

KAWASAKI TEAM

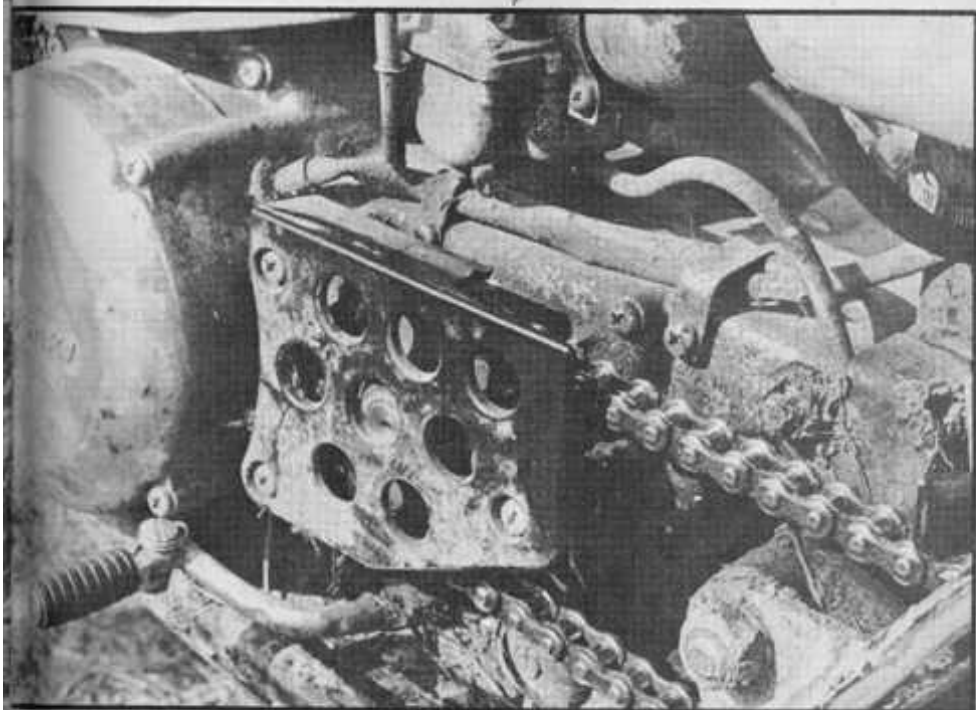


250 TEST

... the Welsh Two-Day Gold Medal Winner ...



The heart of a willing workhorse.



Note the spring-loaded folding gearchange and lightweight ankle protector.

By Pete Plummer

WE have come to accept the enduro bike as something of a powerful and sophisticated animal with a thousand pound price tag. At a glance it is almost impossible to distinguish between the road legal enduro and last year's factory racer. Nine times out of ten it is only the puny lights that give the game away. Almost two years ago some of us had questioned the trend. I had disagreed with the marketing men who quite frankly, in my opinion, did not understand the market.

At a Valiant Trooper meeting I had declared the scrambler with lights was not the answer for the new style events on private ground. In principle we had reached agreement. For thrills and probably spills, the under 125cc enduro iron must make the ultimate fun bike but for the competitor who take his enduros seriously, the one-day bike on knobbies should be damn near right.

Not being a trials rider, I could not in all honesty arrange a trials bike test so to prove something or other I had entered a little 50 racer in the Isca. It had not been a fairy tale debut. The little bike had performed remarkably in the enduro but circumstances had forced me out. Dave Tucker had come along with his then brand-new Kawasaki KT250. I had played in and around the Brechfa and had come away impressed. I had been determined to arrange a longer ride.

For me, that Isca had not started well. The 50 was riding nicely on the trailer but four of us were crammed into the Volkswagen. Not owning a car, I had scrounged a lift with Tony Goodall on the Saturday, but with half a ton of bikes on the trailer and four big blokes in the car, Wales had been a long time coming.

