

# Which Bike?

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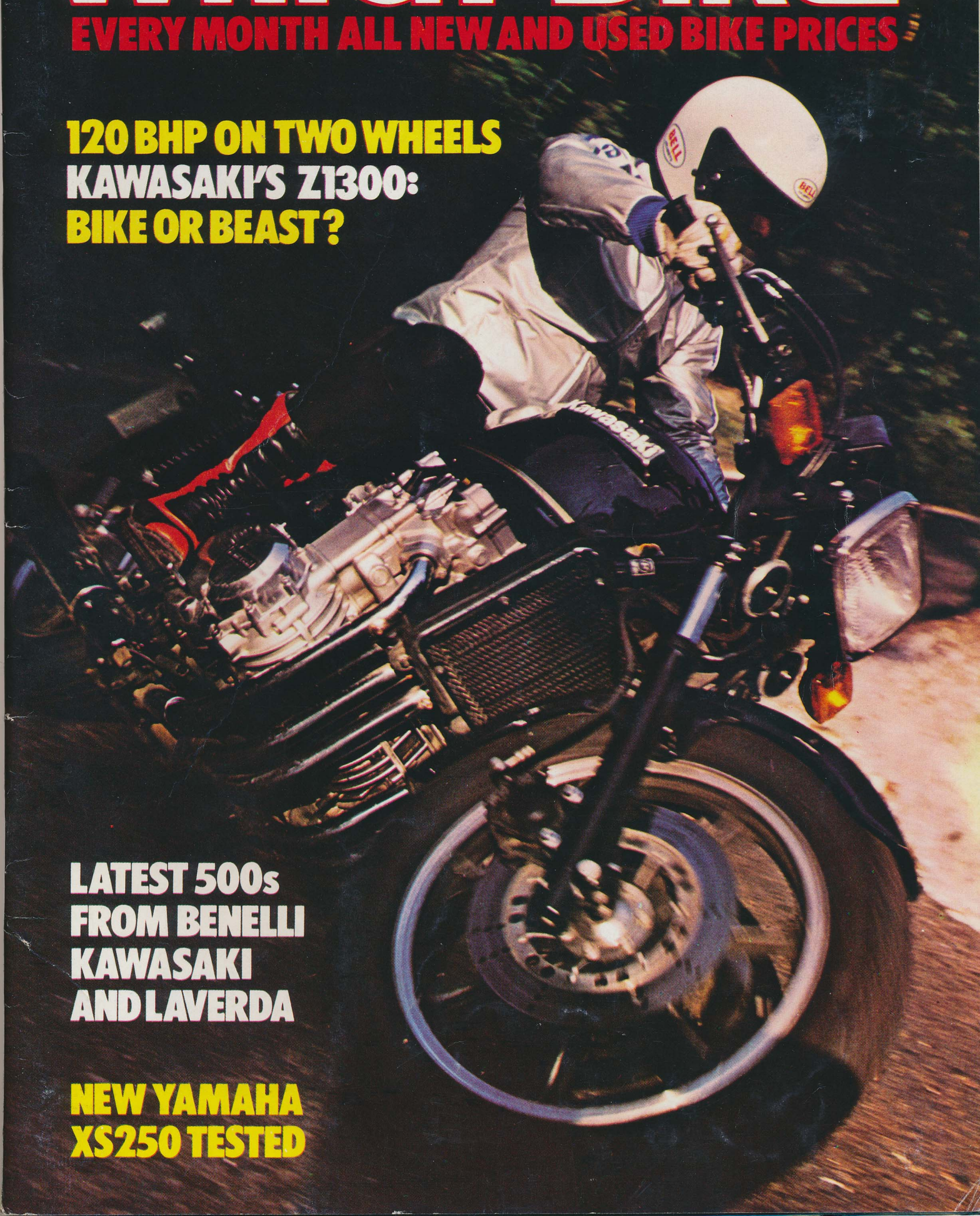
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# Which Bike?

