

# Cycle

35 JULY 1984 ■

**Honda V65 Sabre**  
**It's A Cannon**

**Harley FXRDG**  
**AKA Disc Glide**

## **Honda VF500F**

**The Best Interceptor Yet?**



**Pocket-Sized**  
**V30 Magna**

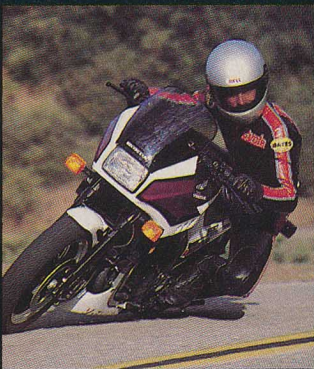
**A Mini-Cruiser**  
**With Jeweled**  
**Movements**







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*This Month's Cover:* Dave Hawkins catches the VF500F Interceptor at full hum, with TW Wolff at the controls. On the panel, five-four Scott Darough used his eight-four camera to make this V30 Magna image, which newboy Art Director, Mark Covault, reduced to usable proportions. The twin test begins on page 24.

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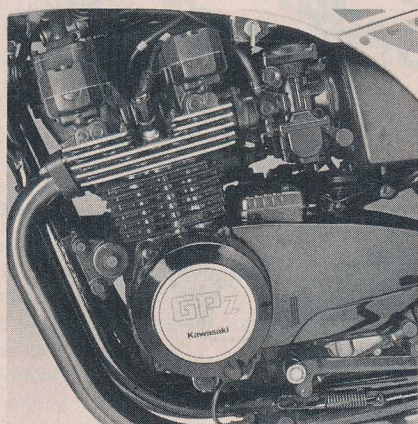
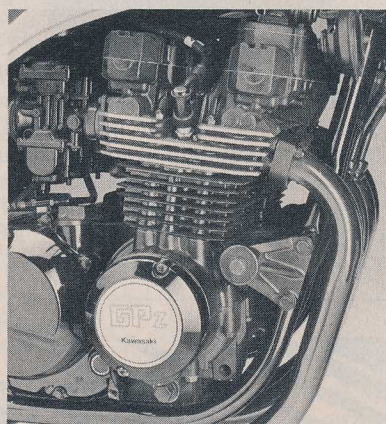
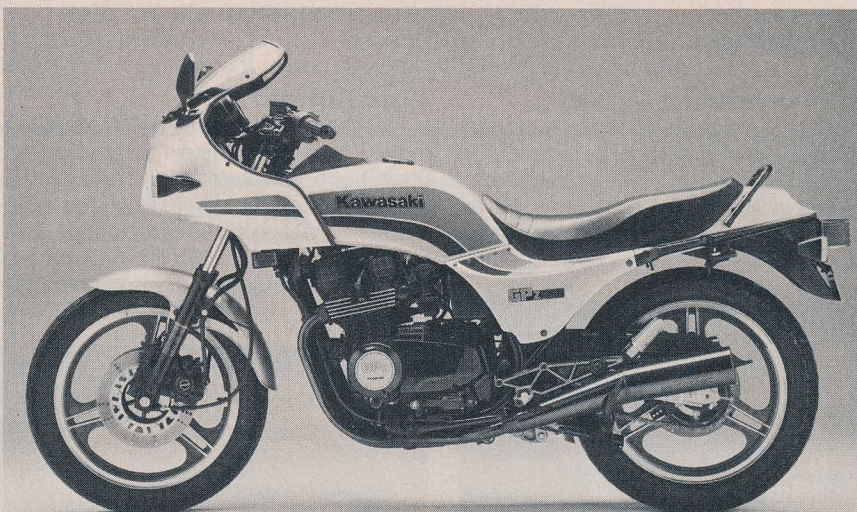
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## KAWASAKI GPZ550

*Subtle refinement has made this GPz the best in its four-year history. Is it enough to stave off the competition?*



□ It has always been a sore point with evolutionists that the roughest corn pone duffer can poke big holes in their theorizing with the simple observation that you can't get Gucci from a Nauga's backside, no matter how long you're willing to wait. Given plenty of time, a fin may sprout a toe and a toe a Florsheim, but the leap to a whole new system is beyond the capacity of random chance. Moving forward, according to Darwin, means

moving in a series of discrete, progressive stages.

