

Kawasaki comments

ROAD TEST REPORTS FROM THE MOTORCYCLE PRESS

4 TRAIL BIKES

on or off the road

KM 90
KE 100
KE 125
KE 175
KL 250



GIANT KILLER

"It wouldn't be an understatement to call the bike a giant killer"

The seventies seems to be the age of miniaturisation and in motor cycles one good example is the power-packed Kawasaki KM90, a hairy-chested little 60 mph flyer.

Most of the Japanese manufacturers make small-capacity fun-bikes but they have yet to make a real impact in the UK, though they are a common sight in the United States.

But the reaction we had to the perfectly miniaturised KM90, the 43-inch-wheelbase, 168 lb bike should catch on like wildfire here once riders have had a closer look at it.

If you want to go on an ego trip, then just set out for a ride on the 89cc two-stroke rotary-valve single, and you'll get all the looks you want. And once you are used to the looks, there is sparkling performance available. It wouldn't be an understatement to call the bike a giant killer.

First reaction when you clap eyes on the KM90 is to laugh, because it is so small and down-right cheeky! Sitting astride it also raises a laugh or two, because the average-sized rider looks enormous.

But if the bike is tiny, its performance isn't, for the little power unit rockets you to a top indicated speed of 60 mph with nippy acceleration into the bargain.

According to the sales blurb, the KM90 is made for junior-sized riders, young teenagers or people who are a bit on the small side. I am average height, and the bike felt perfectly comfortable and safe, and I felt no discomfort for the few hundred miles I covered on it. But it is purely a solo machine, not because it wouldn't have the power to cope with extra weight, but because the basic design and layout of the bike makes two-up riding impossible.

The automatic-lubrication engines belongs to the same family as the 100 and 125cc road bikes, and does its job without fuss or excessive noise.

Only a kick start is fitted. The bike

runs quite warm, so doesn't like the choke being used for too long.

The bike has a five-speed gearbox, which is a delight to use, and although all five are needed, it has a surprising amount of torque for such a small machine, making heavy-traffic riding quite pleasant.

Ride and handling are first class, and on more than one occasion I was able to "take" riders of larger machines on tight bends, with the knobby tyres offering good grip. Unfortunately it did not rain during my time with the bike, so its wet-weather handling is unknown to me.

Although the KM90 only has a single seat, it is well-padded and comfortable, and journeys of 30 miles gave no aches or pains.

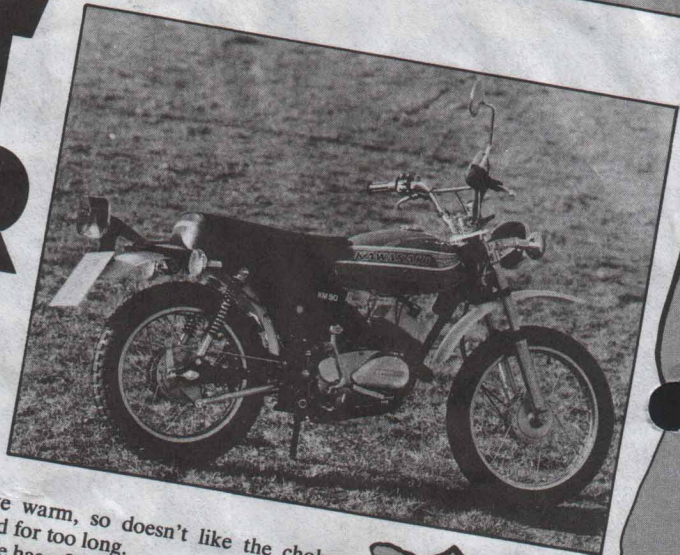
The drum brakes were powerful and light to use, the front being especially good, and used together they brought the machine to a standstill quickly and safely.

Just because the KM90 is small doesn't mean that it lacks the refinements of larger machines. Beautifully finished in a choice of two colours, it has enduro styling, with moto cross-type front mudguard and strengthened handlebars.

The headlight is powerful and has good cut-off; there are indicators front and rear; the speedometer has built-in neutral, high-beam and indicator lights but only a side stand is fitted. Rubber gaiters protect the clutch and front-brake cables from dust, and an extra large tail light adds greater safety. The sporty matt-black exhaust has a heat protector fitted.

Fuel consumption overall was a disappointing 66 mpg on two-star fuel.

The Kawasaki KM90 offers a genuine and refreshing change from the usual run-of-the-mill lightweights, and brings a lot of fun back to two-wheel riding. Well worth a closer look.



