

FULL BODIED PLONK

GREEN OR WHITE, SIR? THEY'RE BOTH QUITE LIVELY, AND TRAVEL WELL ENOUGH IF YOU'VE GOT THE BOTTLE. ROADTASTERS BRECON QUADDY AND JULIAN RYDER FIND LITTLE TO WINE ABOUT



KAWASKI KLR 600 vs YAMAHA XT 600R TENERE

KAWASAKI KLR600

WHY DO so many Japanese motorcycles feel compelled to tell you all about themselves? From those little hints embossed on engine cases, like *Kickstarter*, or *1-N-2-3-4-5*, they've moved on to such compelling pieces of self-description as *Lateral Frame Concept* and even *Liquid Cooled DOHC 4 Valve*. Any factories wishing to turn *Bike's* checkouts into sidepanel stickers please form an orderly queue. Spares prices and dyno charts are optional.

Every morning I'd pull on my meaty Lewis Leathers 600 thumper starting boots and clump down the palace steps to be zapped with *DOHC 4 Valve* in blue and red letters all over the KLR600's huge front mudguard. Since the bike's skyscraper proportions raise said guard almost to eye level, it was hard to ignore. Had the bike been mine I'd have ripped the stickers off but that would still have left *DOHC Liquid Cooled* cast on to the cam cover. Are Kawasaki trying to tell us something?

Oh good heavens, yes. Even without first class honours degrees in plumbing, sign-

writing and putting two and two together, yours truly could see that Big K have spared nothing in their drive to endow the KLR with all the motive power credentials of the fearsome GPz900R roadster. That knowledge, combined with the sight of Kawasaki UK's Alex Dell vainly circulating a car park waiting for a step ladder to allow him to dismount from the 34in-high seat (I exaggerate but slightly), invested me with a sudden urge to abort this test and run screaming to Slough station.

Anyone incautious enough to remark that this thing is 'only a single' while in the presence of

its makers is likely to be taken downstairs and hung by the goolies until well tender. The motor is little short of being the left pot of a GPz900R, cut off and deftly bored and stroked to 564cc. Twin cams operate four large valves above the short-stroke 3.8in diameter piston but size is the only real difference. Both GPz900 and KLR600 feature thermostat-controlled wet liner cooling systems, flat slide carbs and gear driven counterbalance shafts. Not surprisingly, the massive Ninja-lookalike camchain cover on the left side of the single's motor dwarfs its compact bottom end. And



leaves plenty of room for sign-writing (oops).

But wait, there are yet more similarities, notably in the frame, which is again a tubular steel mainframe — although a full cradle in this case — with a bolt-on rear subframe of square section ally. Items like the straight-pull spokes in the wheels, suspension construction and front disc design come, naturally enough, via Kawasaki's off-road competition side.

Much eyeballing by the general public confirmed that the KLR is an eye-catching hunk of motorcycle, although that's probably more due to its size, vivid mean green paint-scheme and blue seat than the overall styling, which is sharp but very much along universal trail bike lines.

