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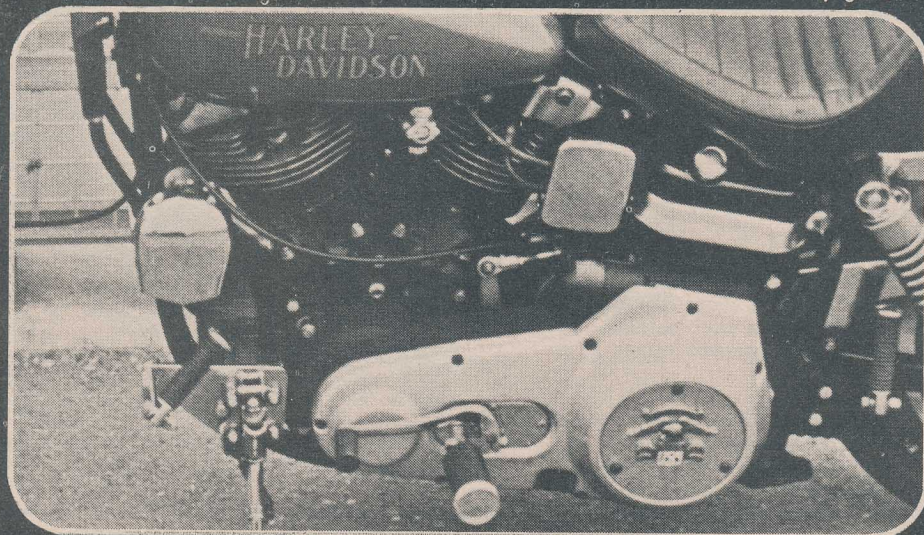
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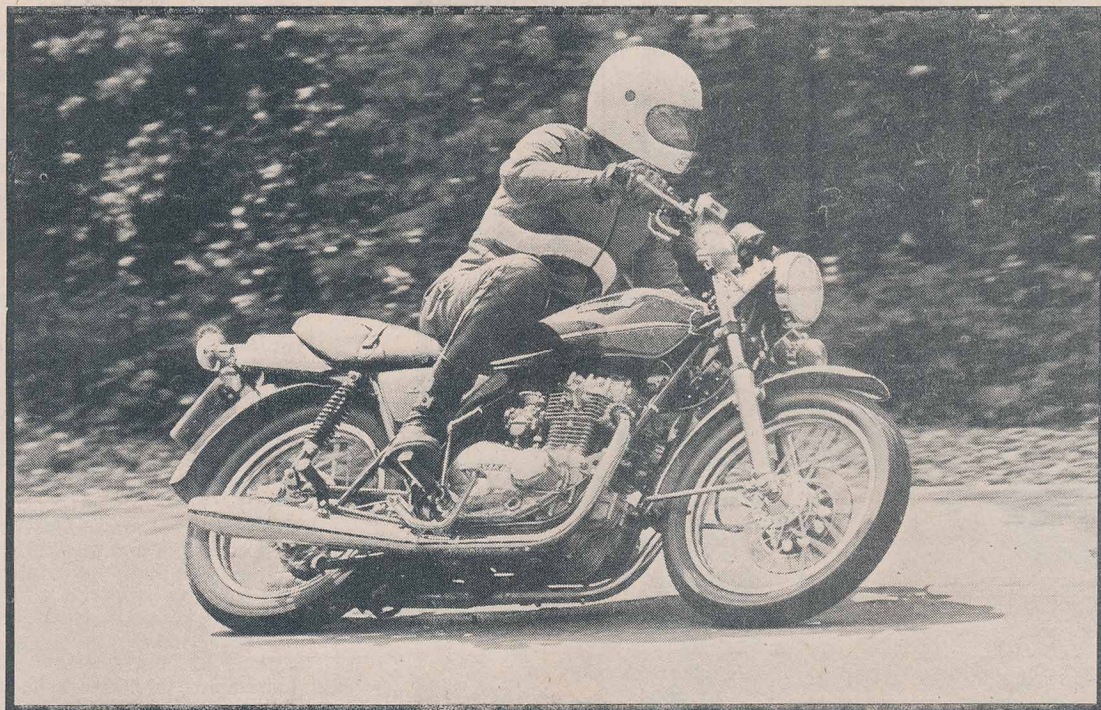
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**WIN A
YAMAHA
DT175 MX**