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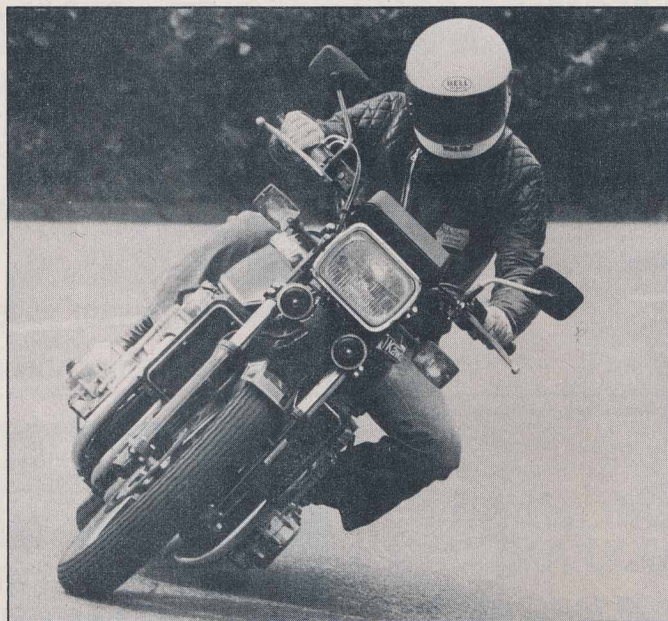
**Back Issues Dept:** Where you can find that road-test you're looking for.





# KAWASAKI Z1300

## BIKE OR BEAST?



Forget everything you ever heard about high performance, heavyweight motorcycles being the death knell of our sport.

You've probably heard the story. A time-honoured buff will tell you how Vincents were the be-all-and-end-all of high-speed motor-cycling and that anything heavier or larger would be totally un-mangeable. Worse still, given the opportunity, the monster would drop on its rider and pin him to the ground with never any chance of escape.

Fact is, there really isn't any limit to the size and weight of a road-going motorcycle. And the proof is in the existence of the Kawasaki Z1300.

When the Honda Gold Wing was introduced five years ago we wondered if the practical limit had then been reached since it weighed nearly 650 lb tanked up. But now many of the bigger bikes tip the scales in that region. And ready for the road, the Kawasaki's 700 plus pounds of rippling complexity make it the heaviest two-wheeler to ever come from Japan.

Yet the Z1300 never feels intimidating. You can raise it onto the main stand more easily than some lightweights. And it steers and corners with a demeanour more befitting the precision instruments found on race tracks.

At ordinary road speeds it

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Kawasaki's Z1300 six – like the heavyweight two-wheelers that have preceded it – has split the motorcycling world into two camps: the haves (who will buy one) and the have nots (who won't).

---

The former will probably think it the greatest ever; the latter, no doubt taking the jaundiced purist view, that it's an overweight, ugly pig of a machine.

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*John Nutting sorts facts from fantasy.*

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Photography by *John Perkins.*

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can be flicked into bends and cranked over delicately. The Z1300 is no RD350 Yamaha, to be fair, but a machine of its size shouldn't really corner as well as it does.

Furthermore, the Z1300 has a reassuring stability that belies the concept that weight is the enemy of handling. In its element, at high speeds on motorways, the Z1300 sits with supreme confidence and gives the rider the impression that if there ever was anything to deflect it from his chosen path it would have wings and the Boeing name on the side.

But that's at ordinary speeds. Trouble is the Kawasaki 1300 is capable of speeds that are anything but ordinary. Like its record-breaking weight, the machine develops record-breaking power. And the 120bhp that the water-cooled six-cylinder engine pumps out is offered so subtly that it only takes the brief space of one gear-change and a few spare yards of road to project its rider

from rest to very illegal speeds.

Though many might regard the proposition as irrelevant in a country with a 70mph speed limit, prospective owners should be warned that at the three-figure speeds the Z1300 can so easily achieve, it starts to display the usual foibles in navigation.

