

# bike

C. BROWN

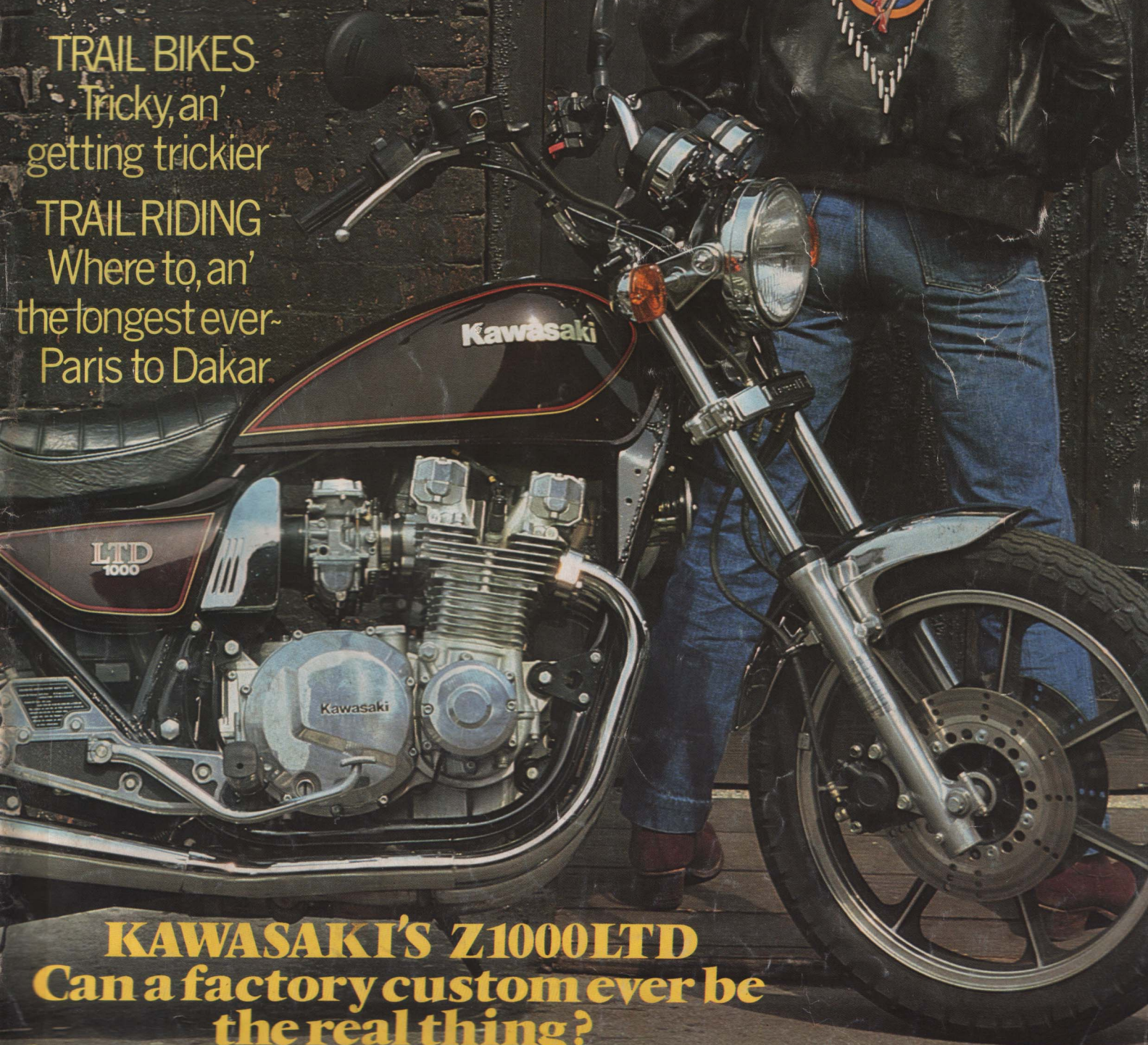
JULY 1981 75p USA \$2.75

## TRAIL BIKES

Tricky, an'  
