

Kawasaki's UK-only Z250 twin is a bike that's lighter, faster and smoother than its competition. But although the bike is Kawasaki's best seller here it still has to do a lot better to approach the competition in sales success. Can the Z250A3 for 1981 swing the balance? Test by Roger Atyeo. Photography by Ian Dobbie.

BEST OF THE BUNCH

KAWASAKI Z250A3

A quick glance at the *Which Bike?*'s 'New Bike Buyers Guide' may lead you to conclude that there are enough 250s on the market to satisfy everybody's taste. Yamaha's RD250LC figure-head has taken the two-stroke field by storm, while in the four-stroke stakes Honda's Super Dream has taken pride of place on the sales figures table for quite some time. Though Kawasaki has a good choice of models, it hasn't been quite so prominent. However, the importers at Slough are hoping to take a bigger slice of the cake through heavy promotion of

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9,500rpm red line without any signs of discomfort to either the motor or the rider. The smoothness is as much due to the four rubber mounts supporting the engine. Along with a similarly rubber mounted handlebar you can not only comfortably maintain a more brisk pace than the bike's competitors but do so with greater peace of mind, thanks to the better rear-view mirror clarity.

The willingness of the motor to rev is helped by its roller-bearing supported 180-degree crankshaft which, like the GSX250E Suzuki, gives a distinctive off-beat exhaust note. Since there is none of the complexity of balance shafts and the like on the Scorpion, it never seems like it's lugging too much weight.

The motor is housed in a duplex frame of classic dimensions with a wheelbase of 53in. If the 33in seat height seems excessive it's because there's more padding in the seat.

The bike does handle remarkably well though. It steers well on fast or slow corners and feels secure enough for wobble-free high speed antics. The Japanese Dunlop tyres give good road-holding, too, and you can take advantage of the

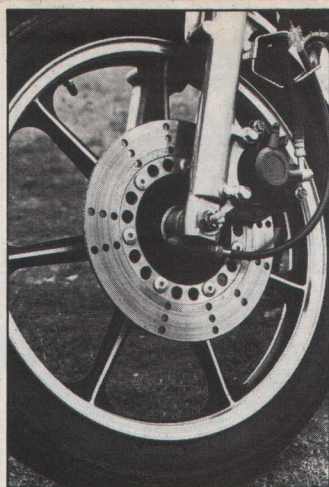


Above: A new bright blue colour scheme, lighter disc brakes and a grab rail for the passenger distinguish the latest Kawasaki Z250 twin. Right: The Kawa is small but effective.

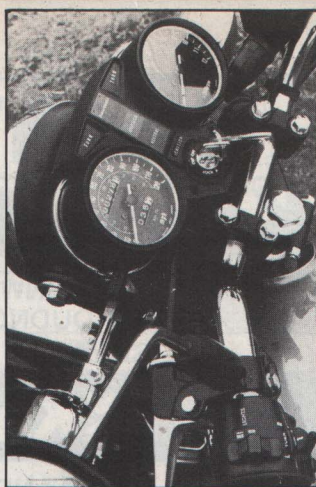
the Scorpion, or Z250A3, which in our experience is the best of the bunch when it comes to function. It may not have the big H on the tank, but it is light, smooth and fast and for 1981 comes with a host of improvements.

The new 250 uses the same single overhead camshaft engine as its predecessor, producing a healthy 27bhp at 10,000rpm, so it's as snappy off the line or as quick at the top end as any of its four-stroke competitors. The beauty of the engine is that it can be revved past its

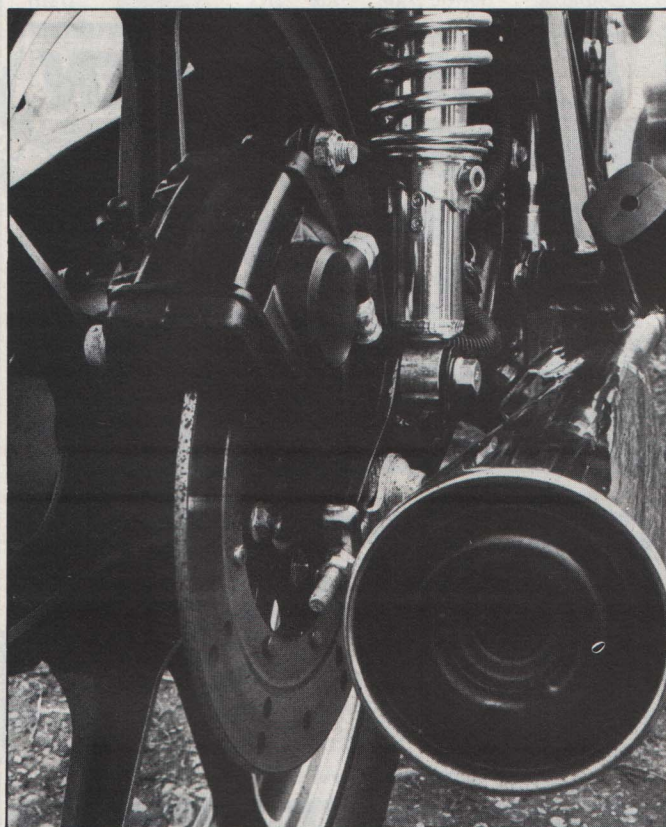




Disc brake rotor is mounted directly on the wheel casting



Steering lock is incorporated in the ignition switch.



High tech rear end for a 250cc twin uses disc brake with dual piston calipers and metallic pads for good wet stops.

cornering clearance enough to prevent scraping of the under-carriage.