We say this only because those speeds can be reached in barely ten seconds so effortlessly. Since you only need to be beaming yourself past a bunch of cars on a less than perfectly smooth road to find yourself in that situation it's worth being mindful of the consequences with £3,183-worth of machinery beneath you. It wobbles and shakes its head but fortunately never gets out of control.

You might wonder what the Z1300 could do with a clear road. So might we. It's geared for 135mph in top at the red line but it takes such a length of road to get there

we can only suppose that's the maximum. What's remarkable is that power which can get you to 100mph in third also makes the bike very safe when you need to jerk yourself in and out of tight spots. The excellent sintered-alloy-padded disc brakes complement this perfectly with massive power and controllability under all conditions. As do the fat V-rated Dunlop Gold Seal tyres in 350 x 18 and 450 x 17 sizes.

What must be remembered though is that while a CBX owner might find the Z1300's handling acceptable at elevated speeds, unlike his own, at least the CBX displays its intentions as being slightly awesome and demanding. The Z1300 is more seductive and can lull its rider into a sense of false security. It's an electric chair in Conran covers; press it too hard and you'll wear through to less appealing aspects of its character.

Nevertheless, the Z1300 is altogether an extremely thrilling motorcycle to ride. And it is, despite its appearance, a motorcycle in every sense of the word. The only difference between this and others is that there's more of it.

It should be good though. Kawasaki have obviously spent a lot of time and money developing what is basically an ill-conceived concept that only a Japanese factory could



## KAWASAKI Z1300

### SPECIFICATION

Price inc. VAT:	£3188
Engine:	DOHC liquid-cooled transverse six.
Capacity:	1,286cc (62 x 71mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp ratio:	9.9 to 1
Carburetion:	Three twin-choke 32mm Mikunis
Ignition:	Coils with magnetic triggers
Max power:	120bhp at 8,000rpm
Max torque:	85lb-ft at 6,500rpm
Primary drive:	Inverted-tooth chains
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Five speed
Final drive:	Shaft and bevel gears
Mph/1,000rpm:	16.84 in top
Electrics:	12v 20ah battery, Kokusan 3-ph. alternator, 12v 60/55w headlamp
Fuel capacity:	5.95 gallons
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Leading axle telescopic fork (f) Pivoted fork with 5-pos spring preload adj. (r)
Brakes:	Dual 11.8in-diameter discs (f) Single 11.4in disc (r)
Tyres:	Dunlop Gold Seal 110/90V18 F8 (f) 130/90V17 K100 (r)

### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	62.2in
Seat height:	32½in
Grnd Clearance:	6½in
Handlebar width:	30½in
Rake/trail:	62deg/3.94in
Dry weight:	653lb