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1st July 78

Motor Cycle News

WORLD'S TOP-SELLING MOTOR CYCLE NEWSPAPER
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TOUGH AND READY

"... the bike ate up the miles in a way I wouldn't have thought possible"

Trail bikes fall into two clearly defined categories—those made purely for the high street cowboy who is never likely to set a wheel onto the rough and those made for the dedicated off road rider who divides his time equally between Tarmac and dirt.

Kawasaki's latest small off-roadster definitely falls into the second group. The firm's KE100-A7 seems equally at home on the open road or green lane and the tougher the going, the more it appears to like it.

On the motorway the KE's disc valve engine keeps the machine scorching up the road at a rate of knots remarkable for a bike of its size.

And on the trail there is useable power all the way up the rev range, from as low as about 700 rpm.

On steep off road hills the motor will pull until you find yourself starting to reach for the clutch as the revs drop to what seems to be a certain stall, but if you resist the temptation it will keep on pulling until you have crested the rise and the engine has picked up again.

Engine brake tests have shown that the 98cc rotary disc valve power unit is still producing the goods down as low as 500 rpm but in practice this seems to be a somewhat optimistic figure.

The thought of riding the KE 80 miles up the motorway had at first filled me with forboding but a few miles into the journey I sat back and began to enjoy myself.

With the needle hovering somewhere between 55 and 65 mph depending on the wind conditions and the proximity of any juggernauts, the bike ate up the miles in a way I wouldn't have thought possible.

Although the Japanese firm has decided

against fitting a rev counter I wouldn't mind betting that maximum safe revs and top speed in top gear coincide exactly.

Nearly every aspect of the bike suits both riding media to the full with handling, comfort and instrumentation all as excellent as the power unit.

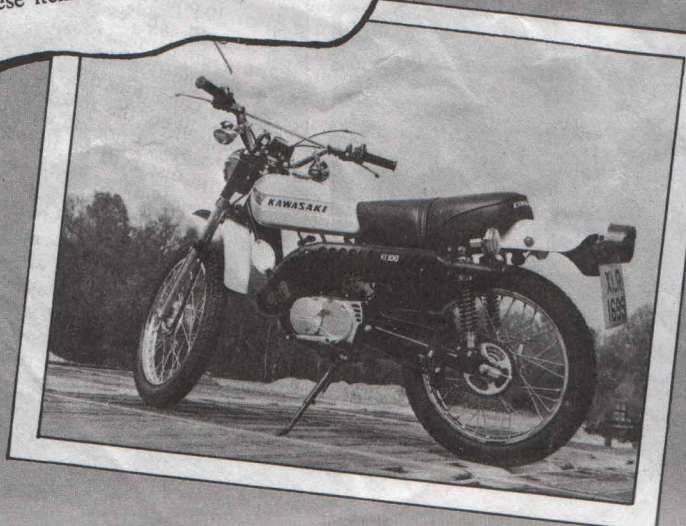
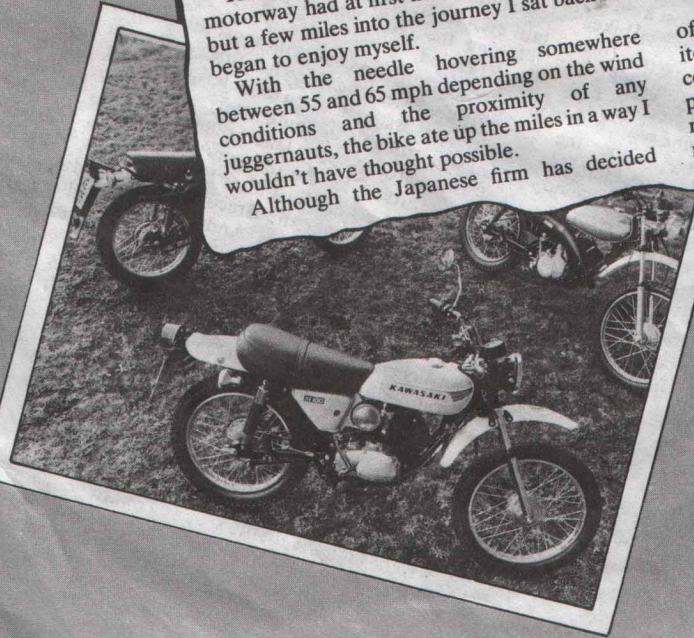
Steering on the dirt is light and precise with exactly the right combination of wheelbase and head angle getting together to make the KE both stable and nimble. The Japanese Yokohama tyres fitted gave no problems on even wet tarmac and with a little less air inside were fine for the rough.

