

# R=J-Y

... WHEN Y IS EQUIVALENT TO PRECISE HANDLING.

**P**ROBABLY the strongest memory that the Z1000R left me with after I had returned it to Kawasaki UK was of the number of bikers who either pulled up outside the house or wandered into the front garden to give it the once over.

And if that sounds to you like I'm damning with faint praise then, while you may not be smack on the target, you are certainly not that wide of the mark.

The 1000R is certainly a good looker — my front garden's got the footprints to prove it. The slab-sided styling and handlebar fairing ape the brute-force appeal of last year's GPz 750s and 1100s, apart, that is, from the cut down seat. The colour scheme too is eye-catchingly different, the large areas of white being set off by large blue and smaller red stripes. Pretty for sure.

The idea, of course, was to produce a machine that bore considerable visual similarity to the bike on which Eddie Lawson (who now rides for Yamaha in the 500 GPs) won the American Superbike Championship in 1981 and 1982. Kawasaki stopped short, they say, of painting the thing lime green (like the original racer and our own project 550) because they thought maybe people wouldn't like the colour too much and because Mr Lawson had changed camps by then anyway.

First impressions of the bike on the street were something of a mixture. The big Kawasaki mill was as good as I had expected it to be. Apart from small changes in the valve timing, the motor is the same as fitted to the Z1000J. And it delivers its power in the same inimitably smooth fashion — pulling smoothly and strongly from way down in the rev range, building faster and faster as the revs increase. It's mighty quick when you want it to be or fast and flexible if you're feeling lazy.

It felt OK until the first bend, a long but not very severe right-hander that most modern big bikes can take at 100mph with no trouble. As I peeled into the bend at about that speed, the R started to shake its head, not violently but something obviously wasn't right. The deeper into the bend the bike went the more it wobbled, not uncontrollably but enough to warrant investigation.

Hitting the front brake hard provided the answer as oil came pumping out of the shot oil seal on the left-hand fork leg. So, I took the bike back to Kawasaki's Slough HQ where the ever helpful senior product technician, Alex Dell, fitted new seals to both legs.

That improved matters some but the bike was still wobbling enough to move it off the chosen line in fast bends. Slow, tight curves it took pretty well but not as well as the Z1000J, from which the R is derived.

Derived is perhaps the wrong word. The only difference between the J3 and the 1000R cycle parts are the cut down seat, the quarter fairing (a GPz item) and the Showa gas-charged rear suspension units equipped with remote reservoirs, four-way damping adjustment and threaded collars to vary the spring preload.

The lack of major differences between the J and the R made the twitchy handling all the more surprising. Despite several lines of approach, from checking wheel alignment and chassis bearings through to experimenting with tyre pressures and suspension settings, I did not manage to find the



Showa remote reservoir rear units give a firm ride and could be contributing to the rather vague, wallowy handling.



This is as far over as you can get a

cause.

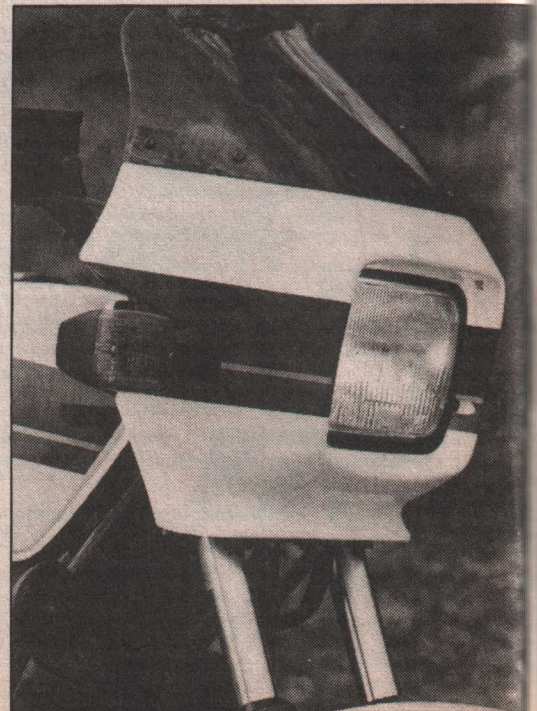
The 1000R's suspension is very firm by current standards. In fact it had the harshness you'd expect of a Ducati, which could conceivably have something to do with the instability. If force normally absorbed by the suspension was being transmitted to the frame, it's possible that the tubes could be twisting, sending the wheels temporarily out of alignment. The J variant, with its much softer suspension, handles noticeably better. Hard suspension, after all, will only work on a frame that has been designed to take it.

It could also be that the 1000R rear units give the bike a slightly higher ride height, thus having an adverse effect on the geometrical relationship between the front end and the ground, by altering the trail and castor away from the optimum.

All theory, of course, and difficult to either prove or disprove but I don't believe that there are any glaring design faults in the frame itself. Kawasaki laid that particular ghost to rest a long time ago.

The cut-down seat is pretty comfortable and puts the rider good and low on the bike. That plus the flattish bars makes for ease of control and the small fairing makes a far better job of deflecting wind away from the rider at high speed than you might think it capable of.