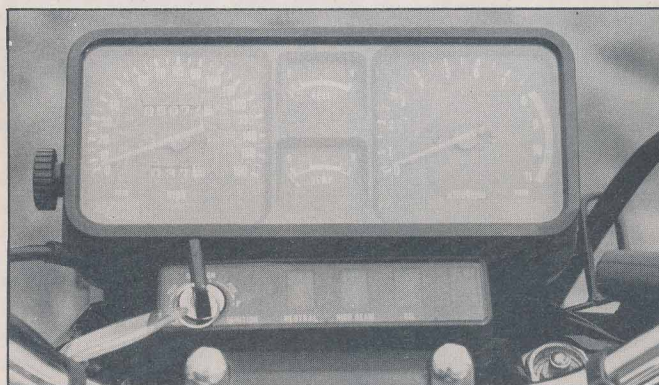
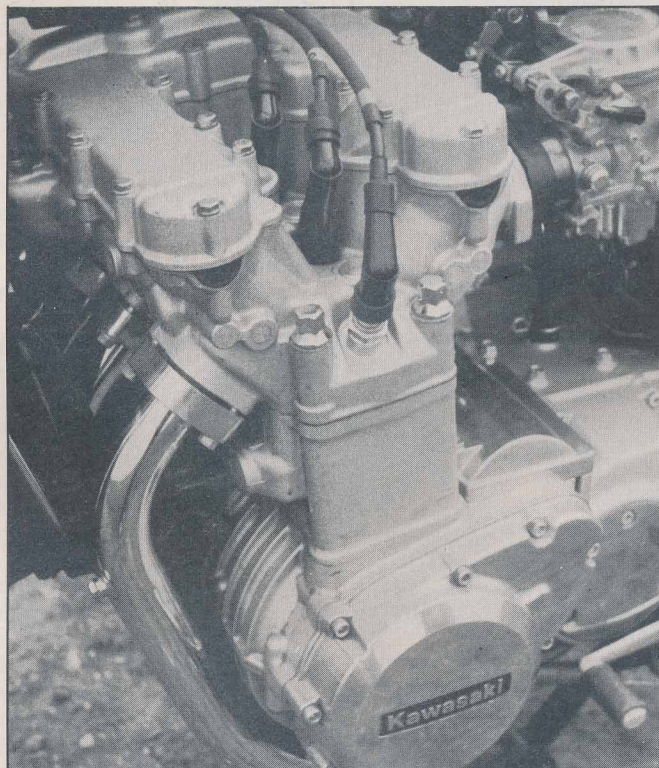
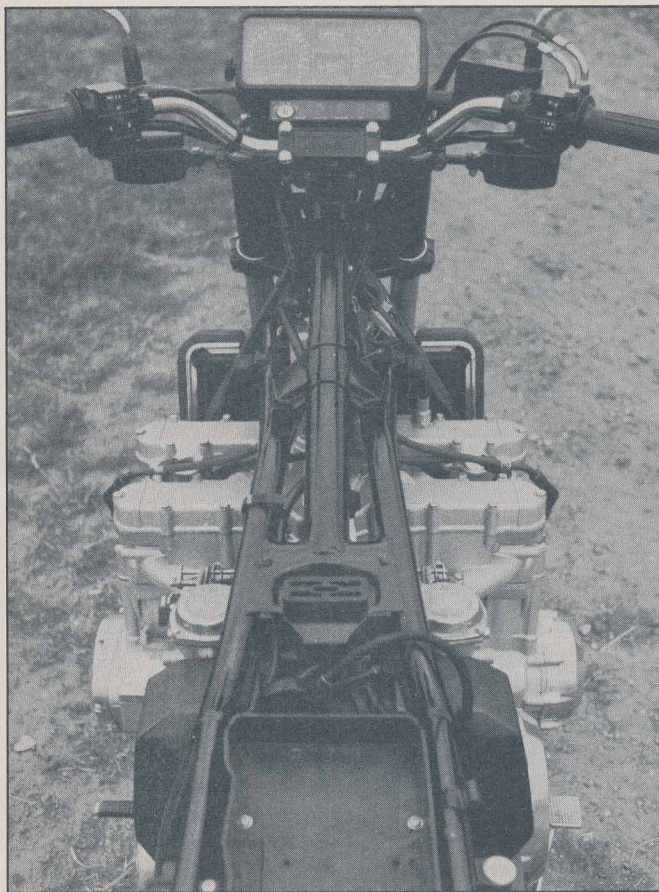
### EQUIPMENT

Self-cancelling trafficators, 11,000rpm rev counter, 160mph speedo, toolkit, prop stand, headlamp flasher, steering lock, seat lock, fuel tank lock, auxiliary cut-out lock, fuel gauge, twin horns, twin mirrors, hazard lamps, coolant temp. gauge, electric fuel cock, helmet lock.

### PERFORMANCE

Top Speed:	135mph (est.)
Calculated Top:	134.8mph
top speeds 4th:	116.9mph
at red line 3rd:	98.1mph
in gears. 2nd:	75.3mph
1st:	54.7mph
St. ¼-mile:	11.98secs
0-to-60mph:	4.2secs
Actual speed at ind. 60mph:	58.4mph
Average fuel consumption:	34.7mpg
Tank range:	200-220 miles
Manufacturer/Importer:	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd., Deal Avenue, Slough Trading Estate, Berks.