getting trickier

## TRAIL RIDING

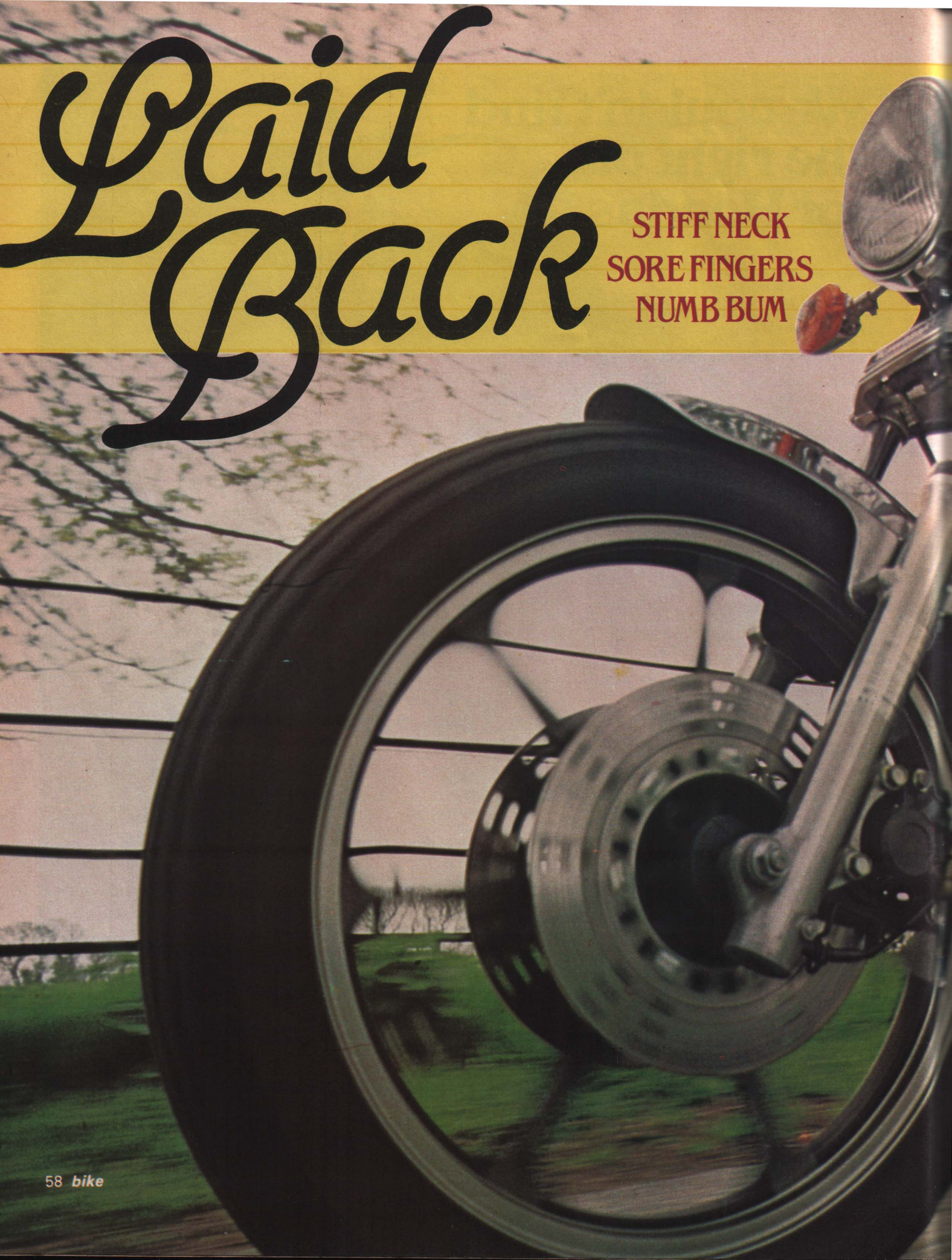
Where to, an'  
the longest ever -  
Paris to Dakar.