Kawasaki understands. Since the sporting cousin of the KZ550 first appeared on the scene in 1981, the GPz has enjoyed remarkable staying power, fending off the onslaughts of other motorcycles through the continual upgrading of its solid basic design. Chassis components have been modernized and refined, and every season Kawasaki engineers wring a few more ergs from the 553cc two-valve engine with hot-rod trickery and time-tested tuner's legerdemain.

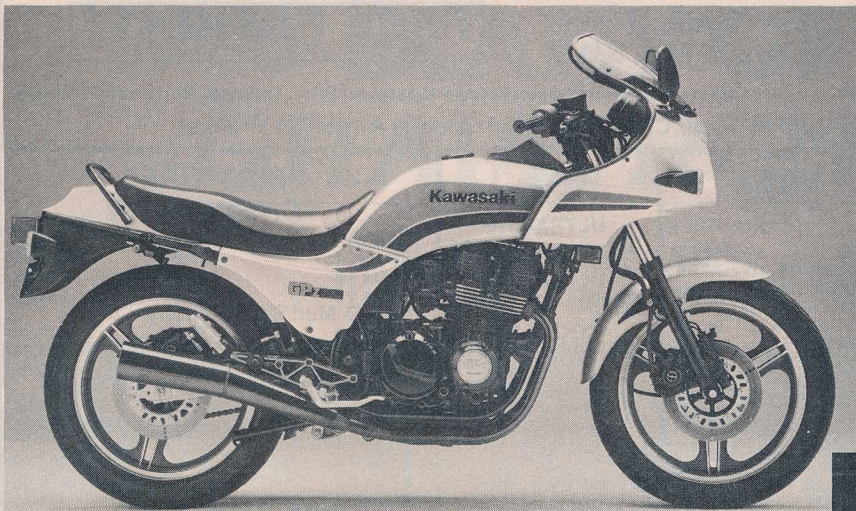
This year's 550 arrives at the middleweight skirmish dressed in Kawasaki's new-style "wraparound" bodywork, bringing it into fashion with the other ZX models in the GPz corps: the 1100, 750 and 750 Turbo. A plastic, frame-mounted quarter fairing supporting mirrors, turn signals and an inner liner replaces the bikini screen of past GPz550s, the tank is reshaped to mesh with the sculpted side panels, and the stepped seat has been thinned and narrowed to enhance the bike's aggressively sporting ergo-

nomics. The new instrumentation includes a 150-mph speedometer with push-button reset odometer, smaller-diameter tach with integrated voltage meter, the standard cluster of idiot lights surrounding the ignition switch, and a pod on the fuel tank displaying fuel level and a number of warning indicators in two-color LCDs.

The GPz's new layout offers both benefits and drawbacks. First the bad news: The short-stemmed mirrors are mounted too close to the bike's centerline to offer an unobstructed view of the road behind, and the small-sized tachometer is sometimes difficult to read, as are the warning lights in the tank pod, being situated below the rider's line of sight. Perhaps the worst aspect of the ZX styling is the bike's new seat. GPzs have never been renowned for their plush passage, but the '84 550's saddle is a real pelvis cleaver—thin, stiff and sufficiently narrow and convex that an hour's ride leaves you feeling like a dressage competitor stuck on a sway-backed burro. On the positive side, the rear-set footpegs and forward-mounted, narrow handlebars give the GPz more riding room for larger riders, and the frame-mounted fairing affords good wind protection for the upper body without compromising high-speed stability.