Top: Strong bracing and large diameter tubing provide exceptional stiffness in the frame.  
Middle: How can a naked motor like the Z1300 look horny?  
Bottom: Instruments follow the rectangular theme.



contemplate.

For if Kawasaki wanted the Z1300 to be the most desirable of the superbikes they fell short of the target. Though it is indeed the largest of the Japanese bikes, and the heaviest, it's not the fastest (a CBX'll beat it by about 5mph) nor the quickest accelerating (our Z1300 clocked 11.98 seconds compared to 11.6 seconds or thereabouts for the CBX). Neither is it the most flexible of the big tourers because Yamaha's XS1100 will out-drag the Z1300 in a top gear roll-on up to 80mph.

It's difficult to work out how the factory originally intended the bike to be, apart from being the largest-capacity six in the business. A clue though is the fact that the Z1300 is a straight across-the-frame six instead of a vee-six.

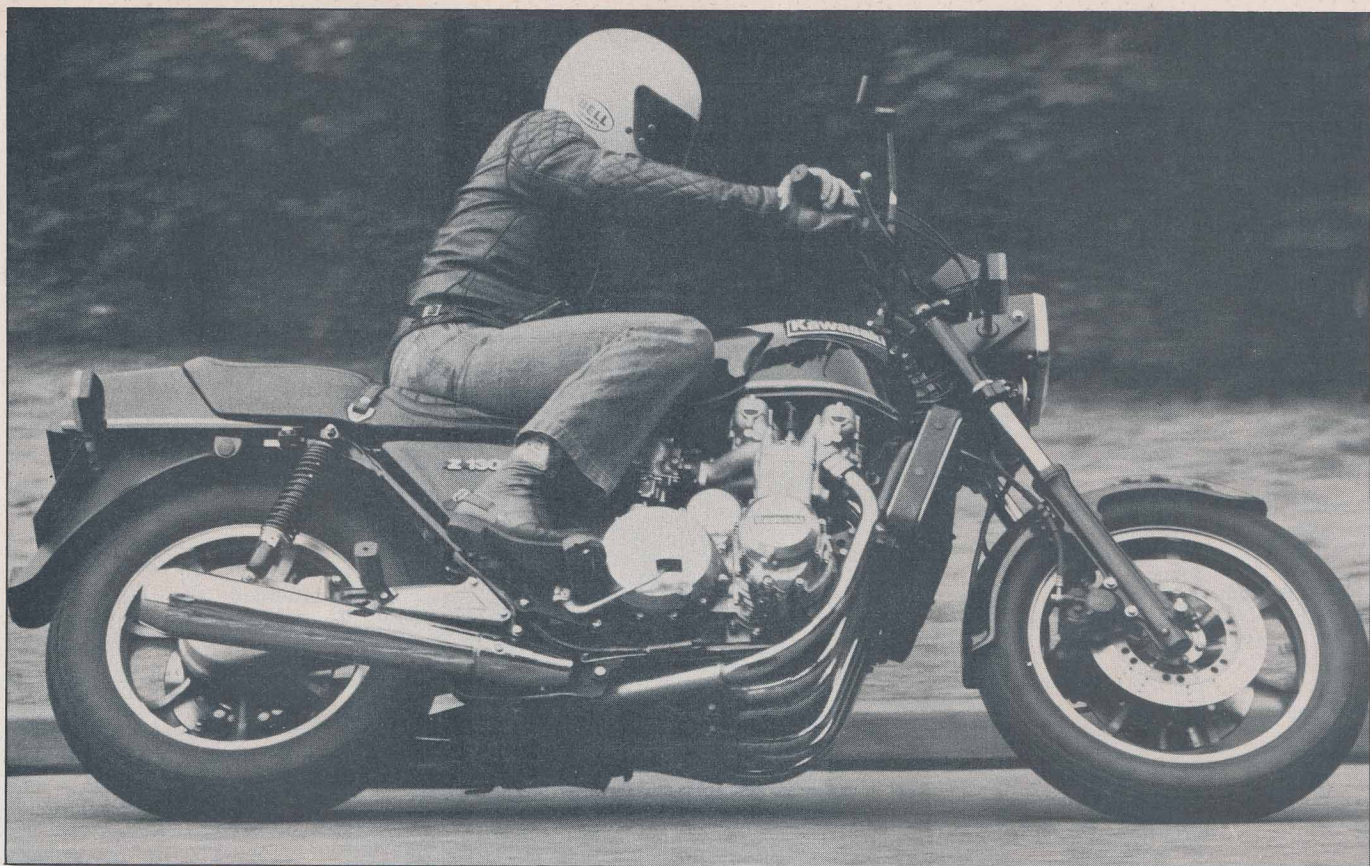
It is arguable that a vee-six could have been designed more compactly and with less complexity than the straight six. But a straight six might apparently be a better seller from the showroom floor because of all those pipes jutting from the front of the engine.