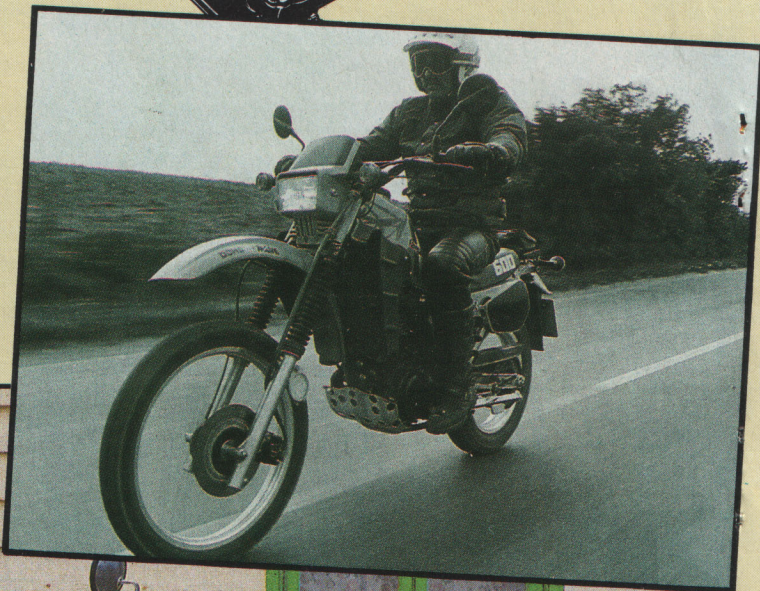
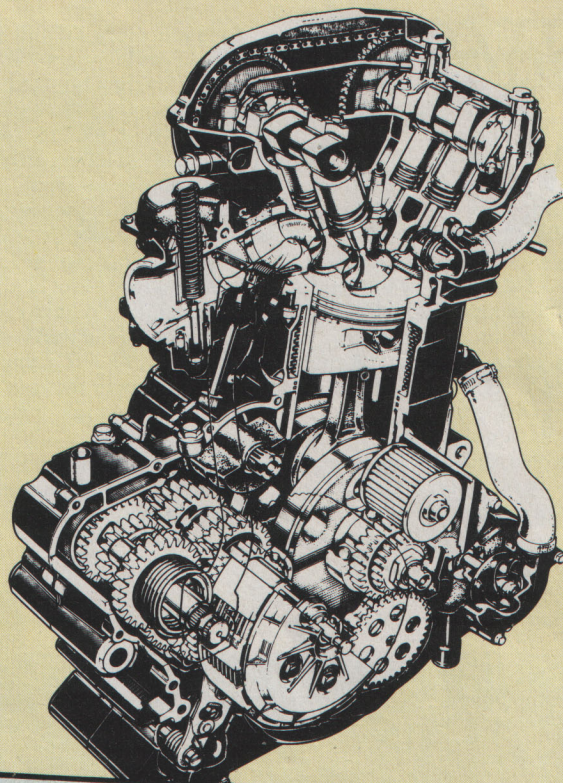
Starting, that time-honoured topic of conversation among big single owners, isn't something the KLR's supposed to be hot on; not since Big Chief 'Broken Toe' Calderwood had a go at it, anyway. Alex said ease the piston just over compression, bring the lever back up, and wallop it. Hot damn, it worked almost every time. Only the business of firing up from cold occasionally took more than three kicks, since the 600 seems to like its choke lever just so depending on ambient temperature and barometric pressure. Or what colour socks

you're wearing.

Credit for this relatively predictable starting is claimed by this year's newest acronym, KRAC (sorry, KACR — must've been thinking of Calderwood's big toe again), which means Kawasaki Automatic Compression Release. It's a small device bolted to the end of the exhaust cam, with two spring-loaded weights and a pin which holds one exhaust valve open for a short time near TDC. When the motor fires up, the weights move apart due to centrifugal force, shifting the pin into a slot in the camshaft where it no longer hits the shim. Probably no more effective than Honda or Yamaha versions which operate from cables linked to their kickstarters, but much neater.

But what of the KLR as a way of seeing the world? Well for a start it's so tall you can usually see four counties without letting the clutch out but once on the move the plot feels so well balanced that riding feels nowhere near as precarious as it must look.

Like the Ténére, the Kawa offers enormous suspension travel — nine inches each end — magically smoothing out almost any road. Yet since it's well damped (too well damped at the rear at the highest rebound setting), it never feels soggy and won't wobble under 95mph. Low speed steering



(especially in the wet when it's not advisable to shove the front down hard) can be a bit jerky but things get better the faster it goes until only lack of trust in the tyres puts a limit on country lane blasting.