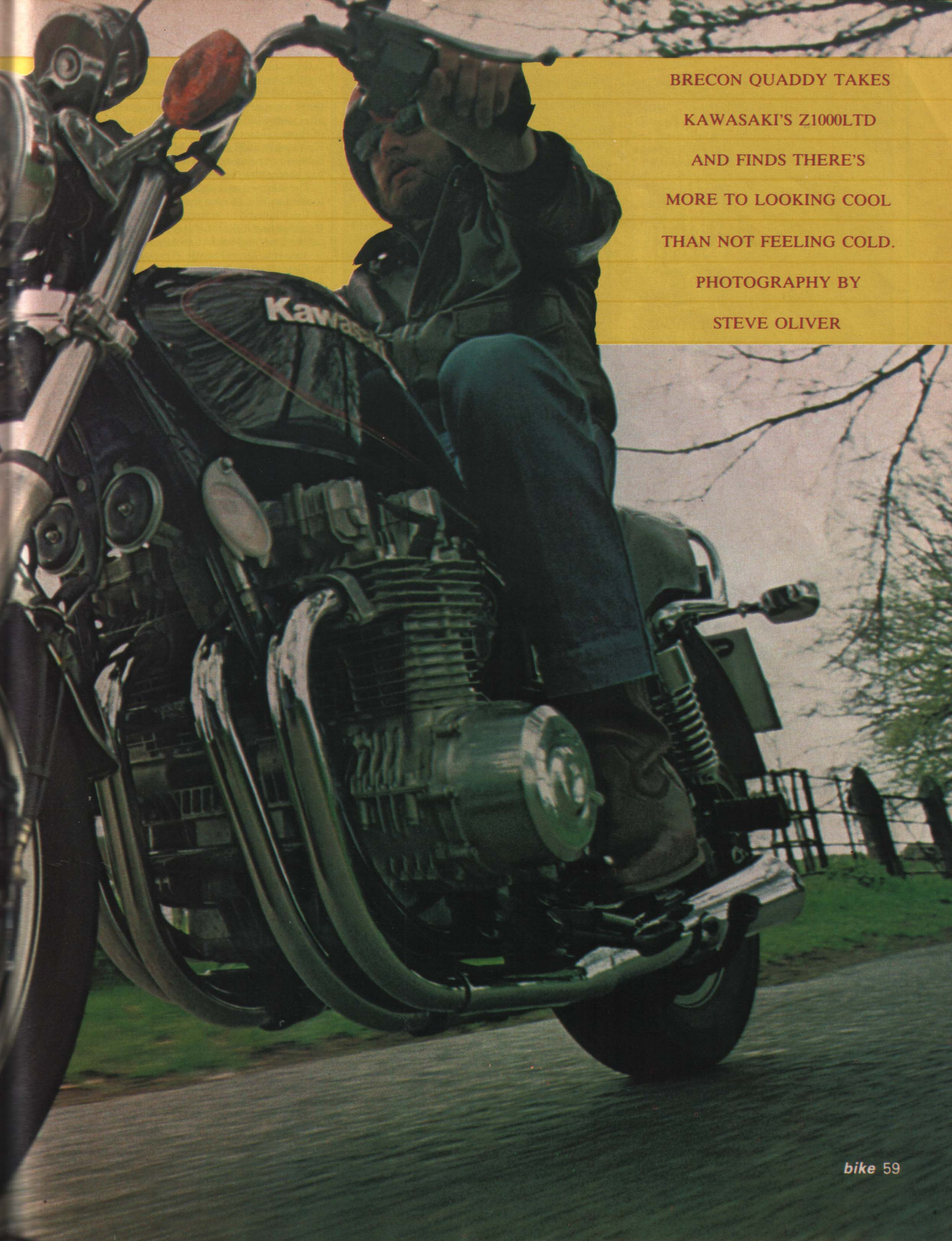


**KAWASAKI'S Z1000LTD**  
**Can a factory custom ever be**  
**the real thing?**

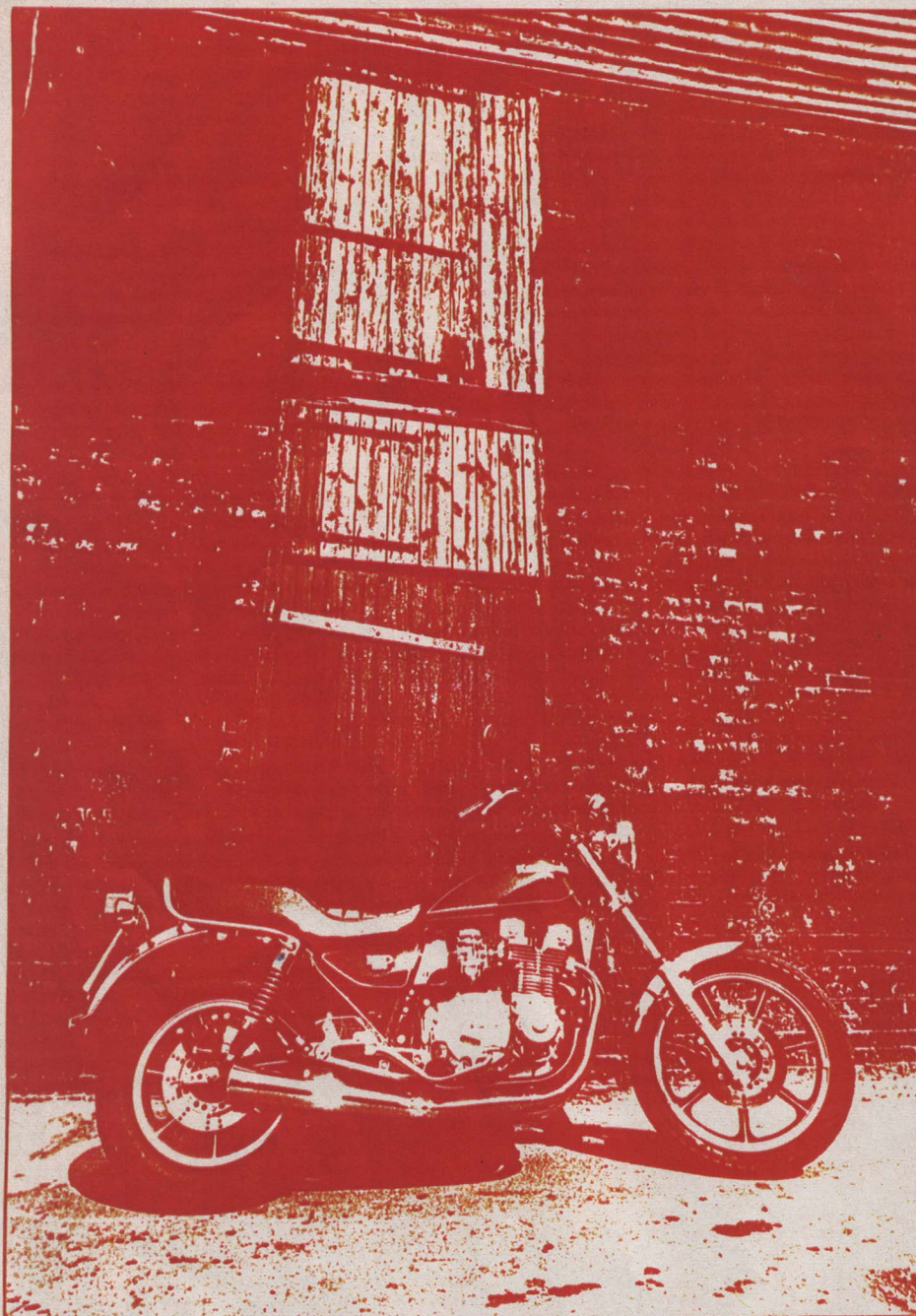
# Paid Back

STIFF NECK  
SORE FINGERS  
NUMB BUM





BRECON QUADDY TAKES  
KAWASAKI'S Z1000LTD  
AND FINDS THERE'S  
MORE TO LOOKING COOL  
THAN NOT FEELING COLD.  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
STEVE OLIVER



IF IT WERE REALLY TRUE IN THIS country that nothing succeeds like excess, then Kawasaki's top-of-the-line boulevard boulder, the Z1000LTD, would simply walk off with all the prizes. It is The Grossest; not to mention the most vulgar, flashy and expensive of its kind. It was built to be stared at and — in spite of that 92 horsepower, 998cc mill — born to be mild.

And if attracting stares (amusement, disbelief, astonishment, you'll get the lot; even admiration) is your main aim in life then this is the bike for you and presumably the £2,476 price tag will be no object.

Were I a betting man, though, and I was putting money on a sales contest between big factory 'customs' and wastepaper bins decorated with pictures of Charles and Di's wedding, I'd have to put my money on the bins. After all, they have novelty value, they're useful, cheap and they take up little space. Big LTD's are the exact opposite in all respects except novelty

value. And that can soon wear off, believe me.

Should you think a contest between a big, expensive bike and a cheap, colourful patriotic rubbish receptacle is unfair on the bike, then how about putting the LTD up against its brother-under-the-skin, the Z1000J sportster? Well, I still wouldn't give much for the custom's chances. Not only is the J a real, useful, workaday motorcycle, it's also £270 cheaper.

All these thoughts ran through my mind while I tried to find my way out of the huge Slough industrial estate where Kawasaki base their test fleet. Before picking the bike up, I'd returned another bike to Oxford Fairings, had a lift in a Mercedes automatic to Didcot station and then caught an Intercity 125 train to Slough, so I was well tuned-in to laid-back travelling.

Looking at the bike in warm, late afternoon sunshine, I had to admit it looked the part. The raked-out forks went up and up to a neat polished metal headlamp shell, and the tank and

side panels were finished in a subtle, deep metalflake called Luminous Midnight Red. The top of the tank seemed quite badly scuffed and there were a couple of chips of paint missing after only 800 miles of use but the bike was one of those taken to Italy for the launch of Kawasaki's 1981 bikes in March. All the same, I'd have expected the paint to stand up to a tank bag base rather better than that.