It's certainly true that Kawasaki had a width problem with the engine, which is why they resorted to liquid colling, which allows the cylinder bores to be closer together. But although the engine is abnormally wide at over two feet, it is not this that results in the ground clearance problems the bike has.

To provide the surprisingly good handling the Z1300 does undoubtedly have, Kawasaki opted for a massive frame, conventional in layout but substantial in execution. The front fork is massive too with 41mm stanchions and leading-axle sliders which offer exceptional torsional stiffness. At the rear, the swing arm, which on the right hand side contains the drive shaft, is a strong fabrication supported in taper roller bearings.

But the frame tubing has eaten into the space that would have been better used to tuck the exhaust system. As it is, the six pipes run into two collectors under the gearbox which end in two boxes under the swing arm pivot. These exit into the two large diameter silencers. Exhaust sound is a distinctive nasal drone which is





fairly hard by present standards.

For the weight of the bike, suspension is lightly sprung with dual-rate 79/100 lb. per. in. rear springs with high preload that allows the machine to squat under cornering loads. And since the frame is wide and the clearance limited it is easy to grind away the undersides of the silencers and header pipes. Worse still, the main stand has projections which also catch under hard cornering.

Were you to be so unlucky as to lift the rear wheel under such conditions it's more than likely that the result would be a write-off for the bike. Like the CBX, the Z1300 is wide and vulnerable, more so since the offside crankshaft-end drives the alternator while the left-side operates the novel Lancaster torsional damper, basically two heavy rings sandwiching a rubber ring, which absorbs torsional vibrations racing up

and down the long six-throw, seven bearing crank.

Engine width was further saved by using undersquare cylinders of 62mm bore which with the stroke of 71mm gives 1,286cc. Like the smaller (can you call the Z1000 small?) Kawasaki fours, valve operation is by double-overhead camshafts opening the valves through bucket followers with shims under the cam lobes. The carburetors continue the width saving theme being three special double-choke constant velocity Mikunis with 32mm-diameter bores.

But from there down, the Z1300 engine is like no other Japanese unit for the tortuous path the power takes from the crankshaft to the rear wheel. Primary drive is by two Morse-type chains via a jackshaft to the multiplate clutch and five speed gearbox. Output to the drive shaft and rear wheel is not direct from the layshaft on

the left side but through a quill shaft that runs *inside* the layshaft exiting from the right-hand side through a set of bevel gears.

There are four shock absorbers in the transmission; a coil-spring loaded cam on the jackshaft, a rubber vane damper in the clutch, a Bellville-spring loaded cam on the left hand end of the layshaft and another rubber damper in the rear wheel.

Drive smoothness and the gearchange are both pleasant and vice-free but at the expense of slack in the transmission, which along with a certain amount of lag in the carburetors, means plenty of jerkiness in stop-go traffic.

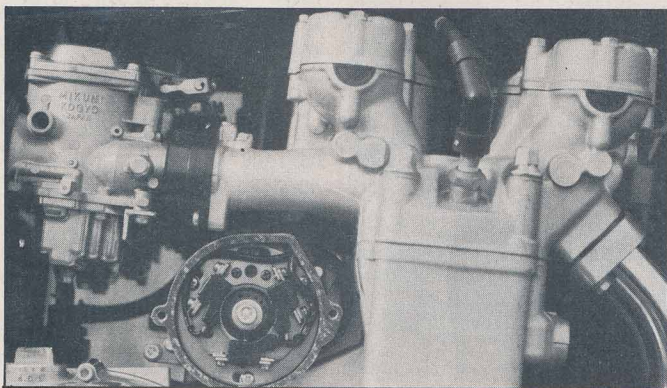
If the convolutions of the transmission aren't enough there's more. The cylinder block casting doesn't just contain the liners. At the rear is another countershaft driven by a roller chain from the jackshaft beneath. In its centre are bevel gears driving a shaft running forward to the front of the cylinder block with the water pump at its front end. Gears on the offside end of the countershaft spin the electronic ignition unit. The camshafts run from a Morse-type chain from the lower jackshaft.

Were you to conclude that this seems a hell of a lot of gear to cram into an engine and that it must have some effect you'd be right. The

back of the engine is very wide and unlike the wasp-waisted CBX the footrests are set at an uncomfortable 25½ inches tip to tip. They're also cluttered with equipment like coolant header tanks and brake master cylinders in addition to being placed inordinately high at nearly 13½ inches from the deck (unladen). The riding position, if you're anything over 5½ feet tall, is therefore cramped enough to make the long-distances the Z1300 is intended for overly uncomfortable.

That's a pity because Kawasaki have gone to great lengths to provide a deeply padded dual seat and a handlebar with exceptionally easy to use finger controls. The dip switch for example is a ring next to the left hand grip that naturally falls under the thumb, as do the buttons for the loud twin horns and the trafficators, which can either be manually or automatically cancelled by flicking a switch.

The Kawasaki Z1300 falls into its rhythm at about 90 mph in top gear and at this speed the suspension all but gives a perfect ride. The front forks are air assisted and the pressure can be varied between 7 and 12 psi to alter the ride height and compliance with varied loads. But at lower speeds the suspension becomes progressively more chattery.