It needs to be stable at illegal speeds, too, since the motor doesn't feel full blooded in the KL's high top gear until 75-80mph. That equals almost 6000rpm and the motor feels and sounds uncomfortable at anything less than 45mph in fifth, preferring to stay over 2500 revs even in the lower gears. On the other hand it charges joyously when treated to handfuls of throttle, and in a most un-big-single like fashion to boot. Yet even on fairly, er, hectic rides it'll give over 50mpg, with 60-plus readily obtainable.

The KLR's unwillingness to slog might be a handicap during serious mud-plugging but it hardly matters on the road, especially since the twin counterbalancers do a remarkable job. And since there are no fatiguing vibes to speak of, the KLR can be charged around all day while you play racers with the slick gearbox and, really rather necessary these days, 9.8in front disc.

First time I saw a disc on a trail iron I couldn't help thinking, 'What, on pseudo knobbies?' but the Kawasaki's leverage and bite are cunningly contrived to outperform traditional drums without overwhelming the tyres either on tarmac or dirt. In other words you'll need more room to stop than on a straight roadster but won't have to put up with fading or low-speed grabbiness. That said, the rear s/s drum could be made slightly more powerful.

While I'm going on about the KLR's good points, let's have a big hand for the quality of all the ancillaries. Full 12 volt electrics power an excellent 60/55W headlamp and bright indicators, the latter safely mounted on long rubber stalks. A neat instrument pod houses small but easily read clocks and temp gauge and the large mirrors give a full, almost blur-free at legal speeds, rear view.

It's a shame someone elected to fit two indicator idiot lights instead of using one space for an oil level light, since the helpful designer who included a sight glass below the clutch cover had his work undone by whoever covered it with the rear brake pedal. The small rocker switches for main/dip and the indicators took some getting used to, however, especially the latter which is

easy to over-cancel. And although the single large diameter header on the exhaust doesn't look as trick as the Ténéré's siamesed job, the KLR's system is made from stainless steel so unlike that of any other trail iron it won't start looking like a terminal disease after 1000 miles.

Then there's the tasty alloy propstand, the dinky grab handles over the rear 'guard, that zippered vinyl pouch big enough for a beer and sarnies plus toolkit, and the QD wheels and eccentric chain adjusters. Brill. But that doesn't answer our original question about what it's like to see the world on.

Uncomfortable but lots of fun sounds like the right answer. It's hardly an ace off-roader: too many weekends on rocky mountain trails will make you incredibly fit and an expert on hospital cooking, not to mention rather hard to talk to. On the other hand, too many 400-mile days on the road will likewise give you a backside so petrified that only the sort of spanking an East German lady shot putter can dish out will do the trick on Saturday nights.

Yes, it's a trail bike. Okay, I award myself next year's *Bike* competition prize for noticing.

It looks like a competition motocrosser and believe me, after 100 miles or so, whoever's riding it begins to feel like the bottom of the big jump at Hawkstone Park. The narrow, hard seat is narrow and hard, while the wide bars and low, forward mounted, footrests throw all you weight on to your bum. Touring is best done in short hops with plenty of breaks . . . fine in countries where the pubs stay open all day I guess.

We didn't, surprise, surprise, attempt to stage an assault on the North York Moors or any other handy blasted heath, and for two reasons. Firstly, the growing popularity of these big thumpers as touring bikes seemed to warrant investigation — and I'll sit down and write about it when I can sit down again — plus, trail bashing on 500-600s hasn't produced any new conclusions since the original Yamaha XT500 first chased a tester down a scree slope and tried to maim him. They just aren't with the 175s as mud wrinklers.

But when the off road going's not so serious, say on firm dirt tracks and unmade road (I happen to live up one), the XLR is pure dynamite. Blasting down a loose, crushed rock, track in Dorset during the

photo session, I made the mistake of looking at the speedo. Which said 70mph. Funny, I hadn't been frightened until then. The KLR felt as if it could've gone faster still. Cripes.

For all that, the KLR would still be great for this kind of off-road fun without the suspension travel overkill (and lowering it would make the seat height more reasonable) or the silly MX mudguard which catches trucks' slipstream and makes the bike wobble. But Japan seems to fear that a pure road single, lacking the apparent dual purpose value of a trail iron, wouldn't sell well enough. Not that we'll ever know so long as they only offer miserable sops like the FT500.