Another huge plus as far as rough riding is concerned is Kawasaki's determination to make their 100 trailster as light as possible. At just over 200lb the machine is light enough to give even the puniest seven stone weakling no problems when he gets into trouble on the trail.

The engine is in fact the same tested plot that is used in the firm's successful 100cc road bike, the KH but with a gearbox that features five well chosen ratios for its dual purpose nature. Five way adjustable shockers are now standard equipment on even the smaller trail bikes and the available settings provide damping to match every condition from tough trailing to two up motorway riding.

Of the 'optional' equipment all the trail bike manufacturers insist on fitting to their machines, the mirrors are sufficiently effective on the open road to provide more than just a view of your right elbow and the indicators do their job. However on the rough both these items are a nuisance.

I can't see why customers should not be offered a choice as to whether or not these items are fitted from new. The serious trail rider could then opt for no extras and a cheaper retail price and be spared the bother of having to get rid of these items before he sets out on the rough.



MOTORCYCLIST

ILLUSTRATED JUNE 77

A PERFECT COMPROMISE...

"... as an out-and-out road bike it'll eat the pants out of half the other eighth-of-a-litre mounts on the market. And that's all the more remarkable when you realise it is an extremely well designed trail bike"

Once and a while there comes a machine which just wins your heart. It's more than merely growing on you. It sort of oozes something that seeps underneath your skin. Often it's the most unexpected. Some of the bikes you hope are going to be real gems turn out to be rather disappointing, while some you're almost indifferent to, turn out to be priceless. Kawasaki's latest KE125 trail bike is one of those. It is, quite frankly, superb.

I had ridden one of the early ones about a year and a half ago, when I took it to the Isle of Man to watch the ISDT, so I knew it wasn't a bad bike. Unless they'd done something seriously wrong in the meantime. Far from it.

Stepping off a bigger bike, it takes a little while to adjust to riding a one-two-five again. But the hour's ride home from big K's new base in Slough was long enough. And by the end of it, far from being disgruntled at taking a step down in the capacity stakes, I was converted into a fully paid-up member of the rabid ring-ding racing club.

This sixty-mile-an-hour six speeder, with brilliant brakes, and tremendous handling is definitely something out of the ordinary. In fact, as an out-and-out road bike it'll eat the pants out of half the other eighth-of-a-litre mounts on the market. And that's all the more remarkable when you realise it is an extremely well designed trail bike.

So well designed that it emerges as the near perfect balance of performance and potential between what it's styled to do and what most buyers will want to use it for.

It's been said so often that it's almost a cliché to point out that machines labelled as trail bikes are an essential compromise. What this euphemism mostly disguises is that the bike in question has been barely adapted to suit conditions briefly on and just off the road. Most likely the real truth is that it has neither the speed nor stability to cope with considerable distances on tarmac, nor the guts or ground clearance to tackle really rough going on the trail.

The sense in this is that a majority of people who buy so-called trail bikes will do little more than potter around on the grass verge if that. And certainly no product-conscious importer can afford to aim his sole market at the slim band of stout hearted hail-fellow-well-met green laners.

But the result of this dilemma has been a range of trials-tyred trailsters which, while popular, have never quite suited either faction. The essential compromise has tended to produce some quite good trail bikes which were a real strain to ride on the road, or some adequate road scooters which were totally at sea in the dirt (if you'll excuse the mixed metaphor).

Well now the dilemma is over. Kawasaki have found the answer, and called it the KE125. I was a little sceptical at first. After all it is so good on the road. Its little over-square power unit thrives on revs and pumps along way into the red line at 8,000.

In top gear it will cruise all day at 55 mph, even against a headwind. But for overtaking you need to cog it down at least a couple. And for real speed you need to use all six ratios fully to keep it buzzing between 6 and 8,000 rpm, where everything happens.

Road handling is very good, even at relatively high speeds without any of the front end wavering so typical of trail bikes with their short wheelbase. And it can be raced through the gearbox around fast bends without executing a series of zig-zags.

The single leading shoe drum brakes both front and rear are exceptionally powerful for their size, but with really precise feeling in hand and foot. So much so that even the back, which is traditionally easy to lock at low speed on a trail bike, refused to break away except in especially slippery conditions. Then of course, it is wise to exercise caution with studded tyres anyway.

I so enjoyed my sojourn on the road with the KE125 I lingered over it several hundred miles before taking it rather apprehensively onto the trail. With such a high-revving engine and so many speeds I had expected it to be a headache in heavy going.

But instead it proved to be one of the most tractable and easy to ride. And the reason for that is that while the motor has to be revved to extort maximum power, it will run cleanly and provide sufficient pulling force from extremely low rpm. Even in quite deep mud, if you maintain enough momentum, it will keep running, spinning the back wheel, but supplying the drive needed.