MCM ROAD TEST

Kawasaki Z400 B



Big K get into the six-speed commuting act

INTRODUCED a couple of years back, Z400 was instantly hailed as a tame commuter bike. People tended to disregard the 400s as they didn't fit into a convenient capacity slot; certainly all the glamour was stolen by the bigger bikes and being a mundane workhorse was about all that was left for the middleweights.

But slowly the 400s proved that they were more than jumped-up 250s and our long-distance test showed that the Z400 was more than capable of producing the goods.

More 400s came in and the competition livened up. All the Japanese manufacturers soon had 400cc four-stroke twins. They were all a bit bland and the casual observer would be hard-pressed to spot the differences. But competition between the manufacturers, as well as producing cunning pricing manoeuvres, put the emphasis on performance. This is something the 400s were not supposed to have — not in any significant quantity, anyway. Even so, speed is still the factor which is most easily measured and it's usually the first thing people enquire about. Consequently speed takes on an importance of its own even on a bike

which, in real use, is not likely to be ridden flat out.

So Z400 has been uprated. It is now Z400B and wears new dampers, a redesigned engine, a six-speed gearbox and different silencers (the last two being sure-fire hints that more power is being sought out). The docile twin has taken on a sporty flavour where none existed before.

Kawasaki's advertising now proclaims, "... you'd like a bike that you can have a bit of fun with. A bike that offers a lot more than those boring commuters."

On the whole, I'd go along with that and I think Kawasaki are right to shift the emphasis — bikes are more than just a form of transport. In most road conditions, from the daily drudge of city traffic to weekend trips up into the hills the Kawasaki is a lot of fun — without putting undue stress on your wallet or your adrenal glands.

In its own right the Z400B is a good machine and Kawasaki have pretty well succeeded in what they set out to do. But how it compares to all the other 400s is not so easy to relate. A straight comparison taken at the extreme end of the performance scale

shows the Kawasaki to be slightly slower, less powerful and with little real difference in fuel consumption and price. The differences show up on paper all right, but they only amount to a few per cent and the real differences, which come through when you ride the bikes, are more subtle.

Kawasaki's twin feels one of the most stable to ride, its positive handling combining nicely with the comfortable riding position to make the machine generally steady and predictable.

The consensus of opinion among our test riders is that all the 400s feel light and are regarded as being more akin to 250s than to 500s. The heavier feel of a big bike is also reckoned to be more reassuring than a lightweight — and this is where the Kawasaki seemed pretty good.

Kawasaki themselves appear to have given a lot of thought to the new model. It's still the basic parallel twin with balancer shafts but the motor's breathing has been improved by changes to the intake and exhaust. Although the engine is flexible peak torque is close to peak power and it all happens at the top of the rev scale; so the

MCM ROAD TEST

Kawasaki Z400B

400 is rideable at low revs but to get at the performance you need to work it up through the gears. The six-speed box helps you do just that, making the machine that bit more usable.

Handling and ride comfort have also been attended to. Like the bigger bikes in the Kawasaki range, the swing arm now runs in needle rollers with new shock absorbers controlling wheel movement. The bike has slightly more ground clearance and its riding position has been altered by using different handlebars. To find out whether any of these changes are good or bad you really need to sit on the bike and see how it suits you. I had no complaints, the riding position was comfortable for town work or 70mph cruising, the seat was OK for 200-mile stretches and I quickly felt at home with the control layout and operation.

Chasing the 400 around the test track used up its ground clearance, rubbing the footrests, stand and brake pedal on the floor. But it felt stable, the only problem being a slight choppiness at the front end. In an S-curve where the bike was picked up and laid over hard again, the forks bounced making the steering go light and letting the front wheel twitch about.