Sunday was worse. Riding number fifteen meant I was one of the first away and the scrutineering had come before that. Up at seven and missing breakfast I had ripped the seat on the 50 dragging it off the trailer single handed. My 'team' had still been in bed but I had made sure they were wide awake when I had screamed through the hotel yard at 8.15. Just after the second check I had known I would fail, riding to the start I



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had used valuable petrol. I had willed the bike on and every mile had felt like fifty.

I had pushed the damn thing about three miles before I had found a village pump. My wallet had been locked safely in the car of course so I had used the emergency quid from the top of my Belfast. Just about all in, I had struggled across the road for a quick pint with the change. That door had been locked. God's teeth; realisation had dawned. I was in Wales on a bloody dry Sunday. Totally sick of bikes; of enduros, of everything, I had raced away to civilisation.

Dave Tucker's Kawasaki had looked nice. Not keen to get wet, cold and muddy all over again I grudgingly agreed to have just a little dabble. He had screamed ahead with the tiddler, I had potted along behind. Back in the Brechfa the bike felt pretty fair and, surprise, surprise — unlike other trials bikes, I had found I could ride it sitting down. The gentle power characteristics had made it safe and all very predictable. Suddenly I had liked it, I had become interested again. With the sap rising I had tackled bigger and better obstacles. With ample bottom end those short, sharp climbs off the fire-roads were easy meat. Traction was never far away and the bike had felt OK up to around 40. In those conditions on that muddy Sunday it has to be said that it felt "damn near right".

Kawasaki's success in the Welsh Two Day Trial is history now. However, with three rides, three gold medals and the manufacturer's team prize it is worth repeating in anybody's book. The three winners are not special one-off jobs flown over from Japan either. They are standard KT250s which have been only slightly modified to make them more suitable for the job in hand.

Kawasaki UK are well aware that off-road sport involvement requires special skills and vast experience rarely found in marketing organisations. Competition Developments, a small St Albans based company were already experts in the field so the tie up had been a perfectly natural one. A separate company, Kawasport, was formed and Alec Wright the Competitions Developments boss man became Kawasaki sport co-ordinator. When the idea of entering a team in trial type speed events sprang to mind, the 175 trial bike seemed the obvious choice. As it turned out, all the 76 quota had been sold and there was little likelihood or point in finding three so they turned their attention to the rest of the range. Everything really pointed to

the KT250. It was light and fairly quick for a trials bike. Sales had not been quite what they should have been, so it was about due for promotion. Trials rider and CD development man John Gazeley was really pleased and set to with the welding torch and spanners.

The three specials are identical and really only differ slightly from the standard bike. The frame is KT and the head angle even remains the same. The only really noticeable deviation is around the sub-frame. The top mountings for the rear units have been shifted down a few inches. This area has been well plated and strengthened and a pair of small diameter tubes run from just above the swinging arm pivot across to the vertical seat tube, à la Bultaco. The swinging arm has been filched from the 125 motocross model and is a fair bit longer than standard so the rear units lay well forward and down. With gas Girlings fitted, the revised set up gives a dramatic increase in movement.

The standard rear wheel was retained but, conscious for the need for speed in every department, John carried out some mods to ease its removal. It is still not quite QD but it comes out easier than it did. The already nicely tucked away brake pedal set-up remains the same. To match the updated rear suspension the front fork came under close scrutiny. Obviously with all that rear wheel travel there was a lot of daylight under the guard. To lift the nose of the bike up, special extension pieces were made and screwed into the existing stanchions. These in turn were fitted with Schrader type valves and air pumped in. Just to be on the safe side in the early stages the springs were left in but John found in practice they always stayed up. To be truthful, I have been somewhat sceptical of this new air-fork craze but John set my mind at rest.

It is all so very simple, but to work one hundred per cent the bushes, stanchions and seals have to be perfect. The more air you pump in the harder the ride. If a soft ride is required you simply let some wind out. The air pressure created pushes the seals out against the stanchions, maintains pressure and retains the oil. The man said it really does work and all three Kawasakis have proved his point. Even I no longer ponder that one.

