

Which Bike?

SEPTEMBER
60p

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**NO KICKS IN TRIUMPH'S
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250s**

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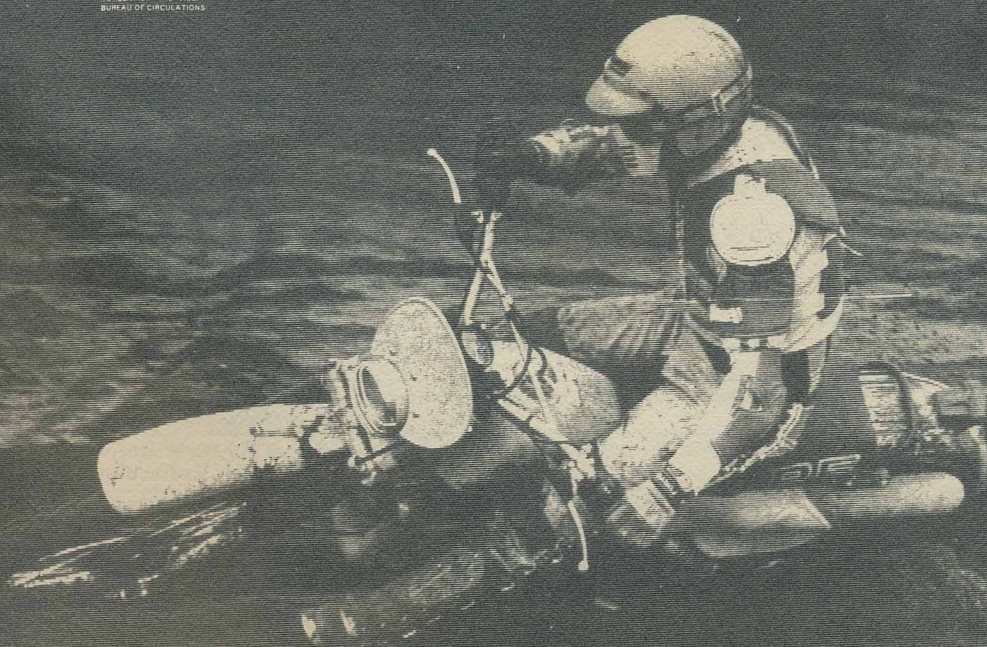
