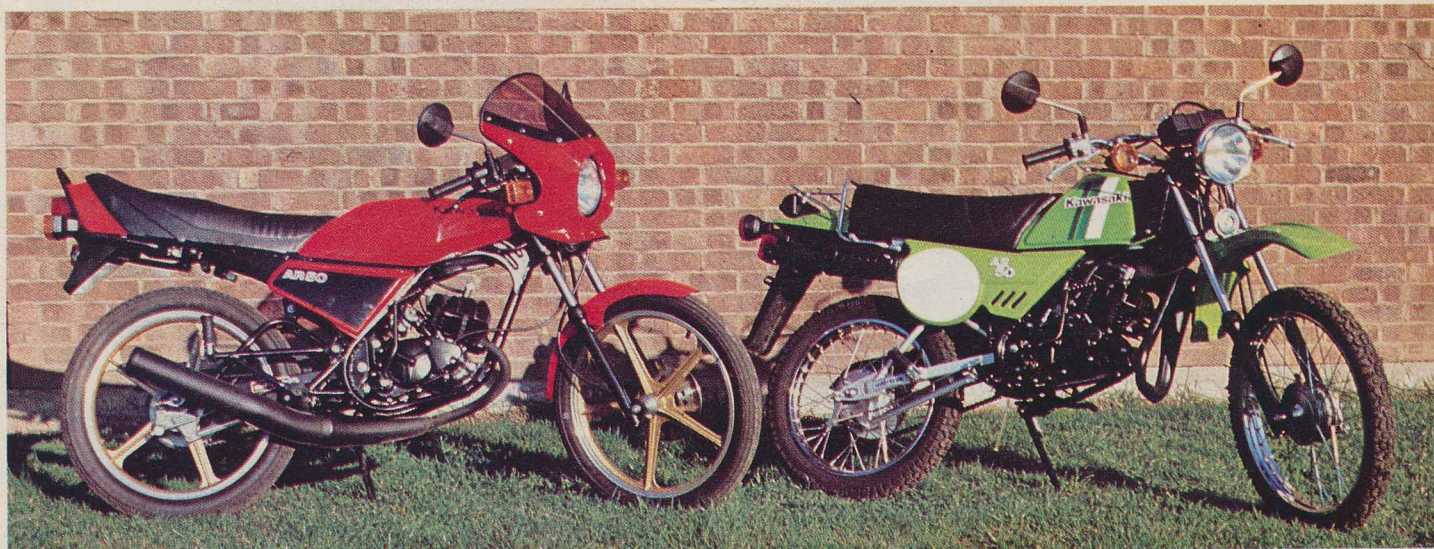
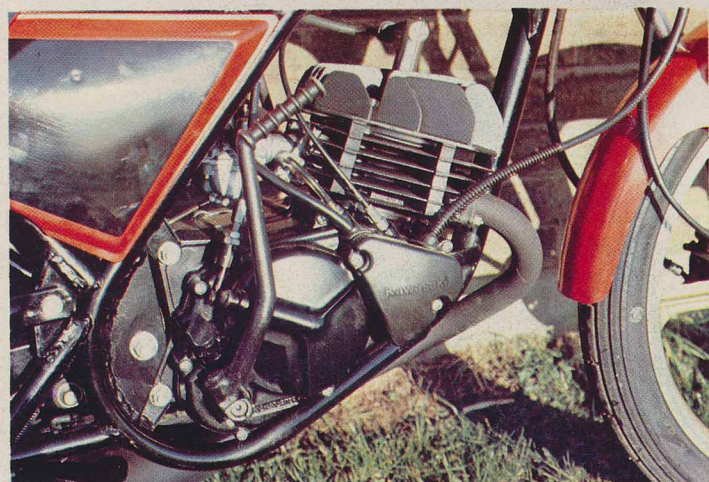


**Kawasaki's first foray into the moped market has produced a pair of very slick machines which have gone largely unnoticed in Britain. But not for long, says Nick Harvey**

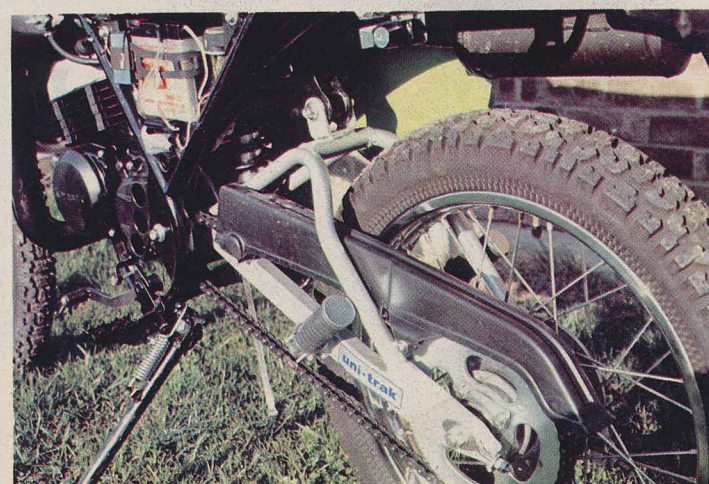
# Small



*Kawasaki's AR50 (left) and AE50 mopeds should give Honda a hard time in 1981*



*Reed valve motor produces 2.9bhp at 4500rpm, looks neat*



*Straight from the world of motocross — Uni-Trak suspension*

**T**here's every chance that you don't know that Kawasaki chose last year's Cologne Show as the launch-pad for its two new sports mopeds. Although these bikes represent Kawasaki's first attempt to produce restricted 50cc models, press coverage of the two new machines was sparse, initially suggesting that the bikes were of little interest to riders in Britain.