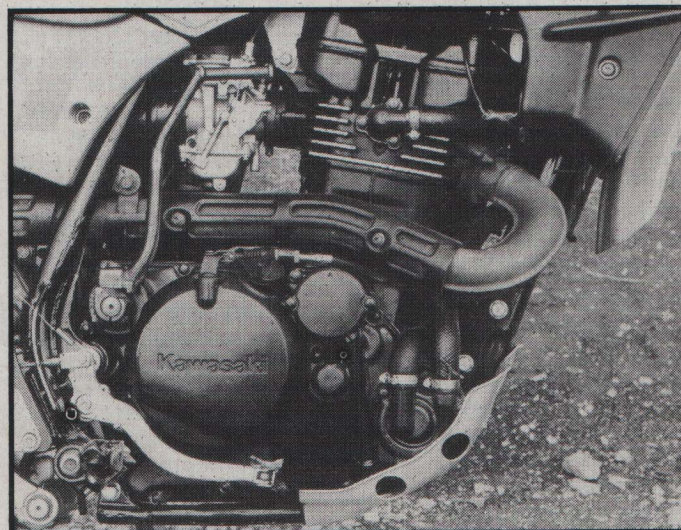
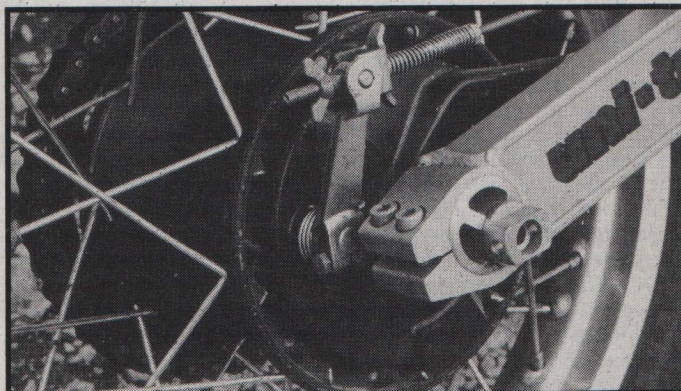
In that case why not reinvent the street scrambler? The key difference here is that a Japanese trail bike, it seems, *must* look like motocrosser, while a street scrambler needn't have a tiny petrol tank, hard seat and eight feet of wheel movement so long as it has slightly lumpy tyres, good steering lock and low weight. I just wanna have a good time, not look like Hakan Carlqvist.

As it is, the KLR's an excellently put together example of its breed but that doesn't mean it's not a real waste of a brilliant — 100mph-plus potential, 80mph cruising, pretty quick, very thump — motor. I for one love thumpers: they make travelling at almost any legal speed more entertaining than doing so on anything else except big V-twins. My (and a lot of other people's) money awaits you, Japan, but only when you scrap this irrational and unreasonable policy of turning trail bikes into Mickey Mouse motocrossers.

Whatever you want, through, the price of the KLR is ridiculous. Only £1699 for the newest, trickiest, best equipped 600cc trail iron around. That makes it £130 less than Yamaha's XT600, £180 cheaper than Honda's XL and a whopping £300 less difficult to acquire than a Ténéré. Not half a bargain I say.

I liked the Ténéré but on price it'd have to be the Kawasaki for me. With the money saved I could fit Pirelli trail tyres (much better on the road than the KLR's), have the seat rebuilt, fit a new front mudguard (there are useful lugs on the fork sliders) and maybe even move the footpegs up and back a little.

But I won't. Just in case Kawasaki produce something that'll save me the bother.



(Top) Rear brake lacked bite but eccentric chain adjuster is a bonus. (Above) A very sophisticated single: note electric fan behind rad, stainless steel exhaust, rather vulnerable-looking water pump at bottom right. Alloy rear subframe has to be unbolted and swung upwards for access to rear shock adjuster

TÉNÉRÉ

ET'S FACE IT.

