

# LOST IN SPACE



## Kawasaki Z1000J

*No designer-moped looks. No droop-snoot fairing. No up-to-the-micro-chip fuel injection technology. No anti-dive front forks. No rising-rate, no-squat rear suspension. No bullshit, either. The latest in a long line of Kawasaki one-litre fours is just a really good ride. Test: Dave Calderwood.  
Photography: Colin Curwood.*



# KAWASAKI Z1000J

SOMETIMES, Y'KNOW, I SUSPECT that riding motorcycles for a living damages your brain: there I was, enjoying my third longish ride aboard the Z1000J Kawasaki, speeding this silvery-grey bullet up the M1 late one evening when I started hallucinating. The light was fading fast and with eyes screwed up to search the shadows ahead for lurking patrol cars, my lower edge of vision just included instruments, gloved hands and four or five inches of leather-clad wrists. I'd been in this position, straining against the 100mph windblast for an hour or so, when I was assailed by the sensation and conviction that both arms had detached from their relative elbows and swapped over. No, I hadn't been sucking an acid drop or anything like that . . . just a random thought of the sort that crosses your mind when undergoing motorway monotony. Daft innit? But it took a hard, full throttle blast to shake the thought and sharpen up.

This is what's impressive about the J, I enthused as it surged easily up to an indicated 125. More than any other single attribute, it's this bike's 100mph-plus acceleration that's so startling for such a complete all-round motorcycle. The J's motor is a steam-roller: at any revs, through all the gears, it just goes, smoothly, with no hiccups, no messin', just a slightly higher pitched note from the primary drive gears and a hefty push in the chest. Then the scenery loses all interest, the sides of your vision blur and it's like looking down a multi-coloured tunnel to the clear, sharply focused screen in front.

It also felt better, more stable and controllable at that speed than any other big Kawasaki I've ridden. The bars have dropped from the usual US-style armchair position to a very English two-inches-from-flat profile; instead of the GPz1100's ridiculous control pod there's more conventional round instruments with a fuel gauge stuck in between so you've no wizardry to confuse or distract. It's just a plain, ordinary one-litre Kawasaki that's returned to the first principles of the original Z1. The Z1000J fits into Kawasaki's 1000-1100cc range as a kind of sports-tourer and is probably the best one because of it. It hasn't the computerised fuel injection system of the GPz and instead relies upon 34mm — the biggest ever for Kawasaki — lightweight aluminium Mikunis; it has none of the outrageous factory custom styling of the LTD nor the shaft and soggy suspension of the Z1100A. It's lack of specialisation which makes the J so versatile.

Our photo session in the Peak District — which is where I was speeding to that evening — emphasised this. We were based in Bakewell, a tourist and hiker launch pad to the Peaks, and we started early the next morning around the still slightly damp stone-paved backstreets trying to sort out a 'northern looking' location for the Triumph Trail, tested elsewhere this ish by contributor Peter Watson. We then progressed through the twisty, undulating and often very fast Peak routes to a road Peter knew would be



good for the sort of fast, hard cornering action that'd show off the J. He set off on the Trail, determined to flash a clean pair of Mudpluggers at me along the busy A6 trunk route before forking off past Buxton and onto the A537 road to Macclesfield. Numbers just indicate routes. The name Cat & Fiddle pass holds more promise.

As Peter had described the road earlier, his expression had taken on a strangely excited look but I'm used to his infectious enthusiasm. Then we crossed the summit (1690 feet) by the Cat & Fiddle Inn and there unwound a snaking strip of tarmac heading downhill over contorted moorland, dodging in and out round spurs and over streams. The Trail ahead proved surprisingly agile considering the tyres were crinkling at the edges on full lean and that the motor sounded like someone playing spoon tunes. We sped — no, hurtled — along the road, passing cars and trucks before they had time to register our existence. One thing held me back on the Kawasaki: I'd wondered at the crazy patterns on the many right-angled turns and at the first stop a quick inspection confirmed that this black mess was indeed a liberal jam of rubber and oil spread by lorries squirming through the turns as they strove not to lose momentum. Stick behind

a truck for a while and the acrid stench of hot brake linings, followed by a sooty black cloud indicating full throttle, showed that the truck drivers, too, appreciated the road. But this did mean caution was required and the J didn't like rapid line-changing to avoid an oil-slick. PW could alter his angle of lean, switch direction, lose a lot of speed, and hold a slide with little more than the (correct) thought. The J never let me forget it's a big, heavy bike; it's not that it doesn't want to lean into the turn, or that a precise line can't be held — it's much better at these things than previous one-litres — but with that much bulk to be shifted, you've got to ride smoothly.

This year's one-litre Ks may look similar to the long line from which they're descended but they've virtually been rebuilt from the crankcases up. As described in the GPz1100 test (August '81), the front mounting lugs are rubber insulated which didn't seem to stop the tingles on that bike but make the J perfectly smooth and vibe-free. Capacity has been brought down from last year's Z1000's 1015cc to 998cc by reducing the bore to 69.4mm. The stroke remains the same and presumably the move is to allow the J to be the basis for F1 and other racing classes. The roller bearing crank is

# LOST IN SPACE



pressed together and has much less flywheel weight. Valve opening duration is the same but with seven degrees more overlap. It's well known and proven that altering valve overlap is an effective way of altering power characteristics on these big Zs which is one reason that Kawasaki's engineers opted for the double overhead cam layout when designing the original 903cc engine back in the late sixties/early seventies. The other major reason, of course, was that Honda launched their sohc 750-4 (in October 1968 at the Tokyo Show) shocking the R&D men and almost killing off Kawasaki's 'New York Steak' project, as it was code-named. However, they decided that the concept of a high-performance, large displacement multi was still good and the delay caused by the Honda's surprise appearance was to Kawasaki's ultimate benefit. These days the Japs worry about being left out of the technology race but it was all so different then. As Peter Carrick in his book, *The Story of Kawasaki Motorcycles*, says these big bikes were of a type new to Japanese factories, requiring heavy plant investment and, to begin with, low rates of production.

That first Z1 weighed 507lb dry, had 28mm slide carbs, a single front disc brake and a crop of handling and roadholding problems brought

on by having the then unheard of 82bhp on tap. Over the years successive models have tamed these wild traits with more and more gusseting to strategic areas such as the steering head and swing arm pivot supports, and frame tube bracing. Plus there's now taper roller bearings in the steering head and needle rollers on the swing arm pivot. The current chassis owes little to its early heritage and a great deal to American Superbike racing.

Solid engine mounts at the rear further stiffen a critical area and, coupled with compliant and tunable suspension, make the J less of a lumbering elephant through the turns than before. Time was when the trepidation rightly felt for all that power also manifested itself for the wobble 'n' weaves. Now the steering is nicely progressive with just the hint of a tendency to drop in on very tight turns. Unlike the GPz which gave me the willies at high speed, it's also steady if you've got the air-assisted front forks pumped up high. One blow is that they're not linked, and it's not particularly easy to get to the nozzles, hidden by chromed steel dustcaps. The right one is very difficult to reach without removing either the handlebar or front brake master cylinder since the brake hose has to be routed close to and resting against the nozzle. A single rate (22lb/sq

in) coil spring is used in each fork leg unlike the GPz's dual rate (22/44) springs but, if anything, I prefer the J's steering and handling. It's much more sure, definite and with the flatter 'bars (an easily altered component, I agree) you're not bothered so much by windblast.

There's a little more suspension travel up front on the J than last year and the action is superb: on a soft, low air pressure setting there's a bit too much dive under braking and it's a bit squashy, but never once did one of those bone-jarring, teeth-grating jolts that would've had an old Z1 into a terminal weave get through. At the rear there's five damper positions available by turning the spring cover and seven spring preload settings. That's a good range of possibilities though I found that the softer options weren't worth bothering with. As the manual says, you increase the damping force as you step up the spring preload making number three spring notch and damper force four about right for my svelte (read skinny) frame. They're not as good as the forks for smooth action, however, and combined with a fairly insensitive rear brake it's easy to induce rear wheel hop over a bumpy entrance to a turn. The 236mm discs all round use single piston floating calipers and metallic pads developed in conjunction with Dunlop. They are very powerful — as I found to my relief while doing top speed tests at MIRA — but lack 'feel' for everyday road use. A helluva lot of lever pressure is required to get that maximum braking which is okay when you're in a straight line, the surface is good and dry and you're gripped by the 'bulging eye' fear brought on by MIRA's timing straight. On the road, two finger pressure will do little more than ignite the stop lamp: it's a full handjob for this mutha. Fortunately, the metallic pads work well in the wet.

