with a neat gear-change and plenty of close ratios, a light clutch and throttle — and good brakes.

Complementing the on-off power supply, the lightweight (270lb), slim chassis and narrow section tyres means the roadholding and handling is super-sensitive needing just a twitch, nay a mere profound thought is sufficient to produce a centre-stand scraping turn. Sneeze at the wrong time and you'd traverse

78 *bike*

three lanes of the M1, and back again if you're lucky. Though it looks similar to its bigger brother, the RD250, the 200 has a completely different feel making it even more nimble — almost unstable at times. In strong winds, it became a real handful to keep upright.

The suspension encouraged these sensations, being very taut and perhaps slightly oversprung. Certainly the damping, front and rear, is not too brilliant and progress along my favourite bumpy country lane resembled that of a pogo, bouncing from each road irregularity. Along smooth roads, there was no problem but sadly there's few such surfaces. It's just as well the centre stand is the first thing to touch down however, for the foot-rests, unusually these days, are rigidly mounted rather than folding.

Minor improvements have been made for 1978 though the bike is basically the same 'electric' model (with the weird catalogue number of CS5E) available five years ago. The front disc has one of the new type floating calipers which pivots on a lug behind the fork stanchion; this replaces the twin piston type which, though more effective, tended to seize its pistons approximately every 2,000 miles because of the ingress of dirt. Both the disc and the rear drum brake work well losing little effectiveness in the wet.

Also changed are the pillion footrest mounts which are now on the rear sub frame instead of the swinging arm, and the carburetors have a little window in the slide bodies

which allows easy synchronisation. On such a highly tuned machine this is vital; after 1,000 or so miles during the test they went slightly out of sync, the engine lost its fine edge of performance and became a lot less fun.

The 12 volt dynastart system is retained whereby the dynamo reverses itself to become the electric starter at the touch of the handlebar button. Ah, such miracles of science . . . The ignition system is still in the dark ages though, using conventional contact breakers, coil and battery and needs regular adjustment.

The weight saving over the RD250 is by economising on the chassis construction though not at the expense of rigidity. A single downtube bolts onto the front of the matt black crankcases while an odd selection of tubes form the rear sub frame and enclose a massive two compartment airbox which successfully silences all induction noise. Also squeezed in there is the small oil tank which, since there's no outside spy-hole, has to be checked regularly for lube level by lifting the seat. You'll get about 250 miles per tankful. Also under the seat is a toolkit stuffed into the seat hump.

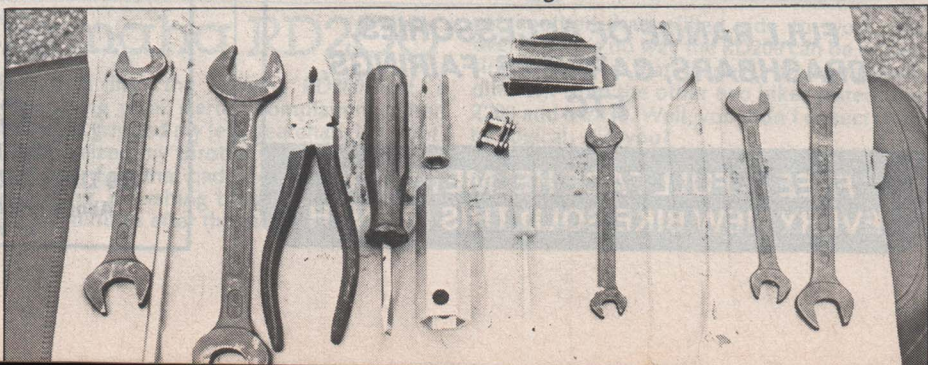
Rest of the bike is nicely finished without inspiring confidence in its durability, a feeling which pervades the whole machine — a kind of built-in obsolescence like the tape deck in Mission Impossible . . . 'This Machine will self-destruct after 20,000 miles' kind of thing. But if you can last that long as well, then you and the RD200 are well-suited.