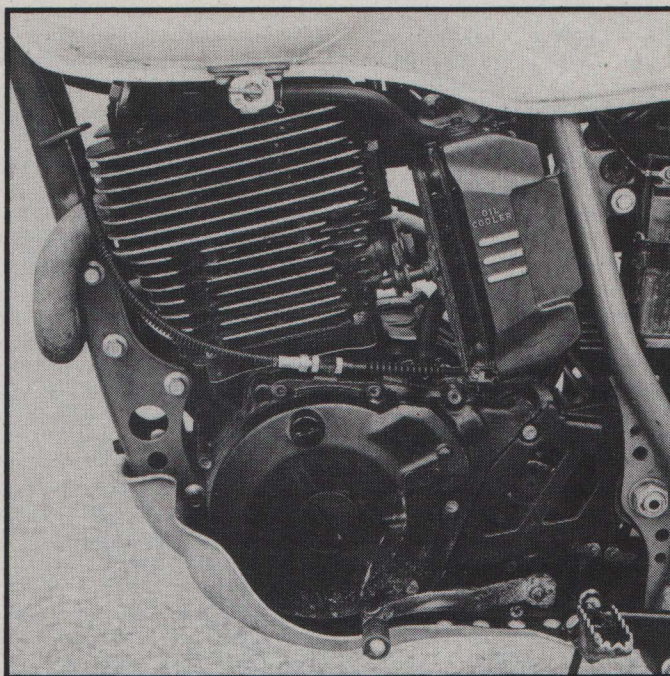
Buying a motorcycle is not

a rational act. Look no further than your local dealer for proof; serried ranks of perfectly good, sensible motorcycles stand untouched while horrendously expensive tyre shredding, petrol guzzling exotica are only PDI'd in time for their new owners to make a guest appearance at the local magistrates court.

It is for this reason that we have to take the Yamaha XT600Z Ténéré seriously. Suspend that disbelief, suppress those giggles and make an effort. A difficult request I admit. After all, a 30 litre — that's 6.6 gallon — tank, 35in seat height and race track paint do stretch the credibility a bit, especially on what the manufacturers insist is a trail bike. There are a variety of reasons why we've got the Ténéré at all, most of them connected with the strange habits of our nearest Continental neighbours. Remember when the Japanese were selling us any number of cylinders we wanted between two and six? Immediately everyone started pining for the good old days of the big single.

So the Japs gave us the SR500 and the FT500, about which the least said the better. Let's just say there was a boom market in secondhand rose-tinted specs. It took trailbikes to keep the big single alive, first the Yamaha XT500, then the Honda XL500. Both grew in time to 600 and sprouted dual-barrel carbs and four-valve heads. Surprisingly a larger percentage of big trailbikes seems to get used on the dirt than the smaller, more off-roadable, two-strokes. That says more about the type of people who buy big singles than the bike. Take a look at our friends the French *motards* again. Their big-single contingent tend to go in for pudding basin helmets and old-age Belstaff jackets, probably with a *nuclear power no thanks* sticker to top it off. Get the picture?

It took the Paris-Dakar extravaganza to spread the word to a wider audience. As is normal in these perverse fringes of motorcycling, the French led the way and as soon as the Ténéré Paris Dakar replica arrived at French dealerships they were out pulling wheelies quicker than you can say Platini. That's the genesis of the Ténéré — a desert racer. Mind you, only an idiot would take a Ténéré off road where the first major get off will punch a hole



Yes, the Yamaha has lots of cast in writing stating the obvious as well; check the oil cooler. Note how the tank makes the plug hard to get at and the rusty pipes

in that megatank. I have to admit to taking the thing off road, but only under severe duress.

The real question is how does the bike shape up as a roadster? Are the large numbers of Europeans you see touring on big trail bikes just masochists or do they know something we don't? The basic attractions of a big single are self-evident; ease of maintenance, theoretically good economy, and a low initial cost. That last point is debatable when you come to the Ténéré.