Second gear will cope with most things with an easy clutchless snick down to first getting you out of the worst of it. For a more leisurely pace, third will probably do quite nicely. If there are any green laners out there raising their eyebrows, let me tell you that during a trail-riding weekend just after Easter we took the Kawa right over the Brecon Beacons and into the Black Mountains. And it found no real difficulty keeping up with more purpose built machines. I was impressed.

The bike is so well thought out for this particular side of its dual purpose role. Apart from being very light and easy to manhandle, it's also very slim and easy to control from standing on the rests. Those are, admittedly rubber-covered and liable to be slippery. But that's one of the few poor touches.

On the plus side you've got an upswept exhaust pipe that even with a leg guard tucks right underneath the seat and out of your way. It's capped by a silencer that reduces sharp noise to a rustle that won't disturb grazing sheep.

There's a stout plastic sump guard that really works when over nine inches of between the wheel ground clearance have failed. There are tough and resilient plastic mudguards, topped with mudflaps to keep off the spray. And there's even a rear frame loop that clears the rear guard between the seat and the tail lamp which can be used as a grab rail for those times when you really have to get off and drag it out of the mire.

The seat and tank meet in a narrow, no-styled union which while perhaps a shade better for long periods on tarmac, is ideal for straddling or sliding off on the rough. A proper dual seat, which with the rear footrest as standard can adequately cope with most for commuting. But on the trail it remains enough to the rear to use as one leg either by choice or necessity. The handlebars are well shaped to be used in a variety of ways. This allows sufficient control and without causing aching of the wrists. This is wide enough to be steered precisely without causing aching of the wrists. It is consequently so easy to direct it can get in and out of most situations with near contempt.

Suspension is generally preferable to damping inevitably a little on the trail. Continued trailing, but certainly not average competition. The front forks don't seem to bottom, and they have the trick addition of damping to ease the compression motion. A feature which has been common to production machines so far.

I carried a couple of spare tubes for times but I was never even flicked over so easily. Carburator was a prodder that pedal—a prodder that became universal, allowing starting in gear.

A brief pressure of the handlebar lever on the right side of the tank likely flooded in real time from the tank. It would get it right to induction and even fact that at low speeds mechanical whirring on the gearbox. It squeaked on the rampage lion deep in the acoustics believe.

The overall excellent, with Perhaps trying meanie imma Candy red left side-stay the right guard, and This pla



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MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS

Jan 78



Generally acknowledged as one of the best trail bikes around, this year's 175 has only a paint job to distinguish it from earlier models.

Where Suzuki and Yamaha have gone to reed valves to achieve a wide spread of torque from the two-stroke motors, Kawasaki have stuck with their rotary disc valve in a clean, compact unit. This, combined with a carefully designed exhaust gives what's needed at the top end for the Kawasaki's 75 mph maximum speed and retains the motor's pure slogging ability at the bottom of the rev range. With a motor buzzing close to 9000 on the open road, a hard spark plug is necessary to prevent overheating. In fact an NGK B9 is used, fed from an electronic ignition system which prevents the plug fouling and the motor gassing up even when it's asked to pull a load from a plonking 1000 rpm.

The result is flexible, and above all, reliable power with more than a fair turn of speed for street use. Its efficiency is reflected in the 175's fuel consumption; 65 mpg used pretty hard, over 80 mpg used carefully.

In a robust chassis with rather old-fashioned suspension the Kawasaki has remarkably good handling despite a pretty bumpy ride from the stiff, short-action springs. On tarmac it can be cornered hard enough to ground the footrests—on trials tyres—and braking is generally as good as most pure roadsters. Off-road the handling is best described as easy. The 175 is only a few pounds heavier than the Suzukis but it is enough to show. It's probably a combination of weight, riding position and the lively pick-up of the engines which make the Suzukis feel a lot lighter at the front. The Kawasaki develops more gentle power and it's not so easy to lift the front wheel to skim across holes and puddles or to keep it from getting wrenched to one side in mud. But overall it is easier to ride and copes with the same obstacles in a more sedate manner.

In general it is sturdy and reliable and, after riding the 500 Yamaha, the 175 feels positively tiny.

Handling, braking and gearing are all the more remarkable for working so well under such a variety of conditions. From greasy mud slopes to sweeping main roads the Kawasaki delivers the right performance. The small drum brakes, like any of this size, will fade under repeated use from top speed; for normal use they are fine and are controllable enough to be used on slippery surfaces too.