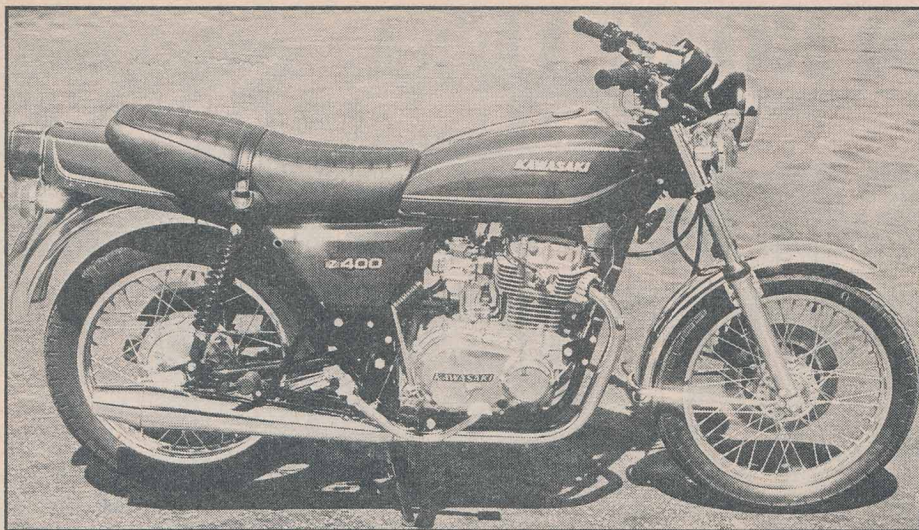
Everywhere else, from slow hairpins to flat-out curves, the twin responded well, with plenty of feel to the controls.

The worst thing you could say about the Z400B is that it's a bit ordinary. If you're looking for something that will turn heads in the high street or attract a crowd in the parking lot, the Kawasaki will be a disappointment. In other respects its ordinariness is an advantage — the first time I rode the bike was at the track and within a couple of laps I was quite at home on it, throwing it around with no fear of it doing anything nasty. It is equally easy to manage in bad weather or tricky road conditions, it's nimble in traffic and even light enough to haul around a tight parking space. OK, so it's a bit bland and unexciting — but it doesn't demand very much from the rider. You don't need to concentrate on the bike or compensate for any odd quirks. Anyone can ride it and it will perform equally for all people. The price you pay for this thoroughly democratic response is a lack of character.

About the only quirk which showed up during the test was the twin's disinclination for cold starts. It needed several long bursts on the starter before it fired on one cylinder, then another burst before the engine could propel itself faster than the starter motor. Eventually the other cylinder would come in and the 400 would then run quite happily. I suspect that the weather was warm enough for it not to need the cold-start device, but not warm enough for it to run properly with no choke at all.

The balanced motor ran smoothly, with just a periodic tingling through the footrests. It isn't particularly powerful; well-developed would be a better description, giving it a torque curve which is flat from 3500 right up to 8000 and a smooth power build-up ending in a broad peak which spreads its 30 bhp over a range of more than 1000rpm.

Keeping it right in this zone at the track



The more it changes, the more it is the same thing . . . but Z400 has competitive performance and is moving away from that "boring commuter" image.



gave us 43mpg — more conservative cruising could get it up to over 60mpg and normal use averaged out at about 55mpg. The 3.1 gallon tank gave a realistic range approaching 150 miles plus a sensible reserve.

The Kawasaki's 101mph top speed is really of much less significance than its cruising ability. It will hold 70mph all day, with plenty of extra urge, via the additional gear, for overtaking, etc. It also gets up to this sort of speed with little trouble — it's not a Performer, but you could lose your licence on the 400 as easily as on a bike costing three times as much . . .