Modest stoking in the engine bay has upped maximum output to a claimed 65 horsepower at 10,500 rpm, five horsepower and 1000 rpm up on last year's 550. Much of the increase comes from intake and exhaust cams with 10 degrees more duration, fed by constant-velocity TK carburetors, one millimeter larger this year at 27mm. The mechanical advance mechanism has been replaced by an all-electronic





ahead of last year's GPz in overall sporting prowess.

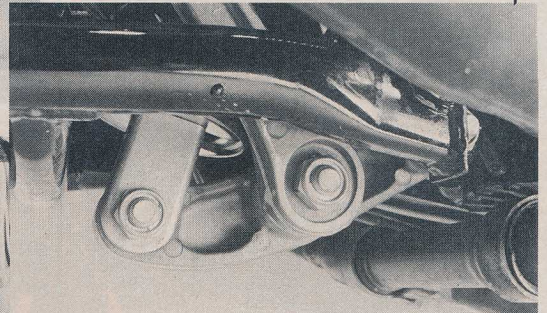
The new fork also carries anti-dive units adjusted by cranking a knurled knob at the bottom of the fork leg. Activated by increased hydraulic pressure when the brakes are applied, the hardware added little to fast-riding control. Unlike many other hydraulic systems, however, the units do not compromise braking action by creating a spongy sensation at the lever. Stopping action is linear and progressive front and rear on the GPz, though the Kawasaki's dual front discs can-

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ignition system with five degrees more spark advance near redline. The GPz's added muscle appears when riding in its upper register, and the 550's mid-range is noticeably stronger as well. The new GPz, far from acting high-strung and temperamental, starts readily, warms up quickly and pulls cleanly and smoothly through the range with no discernible hiccups or flat spots in its power curve. Fuel economy also proved excellent for any middleweight, sport bike or no, the GPz turning in a 46.9-mpg average, dipping to 38 mpg on one redline-intensive canyon ride.

Our GPz, a California-only model, arrived equipped with its mandated tangle of paraphernalia for trapping evaporative emissions: a collector bottle under the right side panel to gather condensed fuel droplets from the tank, plus a charcoal canister mounted in the tail section, all connected by yards of rubber hose coiling in and out around the chassis. Kawasaki representatives assure us that performance of the California model is on a par with that of the so-called 49-state bikes; however, West Coast GPz owners are advised that accidentally pinching the fuel fume hoses may damage the ventless gas tank when a full load of fuel presses against the tank under heat expansion.

The greatest boon to the rider with touring on his mind is the GPz's incorporation of the ZX series' rubber-mounting system, which isolates the engine in a set of four elastic dampers to quell vibration. Last year's bike with a solid-mounted engine proved annoyingly buzzy when ridden above 6000 rpm for anything longer than a sprint. Aboard the new 550, an irritating hum still buzzes through the bars



at precisely 60 miles an hour in sixth gear, but this must be attributed to a maverick harmonic; at virtually every other speed and rpm, the rubber-cradled GPz is remarkably smooth and vibration-free.

While styling and engine alterations are the most obvious changes to the '84 GPz, much of the new model's face-lift is centered in its chassis. Here changes abound, though it takes a keen eye to ferret them out.

In an effort to keep pace with the new breed of sporting middleweights with 16-inch front wheels, Kawasaki has quickened up the GPz's steering geometry. The switch from a leading-axle fork to center-axle legs steepens rake by 1.5 degrees and shortens trail by more than half an inch. Stiffer spring rates give a tauter ride, and new-style 18-inch wheels fitted fore and aft replace last year's 19-inch front and 18-inch rear spinners. Though the new GPz still loses ground through tight transition turns to Suzuki's hyper-fast GS550 and the new Honda 500 Interceptor, its newfound agility, excellent ground clearance and high-speed stability put it

