

# 'Z650'

Road Test comments from the Press on the Z650.

If you're looking for a ride that's out of the ordinary the new Kawasaki Z650 is your kind of power. There are bigger machines to be sure — but few better rides on the road.

With advanced engineering and positive handling, this middleweight sprinter is more than just a sporting challenger to larger capacity machines. That's why the world's motorcycle press acclaimed the Z650 as a superbike in a class of its own.

The compact twin overhead cam engine is turbine-smooth, and whisper quiet at low speeds. Hit the throttle and you get the split-second response of a sprinter taking off, surging powerfully through the gears — delivering blistering acceleration right to the top end of its range.

Perfect balance from its low-slung weight, and remarkable fuel economy make the Z650 an ideal tourer. It devours roads, not petrol.

The Z650 is also packed with well-proven Kawasaki features for rider comfort and safety, making it a machine you'll delight in riding daily.



# If you haven't test-ridden the Z650 yet listen to some who have.



April 1977

## The small King—it's a real nice thing

Kawasaki's Z650 Four has carved itself an enviable reputation for speed and stamina in the six months since it appeared late last year. Proof of the speed came at Daytona in March when Kawasaki attacked the World 750cc endurance records with a trio of mildly mod'ed Z650 roadsters. They came away with a bunch of records that would have been impressive for a 1,000cc roadster let alone a 650. Best were the FIM world 1,000-kilo at 128.4mph, the AMA FIM six-hour at 127.7mph, and the AMA 100-miler 130mph. For good measure they rounded off with the world FIM 24-hour record at 117.2mph.

We weren't quite as adventurous during our own 600-mile road test, but we learned a few things about the bike that haven't been aired elsewhere. Firstly, it's darn fast. Secondly, it can accelerate to 60mph as quick as anything you can buy on wheels. Thirdly, there's only one thing better than a fast big bike, and that's a fast small bike.

For motorcycles, small is definitely beautiful. If there is one thing that hampers the enjoyment of a bike it is weight and bulk. The bulkier and heavier a machine the more difficult it is to manoeuvre, the more trouble it becomes when cornering, and the more fuel it uses.

The Z650 is tangible evidence that smaller is better. At 465lb it weighs in some 30lb lighter than most of the 750's, and with a 56½in. wheelbase is about three inches shorter.

On the road the bike is considerably more agile than most of the big bikes—as you might expect. Yet it gives nothing away in performance to the big bikes, and is far and away a better performer than bikes in the 550 class. Flat out mean top speed at MIRA was 119.6mph, only four mph down on Suzuki's GS750 and two mph less than the Honda CB750F1.

Even more stunning is the acceleration of the Z650. Taking to the track like a drag racer, it scorched through the quarter-mile in 12.9 seconds with a terminal speed of 101.6mph. And though eight runs were timed, six of which were 13 seconds or under, the bike finished as unruffled as ever.

Secret is not only the remarkable power of the twin-cam 652 short-stroke engine but its perfect gearing and balance. And while smooth and light in action, the clutch bites hard.

The Z650's wheelbase is neither so short as to provoke time-wasting wheelies on take-off or so long that there's too much wheelspin. When you drop the clutch at 7,000rpm the Kwacker just digs in and gets on with the job, front wheel just hovering above the tarmac for the first few yards.

A measure of the effectiveness is that the Z650 is one of the quickest bikes up to 110 yards. The terminal speed of 66.8mph has only been beaten once—by the super-fast 1973 Kawasaki Z1 at 68mph. Even more surprising is that the Z650 can reach 50mph in just three seconds from rest. Yet the bike is no rev-happy racer. Though it can scream up to 10,000rpm (though the red line is at 9,000rpm) the engine is sweet and flexible enough to haul along at under 4,000rpm and still be capable of producing a sizeable kick in the seat when you open up.

The bike was exceptionally smooth, particularly at about 70mph in top gear (equal to 5,500rpm) which made it very relaxing to ride at speed with hardly a hint of a powerband.

Undoubtedly the Z650 is the best Kawasaki so far. It restores the image of thundering power and speed with a new one of civilised restraint. The Z650 can afford to be sober in appearance because it takes on the 750's and just about beats them at their own game. The smaller king is definitely a better thing.

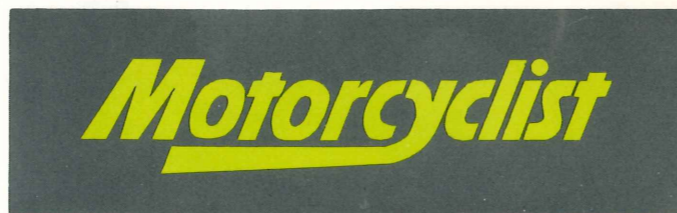


January 1977

*We ran a 12.74 quarter mile. Completely stock. We haven't heard of any 750 that has matched that time.*

*As of this moment the Z650 is the finest Kawasaki made. The pipes are swept up, and give the bike maximum ground clearance in tight turns. It was great in town. For a 650 it was very fast, faster than all the 750's, and with a little imagination it reminded you of Z-1 speed. It was geared perfect for commuter riding and playing on tight, twisty roads.*

*It's smooth, fast, and handles not like a plush tourer but like a true high performance machine.*



December 1976

The Z650 represents Kawasaki's best effort to date. Capable of running with the big tourers in a practical sense, it has excellent fuel efficiency and range, is easy to service and overhaul, and gets in under the 750cc insurance premium. It can take at least a couple of the current 750's in acceleration.

