



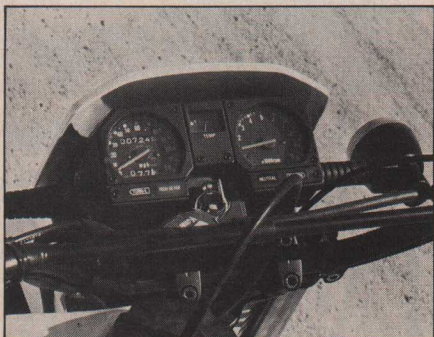
As an off-road plaything, life is exciting on the KLR. Heavyweight and marginal rubber make it a handful.



Our disco, technoid warrior drew rave reviews from the masses. It has more gadgets and trickery than a serious motocrosser. It's impressive.



Stock gearing is too high for trail work but perfect for the street. The power is right in the ballpark, but down a little when compared with the Honda XL600.



The middle gauge is for the water temperature. Yep, it's the first water-cooled, four-stroke dirt-oriented machine out. There are more fans, plumbing and zoot hardware than can be believed.



KAWASAKI KLR600

Engine type	4-stroke, DOHC, 4-valve, single cylinder
Bore and stroke	96mm x 78mm
Displacement	564cc
Carburetion	Keihin CVK40
Fuel tank capacity	11.5 L
Lubrication	Wet sump
Gearbox ratios:	
1	2.437:1
2	1.529:1
3	1.181:1
4	0.954:1
5	0.791:1
Gearing, front/rear	15/43
Ignition	CDI
Recommended spark plug	NGK DR8ES, ND X24ESR-U

Tire, size and type:

Front	3.00 x 21
Rear	5.10 x 17

Suspension, type and travel:

Front	Leading axle, 230mm
Rear	Single shock, Uni-Trak, 220mm

Intended use Street/trail

Country of origin Japan

Retail price, approx. \$2449

Distributor/Manufacturer:

Kawasaki Motors Corp.
2009 E. Edinger Ave.
Santa Ana, CA 92705

Overall rating of bike, keeping intended use in mind:

Handling	Good
Front suspension	Good
Rear suspension	Good
Power	Fair
Cost	Good
Attention to detail	Very good
Effectiveness, stone stock	Good

This rating system is included to aid in comparison of bikes in the same displacement and intended-use categories. Comparing the ratings of two dissimilar machines is a meaningless exercise in futility.

IS IT A DIRT, STREET OR TOTAL TECHNOID MONSTER?

No holds barred

By the Staff of DB



Part-time tester and full-time art critic Dennis West shocks the DB cameras with a one-hander. Dennis felt the bike had great canyon road virtues and tolerable off-road manners.

Finally, we nailed down an elusive Kawasaki KLR600. This bike has been the talk of the techno crowd, the cream of gizmo seekers, the buzz of the gadget elite. No other machine in recent times has hit the dirt market with such hyped fanfare. A water-cooled, big-bore, four-stroke, street/trail bike. Why, the motocross world doesn't even have a water-cooled Open MXer yet! Still, staring us smack in the mug is this electrified, waterized, computerized contraption.

Actually, it's not that bizarre. Advanced maybe, but not out-and-out weird. Water-cooling is the accepted rule of the street bike world. Front disc—no news here. Aluminum side stand—getting away from the norm. Removable aluminum rear section—bleacher time. GPZ-styled rear shock linkage—getting panicky. Spage-age buddy pegs that look like they came straight off a starship—Twilight Zone time. Adding a blue tint to the hair is a dashboard that does everything but play Pac-Man, and a host of little odds and ends that look like they came right off a works roadracer.

This isn't your everyday street-legal trail bike. No way!

SOMEWHAT ECCENTRIC, BUT WHAT'LL SHE DO?

Starting the KLR proved somewhat odd. Slide the handlebar-mounted choke on, turn on the gas and kick. Or try to kick. It feels more like kicking through a vat of mashed potatoes. No alarming kickback, but slow and awkward. We got fire almost immedi-

ately. Let her warm up a bit and hit the road. The first thing we noticed was a considerable *lack* of vibration. In fact, compared with the XL or XT600, there's none.

The second thing we noticed was speed. It's quick, but not as fast as the XL600. Acceleration is steady and smooth, not frisky and abrupt like the Honda. This isn't all bad. On the street the vibrationless KLR motivated through traffic, onto the freeway and into the hills more like a big street bike than a street/trailer. Redline is right at 8000 rpm, but she drops off at about 7500. After that it's shift up or listen to the noise. Short-shifting seems to be the norm with the KLR. It doesn't like to be overrevved and falls on its face when you attempt it.

As far as engine size, the KLR is the smallest of the KLR/XL/XT trio. Its wet sump plant cc's out at 564. Although it's a four-valver, it's the only one opting for a single carb and a single exhaust pipe. Ironically, it's the only dual-overhead-cammed engine of the bunch.

Like the KX lineup, the radiators tuck in nicely. There's a coolant tank mounted on the left side under the tank, which makes for easy eyeballing of the level. An electric radiator fan isn't bothersome until it clicks on and blows hot air on your leg. There's a whole gaggle of hoses and purge systems leading to an Evaporative Emission Control System canister. Nice "touch" for a dirt bike.

MOUNTAIN MOTIVATION

Travel specifications concerning the sus-

pension run in line with the rest of the troops. There is 9.1 inches up front and 8.7 inches in the rear. Typically, the front end is soft, diving with a minor squeeze of the front brake. Going up 15mm on the oil level helped considerably. We'd rate the action as supple, perfect for highway and minor trail-riding use.

While Kawasaki labels the rear single-shock system as a Uni-Trak, it looks more like something off its street bikes than a KX. The damping is adjustable at the bottom of the shock. There are four positions, with number two being stock. We clicked it up to number three for the little bit of two-tracking we encountered. Once off-road, don't expect to clear a gnarly section of whoops without fear—it isn't meant to be. The action is soft to the point of comfortable. A stiffer spring is a must for increased off-highway usage.

A longish rake, 29.5 degrees, thankfully lends itself to stability. Turning the beast in sand isn't a wholesome experience, and we'd suggest sticking to fire roading. Here the stable chassis is at home, and coupled with the electric motor, nothing happens too fast. Head to head with the XL and XT, the KLR holds its own on the jeep roads.

TRIVIA BITS

All the controls are deluxe and easy. The bars are perfect; the seat is comfortable and has room for two. There's a temperature gauge on the instrument cluster to aid (or confuse) the rider.

Up front the disc brake is nice. Most felt it was a little weak, especially in comparison to the strong KX units. Of course, there is a "small" weight difference. The rear brake pedal is aluminum and has that hand-crafted look. Action on the rear binders is average, no better.

Both hubs feature straight-pull spokes and the rear chain is adjusted via eccentric cams mounted in the swingarm. We'd like to see them on the KX lineup.

The skid plate molds nicely around the cases, offering protection, and there are aluminum rubber-ribbed buddy handles that double as grab rails.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

Kawasaki's answer to the Honda XL600 and the Yamaha XT600 is one wild approach. This techno monster is smooth, handles with the best in the field, and is fitted with more gadgetry and sophistication than Captain Kirk's Enterprise. The question is, where's the electric start button? □