The stepped seat and the pull back 'bars looked so West Coast that I half expected Jesus of Cool himself to materialise any second. Rumour had it that this stepped seat was easier on the bum and back than others. We would see.

Anyway. Deep breath. Here goes. Let's ride it. First strap my bag to the back seat using the two thoughtfully-provided bungee hooks on the grabrail. Then start the engine and stroll round the beast while it warms up. Now chuck a leg over, raise it up and . . .

. . . and phut, the engine stops. Yet another bike journo's cool totally blown by Kawasaki's secret side-stand cut-out device which kills the engine if you loft the bike with the stand down. I should have either waited till the bike was upright and the stand retracted before starting or operated the red override button on the left-hand switch cluster while raising the beast.

Ever thoughtful, Kawasaki put a bilingual sticker on the tank to the effect that unless you get the bike well and truly propped, then der Moteradd umkippen kann. Translated, this means some 520lb of motorcycle will fall on you and if you're the kind of pathetic nine-stone weakling who only bought the thing to boost your image and you can't pick it up, then ha ha.

If you want to be cool, you can kick the stand down to cut the engine as you glide towards another gaggle of admiring friends on the sidewalk (note: people who don't own LTDs still call pavements pavements). Be warned. Not only is this a dangerous practice which goes against all good safety procedures(!) but it often means you'll get off and leave the bike in gear. About the only electronic gizmo Kawasaki don't fit is a cut out like those used by Honda to prevent electric starters operating while the bike is in gear. Never mind, you soon get wise after kangarooing into a few walls and parked cars.

Talking of electronic gizmos, don't bother looking for speedo or tach cable on this baby because you won't find any. Weedy little wires are all that's needed to send pulses to the electronic clocks and drive the odometer motors. If you take a look at the checkout panel, however, you'll see their accuracy was hardly impressive. Compare it with the standard of the clocks on the (extremely) well-used Suzuki DR400 trail bike.

Lighting on the clocks was fair. The speedo was hard to read at dusk, while the red zone on the tacho appeared to be individually lit and glowed like the very fires of Hell. The odometer and push-button-reset tripmeter lived outside the clocks and were hard to read under their horizontal window. The odometer light went out towards the end of the test, too. Idiot lights were big and bright but the oil light came on for no apparent reason at 8pm on the night before Good Friday when the whole of Kawasaki UK had decamped to Birmingham for the NEC show. Things looked bleak as there was no sign of anything being wrong but the moment I'd decided the little bugger was just being temperamental, it went out. Now I know why they're called idiot lights.

By this time, I'd seen a large, two-page colour advert for the LTD in MCN, urging me to 'lay back and think of America.' Oh yeah? For a start, you have to put petrol in to go cruisin' and

that's not easy when the frame ridge up the inside of the tank comes so close to the filler hole it's nigh impossible to fill up without spraying yourself and a hot engine with fuel.

Then there's the air adjustable suspension. Oh boy, this is a real gem. The rigmarole you have to go through to get them set up is out of all proportion to the amount of air they require. The recommended range of pressures is less than three psi — or by volume, two-thirds of a small hamster's fart.

You have to go through it twice because Big K haven't seen fit to link the fork legs. We all now know that garage airlines can launch air forks at a stroke (not Guzzi air forks, though). Don't miss next month's *Bike* for sizzling details) so you'll have to invest in a bicycle or car pump. Don't forget to get the front end off the ground to set the pressures, and I wouldn't believe the pressure gauge in the comprehensive toolkit if yours falls apart on the move as often as the test bike's did. Recommended pressure is 7psi with a minimum of 5.7 and a max of 8.5. I found that about 9psi gave a nice firm ride at speed. The LTD has seven inches of travel on its leading-axle forks compared to the 5.7in offered by the 'J' and four and a half inches at the back end, which is controlled by coil spring conventional shock absorbers with seven spring preload and five damping settings.

These had to be constantly adjusted because a comfortable combination for solo riding made for soggy handling and a grounding centrestand tang when two-up. Riding solo on the firmer setting was a harsh experience. That's the price you pay for suspension you can adjust to suit your own personal style, as the ads say — you're always having to adjust it.

With the tank filled and the suspension set up at the cost of only one morning of my life, the time was ripe to cruise off in search of boulevards and impressionable young girls. Well, the People's Republic of Hackney is not encumbered by anything resembling A Boulevard and the girls I chanced upon were neither young nor impressionable.