The handling and roadholding are well up to matching the 400's pace and the original Yokohama tyres proved very good in the dry and OK in the wet. They are obviously using a softer compound, judging by the wear and the wear patterns on the shoulders of the tread after our session at the track. On the road, I found that I had plenty of confidence in the tyre's grip, even on greasy surfaces.

A single disc up front and a drum at the rear made a reliable combination of brakes which kept up their performance in the wet. Both controls gave plenty of feedback which made the brakes sensitive enough to be used quite hard even in difficult conditions.

The control layout, pretty well standardised by now, is easy enough to use: like the rest of the machine, there is nothing particularly outstanding but at the same time nothing warrants any major criticism. Kawasaki must have a designer with a fixation about prop stands. First their Z200 appeared with a multiple-spring arrangement, now the 400 has a bell-crank device which goes over-centre when the stand is down. The stand locks in position, but when the bike's weight is off it, the slightest knock causes the mechanism to retract the stand.

Lighting has been improved over earlier models, with a 50/40W headlamp. Unfortunately our bike had a total headlamp failure — all the bulb filaments were blown, as was the line fuse in the lighting circuit. We

couldn't find the fault — a direct short would have blown the fuse, not both filaments, while high voltage caused by a faulty regulator or simply by continuous high rpm at the track would probably have attacked the tail lamp first. Vibration could have broken the filaments, but that doesn't explain the blown fuse . . .

Overall, in comparison to the other 400s, there is little to choose between them. I like the Kawasaki — it is well put together, pretty easy to work on and has a nice, steady feel to its handling. The 400 Honda has better suspension and is possibly more comfortable, the 400 Yamaha has slightly more response from the engine. They are all marginal points, though — what would influence me more would be availability and service back-up from local dealers along with personal preferences in styling, riding position and so on. These factors relate more to the customer and his local dealers rather than to the machine itself — and that's really where the decision rests.

Performance & specification

ENGINE

SOHC 360-deg twin with balance shafts, twin Keihin CV32SS carbs, ignition by contact breaker and coil, wet sump lubrication, 12V alternator and 12 A-h battery.

displacement..... 398 ccm
bore x stroke..... 64 x 62 mm
compression ratio..... 9.5:1
claimed output 35.7 bhp at 8500 rpm
23.7 lb ft at 7000 rpm

CHASSIS

front tyre..... 3.00 x 18 Yokohama
rear tyre..... 3.50 x 18 Yokohama
wheelbase..... 53.7 in
castor..... 63 deg
trail..... 3.9 in
overall length..... 81.5 in
overall width..... 30.5 in
dry weight..... 370 lb
fuel tank..... 3.1 gal
oil tank..... 5.1 pint

PARTS PRICES inc VAT

front mudguard..... 9.16
handlebar..... 6.57
exhaust system complete..... 84.17
set of pistons/rings..... 28.99

£
cb points..... 3.43
list price..... 829.00
warranty: 6 months/6000 miles
importer: Kawasaki UK, Deal Avenue, Slough, Bucks.

TRANSMISSION

HyVo primary drive to six-speed gearbox, final drive by chain.

primary reduction..... 2.43
final reduction..... 3.00
gearbox ratios: 2.54, 1.75, 1.32, 1.10, 0.96, and 0.88.

Max. speed, 101 mph		ss ¼ mile 15.0 sec		speed in gears (9000 rpm)		
first 35 mph	second 48 mph	third 67 mph	fourth 79 mph	fifth 91 mph	sixth 103 mph	
FUEL CONSUMPTION					Oil used	Brakes from 30 mph
Best 62 mpg	worst 43 mpg	average 55 mpg	range to reserve 130-150 miles	nil		26 ft

HOW IT COMPARES

Model	Price £	Max. speed	Av. mpg	ss ¼	bhp
Kawasaki Z400B	829	101	55	15.0	30
Yamaha XS400	883	106	51	14.6	33
Suzuki GS400C	850	101	63	15.5	33
Yamaha RD400	815	99	43	14.8	34
Honda CB400T	838	102	53	15.0	36