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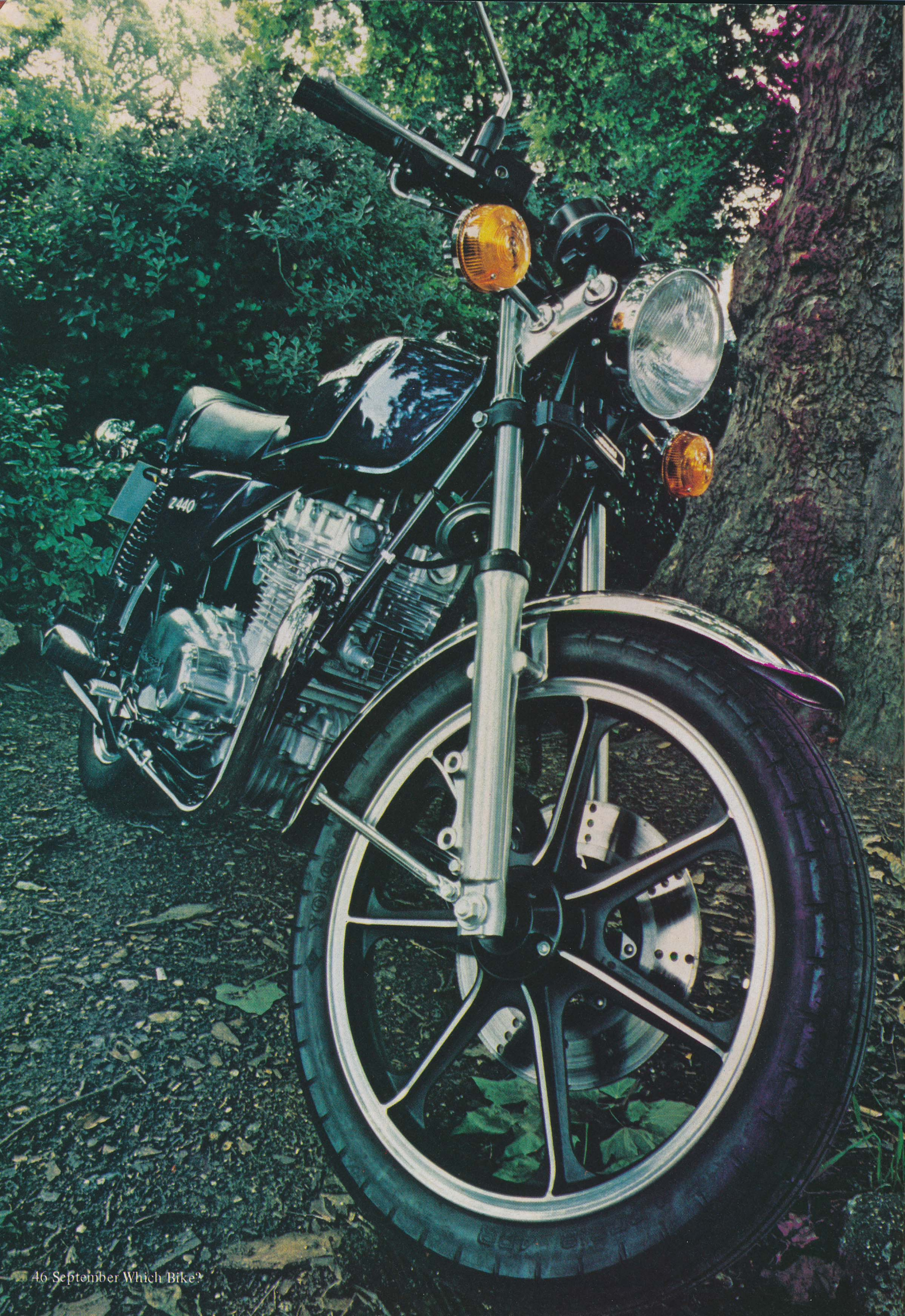
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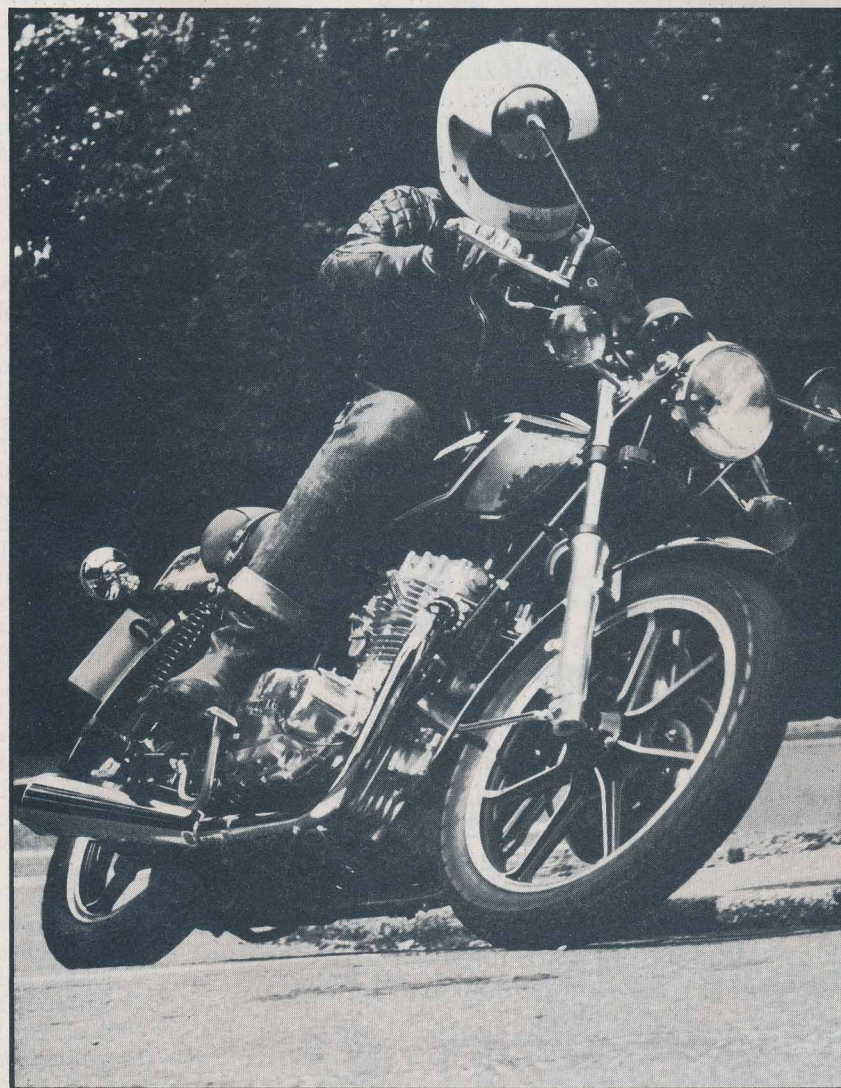
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PLAIN JANE

Don't let the staid looks and modest performance of Kawasaki's Z440C twin allow you to pass it over in favour of more flashy machines: in the long term it's got plenty going for it. Quickspin by John Nutting. Photography by John Perkins.



KAWASAKI Z440C

Bigger is always better when it comes to bike capacities; moreso when the extra cubes come without an increase in weight. And so it is for Kawasaki's middle-of-the-range twins.

This year, the Z400G gets a bigger brother to fight off the marketplace bullies from the rest of the Japanese factories in the form of the Z440C. And though the bike still looks much the same, the extra poke lets the bike more than amply hold its own in the company of Honda CB400N Superdreams, the GS450 Suzukis and custom XS400 Yamahas.

All the same, the Kawasaki remains much the same sort of bike: unpretentious and conservative. It's a sensible bike with practical features and hardly the sort of machine to stand out for its looks. Many, even myself have called the bike boring in the past, but that's only a natural reaction when being fed a diet of more exotic equipment. Given time, the solid reliability of the Kawasaki twin begins to overshadow the lack of surface glitter.

The main appeal of the Z440C's extra capacity is in its provision of better torque at low revs. This gives more lively throttle response and makes the bike easier to ride. For example, pulling away from a standstill, even with a passenger, is relaxed because the clutch lever action is ultra light and the motor will pull adequately from under 2,000rpm. So with a red line of 9,000rpm and six gears to play with the bike has ample flexibility.

Wisely, Kawasaki haven't taken advantage of the Z440C's top-end power improvement to give a higher top speed with raised gearing. Top speed is given boost to about 100mph by the fatter power curve but this is a mere pleasant side effect of the extra power: where it counts, and that's in the 30mph to 80mph speed ranges, the bike is vastly improved. Cruising at the legal limit is easy and even 85mph can be held without trouble.

Unfortunately, the less appealing character of the Z440C makes itself obvious when you start using the extra performance, and this is mainly because the engine design is virtually unchanged.

The motor is a vertical twin with the pistons reciprocating in unison. Normally this would result in unacceptable vibration, so Kawasaki designed the unit with a pair of bobweights in front of and behind the crankshaft that are supposed to cancel out the horizontal component of the vibration. Unfortunately, the system doesn't work as well as the gear-driven balance shaft used on the Suzuki GS450 twin and vibration becomes annoying when you rev the engine hard. There's a particularly acute vibration period at about 65mph in top gear that buzzes the footrests, handlebar grips and rear-view mirrors.

It's surprising that Kawasaki haven't improved this aspect of the Z440 because in many ways, the bike is pretty sophisticated. Like the 400 it has a single overhead camshaft, this year driven by a inverted-tooth cam chain with automatic tensioning. The extra capacity of the bigger motor is achieved simply by opening up the bore sizes from 64mm to 67.5mm which with the same 62mm stroke ups the capacity from 398cc to 443cc. Breathing is also enhanced by increasing the bore sizes of the constant-vacuum Keihin carburetors from 32mm to 36mm. Maximum power is boosted from 36bhp to 41bhp at the same revs, 8,500rpm while the maximum torque is increased from 23.7 to 26lb-ft at 7,000rpm. ▽

The rest of the engine is unchanged. Like the cam chain the primary drive is by a Morse-type chain to the wet clutch and six speed gearbox. But then it's just as well. Because like the rest of the bike it's very easy to work on. There's only one contact breaker for both cylinders to adjust and all the items needing regular attention are readily accessible.

The healthy-looking 12-amp-hour battery spins the starter motor for quick firing up every morning though access to the battery fillers requires its removal. One annoyance of the starting ritual was than an optimum position for the carb-mounted choke lever had to be found otherwise the engine would quickly bog if full choke was used. Once the engine was warm it would return to a regular 1,000rpm tickover, even after a long motorway blast.

The Z440C's chassis is almost identical to the Z400G's. It uses a simple duplex frame into which the engine slots with easily accessible mounts for quick engine removal, should that unlikely task be required. You won't find any smart features in the suspension with a conventional telescopic fork and preload-adjustable rear dampers. We weren't very impressed with the finish on the frame though: the paint looked as if it had been half-heartedly aerosol sprayed ten seconds before knock-off time on Friday night with an overall roughness only broken by the several paint runs.

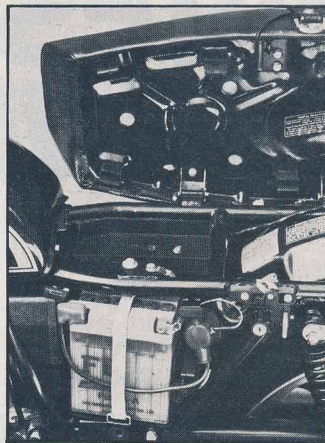
With a wheelbase of 53.7 inches, the Z440C offers just about the minimum size for really adequate room for a rider and passenger. The riding position is roomy with an average height handlebar and low footrests that could only be criticised by the sportier rider. The springing is soft so along with the ample seat the bike offers good comfort.

Despite the softness of the suspension, the Z440C handles fairly well. The damping, so long as you don't push the bike too hard into bumpy corners, copes just fine. The steering is very light though, and while this makes the bike very easy to control in dense city traffic, in combination with the soft front end it affected the feel of the bike under braking. This is because the steering geometry (63 degree head angle and 3.9 inches of trail) changes dramatically when the weight pitches forward. The front springs are soft enough to allow much of their travel to be used up by just sitting on the bike, so there's not much left for soaking up bumps and maintaining stable steering when pulling up.

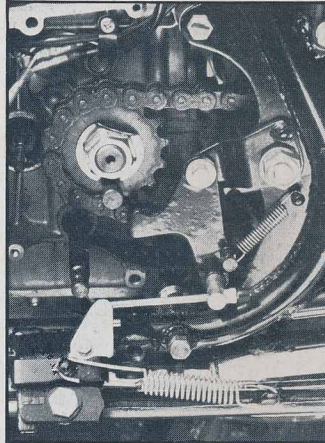
Tyres are Yokohama, 300-18 front and 350-18 rear fitted to seven-spoke cast-alloy wheels, and provide more than sufficient traction to satisfy all but the most critical hot-shoe riders. The cornering clearance, particularly on the left because of the centre stand projection, won't let you reach the tyres' limits anyway.

Kawasaki are now well known for their lead in brake design with stainless-steel front disc stoppers using sintered-alloy pads in the calipers, and like the other Kawas we've tested the Z440C's brake works well wet or dry. Following the latest fashion for 'practical' (and no less welcome for it) rear brakes, the bike uses a 6.3 inch drum that's as ample in feel as it is in power for safe emergency stops.

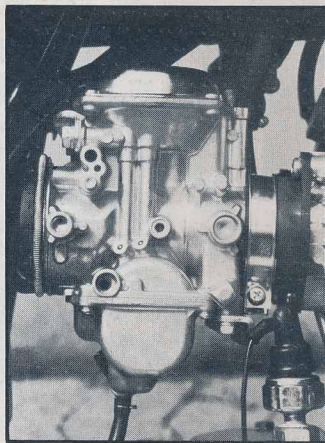
Another safety feature is the self-retracting side-stand. There's a small projection on the final drive engine sprocket that knocks a linkage connected to the stand. So if the bike is moved with the stand down it's automatically



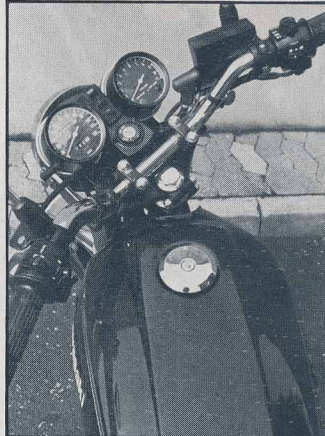
Twelve-amp-hour battery needs removal for topping up with distilled water.



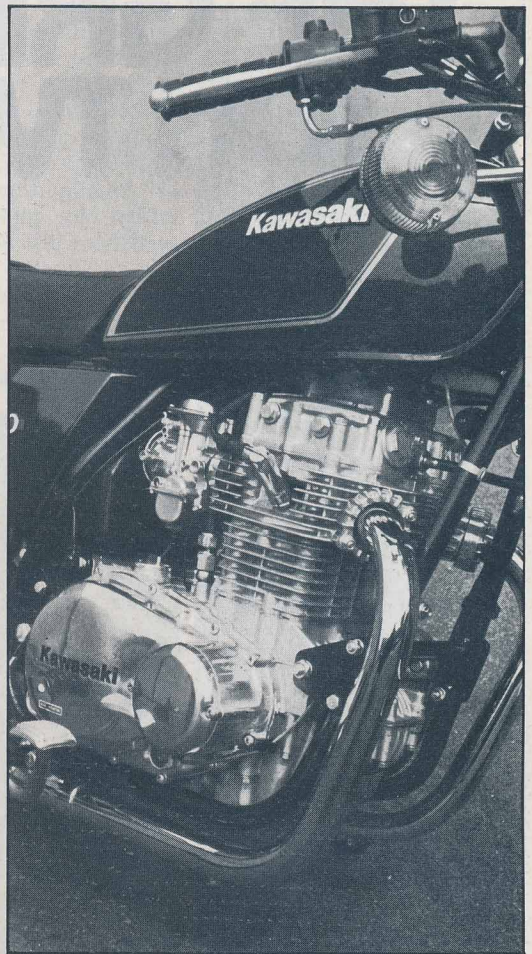
This is the mechanism that retracts the prop stand automatically: a real safety feature.



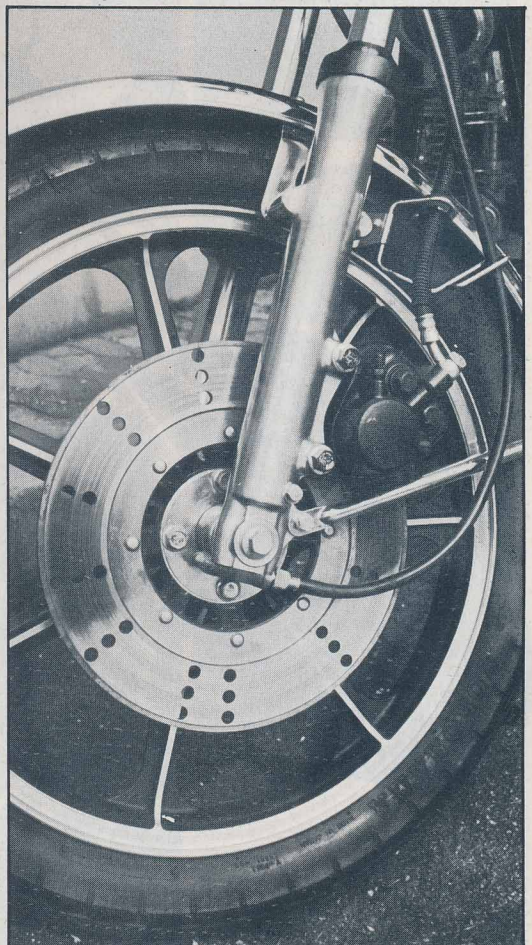
Larger 36mm-choke Mikuni constant-vacuum carbs have no visible adjustments.



Modest instrumentation includes a stop lamp repeater in rev counter face.



Rugged-looking engine is simple to look after with a single contact breaker and self-adjusting cam chain. Rocker caps could almost be vintage Triumph!



This is a disc brake that works in rain. It's done by using sintered metal pads on a stainless disc. Holes stop squealing say Kawasaki - we'll take their word.

KAWASAKI Z440C

PLAIN JANE

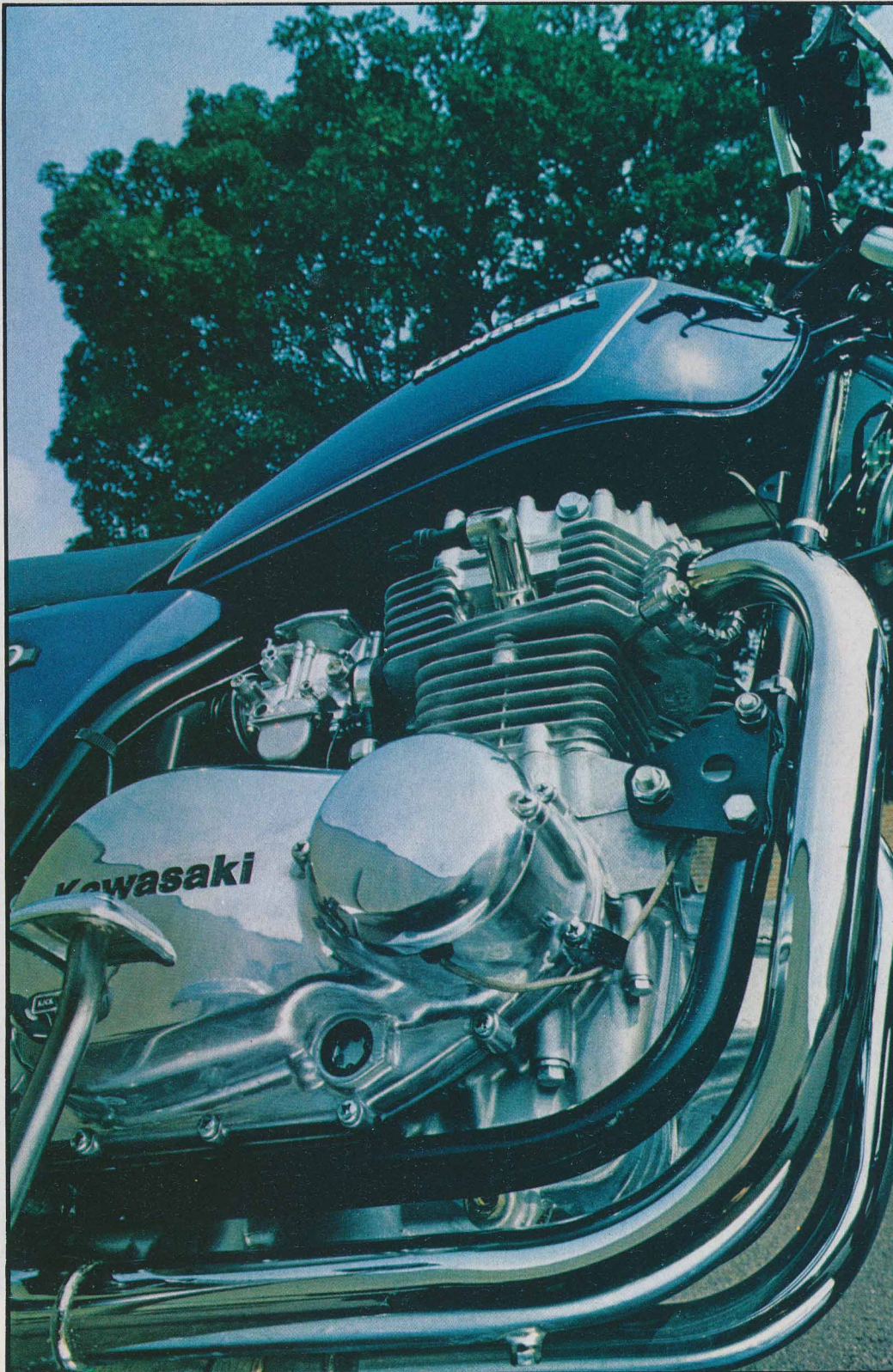
◁kicked up. It's a complicated-looking system but no less useful: after all, sooner or later we occasionally forget and the results could be nasty.

On bikes where the selling price is critical one of the first pieces of equipment to pared for cost saving is the lighting. So it's not surprising that the Z440C's 35/35-watt headlamp is of only average power. We'd prefer to have cheaper wire wheels in exchange for a halogen headlamp though.

Kawasaki's stretched middle-range twin makes a sensible step up for the 250cc rider wanting more performance but without extra

running costs. The Z440 will return 60mpg with ease and with more comfort than most two-fifties can offer.

Only the list price presents a hurdle, for £1,049 puts the Kawasaki alongside the more stylish CB400N. That's over £50 to £150 more than comparable 'cooking' four-hundreds. No doubt once the Z400 twins being sold off by dealers for as little as £709 on the road have run out then the price of the 440 will be cut. Then the bike will become an economic and appealing, if unassuming, Plain Jane alternative to the sporting Z400J four.



KAWASAKI Z440C

Price inc VAT:	£1,049
Warranty:	12 months/ unlimited mileage
Engine:	Ohc parallel twin with balancers.
Capacity:	443cc (67.5 x 62mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp. ratio:	9.2 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 36mm Keihin CV
Ignition:	Contact breaker and coil
Max power:	41bhp @ 8,500rpm
Max torque:	26lb-ft @ 7,000rpm
Electrics:	12v 12ah battery, Alternator, 35/35 w head- lamp
Primary drive:	Inverted-tooth chain
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six speed
Final drive:	530 chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	11.5 in top
Fuel capacity:	3.1 gallons
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos. spring preload adj (r).
Brakes:	10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in disc (f) 6.3in drum (r)
Tyres:	Yokohama 300S18 (f) 350S18 (r) on cast alloy wheels.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	53.7inches
Seat height:	31.5 inches
H-bar width:	29 inches
Grnd clrnce:	6 inches
Rake/trail:	63deg/3.9inches
Dry weight:	365lbs

EQUIPMENT

Mirrors, elec starter, 120mph speedo, 11,000rpm rev counter, brake light warning lamp, trip meter, vacuum fuel tap, headlamp flasher, locking fuel tap, helmet lock, steering lock, toolkit, self retracting prop stand.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed:	100mph
Speeds in gears at max. power:	34mph, 49mph, 65mph, 78mph, 89mph and 97mph
St. ¼-mile:	15 secs
0-to-60mph:	7.0 secs
Av fuel consumption:	58.4 mpg
Speedo correc- tion @ 60mph:	n/a
Tank range:	170-190 miles
Importer:	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd., 748 Deal Ave., Slough Trading Estate, Berks.

Now here's a view of the Z440C you won't see very often. It accentuates the motor's raw and rugged engineering (it says 'ere) and what's more, it even looks good. Just goes to show what a snapper like Perkins can achieve.