Motocross tyres are standard ware on the time trials so that was the next move. There was not a lot of room inside the 125 swinging arm so John opted for the 400 by 18 Dunlop Sports. It fouled the exhaust so John re-routed that around

the outside of the right hand suspension leg. The American specification muffler/spark arrester still clipped on neatly so noise was kept to an acceptable level. Fearing the worst — and water — the filter box was modded to breathe through the top. Seats from a little Kawasaki fun bike took care of rider comfort.

Being a trials bike, the Kawasaki had ample bottom and mid range power and although quick enough for most things, lacked the sparkle necessary for scratching between checks. More poke was found by porting the barrel, upping the compression ratio and modifying the ignition system. The standard electronics were removed complete with all the wiring and switches and the 400 motocross unit slipped on. The tiny 400 flywheel made it all so much more responsive. On the KT250 the little oil tank really is out of sight and out of mind so to avoid all sorts of nasties it was removed completely. Lubrication became petrol with a racing Shell 20 to 1 mix.

Just lately manufacturers and importers have been loath to lend me test bikes when they learned I actually intended to *ride* the beastly things — not so Kawasaki. Alec and John had been really pleased and, oozing confidence, had dragged out one of the bikes just as it had finished the event. I saw the mud scraped off, the chain oiled and adjusted, the tank filled with fuel. She had fired third prod, we were away . . .

Although evenly spaced, the first four gears felt really close. A touch of throttle and zrrrp-zrrrp-zrrrp, I was up through the box as quick as I could co-ordinate ankle and wrist. A very pleasant, muted bobbling wafted from the exhaust. In traffic the bike is quick, quite decisive. On moderate throttle openings it does not aviate.

Without doubt it is still very much a trials bike. Wheelbase is upped to 54in but it has that light, airy fairy feel about it. Straight line stability has improved but B class roads caused the whole plot to pitch and yaw at speed. The new, long-travel rear suspension is hopelessly soft. With my weight aboard the springs were wound up almost all the time, so rapid cornering became something of a problem. Even sitting well up the tank, so transferring weight well forward, ridges and undulations kicked the wheel out when the power was on.

Engine-wise the bike feels reasonably happy cruising at fifty odd on the road. To ease wheel removal the drive box on the front hub has been modified so the



Development man and Gold medallist, John Gazeley.

speedo no longer works but it feels like 50-55ish. With this modified bike though gradients and headwinds turn pleasure into a right chore. Overall gearing has been upped quite a bit, so under adverse conditions no way is it possible to hang onto top. The trial's internal ratios have been retained so there is not just a jump between fourth and fifth, there is a great void, a great big gaping hole. On metalled roads in less than favourable conditions the poor old motor was either gasping and tinkling or revving and rattling.

Riding position is first class. Normally one-day bikes are cramped for long legged men (or women) but the deeper seats fitted to the specials lift your bum up and further back. Those with dainty feet my find the gear pedal a fair way from the rest but with my old rubber trials boots I liked it, it was right. A useful feature (and one typical of Japanese thinking) is the spring loaded end to the gearchange. It will stand any amount of leaden feet bashing up and down but



"Is this wot Mick Grant rides, Mister?"

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Tucked away brake arm, long travel fork and DID rims.

brush it against an obstacle and it folds neatly back.

Balancing on the rests through tricky going the high, wide handlebar gives maximum control and the slim, almost unobtrusive standard steel tank makes it possible to climb all over the bike — but how I wish it contained more fuel! Holding around one and a half gallons (including reserve) I am constantly worried about running out of the precious liquid. With mixed road/rough riding the three modified bikes are returning around 45mpg so after something like 40 plus miles I stick a gallon in. I have not discovered fortunately just how far reserve will carry us. Builder Gazeley reckons an extra two pints capacity would be adequate for enduros but I would disagree. Most of us don't enjoy works support and the luxury of a pit crew on every other hill, so for those of us less fortunate souls I would ask for at least another gallon. With my old Dalesman I could ride all day in the wilds on a tankful. That's the way it should be, surely? With these team Kawasaki bikes it will be argued, probably quite rightly, my problem is not their concern. After all, being team machines they do have full team support. To be completely fair the bike did begin life as a one-day trials iron so for its original purpose the standard tank is more than adequate.