The disc valve motor has clean lines, doesn't clog up with mud easily, needs the minimum of maintenance and when running adjustments are needed the bike is simple to work on. For an off-road novice or a learner-rider the bike has big attractions—it fires up easily and won't gas up, it pulls like a train even if you are in the wrong gear and you can get away with grabbing the big handful of throttle because the motor doesn't have any vicious tendencies. On the negative side it's pretty near idiot-proof, on the positive side it makes an economical commuter with plenty of scope in its off-road role.

in the clip that secures it. It's meant to be released by pushing down on the lid and pulling outwards. But it's almost impossible to acquire the knack and can supply hours of frustration, or bloody-minded brutality before access is given to the tools.

The lights, run off a six volt system via a small battery, are big and bright. And another neat touch is the fact that the stoutly mounted indicators can be readily removed to avoid damage in trailing. The rear ones are on a single plate on top of the rear mudguard, with a backing plate underneath, and all rubber mounted.

The chain guard is something of an afterthought, sadly, and could be greatly improved, although I suppose it does make spraying the rear chain that much easier.

But all round, a few minor touches can do little to outweigh the overwhelming balance in favour of the KE125. There are so many thoughtful features which aptly compliment a fundamentally well sorted motorcycle.

Kawasaki have mated a tremendously flexible little engine with clean running characteristics onto a six speed gear box combining three trail gears and three road gears, to produce the perfect compromise. And perhaps the definitive trail bike of its class. Let the good times roll.



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...al finish of the motorcycle is th good chrome and paintwork. ng to get away from their green ge Kawasaki supply the KE125 in or Cobalt blue for the tank and the ver which conceals the oil supply. On ide of the bike is the gloss black leg d underneath it, a triangular toolbox. tic receptacle has one terrible feature

KL 250

A VERY MAJOR STEP FORWARD

“The resulting package is a very impressive motorcycle both on the road and off it”



The KL250 fits neatly between both excesses. It is a lightweight four stroke with still enough guts to provide both charm and competitive pulling power. It feels and rides lighter and livelier than the old XL250 certainly, though how it will shape up against the yet to be introduced new version has still to be decided. Probably fairly well, because with the same basic proportions to work on it will be hard to make exceptional progress. Certainly Kawasaki, with a bike already in the shops and selling well, have got the drop by doing what Honda could and should have done a couple of years before.

The first thing is that by only a small increase in height from the Z200 engine, and doing away with attachments like the electric starter, they have a compact power unit. It is, in fact just 16 inches high, and 10 inches long, while across the frame it is 11 inches wide. Further, with a single overhead camshaft, and conventional two-valve head, top end weight is kept to a minimum. In an all-new frame, and despite the fact that the engine sits upright, the whole mass is still kept sufficiently low to aid off-road handling, while high enough to provide adequate ground clearance.

However, the really big bonus comes in the suspension, both front and rear. You realise that just sitting on the bike at rest by putting on the front brake and letting the bike rock front and aft. It gives a nice floating feeling that lets you know someone's done their homework on damping. Not quite so surprising perhaps when the front forks, made by Kayaba are virtually identical to those used on Kawasaki's previous production moto-cross bikes. Although now

superceded for racing, they are certainly among the best suited for more general off-road riding. Oil-damped, they have a good eight inches potential in wheel travel, though during the test actual measured movement worked out around six inches.

At the rear, two massive oil-damped units with dual rate springs and five position adjustment for load provided just on five inches of real travel with their fixings inclined at sixty degrees to the rear of the frame. With the good damping characteristics provided, this is certainly more than sufficient for an average off-road bike. Not anything like moto-cross standards at the moment, but if you look at it another way, somewhat more than most trial bikes. The biggest bonus is that Kawasaki has achieved this set up with a relatively high steering head, and a low seat height, so that you get an impression of sitting actually *in* the bike rather than perched on top of a slab. As a result the KL250 is a comfortable bike to control from the seat, both on the road and off it. Standing up on the serrated metal footrests, it is also easy to control with its narrow waistband unobstructed by overhead pipes, oil tanks or other gubbins, though the plastic side panels and occasionally the kickstart can foul the boots of the rider.

There's no oil tank because, like the Z200, the engine oil is contained in the sump, and without making the motor excessively bulky at the base. The exhaust system, while it doesn't foul the rider's legs, is, however, on the bulky and badly positioned side, rather like that of the XT500. It runs down the right side of the main down tube of the frame from the head and

Just over a year ago Kawasaki brought out a rather nice little bike called the Z200 powered by a neat and compact single overhead camshaft four-stroke engine. Styled somewhat plainly, and aimed more directly at the commuter market, it was nevertheless a bike which made a very favourable impression on the discerning rider. One of its big stars was the robust but lively power unit.

It was difficult not to look at it and say to yourself, this motor could go places. Finally, after a year of development, it has. For much longer Kawasaki have been making some excellent small capacity trail bikes, with the KE125 and the KE175 standing out as some of the best contenders in the market. One of their biggest stars has always been handling.

So the mating of the rugged four-stroke engine with Kawasaki's trail bike technology was almost inevitable, both from natural progression, and from the continued Japanese policy of transferring production away from two-stroke and into thumpers. In that, the KL250 is not just a cobbled-together compromise, but a very major step forward in development of both an off-road machine and an overhead cam engine.

For a start, it is not just an overbored Z200. Kawasaki have increased the bore by 4mm, but they have also increased the stroke by 6mm to give it more torque and better pulling characteristics for the job intended. For all that it will still rev to 9,000 and beyond in ease and safety. Kawasaki call it the 'country cousin' of the Z200. And that distant relation status is just apparent from the outside of the engine. But that's where the similarity ends.

The frame is completely new, and so is the suspension, together with a host of detailed features learnt from big K's smaller trailers. The resulting package is a very impressive motorcycle both on the road and off it.

With a 70 mph practical cruising speed at 7,000 rpm—two grand below maximum revs—and a top speed of over eighty, it has sporty enough performance for an average medium-weight road bike. Yet with suspension, steering and general handling, it's a lively and tractable off-road mount. It begs the inevitable comparison with the XL250 Honda, the ugly duckling which has for so long found an uncomfortable position as a compromise between road and trail. Beloved by enthusiasts because it was a four stroke, it has been nevertheless a generally unmanageable and overweight proposition for anything more than amusement purposes. Similarly thumper fiends may have found the XT500 Yamaha a bit too much of a handful, particularly for anyone much under six foot, despite its tremendous flexibility.

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actually under the engine to escape into a tortuous "S" shaped expansion chamber capped by a silencer just below the right seat.

It works almost 100% efficiently, Kawasaki having gone overboard to please US emission control laws. The bike is exceptionally quiet, and of course the muffling means less power. Worse, the system with a matt black finish, and additional leg guards is a likely rust trap along its more inaccessible wanderings. It is also far too heavy, not only as far as the silencer and expansion chamber goes, but because the actual pipe has a separate inner liner. The real diameter of the exhaust pipe is thus smaller than it actually appears—a good thing as far as four-stroke power characteristics go—but obviously an overkill on bulk.

Another area where Kawasaki have doubled up on layers is the rear mudguard where a strong plastic one is supplemented by a large alloy plate beneath it. This is only necessary because the huge rear light is perched very high and very far back on an independant mounting which would otherwise split the plastic. All very sensible for the longevity of the standard product, but if you are really keen on trimming weight, pounds can be shed on fixtures like that.

For regular off-road riding of course, the indicators are a must to be ditched. They are mounted on stout stalks front and back which are prime candidates for snapping, but which can be detached with a reasonable amount of ease. Like other Kawasakis, earth wires attached to the rear stalks are also an integral part of the rear light system, so they have to be replaced. The large grab rail on which the rear indicators are mounted is a little excessive for a trail bike, but it does provide a useful handle for pulling the back end out of bogs.

Like many modern Japanese trail bikes, in fact, the KL250 shows in its accessories the curious contrast between the practical and the unnecessary that underlines the compromise between on road and off road.

The intention is to build a bike that can cope adequately with off-road conditions but with the knowledge that the majority of its purchasers will keep it on tarmac for most, if not all, of its life. Thus we have the inevitable large speedo and rev counter cluster with warning lights in between, and one interesting addition to the control console—an ignition switch which also acts as a steering lock like many present day cars.

The seat is wedge-shaped and well padded, meeting a pear-shaped tank to give a trim waist. But the petrol cap simply turns in the tank and is prone to leakage if the bike is on its side. The trail rider needs a more secure stopper, and probably a breather pipe as well. The handlebar is wide, braced and the ends neatly angled, and the alloy levers have neat rubber shrouds over the adjusters to prevent them filling up with mud. The 5½ in. diameter headlamp is spring loaded in rubber bushes and well designed when intact, but with an excess of electrics inside, it is a tight fit getting the rim and light unit back on again.

The fork yolk is triple clamped at the top for extra rigidity and in the now common motorcycle cross fashion. Fixed on to the bottom yolk by four rubber-bushed bolts, the plastic front mudguard is good, wide and seemingly unbreakable. The brakes, both single leading shoe and cable operated, are excellent. They are quite adequate for the bike's fair turn of road speed, and very responsive to delicate use off the road. The rear one is fully floating, the torque arm being bolted to the rear sub frame, and was particularly impressive. Unlike most light trail bikes, it proved difficult to get it to lock up even under severe braking.

Light alloy non-valanced rims (the ones that don't fill up with mud) are laced round the hubs and add another touch of professionalism to Kawasaki's impressive two-fifty trailer. They fit two security bolts in the back and one in the front for tube protection when running rough on low tyre pressures. During the test I picked up a front wheel puncture through a thorn pushing its way through the rubber, and though cursing it at the time, it provided a good opportunity to test what can be called practical maintenance.

The front wheel is a particular gem. It is secured in the fork legs by bottom clamps with a stud either side of the spindle. Undo the four nuts and the wheel, complete with spindle and sleeved bushes that act as spacers, drops out. It is about as quickly detachable as you could make it—assuming you can set the rest of the bike up on something as only a prop stand is fitted. The trials pattern tyres fitted as standard are of a soft compound and easy to remove despite the thick lipped bead protectors, and while probably not up to ISDT standards, my wheel change and puncture repair proved much less effort than I feared.

Some things I was more apprehensive about were the sump plate and the chain guard. To their credit, Kawasaki have fitted a metal sump guard and a good sized plastic chain guard. But there is a lot underneath the bike that has to be protected from rocks, including the exhaust pipe and the clutch operating arm, and for safety, and serious green lanning, a larger one would be essential. It doesn't look like any Japanese manufacturer is going to come out with a fully enclosed chain, despite all our moaning, though to be fair the KL250's top guard is as good as any. The problem is that mud and dirt tends to fill in the gap between it and the frame and press the flexible plastic against the side of the tyre. A more rigid material, or better fittings would get round this problem without too much difficulty.

I have spent some time talking about the fittings because it is obvious that Kawasaki have spent some time thinking about them too. The KL250 is certainly a bike that a large proportion of off-road enthusiasts are going to think seriously about. And with good reason. Only a small amount of attention to detail will convert the basic Kawasaki into one of the best serious trail bikes on the trails today. One thing that will very much depend on the rider is the gearing. Almost inevitably, it is more suited to

general road use, but is able to get away with it by tremendous flexibility in the engine. Even in top gear it will go down to as low as 15 mph—barely tickover speed—and pull away cleanly. Quite remarkable for a 250cc machine which does not appear to have a great deal of flywheel weight. It does rev high, and readily up to its maximum of 9,000 rpm. But it is no buzz box. The trick is to let it find its traction on slippery going—to rev it till it spins and then ease off until it grips. That's where the gearing problem comes in.

First is very low—low enough for most nadgery going, but too low for much more because the engine wants to rev and lose traction. Second on the other hand is a shade high, so that when it grips, you may be going too quick. The large gap between the two gears also means that it is hard to change without using the clutch. The remaining ratios are fairly close and well suited so that the serious rough rider is faced with the quandry of lowering the overall ratios and probably making first unnecessarily low. The real answer on the manufacturing side is for a lower second gear in the box, and perhaps Kawasaki may get round to that themselves.

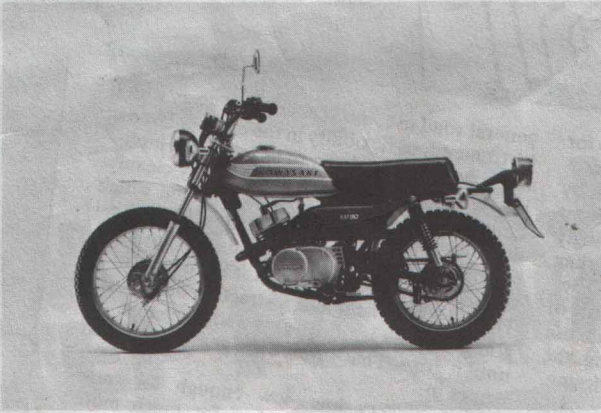
The clutch itself worked well, although, like the Z200 the wet multi-plate unit tends to drag when cold, and can send you lurching off from a dead start.

The KL250 needed a few prods to start from cold, although it was soon warm enough to take off the choke, and run smoothly. Warm starts could also be a shade temperamental, though kicking the little single cylinder off was no trouble. The power is well spread along the rev range, having no real steps, and makes for easy controllability. Plus with a motor that thrives on revs it can be held on in low gears.

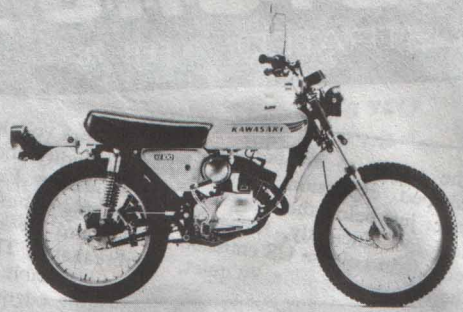
The overall impression of the KL250 is of a light, lively and extremely enjoyable bike. Even fully tanked up it weighs in at under 300 lb in standard form, and with the modifications mentioned, could shed probably thirty of those. At that, and with its power characteristics, it would not only be a pleasant machine to own, but also a fairly competitive mount for off-road riding. And I can see no reason why it shouldn't hold its own in many of the club enduros now gaining popularity across the country. The success of the XT500 has shown that there is a growing affection and following for a serious four-stroke trail bike. For those who find the big five-hundred just too much of a handful, Kawasaki's KL250 is the only practical alternative now in the dealers' shops. With only half the cubes, it more than makes up for its capacity in control and handling, and has got to rate as one of the best general purpose products to come from Japan yet.

If bikes like the KL250 are just the first of a new generation, we have got an exciting and an enjoyable time ahead.

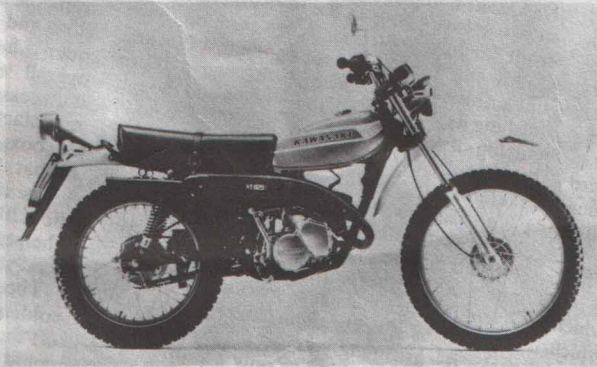




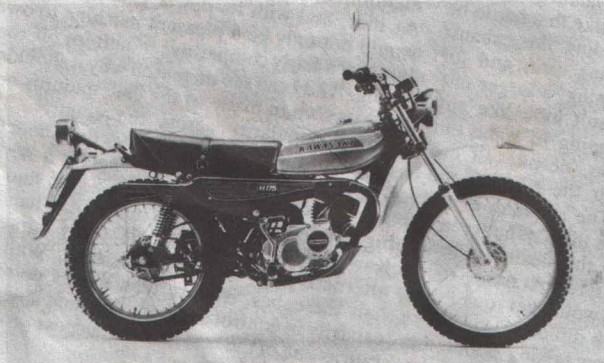
KM90
A midi-bike built like a big bike
1-cyl/2-stroke 99cc Rotary disc valve Primary kick
5-speed Dry weight 76kg/168lb



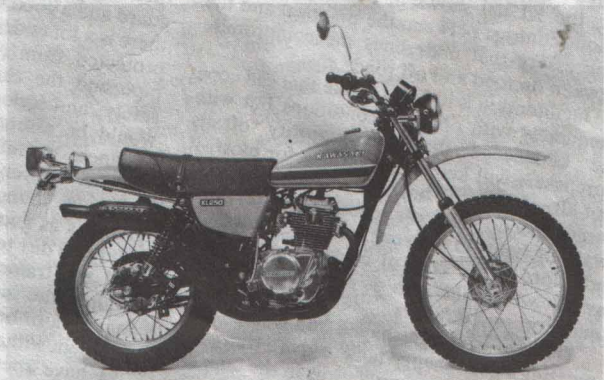
KE100
The lightweight fun trail bike. Agile-Economical-Competitive Insurance
1-cyl/2-stroke 99cc Rotary disc valve Primary kick 5-speed
Dry weight 91kg/201lb



KE125
Six-speed road-trail machine. Built to take to the country
1-cyl/2-stroke 124cc Rotary disc valve Primary kick
6-speed Dry weight 99kg/218lb



KE175
Nimble-Strong-Punchy performance
1-cyl/2-stroke 174cc Rotary disc valve Primary kick 5-speed
Dry weight 106kg/234lb



KL250
Kawasaki's first 4-stroke road-trail machine. Rugged-Dependable
1-cyl/4-stroke 246cc SOHC Primary kick 5-speed Dry weight 127kg/280lb

 **Kawasaki**
Let the good times roll.

Kawasaki Motors (UK) Ltd
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