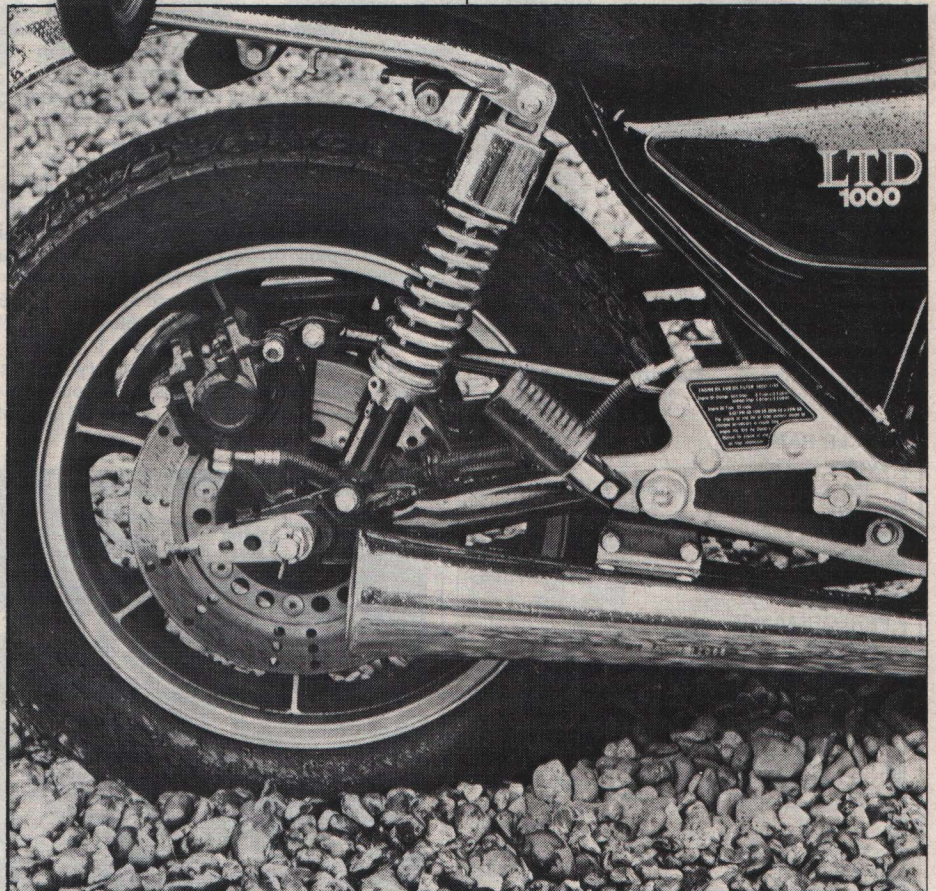
Nevertheless, the big LTD attracted attention wherever it went. Jaded drivers would lean from lorries, taxis and cars at traffic light stops and cast admiring glances. Impressionable girls (there are two in Finchley) would wave as the bike whirred past and complete strangers would comment 'that's quite a bike you've got there' and ask the usual questions about how much, how fast, how often etc. People who could walk past a red-hot black and gold Guzzi Le Mans without a second glance seemed to view this monster's motel shower plumbing handlebars, shortie mufflers and fatso rear wheel as an exemplification of everything which is 'motorcycle.' In their shining eyes flickered scenes from old Marlon Marlon Brando outlaw biker movies where men were men and a big bike represented a raw challenge to the world.

Poor fools.

The LTD's no wild one. It's a great, big smoothie with all mod-cons and all the benefits reaped from Kawasaki's development drive to lose weight and improve everything else.

The frame is shared with the J, with the exception of the rake, which is 29 degrees on the LTD and 27.5 on the sportster. There is a bigger, stronger top frame tube than on the old Z1000 MkII and gussetting round the head has been increased to a point where the gussets themselves are the size of moped side panels.

The engine cases have been redesigned and the internals have been doctored to lighten the crank webs and strengthen the gearbox. The clutch housing and carbs, which used to be steel



This is what factory customs look like to very short people or large cats. Blending of US neo-romanticism and Oriental techno know-how leads to 'chopper' fatso tyre which'll struggle to keep you upright linked to superb 10-inch disc brake which'll never let you down. Rear shocks

and zinc respectively, are now aluminium to reduce weight. Above the four 34mm Mikuni CV carbs lurk the only differences between the custom's motor and the sportster's: Milder cams and valve timing bring the LTD's power peak down to 92bhp at 8,000 rpm instead of the 102 at 8,500 rpm enjoyed by the J. Peak torque is 62 ft/lb on the custom.

