

Fat Tracks

PHOTO: KAREL KRAMER

KAWASAKI KLT 160:



CAMP RUNNER OR CLASS KILLER?

The KLT160 has the features and specs of a camp runner, and the performance of a semi-racer.

Kawasaki has dropped a hot little three-wheeler on the market that travels right to the head of the econo-ATVs class. Sometimes called campfire runners, econo-ATVs are small, inexpensive three- and four-wheelers that attract the family and beginner market. Other three-wheelers in this class include the Kawasaki KLT110, Honda's ATC® 110 and ATC® 125M, and the 125s from Yamaha and Suzuki. Of that group, only the Kawasaki has suspension, though it's only in the front and offers just a meager amount of travel. Only the KLT has shaft drive and the most displacement in its class.

In sum, Kawasaki offers the same small, light package that makes these entry-level ATVs attractive, but offers more power, less maintenance and a reverse gear as well. That's a hard combination to top.

There is some controversy involved,

though. The KLT160 fits the econo-market in terms of features, but with \$1399 as the suggested retail price, it's roughly \$400 more than Kawasaki's own 110. That price tag puts the 160 in the same price category as the ever popular Honda ATC® 200, the son of the original sporting three-wheeler, the ATC® 185S. Seen in that light, the KLT gives away displacement and performance to the machines in its class.

Yet the problem with most entry-level ATVs is they're too easy to outgrow. They soon become too small or too slow. For that reason, we can recommend the KLT160 as an econo-model. This is the first econo-type three-wheeler we've ridden that could entertain both the rank novices and the most calloused of *Dirt Rider* editors with ease.

The small size and simplicity of the controls caused us to press the KLT

into service as a learning vehicle for two beginners. One complaint concerned the difficulty in downshifting. A little blip of the throttle was needed to take the load off the transmission dogs, or else a firm lift with a booted foot for a good, clean downshift. Upshifts were no problem, and for riders with three-wheeling or motorcycle experience, shifting was merely a problem of acclimation.

Another complaint was minor, but potentially troublesome. Whenever a rider had the misfortune to end a miscue with the wheels pointing skyward, oil from the transmission vent tube would pour all over the bike; once enough was lost to affect the oil level significantly. We can imagine a situation where enough oil could be lost to compromise the safety of the engine if the rider tried to return to camp after a turnover.

On the plus side of the ledger, the



Soft tire walls hampered race-type action like this a little, but greatly aided comfort.

KLT has roughly the same frame/engine combo the KLT110 does, but with the shaft drive and a different top end for more displacement. Rather soft tire sidewalls help mask the fact that there is no rear suspension. Naturally, large bumps shatter that illusion, but the 160 handles with a fair amount of agility and good stability. The soft tires perform better on sand or mud than on hard-packed terrain.

The normal complement of controls for an auto-clutch three-wheeler are present: two hand brakes, a foot brake, a shifter with an all-down shift pattern and a thumb throttle. A red button on top of the transmission must be depressed while the shift lever is lifted above neutral to engage reverse. There is a parking brake on the handlebar, also. The fenders offer good roost protection, even in water, and a handy storage compartment behind the seat holds a quart of drinking water and

other such necessities.

At the performance end of the spectrum, the KLT also fares quite well. It kept company with an ATC® 200X and an ATC® 250R during its day at Pismo Beach. Even with a 185-pound rider, the little bomber was not humbled by a single dune, including a bunch that left the ATC® 125M and the KLT110 gasping on a previous visit. Unlike past visits, no staffers complained when relegated to the econo-model since the only antic that needed to be curtailed while on the bike was jumping; all other facets of "duning" were taken in stride.

This is the first economy ATV we didn't tire of quickly. In fact, you could look upon the KLT160 as two ATVs in one. It can be your first campfire runner when you begin three-wheeling, then it can take the place as your second, more powerful ATV as well. That sounds like a good deal in our book, even if the initial price is a bit higher.

—Karel Kramer

EVEN MORE FAT TRACKS



Petersen's Specialty Publications Division has just released their latest edition of *Three Wheeler* Magazine. We've seen the book and it contains a lot of good information for the three-wheeler enthusiast or anyone thinking about getting into the sport.

Among the features are pictures of the 1985 Honda ATC® 250R and a test of the radical new Yamaha 250 Tri-Z, a race-type, two-stroke three-wheeler to compete with Honda and Kawasaki. There will be lots of other tests, as well as a buyer's guide for three-wheeling (and four-wheeling) accessories.

Racing, budget build-ups, racing organization information...it's all there. If you're into three- or four-wheelers, you should check out Petersen's *Three Wheeler*.

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