Like Honda, who produce for sale in France and Germany both 50cc and 80cc variants of their MB and MT models, Kawasaki's new sports mopeds are really scaled-down eighties. But unlike Honda, Kawasaki are introducing the 80cc models into Britain, obviously hoping that the anticipated learner-rider legislation will make this size of machine popular.

They could be right. If a 12bhp limit is decided upon, the machines with 80-100cc engines will be plenty powerful enough and will probably be cheaper to insure than 125s or restricted 175s. But for now, the real interest in Britain is in the two new sports mopeds.

Kawasaki's AR50 is as good a rival to Honda's MB5 as we are likely to see this year. On paper, the technical specification is highly competitive. We can only guess that the price will be equally attractive to buyers.

Undoubtedly the AR50 is a very good looking, especially the lime-green version. From the

neat quarter fairing to the gold five-spoke cast-alloy wheels. The use of motocross derived Uni-Trak rear suspension leaves the rear end of the bike looking bare, but will certainly be a good sales aid. Chances are it will have more practical benefits on the 80cc bike. The Uni-Trak set-up is, in Kawasaki's words, 'race-proven' and if it gets you one up on MB riders, who's complaining?

The machine we photographed was a pre-production model so don't be too surprised if a few mods have been made by the time the AR50 goes on sale in Britain (which could be as early as March). In particular, it



*Trick styling on the AE*

# TALK

is not certain that the pillion footrests will be mounted on a separate subframe loop; Kawasaki may go for the cheaper option of welding footrest mounting lugs on to the swinging arm.

Rider comfort is helped by the use of semi rear-set footrests which, with the adjustable clip-on style handle-bars, give a good 'lean forward' riding position.

The slim petrol tank holds just over two gallons and conceals a forward-mounted two-stroke oil tank which feeds the separate injection Superlube system via a pump on the right-hand end of the crankshaft.

Kawasaki have produced an all-new motor which features a five-speed gearbox (six-speed on the AR80) and a power output of 2.9bhp at 4500rpm. The fact that the AR80's 78cc motor pumps out 10.2bhp at 8500rpm shows what this little motor is capable of.

Breathing via a reed valve through a 14mm Mikuni carb (18mm on the 80), the engine produces maximum torque of 3.3 ft-lb (0.46kgm) at 4000rpm. Even with the tachometer lined at 10,000rpm it's obvious there is not a lot to be gained by thrashing this little baby.

On any new moped, we tend to look closely at the safety features which can mean life or death for a novice rider. The two rear view mirrors as standard are welcome. The AR50 also features very good lighting with well-spaced indicators and a stop light operated by both front and rear brakes. Braking is taken care of by a 4.3in (110mm) diameter drum at the rear and a hydraulically operated front disc brake featuring the sintered metal pads as used — and acclaimed — on larger Kawas.

Kawasaki have chosen Nitto tyres to keep the AR50 in contact with the road, 2.50 x 18in at the front and 2.75 x 18in at the rear. The tyres are just one of the differences between the AR50 and its sister machine the AE50 ('R' stands for road, 'E' for enduro).

Like the roadster, the AE50 is also available in lime-green or bright red. It's our bet that the green option will be the most popular, echoing as it does the 'Green Meanie' image which

helped to establish Kawasaki in Britain.

Although the AE50 is fundamentally the same machine as the AR50 it has a strikingly different appearance. The motocross-style petrol tank is provided with an unusual plastic trim at the front. This serves two purposes, one practical and one cosmetic. It covers the oil tank filler (the tank nestles under the petrol tank) and it is specially designed to look like a radiator shroud, as fitted to many of this year's smaller motocrossers.

Practical points include the small rack behind the seat (to which is bolted a plastic tool tube) and an exhaust system plumbed over the engine and exiting high on the right-hand side of the bike.

With 5.5in (140mm) fork travel at the front and the Uni-Trak rear springing providing 4.7in (120mm) wheel movement, the AE50 should be a good performer on the rough.

Bridgestone trail tyres (2.50 x 19in front, 3.00 x 16in rear) run on steel rims with 4.3in (110mm) diameter single leading shoe drum brakes front and rear.

Footrests are some six inches further forward on the AE50 than the AR50 and this, with the shorter fuel tank (holding just 1.4 gallons), provides an excellent riding position for off-road work. What's more, it provides an almost ideal position for town riding.

Despite their larger than life appearance, both machines are lightweight. The AR50 tips the scales at 159lb (72kg) with the AE50 strangely 10lb (4.5kg) heavier.

By the time the new Kawasakis arrive in the UK there may well be a wider choice of mopeds *purpose-built to meet British legislation*. This is an important point, because as we have found in earlier Small Talk tests, existing designs of moped cheaply modified by the manufacturer do not necessarily provide the best bike for a novice rider.

What Kawasaki (and Honda) have done is more expensive (for the manufacturer) but results in a much better buy for Britain's young riders who want safe, stylish, machines which are fun — if not fast — to ride.

March  
Issue On Sale  
February 26th

# THE BIKER

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