Those 92 horses are all you'll ever need in a straight line on this showroom queen. In a bumpy corner you'll probably wish for less as you hang on to the high, waving bars and feel the bike wriggle and shake beneath you. On a wet bumpy corner you'll wish you had a train ticket back home.

But so long as you stick to the speeds the chassis and riding position were designed for, rather than those the engine is capable of, the LTD is a great roller. It will pull cleanly from little over 1000 revs even in top gear and it accelerates like a jet up to around 5,500 rpm and like a rocket after that. Two-up and well loaded it will roll along in top down to about 20 mph and then accelerate rapidly to more than 120.

Kawasaki have worked hard on the riding position and it's the best I've seen on an LTD (which isn't saying much if you want to do anything other than look The Part at a poseurs' rally). The bars reach the dizzy height of 48 inches before curving back to the handgrips but they don't cowhorn outwards like those on so many other factory customs, so high speed riding isn't the arm-wrenching torture it might appear to be. The seat holds you in a fairly

were good when properly set-up and those shorty zorsts emitted a zippy, coffee grinder note which sometimes went gr but never managed a whole growl. Helmet lock is one of two on the LTD — a great idea — and looked flimsy but worked ok. (Who wrote this? — Ed.)



## Kawasaki Z1000LTD (K1)

Engine..... 4 cyl dohc  
 Bore x stroke..... 69.4mm x 66mm  
 Capacity..... 998cc  
 Compression ratio..... 9.2:1  
 Carburation..... 4 x 34mm Mikuni CV  
 BHP @ rpm..... 92 @ 8,000  
 Max torque @ rpm..... 62 @ 7,000  
 Primary drive..... Gear  
 Clutch..... Multiplate, wet  
 Gearbox..... 5 speed  
 Electrical system..... 12v 18ah battery,  
 alternator, electronic  
 ignition.  
 Headlamp..... 60/55w

### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase..... 60½in  
 Seat height..... 31in  
 Overall width..... 32in  
 Ground clearance..... 5in  
 Weight..... 515lb  
 Fuel capacity..... 3.2 gal

### EQUIPMENT

Indicators..... Yes  
 Electric start..... Yes  
 Trip odometer..... Yes  
 Steering lock..... Yes  
 Helmet locks..... Two  
 Headlamp flasher..... Yes  
 Others..... Electronic instruments,  
 black lens tail light.

### CYCLE PARTS

Tyres  
 front..... 3.25 x 19in Dunlop  
 rear..... 5.00 x 16in Dunlop  
 Brakes  
 front..... 2 x 10in disc  
 rear..... 10in disc

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed  
 prone..... 124.1mph  
 sitting up..... 115.29mph  
 Standing ¼-mile..... 12.09sec/109.8mph  
 Speedometer error  
 at indicated 30mph..... 27.83mph  
 at indicated 60mph..... 55.31mph  
 Fuel consumption  
 overall..... 47mpg  
 ridden hard..... 41mpg  
 PRICE..... £2,476  
 Guaranteed..... 12 months, unlimited  
 mileage

Supplied by..... Kawasaki Motors UK,  
 Deal Avenue Trading  
 Estate, Slough, Bucks.

comfortable position but it does hold you and there's little room to shift around in search of relief when it starts hurting. Which it does after 30 or 40 miles.

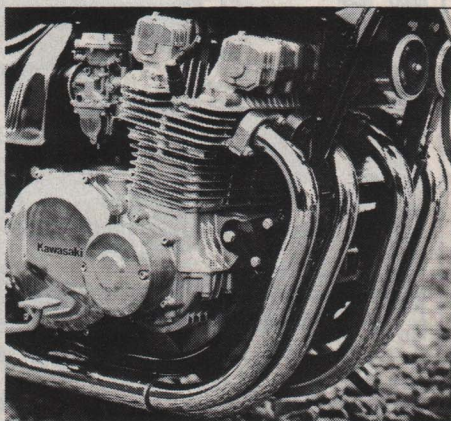
Laying back with my arms straight was bad on my back and made for control problems but I found speeds up to and a little beyond the 70 limit could be maintained in an upright seating position with my arms bent at the elbow. Riding thus limited, cramp set into my fingers, which had to maintain a clawlike grip on the grips, and they usually took several minutes to unbend after a ride of more than 50 miles.

