

# ART ATTACK



## Hot poop at Jerez. Rupert Paul fails to get his knee down on the new Kawasaki ZX-10

The Circuito de Jerez is 2.6 miles long, has 16 corners and only one straight of more than 400 yards. The fastest object ever to get round in one piece was an F1 racing car driven by Nigel Mansell — 1 min 27. Last year's 500 GP bikes managed about 1 min 51 while Oxley's endurance racer makes it in 1 min 59. To this

information we can now add the fact that a bog standard Kawasaki ZX-10 laps Jerez in 2 min 7, complete with new Kawasaki Superstock signing Roger Hurst, road tyres, contrestand and mirrors. In my book, that's fast enough.

The ZX-10 replaces the GPZ1000RX as Kawasaki's top-of-the-range sports bike. It

weights 222kg, produces a claimed 137bhp and was, according to my notes after my first ten laps in the rain, 'absurdly powerful, much too heavy for a circuit like this'. One day and 40 dry laps later my hands were shaking and sweat was dripping onto the page as I scribbled: 'Wow. God. Bejusus. I'm knackered. I've never ridden so fast in my life and I can't find anything wrong with the bike'. As far as getting a good review went, the racetrack launch was the right idea.

The motor is based on the 1000RX which, like many Kawasakis, lags horribly at low revs if you open the throttle too wide. The new engine is different, pulling strongly in top from about 3,000rpm with a harsh, gravelly sound. There's a bulging midrange which the bike will surely become famous for, followed by a top end rush which varied according to the spec of the bike. UK hacks got goes on both restricted and full power versions but in the wet I found the difference between a claimed 123 and 137 bhp tricky to pinpoint. A series of prangs made the low power version unavailable when the track dried out but even so, the full power version's last couple of thousand rpm built up slightly slower than I'd anticipated. Maybe the strong midrange was disguising the top end. For sure the ZX is powerful, but whether it'll beat the CBR1000's record 120bhp (as Kawasaki say) on LEDAR's dyno remains to be seen.

Rider ergonomics are excellent. Tank, seat, footrests and 'bars give the natural comfort which only the

Japanese can get right every time. All the bits you touch are smooth and contoured and there's plenty of room for moving about. Your legs sit behind the fairing lowers, protected from the wind, and the screen is higher and wider than on any sports bike apart, perhaps, from a GSX-R.

The result is negligible wind pressure at speed, better weather protection than on any comparable bike and a claimed 7% increase in aerodynamic efficiency over the 1000RX. The mirrors remained clear and elbow-free (at least when I was looking), and the well sorted clocks and switches worked predictably perfectly right down to the new push-cancel indicators. In short, it's a pleasure to be in control of the bike.

With this idea fixed in my skull I needed little encouragement to thrash the thing round the circuit as hard as possible in an attempt to make something go wrong. Nothing did, and by the low 2 min 20s mark research tailed off due to my own inability to go any quicker. The aluminium frame seemed to be totally unbendable and the suspension did the rest. Jerez is a new, and therefore very smooth track but the 41mm forks absorbed every little ripple without a murmur getting through to the bike. Nobody missed the lack of preload adjustment, or even the absent anti-dive. The chassis engineers explained that a longer bump stop taper on the fork's damper rods made anti-dive superfluous. They were right, which is pretty extraordinary when you consider that racing hacks were lapping in 2 min 10.

### The times they are a changing

The first thing that struck me about the ZX-10 at its European launch at Jerez had nothing to do with its mind-bending performance. It was more to do with the lack of it. Of the twelve bikes available for riding, four of them were restricted. The Germans, Swedes and Austrians get 100PS — more or less 100bhp. The French limit is 75.1kW, or 100.7hp. The Swiss have the strictest control; their 72PS is a little over half of the ZX's quoted maximum of 137PS. But what got my eyeballs popping was the UK spec bike's limit of 91.9kW, or 123bhp. That makes it the first superbike available in this country with less than full power. That's quite a precedent.

Of course we've all heard about, and probably forgotten, the Motor Cycle Association's voluntary 125bhp limit which was set back in 1985 to make the UK bike importers look safety conscious even though there was no proven link between power and accidents. Until now the limit has been studiously ignored by Honda with their '135PS' CBR1000 and Suzuki's GSX-R and GSXF 1100s. As the most powerful bike we've tested, the CBR, only made 120bhp on our dyno we couldn't see anything wrong with that. After all, nobody actually *believes* manufacturers' quoted figures, do they?