What also makes the J stand out from its brash stablemates is its restrained, tasteful styling. From the chamfered edges of the sensible full mudguards, the hint of a stripe along the tank sides — just to break the expanse of sleek metallic paint, the correct amount of chrome and polished alloy breaking up the black mass of the engine unit, to the deep, large and comfortable seat, it's a classic. It's one of those bikes you can sit back and stare at and wonder at the nice design points, the way it all fits together with few of the ugly compromises necessitated by mass production techniques. One compromise is the seat fixing; if Kawasaki know who designed that particular bit he should be sentenced to a year's practice of unlocking, taking it off and re-securing. It's locked by the left — one of two — helmet holder and two levers need pushing forward. To site, they have to be fed into the helmet holder bracket and it never seems to fully close.

As with most multis, fuel consumption varies greatly according to use. I was surprised therefore to average 42mpg on one trip westwards to Cornwall with another of our band of roving contributors, Martin Christie. Mart was on a 1000 BMW equipped with a slightly larger tank than the Kawasaki's admirable 4.7 gallons, again

## KAWASAKI Z1000J: LOST IN SPACE

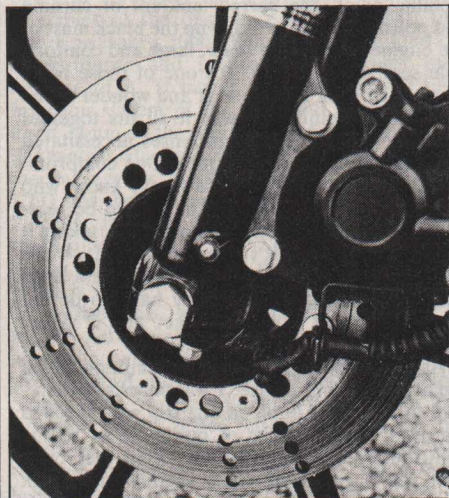
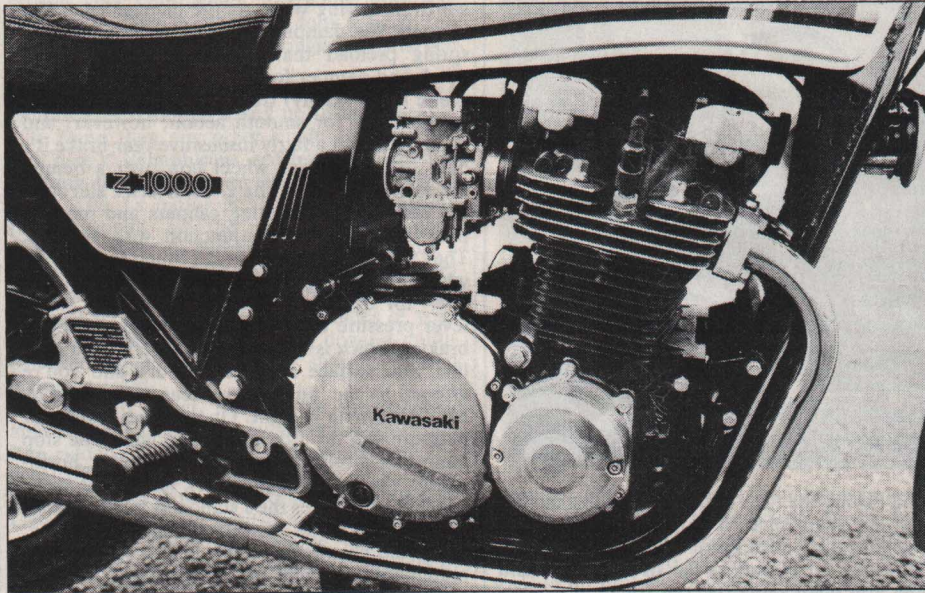
SPACE

up on last year. But on fuel stops, the J proved to be using fuel at the same rate as the BMW and this after holding a steady ninety all the way along the M4/M5 to Exeter with occasional higher bursts. Perhaps it was because the BMW was playing up a bit but both of us were mightily impressed with the J's ability to out-tour a BMW, on this trip at least. Night-time riding along Cornish lanes, spotted with farm muck and clogged with tourists, showed the Kawasaki's 60 Watt headlamp to match the Bosch H4 of the BMW, another chip away at the Germans.