The straight line stability was acceptable if not good, and the bike was able to gobble back straight miles of motorway with grati-



Handlebar fairing has been culled from the 1982 GPZ range. Note oil cooler.





fyingly indecent haste.

Photographer Patrick Gosling took the 'R' for a long jaunt to the coast one Sunday and said he thought that it was fine in the touring mode.

There's a certain perversity in my nature that makes me like bikes that don't handle precisely. Perhaps it's the fact that you have to work that much harder on twisty roads to keep the speed high. Or maybe it's just that the other big bikes I've ridden so far this year have been excellent handlers and I simply enjoyed the difference offered by the Z1000R.

It would have been more fun still if the sidestand had been consigned to the dustbin. It severely restricted ground clearance on left-handers. It even grounded on a 95mph sweeper en route to Leicester, much to the surprise of Tony Baskeyfield who was following close behind on his own Honda 900.

Although I had plenty of fun with the Kawasaki (any bike that makes as much power as the Z1000R can't really fail to be fun some of the time), I did not end up liking the bike. The left-hand fork seal popped again a few days before the end of the test. The morning that I took it back to Slough it was hacking it down with rain, making me acutely aware of the twitchy handling.

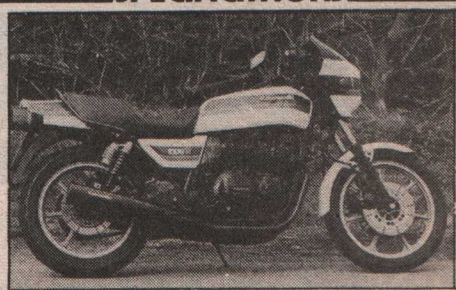
I was not sorry to hand over the bike to Alex Dell and ride away on the next machine on my schedule, the GPz 750. Twenty miles up the road on the way back to Peterborough, laying the GP into a long fast curve, I knew what I had been missing during the previous fortnight.

If I had £2,600 lying around doing nothing, there would be quite a few possibles on my shopping list. There'd definitely be at least one Kawasaki in there but it would not be a Z1000R.

Shame, it does look so pretty too. Suppose I'd better go and lay some seed over those bare patches of lawn and make a note to keep smart looking test bikes round the back in future.

Jim Lindsay

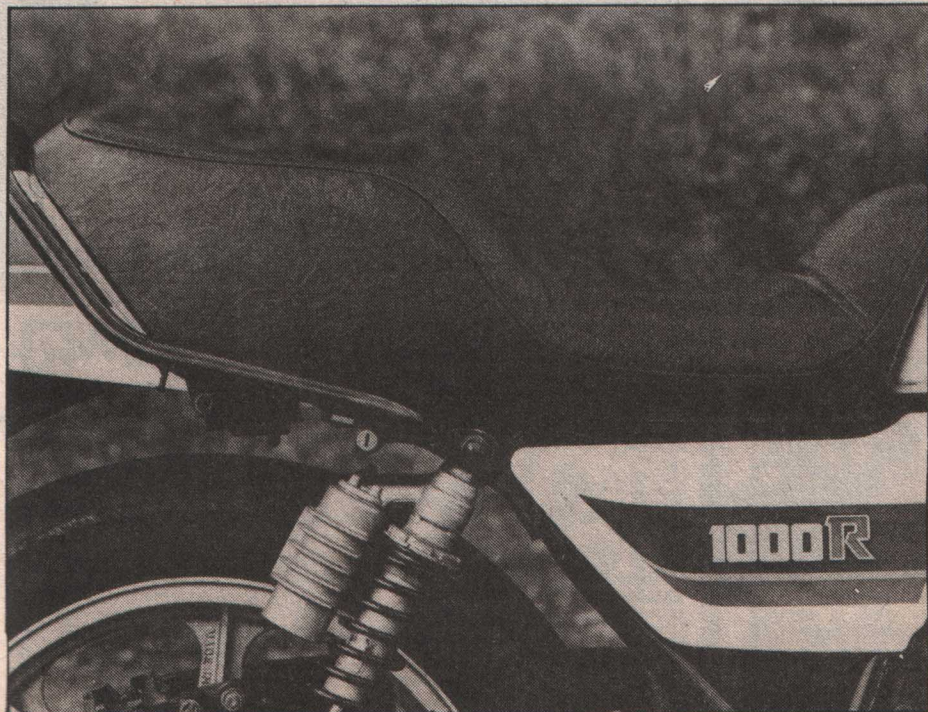
## SPECIFICATIONS



### KAWASAKI Z1000R PERFORMANCE

Maximum speed	
upright .....	119.83 mph
prone.....	129.83 mph
Standing start 1/4 mile.....	12.15s/109.3 mph
Fuel consumption	
worst.....	33.29 mpg
average.....	42.8 mpg
Price.....	£2649

Other specifications as Z1000J



The cut down seat looks well and is comfortable. It does, however, have a slight tendency to absorb rainwater and store it up for the seat of your jeans.

left-handers. The sidestand prevents any greater angle of lean. Needs removing really.