At over two grand it is not a cheap motorcycle. For around the same money you could have a GSX 550 Suzuki or a Kawasaki Z750L. You won't get noticed by as many people as if you'd bought a Ténéré but you'd get a damn fine bike.

However, what you most definitely get with the Ténéré is presence. It is the only motorcycle I've been able to ride between queues of traffic happy in the knowledge that I'm not going to take someone's wing mirrors off. This is for the simple reason that the bike's sticky-out bits are out a foot above the level of the average car's mirror. People notice the Ténéré; the vast majority of non-motorcycling members of the Great British Public who stopped to ogle it whenever it was stationary thought it looked really good, an opinion shared unanimously by the occupants of this office.

Any motorcycle with that sort of appeal has to be desirable, but the question still remains; are big trailbikes any good as year round transport?

First off, the old big single bugbears of difficult starting and harsh vibration have been well and truly dealt with.

The only time starting was ever a problem was when the bike was really hot. This is par for the course on a big single, but the problem is less pronounced than I remember on previous XTs. The now obligatory balance shaft damps the vibes out very nicely except for a mirror-blurring period around 4500rpm — no problem.

Even fans of earlier big singles — usually rather individualist specimens — had to admit the bikes made better road bikes than trail irons. The modifications from the 550 models make that even truer and the most credit in this department goes to the front disc brake. A good handful of lever gets the tread blocks on the excellent Dunlop squealing and squirming while the massive 41mm diameter front forks twist themselves into knots. Thankfully this behaviour is more interesting than frightening and never threatened to get out of hand.

You will also be totally unsurprised to hear that the whopping ten inches (255mm) of movement at the front and 9.3 inches (235mm) of rising rate Mono Cross at the back make for a beautifully controlled ride that deals happily with anything that British roads, even in their currently decaying state, can come up with. It is worth playing with the damping and preload on the back and the air pressure in the front forks to

ensure that all that suspension travel doesn't translate into weave at motorway cruising speeds.

However, this is complicated by the fact that the fork legs aren't linked. How the hell are you supposed to get the same pressure into each leg when the bike only has a side stand? The left leg's always going to be pressurised. I know how the dirt racers do it, thanks — put the thing on a crate to lift the front wheel off the ground, but I don't usually carry a crate with me. This sort of aggro on a bike costing over two grand is not on. On the positive side, the rear suspension linkages are well protected by rubber gaiters that look as if they were designed for the job, not bunged on as an afterthought, and there are grease nipples to keep the sliding surfaces nice and slippery.

The rest of the changes from the 550 models are also quite dramatic. The motor is now dry sump with the oil tank on the left of the bike partially hidden by the sidepanel. As the whole system only holds 2.4 litres, and there's no oil warning light XT600 owners are advised to make frequent use of the dipstick in the tank. The transition from 550 to 600 comes courtesy of a three-mil bore job and is backed up with a one-mil hike from 26 to 27mm in the choke diameter of the carbs (YDIS for acronym collectors).

The extra poke is most welcome, the 600 can happily cruise at well over 80mph for as long as the rider can stand it and still have a big dose of top-gear power for getting past any mobile thromboses (bloody clots who're always blocking things up). But the most satisfying thing about riding a big single is still the way the motor'll pull away from walking pace with a beautiful crisp, sharp exhaust note and a relaxed feeling of power. The Ténéré does it as well as anything — better than the KLR — and does it feel good. In town or on a nice sweeping A-road you just use the throttle and brakes and forget the gearbox. Very relaxing and quite difficult to adapt to after years of peaky motors: try the handful-of-throttle technique away from the lights and it's instant wheelie time.