It's a happy engine with a remarkable capability—one we've never encountered before—of being able to pull down to 5mph in fifth and recover without sign of lurch or chain snatch. The Z650 is a new experience in fours, narrow and so smooth as to be totally unobjectionable at all speeds. The engine responds instantly to the starter, builds quickly without hesitation, and idles evenly. With a minimal amount of practice rapid starts can be accomplished with a minimum of wear and tear to the rear tyre and chain. Shifting at the redline rpm (9000) proved to be the best, and it was pleasurable to feel the smoothness of the acceleration without the slightest hint of camminess or carburetion inaccuracies. As long as the tachometer is reading 5000 or better, acceleration in the lower gears is just short of amazing.

The brakes are confidence-inspiring and sure, coming out on the high side of the present state of the art for effectiveness and feel.

Although the Kawasaki is up to 3 inches shorter than your average 750, the ride hardly lets it be known. It's quite good as a matter of fact. Kawasaki made the concession to modest wheelbase in search of effortless and very responsive handling. After a 2,000 mile relationship with this chassis we do not feel prompted to criticise.

This is a bike the rider sits in, not on. Footrest, handlebar, seat relationship are good. A definite improvement over previous Kawasaki seats, the newly proportioned couch features a mysterious padding that is both soft and untiring after long rides. A tough combination to find.



March 1977

## Giant Jet Performance is back!

Big bike power married to lightweight or middleweight handling qualities is one of those elusive combinations that motorcycle buyers will eternally pursue. It can be done—but usually only at the considerable expense of seeking out exotic custom-made parts. Kawasaki seem to have got there with a production line bike.

As soon as you swing into the saddle of the Z650 you feel a reassuring compactness about the bike that tells you a lot of thought has gone into its design. It's noticeably smaller and less bulky than 750cc multis, and with a kerb weight of 465lbs it's well under the 500lbs barrier.

It runs at continued high speeds in a way that no Bonneville or Rocket Gold Star ever could. This Kawasaki will hold 80, 90, even 100mph for mile after mile without flinching. It streaks on by leaving the characteristic graunchy wail of an air-cooled 4-cylinder motor trailing in the wind. It also accelerates one hell of a lot smarter than any oldie 650.

On the test strip it ran a 13.36 second quarter, which is up to a whole second quicker than anything else in the 550-650 class, and level with several 750's. It might even have gone a tenth or two quicker if the strip had been dry on test day.

Power feeds in from as low as 2,000rpm, which means you can drop to 25mph in top without having to change down.

But even more impressive is the skilful way they've matched the gearing, torque, power and overall weight of the machine so that instant zap is available in the higher gears at the kind of road speeds that you really need it. Twist the throttle at 50mph in top and it moves out: no hesitation, no need to scramble down through the box. The real performance lies above six grand, when you need one eye stitched to the tacho to avoid straying into red-line country in the lower gears, so fast do the revs rise. But you don't need 8,000rpm to get past traffic on the Z650.



January 1977

Have Kawasaki produced a motorcycle which will take over where the T120 Bonneville left off? Yes they most certainly have. There is no doubt about the superiority of the Z650 and its four pots over the T120 and its two. Even more fascinating is the unarguable fact that the Kawasaki is actually simpler than the Triumph in several respects. The Z650 utilises the much simpler wet sump method, with its absence of oil pipes, external reservoir, and delivery oil pump. Kawasaki employ a single chain to drive their two overhead camshafts straight from the crankshaft.

Whether kick or electric started the Z650 was a cinch to fire up, even after an overnight stay in freezing fog, perhaps the most arduous of

all weather conditions. The thing was dripping moisture and ice all over, but the instant the button was pressed the engine purred.

Pick-up was amazingly fast, as was acceleration through the gears. The Z650 boasts a useful torque development in the lower and medium engine speeds, facilitating such low top gear speeds of 20mph without the slightest problem.

Throttle response was pretty sharp, although still gentle enough to inform nobody but the pilot what was going on. Around 6000/6500 revs all hell broke out of the engine. No fuss about it mind, but a gut-churning swing at the horizon. No noise, and nothing vicious like one of the oldtime power steps, but a nice big lump of simple fun you keep under your commuting hat all week, specially for letting loose over the weekend when guys on 750's are going to find themselves hard pushed to keep up.

The Z650 comes as one of the most unified packages currently available. There is about it an air of sweet reason which is sharpened by excitement and founded on a rock-bed of quality.



February 1977

## Big Z's Little Brother Packs a 750 Punch in a 500 Package.

*Kawasaki has done more than fill a gap in the market line-up. No matter how you define it, the Z650 does offer 750 performance in a more sporting package and for a few less bucks. The Z650 has the visual appeal of its big brother and because the chassis is at least equal to the engine, the 650 has agility and a sporting feel to compensate—or better—the sheer speed of the Z1000.*

*The Z650 being tuned for brisk performance rather than blazing power, is smooth and delightful at all speeds. There are no flat spots, or even weak spots. The Z650 is strong all the way to redline. There's power to pass without needing to downshift—although shifting down does help. The 650 is remarkably smooth below 5000 rpm.*

*A shift of the body, a flick of the bars, and the Z650 lays into the optimum cornering line as sure as water runs downhill. The feeling is that the Z650 is willing to follow orders in spots where a heavier machine would need to be muscled into cooperation.*

*And the same feeling of control applies to city work, which we all must cope with at times.*

*The mirrors are clear as glass, a trait so rare we had to think hard before realizing what was different. The seat is filled with some manner of bionic foam with rising-rate compression, if there's such a word. Theory is, the padding is soft initially and becomes firmer as its compressed. Fine idea, and that aspect of the Z650's saddle makes it equal or better than any other on the market.*