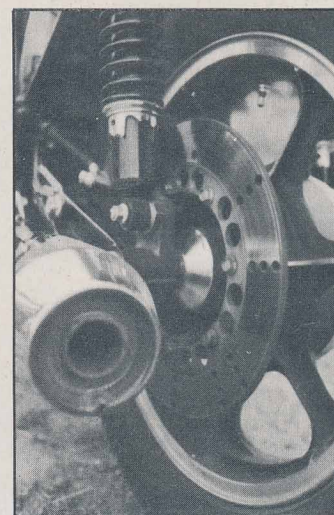
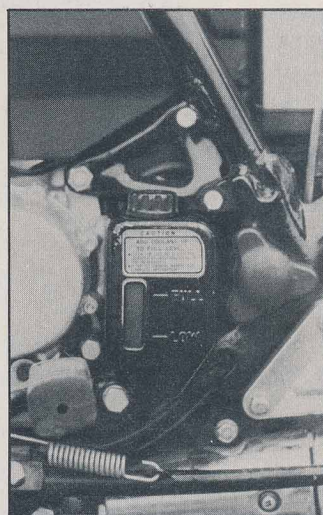
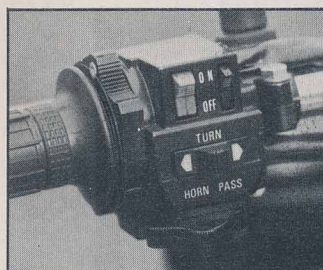
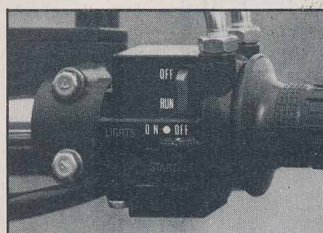
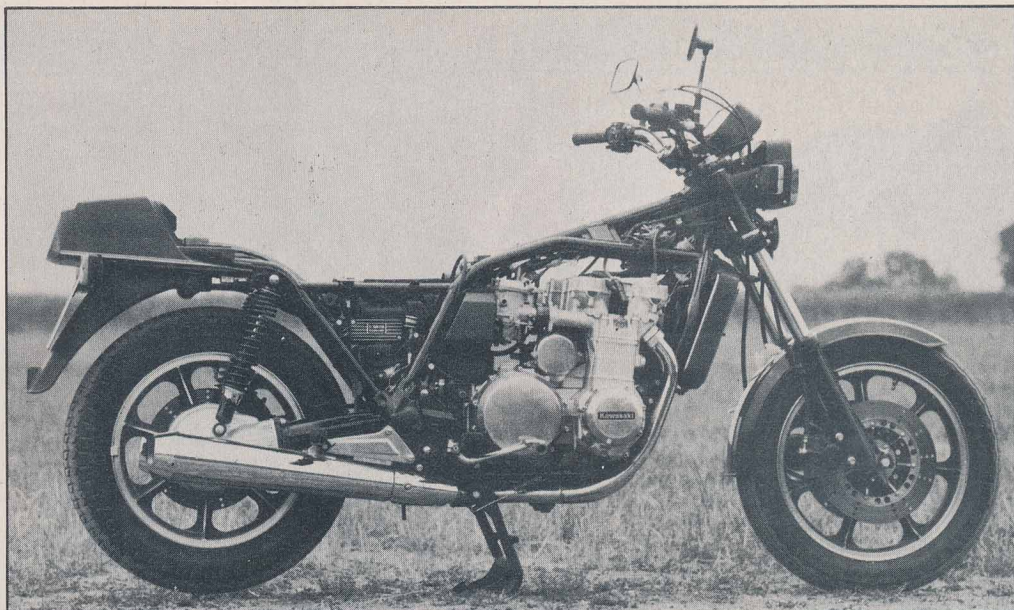
Perhaps the biggest criticism of the Z1300 is that in Kawasaki's bid to get the most power out of the engine they have had to sacrifice the low-end torque. The maximum power is developed at 8,000 rpm, which is also the red line while maximum torque is developed at 6,500 rpm. The maximum torque revs correspond to a top gear speed of 109mph which means that firstly, the engine will invariably be running less economically than it otherwise could (since the lowest specific fuel consumption of the engine corresponds to maximum torque) and secondly, the rideability could be improved if maximum torque was lower in the rev band since the throttle response would be better.

The former feature would then improve the bike's poor fuel consumption of just under 35mpg on three-star (using two-star caused pinking). The Z1300's fuel tank capacity of just under six gallons somewhat overcomes this, but who wants to pay (at time of writing) over £7 every time you fill up?

We can't help thinking that the Z1300 could have been a much better touring machine than it is, if only because there are smoother (yes, the rubber mounted Yamaha XSI100 has much clearer mirror images at 100mph) and lighter machines with similar performance which are also more comfortable. There's no quibbling with the quality of the equipment though. The sintered brakes are beyond reproach, the rectangular headlamp pumps out a powerful beam and the toolkit is smart in its chrome finish.

But whether or nor the bike functions satisfactorily is neither here or there. Fact is that it has six cylinders, looks amazing, sounds amazing and even occasionally surprises people with things like the automatic electric fan for the radiator that invariably cuts in just *after* you've switched the ignition off.

We'll let the final word remain with the girlfriend. She thought it was just fantastic riding on the back. The excitement, acceleration and comfort was second to none said she. Since most of us miserable mortals are no more likely to see one of these bikes let alone ride one, who can argue?



*Despite the Z1300 engine's massive girth, Kawasaki have done well to contain it with a frame of equally striking proportions. The seat is low but the footrests wide and cluttered by the coolant header tank (middle). Detailing is tidy with handy switches (above left) for all their complexity. Magnetic triggers for ignition (opposite page) run from countershaft in the cylinder block.*