There's only one thing that stops the Ténéré being a superb road bike and that's the other old trail bike problem of comfort. Surprisingly that big, luxurious-looking safety seat compresses pretty badly after only 80 miles and gives you the

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dreaded numb bum.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the bars, seat and footrests force an average-sized rider into one position. So you've either got to hustle up the nose of the seat (and do Hakan Carlqvist impersonations) or stretch your legs, sit back and look like a real wally. Pillion passengers also reported minor discomfort due to being trapped in one place. Nothing serious but just enough to make life unpleasant. Primarily for me. A major plus for pillion comfort are the frame mounted footrests, on bolt-on loops. Full marks, too, for the little enduro type rack which lets you carry the usual waterproofs, fags, camera and lock without resorting to throwovers or bungee-cord engineering.

When your comfort is marginal on a bike like the Ténéré, the prevailing weather conditions can make all the difference to enjoying or tolerating the ride and to how long you can bear to stay in the saddle. My annual bumble up to Silverstone for the GP illustrated this quite nicely. On the way up the Ténéré battled into a headwind at 70mph and I was uncomfortable: I think I'd try hacksawing about an inch off either end of the very wide

bars just to let the rider do a slightly less accurate impression of a barn door. On the way back down the M1 in much more favourable conditions the bike creamed along at 80 with no sign of effort and with very little strain on the rider.

When you get off the main roads and motorways and on to tarmac more suited to the Ténéré, you're in for a pleasant surprise. The thing handles better than it has any right to. The tyres adamantly refuse to slide despite the most hamfisted provocation and chassis copes really well.

In fact, only a couple of small problems afflict the Ténéré's road manner. Prime among them is the dual-system's sensitivity. We rode two Ténéré's and the first of them, Mitsui's homologation pre-production model, carburetted cleanly right through the range. The second, although appearing to have more go, had a very odd carburation glitch at 5000rpm. It felt like the first barrel — the slide side — was working fine but the CV side was out of sync with it. Hence if shut you off from just over five grand the engine would find a sudden hiccup of power and pogo forward before deciding the throttle had been shut off after all. The word is that the

YDIS system needs careful setting up, but I have to say this is the first time we've had a problem of this nature on a dual-carb single. The only other nasty was the exhaust system which was sporting a very nice ferric oxide finish after only 4000 miles.

On the subject of the exhaust it makes a nice, muted but throaty duff-duff sort of noise, especially when you crack the throttle open from low revs. It goes just right with the crisp power delivery; tasteful.

Which, I suppose, brings us back to the original question. Does the Ténéré make it as a road bike? The answer has to be yes — as long as you can cope with the attention from the man in the street that comes with riding one, and as long as you can cope with the petrol pump attendant saying, 'I didn't think bikes took that much' every time you put over ten pound's worth of juice in the tank. If you're already a big-single fan you'll love the Ténéré, it's more of what you want. But I'm afraid the price, traditionally the attraction of a single, will limit the number of converts to thumping. I've got to say though, that it's how you feel about a bike that matters and I have to admit that as I duff-duffed back to London in the fading light after a very silly

weekend on a mud-plastered 600Z I felt as good about a motorcycle as it's possible to be. So what if you get a pain in the bum on your yearly run to the sun, what about the enjoyment of everyday riding?

SUMMARY

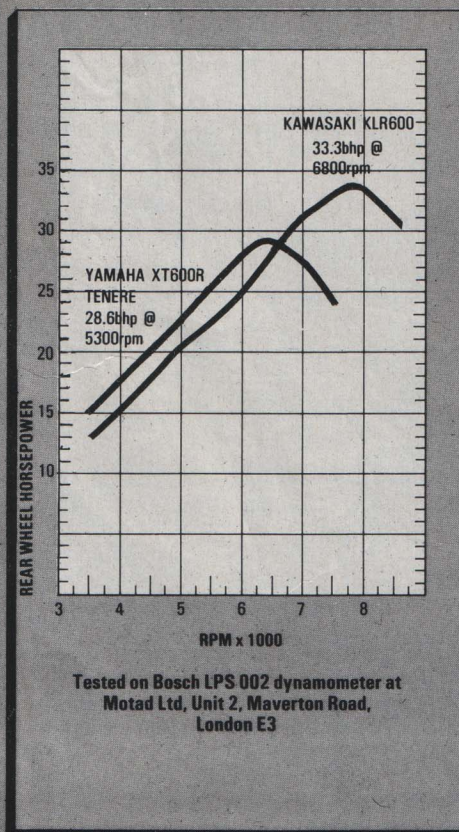
NOTWITHSTANDING the popularity of big trail bikes as tourers on the Continent, both the Ténéré and the KLR600 are too handicapped by their trail iron styling to cut it in the serious long distance stakes. That's a shame, because in other respects they offer a pleasant alternative for anyone wanting a 'big' bike without paying the penalties of high weight and running costs associated with multis.