I couldn't match the BMW's agility — again, as in the Peaks with PW, the Kawasaki's bulk though slimmed by 33 lb for '81, still makes its presence felt. It's not that much heavier than the BMW R100RT now but the weight is higher, raising the centre of gravity and making movements from side to side more deliberate. What you lose there though — and it's only a little for

an experienced rider — is more than made up as soon as there's an opportunity for speed and a chance to unleash that unburstable powerhouse. It's docile too and can be driven down to just off tickover in top. It's not the smoothest big motor at this trick — Honda's CB900F has that place reserved — but the J is unlikely to catch you out by stalling. It's certainly smoother than the fuel-injected GPz which is probably because the carbs work better at low rpm, and flowing less air, than injectors.

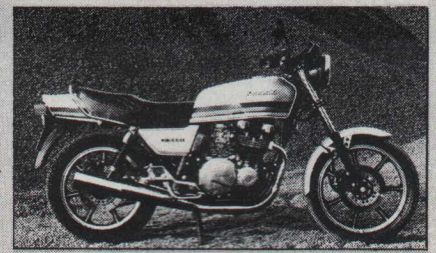
Above all with the Z1000J you can't help wondering at the lavish display of turbo technology and multitude of engines now being announced: are they all really worth it? Of course, new ideas and technology are worth investigating and, now and again, good ideas which make some measurable contribution to safer or more enjoyable motorcycling occur. But the J is an interesting development of the old saying: 'Racing improves the breed' using just a bare minimum of high-tech goodies.



Above: note new aluminium bodied 34mm CV Mikuni carbs; new crankcases omit kickstarter mechanism.

Left: Speedo is electrically triggered by this speed sensor on the front wheel.

Below: Silly sidestand over-ride, others are easy to operate.



### KAWASAKI Z1000J

Engine .....	4 cyl dohc
Bore x stroke .....	69.4 x 66mm
Capacity .....	998cc
Compression ratio .....	9.2:1
Carburation .....	4 x 34mm CV Mikuni
Bhp @ rpm .....	102 @ 8500
Max torque @ rpm .....	67.3ft/lb @ 7000
Primary drive .....	Gear
Clutch .....	Multiplate, wet
Gearbox .....	5 speed
Electrical system .....	280W alternator, 12V 18ah battery, transistorised ignition
Headlamp .....	60/55W

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase .....	59¾in
Overall width .....	32¼in
Seat height .....	31½in
Ground clearance .....	5½in
Weight (with 1 gal) .....	539lb
Fuel capacity .....	4.7gals

#### EQUIPMENT

Indicators .....	Yes
Electric starter .....	Yes
Trip odometer .....	Yes
Steering lock .....	Yes
Helmet lock .....	Yes
Headlamper flasher .....	Yes
Others .....	Locking filler cap, twin mirrors, hazard warning lights, cast wheels

#### CYCLE PARTS

Tyres		
front .....	3.25 x 19in	Bridgestone
rear .....	4.25 x 18in	tubeless
Brakes		
front .....	2 x 236mm discs	
rear .....	236mm disc	

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed	
prone .....	131.19mph
sitting up .....	116.8mph
Standing ¼-mile .....	12.14s/112.95mph
Speedometer error	
at indicated 30 .....	29.05mph
at indicated 50 .....	46.18mph
at indicated 70mph .....	63.36mph

Fuel consumption	
overall .....	44mpg
ridden hard .....	38mpg

PRICE (inc taxes) .....	£2349
Guarantee .....	12 months/unlimited mileage

Supplied by ..... Kawasaki Motors (UK),  
Deal Avenue,  
Trading Estates,  
Slough, Berks.