It appears that Kawasaki do. They ZX-10 is claimed to give 137PS in standard form, so they've produced a special 123bhp version for us. No, we don't like it either, and what this figure will translate into on Ledar's dyno is anybody's guess. The 1000RX was quoted at 125bhp; we measured 105. Watch this space.



Flexible friend. The ZX-10 gulped down whole sections of the track in one gear.

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The back end behaved in much the same way, failing to lose its damping even after 45 minutes of being caned round a hot track. To be fair, Jerez hardly tests rear suspension to the limit, but I couldn't get the bike to weave or waggle its bars about in corners at all. Stability under braking, acceleration and cornering was never in question.

Jerez may be kind to rear shocks but it's notoriously unfriendly to front tyres. As it turned out, only three or four people crashed with any kind of style over the two day period which isn't bad considering how excited everyone was getting. It's certainly no criticism of the tyres — great fat 17 inch radial Dunlops which, even at the track, were better than the ZX-10's considerable ground clearance.

One thing that seemed strange was how cool the tyres were running. After 15 laps on a hot track the rubber was only just beginning to get that frazzled look — certainly nowhere near as sticky as the sports tyres we tested on the CBR600 at Donington a couple of months ago. Maybe it's a sign that they'll last longer.

Each time the Japanese design a new brake system they build in more feel. The ZX-10 hasn't got, say, the GPZ600R's hairtrigger control; the front brake feels softer, with more lever travel. This made me think it was going to go off but it was still howling the tyre from the 9000rpm in fifth pit straight when my 45 minute track time was up. For permanent track use a more immediate feel would have been better, but on the road the ZX-10's balanced actuation calipers could be the best yet. There's even a little four way thumbwheel adjuster to vary the free play on the lever, and another one for the clutch.

In between riding sessions we talked to the ZX-10 design team wandering around the pit lane. Mr Araki was involved in engine development.

"Two years ago you launched the 1000RX at Salzburgring."

"Yes."

"You said it would be the fastest bike you'd ever build."

"Yes."

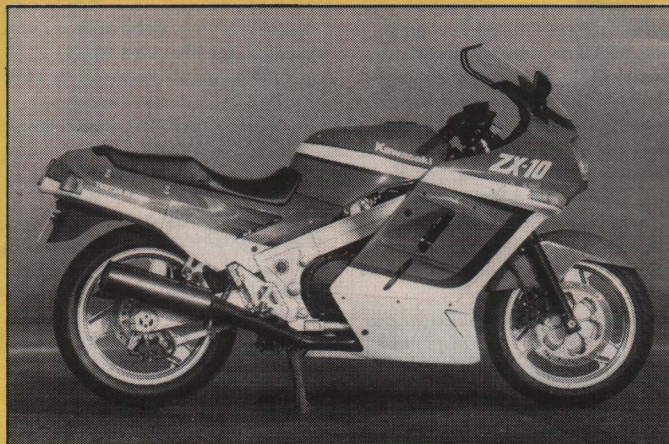
"So what's all this about the ZX-10 having 12 more horsepower, 16kg less weight and superior aerodynamics?"

"The 1000RX was the fastest bike we would ever build at that time."

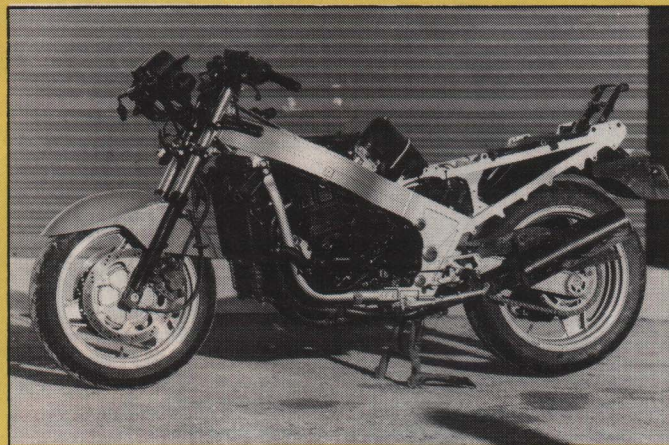
"I see. Is there a limit beyond which you won't go?"

"Engineering has no limit.