Of the two, the Yamaha would be the choice of most Bike staffers for distance work. It's more comfortable than the KLR and it's more softly-tuned motor makes for more relaxed touring. And, of course, it offers more than double the Kawasaki's range despite poorer fuel consumption.

But at £1699 the KLR600 is unmistakably good value for money — and there's a demon roadster in there somewhere. Either way, both these modern big singles are worth a second glance.

bike

CHECKOUT



	KAWASAKI KLR600	YAMAHA XT600Z TENERÉ
Price (inc taxes)....	£1699	£2015
Guarantee.....	12 months/ unlimited mileage	12 months/ unlimited mileage
Engine.....	dohc watercooled single	sohc single
Bore x stroke.....	96 x 78mm	95 x 84mm
Capacity.....	564cc	595cc
Comp. ratio.....	9.5:1	8.5:1
Carburation.....	40mm Keihin	27mm dual-barrel Teikei
Air filter.....	Paper element	Foam element
Oil filter.....	Replaceable cartridge	Replaceable cartridge
Clutch.....	Wet, multiplate	Wet, multiplate
Primary drive.....	Gear	Gear
Gearbox.....	5-speed	5-speed
Electrics.....	12V 4Ah battery, 60/55W headlamp	12V 5Ah battery, 60/55W headlamp

SPARE PARTS PRICES (INC VAT)		
Air filter.....	£2.01	£7.85
Oil filter.....	£2.42	£4.02
Head gasket.....	£6.32	£10.12
Front mudguard.....	£24.55	£28.95
Front indicator and stem.....	£18.99	£8.40
F/brake lever and master cylinder.....	£62.05	£54.61
One side panel.....	£20.89	£18.34
Total.....	£137.23	£132.29

DIMENSIONS		
Wheelbase.....	1470 (58in)	1430mm (56in)
Overall width.....	810mm (32in)	880 (34.6in)
Seat height.....	870mm (34in)	890mm (35in)
Weight (inc 1 gal fuel).....	141kg (312lb)	147kg (324lb)
Fuel capacity.....	1.5 litres (2.5 gallon)	30 litres (6.6 gallons)

CYCLE PARTS		
Tyres.....	Dunlop K550	Dunlop K650
Front.....	300 S 21	300 S 21
Rear.....	5.10 S 17	4.60 S 18
Brakes.....		
Front.....	250mm (10in) disc	260mm (10.5in) disc
Rear.....	130mm (5in) drum	170mm (7in) drum
Suspension.....		
Front.....	Telescopic, air assisted	Telescopic, air assisted
Rear.....	Monoshock, adjustable preload	Monoshock, adjustable preload and damping

PERFORMANCE		
Fuel consumption.....		
Overall.....	4.9 litres/100km (57.2mpg)	6.14 litres/100km (46mpg)
Ridden hard.....	5.4 litres/100km (52mpg)	
Speedo accuracy.....		
At ind. 30mph.....	29	28
At ind. 50mph.....	48	48
At ind. 70mph.....	67	64
Supply by.....	Kawasaki Motors UK, Deal Avenue, Slough.	Mitsui Machinery Sales, Oakcroft Road, Chessington, Surrey.