Dave Calderwood

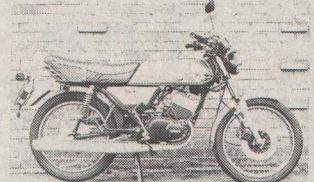
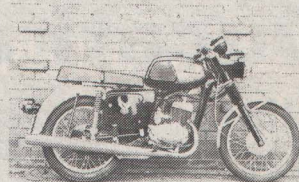
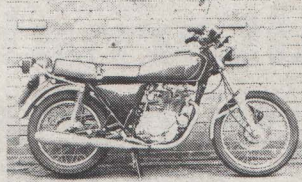
Summary

It's impossible to point a finger at any of the three machines tested and declare one the winner of this particular confrontation because they are all so different. The RD200 Yamaha is the epitome of the two-stroke screamer, an uncompromising round-town racer that loves to be revved and ridden hard. For its capacity, it performs remarkably well and would appeal to someone whose bank balance couldn't stretch to the price of, say, an RD250. The Kawasaki on the other hand appears to be suffering from an identity problem. It's been designed as a commuter but it is so overstated in price at £579, in performance at 76.53 mph, and in its unnecessary use of an electric starter and five speed gearbox. Significant commuter-like equipment such as a fully enclosed rear chain is omitted and though Kawasaki have given the Z200 a sporty appearance there's no way that it's a match for the RD200. Nevertheless, despite its problem, the Z200 is still a pleasant enough machine to have around for short journeys. The MZ Eagle, though, suffers no such confusion. It's a superb commuter machine equipped with an excellent and realistic balance of performance, handling, equipment, comfort and most of all price. A tag of a mere £279 should ensure its well-deserved success.

Below: MZ's high quality toolkit is the most comprehensive to be found on a machine of the Eagle's class.



CHECKOUT



KAWASAKI Z200

Engine	ohc 4-stroke single
Bore x stroke.....	66 x 58mm
Capacity.....	198cc
Compression ratio	9:1
Carburation	26mm Keihin
BHP @ RPM.....	18 @ 8,000
Max torque @ rpm	—
Primary drive	Gear
Clutch	Multiplate, wet
Gearbox.....	5-speed
Electrical system	12v 10ah battery, battery/coil ignition
Lighting	35/35W headlight

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	51in
Seat height	30in
Overall width	28in
Ground clearance	5in
Kerb weight.....	285lb (inc 1 gal fuel)
Fuel capacity.....	2.05gals

EQUIPMENT

Trafficators	Yes
Electric start.....	Yes
Trip mileometer	Yes
Steering lock.....	Yes
Helmet lock.....	Yes
Headlight flasher	Yes
Others	Locking fuel cap, mirror

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres (front).....	2.75 x 18 Yokohama
(rear).....	3.25 x 17 Yokohama
Brakes (front).....	9.75in disc
(rear).....	5.5in drum

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (sitting up).....	67.26mph
(prone).....	76.53mph
Standing ¼ mile	18.45 sec
Speedometer error	
at indicated 30mph.....	27.85mph
at indicated 60mph.....	55.97mph
Fuel consumption	
ridden hard	56mpg
overall	64mpg
Braking distance	
from 30mph	33½ft
from 60mph	136½ft

PRICE.....

Guarantee	£579 inc VAT
Supplied by	6 months/6,000 miles parts and labour Kawasaki Motors (UK) Ltd, 748/749 Deal Avenue, Slough, Berks.

MZ TS150 EAGLE

2-stroke piston port single
58 x 56mm
143cc
9.5:1
24mm BVF
12½ @ 6,300
10.9ft/lbs @ 5,500
—
—
4-speed
6v 60w dynamo
battery/coil ignition
45/40w headlight

51in
31in
29in
7.75in
—
2.75gals

Yes
No
No
Yes
No
Yes
Mirror, tyre pump, enclosed rear chain, puncture repair outfit

3.00 x 18 Pneumant
3.25 x 18 Pneumant
6.3in drum
6in drum

60.97mph
66.08mph
21.25 sec
30.24mph
57.80mph
79mpg
84mpg
—
—

£279 inc VAT
6 months/6,000 miles parts and labour Wilf Green Ltd, 330 Queens Road, Sheffield 2.

YAMAHA RD200

2-stroke twin
52 x 46mm
195cc
7.1:1
2 x 20mm Mikuni
22 @ 7,500
15.7ft/lb @ 7,000
Gear
multiplate, wet
5-speed
12v dynastart
battery/coil ignition
35/35w headlight

49.5in
32in
32in
5in
270lb inc 1gal fuel
2gals

Yes
Yes
Yes
Yes
Yes
No
Mirror, locking fuel cap, self- cancelling indicators

2.75 x 18 Yokohama
3.00 x 18 Yokohama
9in disc
6.5in drum

73.89mph
81.96mph
16.76 sec
28.85mph
55.87mph
39mpg
45mpg
—
—

£610 inc VAT
6 months/10,000 miles parts and labour Mitsui Machinery Sales Ltd Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey.