

ARM CHAIR ROCKET SHIP

Kawasaki's latest 1100 shaft combines blistering speed with super suspension. So why's it a pain in the legs? *Allan Sayers* took time out from selling ads and riding his Gold Wing to test the bike. Photography by *Ian Dobbie*.

Let's say you've passed through the phases of enjoying sewing-machine two-strokes, good ol' Brit bikes, sporty Italian romances and multi-cylindereed Japanese speed. You want to settle down to a solid luxurious tourer with trouble-free shaft drive, but still want a bike with guts. Sort of oomph with comfort.

Up to now, that need was difficult to satisfy because most of the luxury tourers had too little get-up-and-go and the sports bikes were short-changed in the suspension department. Kawasaki has now come up with a bike that offers the best of both worlds.

The Z1100A has shaft drive, a smooth rubber-mounted four-cylinder dohc engine with only slightly less power than Kawasaki's new sports Z1100GP fuel-injected four and, best of all, fully adjustable pneumatic suspension front and rear. The riding position is laid back, armchair style, the handlebar is wide and droopy and the seat low and broad.

Yet with all the home comforts, here's a bike that can top 130mph, scorch through the quarter in the high 11s and peel back your eyelids just by opening up in top gear. And it looks a sleeper, too: you won't find any understated matt black

KAWASAKI Z1100A

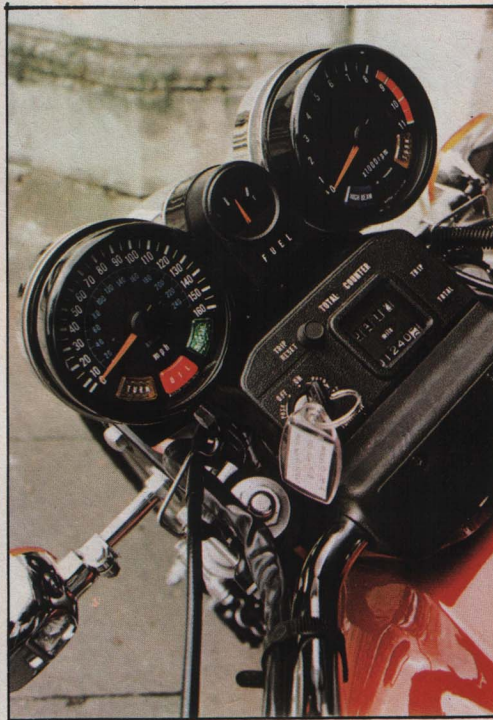




Order what you want on the Z1100B Kawasaki, you get it: shaft drive, air suspension, self-cancelling turn signals, the lot. And it's blazingly fast too.



Big fuel tank is deceptive. Nominal capacity is over 4½ gallons but the most we could squeeze into it was four.



Press button reset for trip meter is an invitation for any kid but rest of instrumentation is easy on the eye and hands.

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here. Paintwork is metallic maroon with gold lining, right down to the mudguards and their generous fluting, and there's plenty of chrome. It's a real sparkler and turns heads.

ENGINEERING

The Z1100A is derived in part from last year's Z1000ST shaft but that does the new bike scant justice. Like all this year's Kawas, the 1100 benefits from a weight-saving programme that cuts the weight by 20lb to 542lb dry. It uses an engine very similar to the Z1100GP's with a capacity of 1,089cc, but which is fed by a quartet of light-action 34mm Mikuni

constant vacuum carburetors. Softer cams and a compression ratio of 8.9:1 broaden the tractability but still give maximum power of 100bhp at a modest 8,000 rpm. Unlike the chain-drive Kawasakis that require a solid rear engine mount to complement the front rubber supports and maintain some degree of rigidity to save the chain, the Z1100A has an additional set of rubber bushes above the gearbox that isolates the engine vibration and makes the bike as smooth as Yamaha's XS1100, or dare I say it, the Honda Gold Wing.


Suspension is what you'd expect of a big tourer. The

leading-axle telescopic fork has an air valve and its legs are connected by a link just above the bottom triple clamp. The rear shocks are also air sprung and connected to a single valve under the seat and have the further refinement of four-way rebound damping adjustment. It's the suspension that should've found its way onto the Z1300 six last year. Which brings us to an interesting comparison, because the Z1100A proved to be more flexible, lighter and more comfortable to ride than the six.

Other new developments include brighter and easier to use switchgear, electrically



KAWASAKI Z1100A



operated speedo and a rev counter which incidentally has a red line that lights up at night. Illumination is provided by an ample quartz-halogen headlamp and a rear lamp (the most talked-about part of the bike) with a dark grey lens that shines red when it's on.

But the first thing to strike you about the bike is its apparent compactness. Without the side panels to give the game away, you could mistake the 1100 for a 750 or even a 550 from side-on across a street. Some of this is because of the fat but small diameter 16in rear wheel with its 130/90 tyre (that's just over 5.1in wide for the Brit fans). The engine

layout is uncluttered, even roomy, and nothing like the more cramped engine room of the Yamaha 1100.

RIDING IMPRESSIONS

Getting on the machine for the first time outside the London office reminded me of a visit to the dentist — lying back with your feet in the air. But instead of gripping the armrest I was tearing down Rathbone Place, struggling to keep my feet on the footrests and my bum from sliding off the back. This bike is definitely fast.

Flicking the choke lever (it's really a mixture richener 'cos it doesn't work like a choke on older bikes) on the left side of the carbs made cold starting easy on the button, but it was necessary to run on full choke for a minute or so before moving off on half-choke.

Riding in London on a big bike means often losing out to tiddlers in the jams — but not on the Kawasaki. With the wide handlebar it was a bit like trials riding. The engine was untemperamental and the twistgrip

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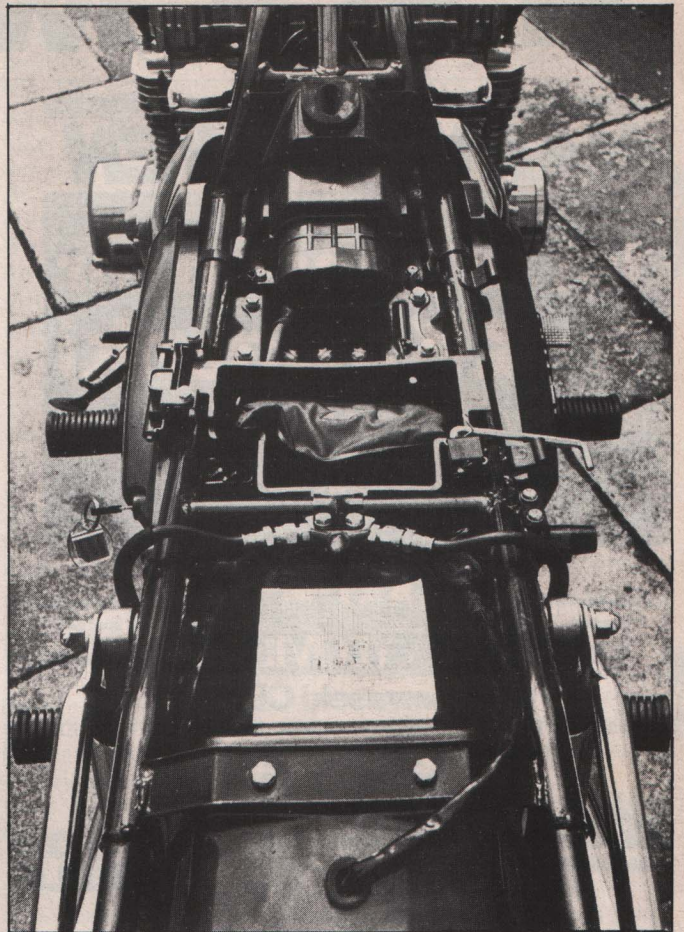
action light, like the clutch, which made feeding between cars a doddle, even round those notorious Rover 3.5 door mirrors that seem set just right to catch the end of your levers. Pillion passengers seemed to enjoy the ride but all complained about the grab rail that dug into the base of your spine. This was especially bad on long trips.

I'd intended taking the bike to the south of France but without enough days to spare it meant a trip to Norfolk to visit relatives and see some club races at Snetterton. The weather was mild that Saturday so I left the thermals at home, the stuffa bag was strapped to the rear lamp, and Liz rode shotgun, keeping an eye on the speedo and occasionally reminding me of her presence with

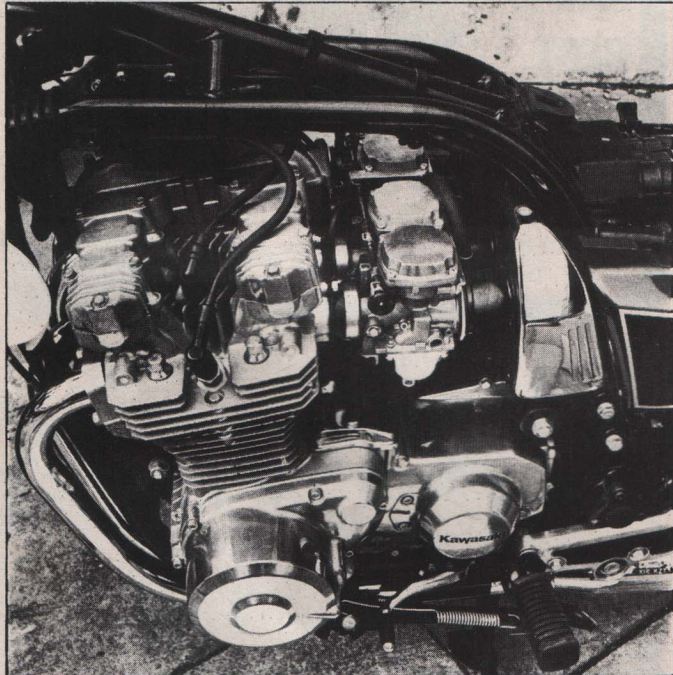
screams and jabs in the kidneys.

COMFORT

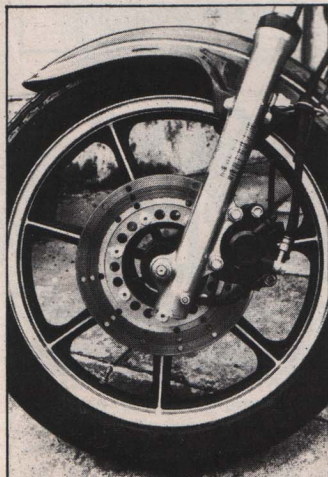
First stop was on that most boring of roads, the M11, to help a rider with a dud battery on his 350 Yam. So after pushing the bike several times I wasn't aware that it was getting colder. (Talking of stops, the Z1100, like all the new Kawasakis, is one of the best, with big perforated discs up front using metallic pads with good power and feel. There's a single disc at the rear that's got to be one of the best on a modern bike: smooth, powerful and free from locking.) It got progressively colder as we cruised the motorway at a steady 70 to 80 and I started to realise that I couldn't get



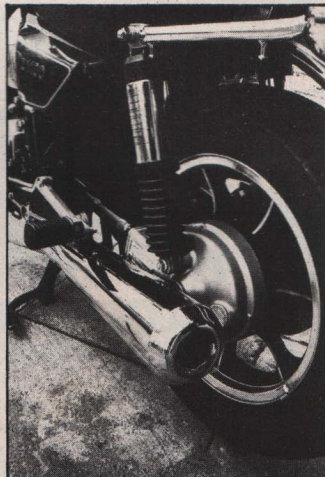
Air lines for rear units are linked, but unfortunately there's no pump in the toolkit.



New cam covers don't have rubber bungs in the ends. Rear rubber engine mount can be seen under air filter box.



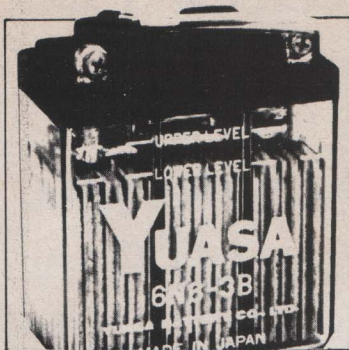
Lightweight discs and sintered pads really stop this big cruiser.



Air shocks, fat rear tyre and shaft-drive combine to give a smooth ride.



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myself into a comfortable position. I thought at first it was the cold, but gradually realised that, as supplied, the bike is somewhat ill-thought out for high speed cruising, an opinion echoed by the other *Which Bike?* staffers. With the footrests set far forward and the seat being so soft and low, there's a lot of muscle strain just keeping your feet on something solid.

Altering the handlebar wouldn't help, neither would raising the seat (which would only bring us back to the awfully high seat on the old Z1000ST). Rick Kemp suggested that the easiest way to make the bike comfortable to ride at the speeds it's easily capable of (90-plus fully loaded, if you can find the road) is to fit it with a frame-mounted fairing. That may have been the original plan by Kawasaki anyway, for in America the importer has a more vigorous attitude to selling accessories.

If you don't like fairings, then you'll have to live with sore thighs and tell your friends you're limping for... er... some other reason. On our trip, though, the first hassle was relieved by stopping at the first village and buying two sweaters so we

could warm up, and then adopting a more aggressive riding style with more weight on my feet.

Another trouble, which was common to the Z1000ST too, was the width of the footrests. They didn't ground on corners, or anything like that (there was much more to touch down than the rests, anyway), but the width of the gearbox caused by the addition of the shaft drive unit pushed your feet into unnatural positions which were cluttered by bits of equipment like the ends of the swing arm pivot spindles.

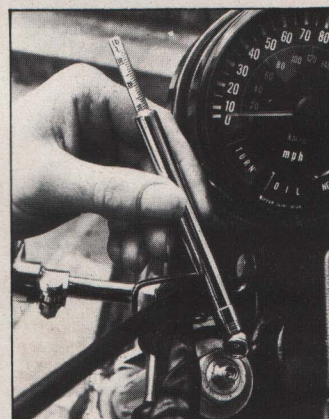
Gearchange action for the five-speed box was as good as you could expect, except that the gear lever itself was curled to clear the new automatic side stand mechanism. This meant you were toeing the lever arm most of the time, making changing often awkward.

PERFORMANCE

About the time I was getting used to the riding position we met a guy on a Honda CB900 who decided he was going to have me breathe his exhaust on the next straight. The Kawa left him standing and continued to pull ahead on the following left-hander. ▶



All the linkages are dealt with neatly, the hose running across under the headlight balances the air fork.



Pressure gauge is provided – it's also suitable for tyres.



Centre stand lock is very effective – this bike won't get wheeled away.

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Low down power is a lot stronger than on my own Gold Wing 1100 and as the Kawasaki is chasing a similar sort of rider, it's worth comparing the two bikes.

With a top speed of about 130mph, the Kawa's certainly got the edge on top end, but it's the Z1100's mid-range power that's so much better.

Because of the width of the handlebar, everybody who rode the bike said they felt remote from the steering at low speeds. It's not fair to blame the suspension, which gave a good ride, but it doesn't seem as smooth as the Gold Wing's.

After bedding down in a pub at Attleborough, Sunday morning brought rain and a wet ride to Snet, but the Kawasaki's Dunlop Gold Seal tyres gripped well.

The Z1100 makes a good basis for a touring bike and its power can provide thrills just when you need them. Over long distances it would be better for having a fairing. And we would suggest that Kawasaki sorts out the fuel tank, or its gauge, because although it claims it'll take 4.7 gallons, I always felt I was flirting with an empty tank with the needle on the stop. Yet it never took more than four gallons, an annoyance when the bike drinks gas at just under 40 to the gallon.

CONCLUSIONS

Kawasaki obviously feels this is an attractive motorcycle and I'm inclined to agree. To show it, they've provided a centre stand lock in addition to the steering lock. The lock body is mounted on the left side footrest support and, though it would appear to be vulnerable, it's not possible to break the lock because you can't get enough momentum when you try to push the bike off the stand.

Compared to the prices of some other tourers, the Z1100A's RRP of £2,368 looks pretty good. But if demand for the Z1000ST is any guide (last year's models go for well under two grand and year-old models are worth little more than £1,300), then you might find better deals with that.

Certainly, the Z1100A is Kawasaki's best touring bike to date.

Model:	Kawasaki Z1100A
Price inc VAT:	£2368
Warranty:	12mth/warranty
ENGINE	
Type:	Dohc four
Capacity:	1,089cc (72.5x66mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp. ratio:	8.9:1
Carburation:	Four 34mm Mikuni CV
Ignition:	Pointless inductive
Max. power:	100bhp @ 8,000rpm
Max. torque:	70.9lb-ft @ 6,500rpm
TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive:	Helical gears
Clutch:	Wet multi-plate
Gearbox:	Five-speed
Final drive:	Shaft and bevels
Overall ratios:	11.2, 7.8, 6.1, 5.0 and 4.4:1
ELECTRICS	
Power source:	3-ph alternator
Battery:	12V 18Ah
Headlamp:	12V 60/55W quartz
CHASSIS	
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension (f):	Pneumatic leading-axle telescopic fork
(r):	Swing arm with dual adjustable air shocks.
Brakes:	Dual 10.7in discs (f) Single 10.7in disc (r)
Tyres:	Dunlop tubeless 3.50V 19E8 (f) 130/90V 16 K427 (r)
CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank:	4.7gal
Oil:	7.8pt
DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase:	60.8in
Seat height:	31.0in
H-bar width:	35.2in
Grnd clnce:	4.9in
Rake/trail:	61deg/4.9in
Dry weight:	542lb
EQUIPMENT	
Electric starter, self-cancelling turn signals, mirrors, trip meter, speedo, rev meter, fuel gauge, hazard lamps, auto side stand, centre stand lock, fuel tank lock, steering lock, seat lock, toolkit.	
PERFORMANCE	
Top speed:	130mph
Speeds in gears at max. power revs:	53mph, 76mph, 97mph, 120mph and 132mph
0-60mph:	4.5s
St.¼-mile:	11.8s
Av. fuel consumption:	39.6mpg
Tank range:	186miles
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