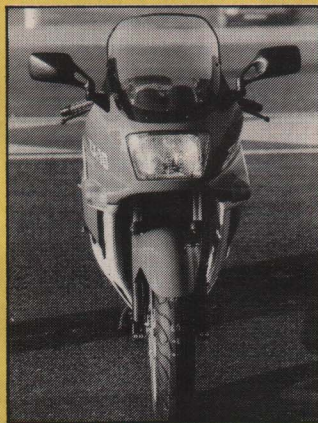
Speed is not the reason we make the ZX-10. We always improve comfort, suspension,



Rear damping adjusts via knob in the frame above the footrest. Black dot nearby is in the air pressure adjuster valve cap.



Floating discs, angled carbs and bolt-on down tubes. Sidestand switch decked hard during radical cornering.



FJ 12-ish fairing, screen and mirrors were the biz.

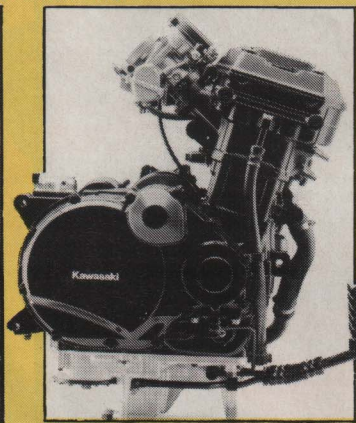
aerodynamics, engine efficiency. Then we find it possible to increase speed."

"Why do you no longer use the forward facing airbox intakes which were on the 1000RX?"

"The new carburettors are at a steeper angle so there is no room for these intakes. Also it is very difficult to silence that system without losing the extra power."

"You quote a lower maximum horsepower for the UK spec ZX-10 than for the standard model. Is this just Kawasaki being respectable?"

"No, the UK model has a



More power everywhere. RX eat your heart out.

restriction in the engine."

Gulp. Suddenly track testing the bike seemed to lose its importance. "Where is the restriction?"

Unfortunately it was only after I'd shaken hands and promised I wouldn't tell the readers that Mr Araki let on where the restriction was. It'll be common knowledge sooner or later (and, I guess, cheap and easy to remove), but Mr Araki understandably didn't want it to be his fault.

Mr Endoh, who launched the GPZ900R, GPZ600R and GPZ1000RX was even more keen to appear responsible.

"The very existence of large displacement superbikes has been questioned," he said at the ZX-10 press conference, "and this criticism has been growing in the past few years. Some of these opinions may be correct, and we should listen to them. However, relating performance to accidents is oversimplifying the problem. Personally, I firmly believe that large displacement superbikes have a rightful place in society. The ZX-10's extra horsepower, higher top speed and acceleration can provide qualified riders with broader riding options, and even help them escape a hazardous situation."

Quite right too. Limiting the power of the ZX-10 doesn't make any sense at all. The bike I rode at Jerez was superb not for any one reason, but because of its overall balance. Every part of the bike's performance was in proportion to the whole; more so than on any previous Kawasaki.

It's always difficult to gauge from track launches how a bike will feel on the road but the ZX-10's wind protection, 22 litre tank, superb suspension and rider comfort suggest that it will be able to cover sizeable portions of the earth's crust at a time.

Pillion comfort definitely won't be as good as on the GPX750; the seat's higher and narrower, and the retractable grabrail isn't really big enough.

It sounds corny, but there really doesn't seem to be much wrong with the ZX-10. The fact that the UK version is getting its peak power lopped off to satisfy the presumption of the do-gooders in our society sticks in my throat a bit, but if you own a 1000RX, tough luck. It's just become a dinosaur.

## SPEC

Engine: Based on GPZ1000RX but with lighter pistons, crank and rods, 36mm semi downdraught CV carbs, hand finished inlet ports, narrower valve angle, bigger valves actuated by super light rockers with shim adjustment, 11:1 compression, 11,000rpm redline, digital ignition, uprated oiling system. Claimed max power 137PS @ 10,000rpm. Claimed top speed 169mph. Claimed standing 1/4 10.5 sec.

Chassis: Aluminium frame, non-adjustable forks, air and damping adjustable Uni-Trak rear, GPX type Balanced Actuation Caliper brakes, floating front discs, floating rear caliper, new Dunlop radials (120/70VR17 front, 160/60 VR18 rear). Dry weight 489lb, seat height 31in, w/base 58.7in, tank capacity 4.84gal, price to be announced.