All this goes to show the LTD is not impossible to ride fast and for long distances, with effortless-tourer-style performance from the motor. It's just that it's damn uncomfortable compared to doing the same thing on bikes Kawasaki themselves make more cheaply. I'm well aware that no-one should be buying a custom if they really want a sportster or a proper tourer: just don't let anyone use that high frame, motor and chassis specification to convince you that the LTD can successfully double up as either.

God's teeth! This is the bike which whizzed round MIRA at 124mph and smoked up a standing quarter in almost under 12 seconds. Fear not though, custophiles, the handling may go a bit wonky over 80 mph but the brakes can handle it all easily. Twin 10in discs bolted direct to the 4½in wide hub on the front wheel take care of front retardation and another 10 incher at the back provides great dollops of feel as well as massively powerful braking. Sitting upright meant it was easier to brake hard without being thrown forwards and downwards onto the bars and I confess to taking a childish delight in waiting until the very last moment before braking, just to enjoy the feel of those massive anchors slamming into action. Kawasaki's sintered pads worked well in the wet.

But the V-rated (130mph plus) tubeless Japanese Dunlops didn't. The front was very unhappy at being asked to hold on to the road in even smooth wet bends and the back tyre would squirm around on *dry* tarmac until it warmed up. Having the front wheel let go at speed and fly right over to the opposite kerb before it gripped again was one of those memorable occasions I'd prefer to forget.

When the roads were dry and the tyres were warm and the suspension was right, going nowhere was fairly good fun. The LTD will cut



Above: 998cc mill features new cases outside and lots of refinements inside. Engine mounts are dual density rubber and they really work — the LTD is superbly smooth. Power delivery from this motor rises evenly to a meaty 92bhp at 8,000rpm.

through the traffic with surprising ease, thanks to its massive low-down urge, and on delugrip-surfaced roundabouts something approaching scratching could be indulged in.

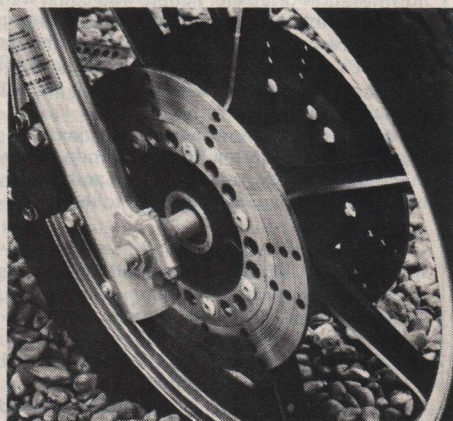
It was a lonely existence, though, because the addition of a passenger took the fun right out of riding the LTD. The biggest problem for a passenger was a rear seat which simply, and unforgivably, tipped down at the back as the thick foam compressed during acceleration. Horrible for the poor pillion and boring for the driver, who has to drive like a geriatric today if he wants to see his girlfriend grow old tomorrow.

I never found the LTD's ground clearance limit riding solo but the centrestand tang would thump down occasionally when two-up. Another problem when riding in company was the riding position. If I leaned back and thought of falling off backwards. This made the riding position even more cramped and the seat didn't help because I couldn't sit forward on it without being slid back to where it wanted me to sit.

Anyway, I was finally thinking I'd got it sussed (fit cissy bar, stick to 45 mph and only go out in the sun) when I came up behind a *real* Harley-D at the lights near Kings Cross station. The guy riding it wore a silly hat and a fur-collared highway patrol jacket but when the lights changed, man, he just go. The Harley gave a burp, a loud pop and with one enormous *blat!* it was halfway to the next set of lights in the same gear and the rider was pulling the clutch back in. The whole affair was so understated, so cool, so *real* — and needless to say the Kwacker was still winding up its twin cams and generally making multi-type threshing noises while I reflected glumly on the true nature of bottom-end stomp.

Oh frustration, oh chagrin, oh knickers. The Kawa was no longer even cool, just a little flashy. Numb, I drove it back to Slough, hardly noticing the bike's faithful ability to return 45 and even 50mpg under most circumstances, not looking in the big, crystal clear mirrors, and not caring about the not-quite-right-yet self cancelling indicators and the turn switch which gets too easily mixed up with the horn/flasher item below it.

Still, if the bike under the cosmetics is anything like a foretaste of the Z1000J, I for one can't wait to get my hands on the sportster. As for the LTD, Kwasaki are dead right. It's limited. ■



Above: Cor, look at that, mum. They've bolted the discs directly to the hub. Gosh! Notice on the fork slider warns against incineration, so take the slider off before you set fire to the rest of the bike.