**Vital Statistics**

Make and model . . . . . Kawasaki GPz550  
Price . . . . . \$2899

**Engine**

Type . . . . . Four-stroke, transverse four; air-cooled with two chain-driven overhead camshafts; two valves per cylinder  
Bore and stroke . . . . . 58.0 x 52.4mm (2.28 x 2.06 in.)  
Displacement . . . . . 553cc (33.7 cu. in.)  
Transmission . . . . . Six-speed, constant-mesh, wet-clutch

**Chassis**

Type . . . . . Double-downtube, full-cradle frame; box-section aluminum swing arm  
Suspension, front . . . . . Center-axle, air-adjustable fork with 35mm tubes and 5.9 in. (150mm) of travel  
rear . . . . . (1) shock absorber, adjustable for spring preload and rebound damping, producing 4.9 in. (124mm) of rear-wheel travel  
Brake, front . . . . . Hydraulic, dual-disc with single-piston calipers  
rear . . . . . Hydraulic, single-disc with single-piston caliper  
Tire, front . . . . . 100/90-18 Bridgestone Mag Mopus-L303  
rear . . . . . 120/80-18 Bridgestone Mag Mopus-G508  
Fuel capacity (main/reserve) . . . . . 3.8/1.0 gal. (14.4 l/3.8 l)  
Weight (w/full tank) . . . . . 462.0 lbs. (209.6 kg)

**Performance**

Standing start 1/4 mile . . . . . 12.88 sec. @ 102.27 mph  
Engine rpm @ 60 mph, top gear . . . . . 4706  
Average fuel consumption rate . . . . . 46.9 mpg  
Cruising range (main/reserve) . . . . . 178/47 mi. (286/76 km)  
Load capacity (GVWR less wet wt.) . . . . . 408 lbs. (185 kg)



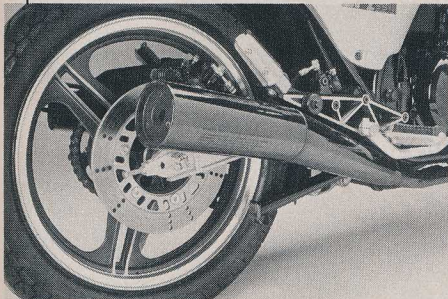
**S H O R T S**

**KAWASAKI GPZ550**

*Continued from page 55*

not match the power and controllability of the dual-piston calipers mounted on the Suzuki or the Honda 500 Interceptor.

Like the other ZX models in the GPz line, the 550's Uni-Trak rear suspension system's gas-charged Kayaba damper is now carried in forged aluminum arms, and the shock bolts directly to the frame at its upper end, allowing the rocker arm and linkage to be positioned beneath the extruded, box-section aluminum swing arm for a lower center of gravity. Wheel travel is somewhat reduced by this system, spring rates are up, but the suppleness and load-handling range of the GPz's new rear end give it compliance and stability to match that of the latest road weaponry. Damping rates are selected by turning a wheel at the base of the shock body, and preload changes are eased by the use of a remote hydraulic adjuster mounted just under the left side panel.



If you're getting the impression the new GPz is in every fundamental way a better motorcycle than its predecessors, you're right. Deft and careful hands have corrected this bike's shortcomings while preserving the strengths that have fostered a cult of GPz fanatics, and the precepts of function have been followed at every turn.

For years, riding a GPz was as close as you could get to owning a piece of the sport-bike rock. The 550 ruled as uncontested king of the middleweight jungle, winning its spurs in canyon battle, often against larger foe. Now the GPz's toughest challenge comes from its rivals in the middleweight camp; the GS550 is quicker, the FJ600 stronger, the 500 Interceptor more advanced.

Designs have inherent limitations, and refinement risks annihilation in a period of exploding change. Ultimately, the only law the sport-bike community observes is survival of the fittest, and the fittest is the fastest in a world the GPz550 did much to create. ■

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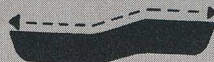
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