Riding position was excellent and the slim lines of the Kawa made for an easy-to-handle mount in all traffic conditions, though the slightly long stretch when sitting up to the flat bars did slightly favour the taller riders.

Though the fashion in rear brakes is back to drums, the Z250A3 still uses a disc. That's because it's rightfully smaller than the front 9in unit and likewise has metallic pads and perforations for good feel and power when wet or dry. As on many of the later Kawasakis the front disc and wheel

assembly is lighter because there's now no carrier for the disc rotor.

Switchgear, controls and general instrumentation held no surprises when compared with the other Kawasakis recently tested. All controls were within easy reach and throttle control was light and responsive, as was the clutch and brake action.

There are several other subtle changes, though the most obvious improvement is in the new colour scheme of royal blue with a contrasting silver flash on the tank and tail. Weight saved by the front disc is made up by the substantial chrome-plated grab rail. Like the 440 we tested last year, the

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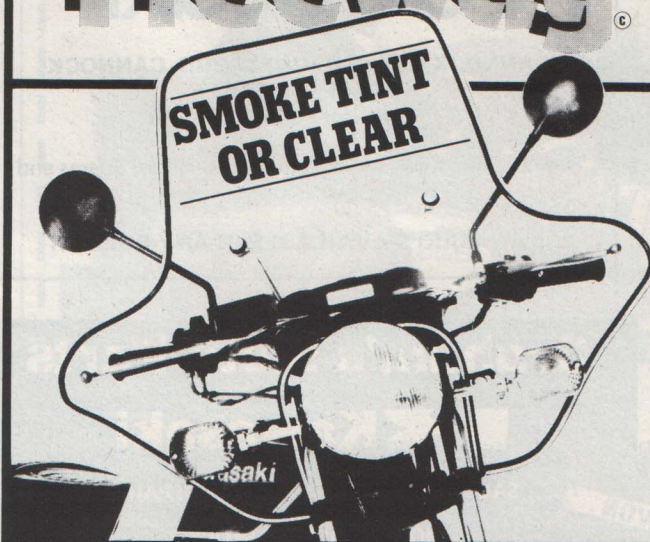
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BEST OF THE BUNCH

KAWASAKI Z250A3

Scorpion has been wisely fitted with a self retracting side stand, the deed being achieved by trip lever on the final drive sprocket. The carburettors are operated by a single cable and in the engine, the new Hy-vo type camshaft chain has an automatic tensioner. The six-speed gearbox also has a positive neutral selector from bottom gear as on the bigger fours.

The performance of the Kawasaki was much the same as its predecessors'. The free-revving motor took the A3 to an indicated top speed of 87mph with a 13st rider clad in an oversuit on board. Unlike on buzzing two-stroke 250s, there's no need to keep the kettle constantly on the boil when flitting through traffic on four-stroke 250. Should you find yourself in the wrong ratio on the Z250A3, there's no need to hit the panic button; any one of three gears can be selected, as they're quite close together. On the open road it cruised quite happily at the legal limit with enough in reserve to make passing manoeuvres with relative ease. Fuel consumption figures are something that many first-time buyers look at very closely - the 250 we had for test was still running-in, with a meagre 352 miles on the clock when collected and a slightly tight motor -- but as we've already said, it revved right to the end and returned a mean 61mpg.

Kawasaki is committed to capturing a larger share of the market in 1981. Last year its marketing boys decided that, in our impoverished times with sales levelling off, what was required to stimulate the market was a cheaply-priced machine that was inexpensive to run and would perform well both in town and on the open road. Hence of the crop of sub-£800 250s from the big four, Kawasaki is currently offering three. In 1981 Kawasaki hopes to push the Super Dream from its pedestal as the top seller and,

in the A3, it may well have the answer. The Scorpion has great handling, good looks and, at £899, it's no more expensive than the rest. Though time will tell, we think it deserves to succeed.

MODEL:	Z250A3
Price inc. VAT:	£899
Warranty:	12 months unlimited miles parts & labour
ENGINE:	
Type:	Ohc twin
Capacity:	248cc (55 x 52.4mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp. ratio:	9.5 to 1
Carburation:	Two 32mm CV Keihin
Ignition:	Coils and cbs
Max. power:	27bhp @ 10,000 rpm
Max. torque:	15lb-ft @ 8,500 rpm
TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six-speed
Final drive:	520 chain
Overall ratios:	22.6, 15.5, 12.2, 10.1, 8.7 and 7.7 to 1
ELECTRICS	
Power source:	Alternator
Battery:	12v 10Ah
Headlamp:	35/35W
CHASSIS	
Frame:	Simple cradle
Suspension, front:	Telescopic fork
rear:	Swing arm with five-pos, spring pre-load adj.
Brakes:	Single 9in disc (f) Single 8.5in disc (r)
Tyres:	Dunlop Gold Seal 3.00S-18 (f) 3.50S-18 (r)
CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank:	3gal
Oil:	0.4gal
DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase:	52.8in
Seat height:	33in
Handlebar width:	29in
Grnd crlncce:	5.6in
Rake/trail:	63deg/3.9in
Dry weight:	336lb
EQUIPMENT	
	Mirrors, electric starter, 120mph speedo, 12,000 rpm rev counter, steering lock, locking seat, trip meter, tools, automatic side stand
PERFORMANCE	
Top speed:	87mph
Speeds in gears at max. power revs:	33mph, 48mph, 60mph, 73mph, 85mph & 95mph
0-60mph:	10.4s
St ¼-mile:	16.8s
Av. fuel consumption:	61mpg
Tank range:	183 miles
Importer/Manufacturer:	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd, Deal Avenue, Trading Estate, Slough SL1 4SH

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