Bang in the middle of the fourteen day test session came a Saturday trial run from Pateley Bridge. Ever keen to enjoy the beautiful scenery, that special northern warmth and the John Smith's ale, I found myself in MCI country.

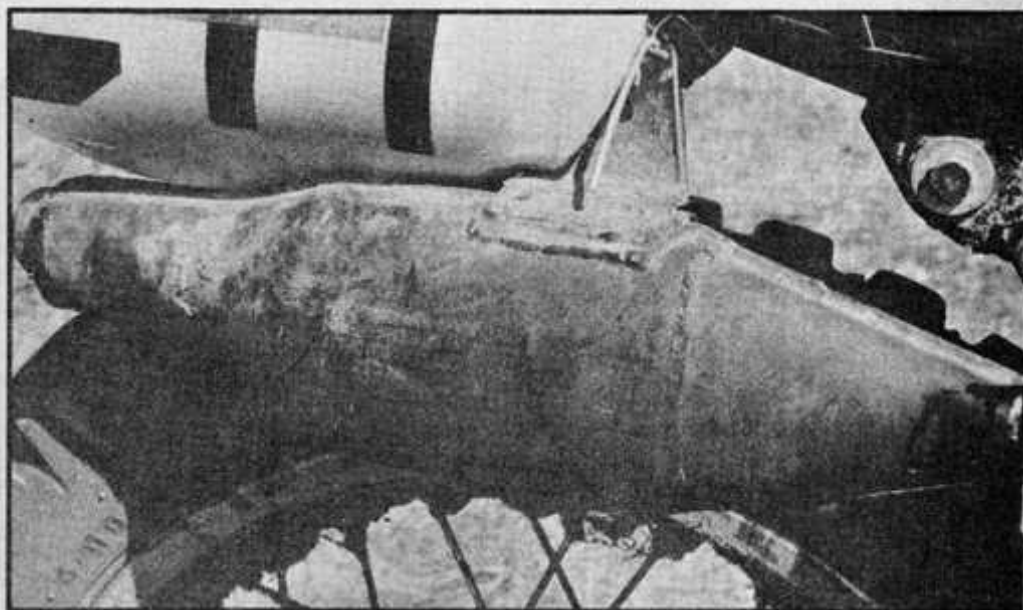
At moderate trial riding speeds the Kawasaki really does make the going easy. Even on the tall gearing, steep climbs could be taken in third with just a touch of power. Slowing for steps, second gear and a stab of power lifts the front up and over every time. Bottom is the emergency ratio — the crawler gear, and it was rarely used. The motor lacks a decompressor, so sharp downhill call for a modicum of caution. The brakes need bringing into play early on to keep speed down. Smooth, progressive and oh so controllable, they perform their task beautifully. On a par with the best in the business (the Sachs units in the works DKWs) the Kwacker brakes slow and stop the bike with little pedal or lever effort. From speed on the road they are just as effective.

Back home on familiar ground I was disappointed at my inability to ride the Kawasaki at anything like proper 'enduro' speeds. On the private forestry

type test circuit I got into all sorts of bother. The gas Girlings retained their damping but the springs were just too soft. Slotting into fast corners over sun-baked ripples kicked and flicked the back end up. I swear I saw the wheel over my shoulder every time round. By way of consolation, the bike does perform in really tight going. Squirting down a firebreak, doing a left over a rise then easing down through the densely wooded section, the Kawasaki was as quick as anything, and quicker than most.

Prior to my ride in the Brechfa I had never thrown a leg over a competition Kawasaki or indeed given much thought to the marque. Since that time I have ridden several other privately owned KT250s and remain impressed. I am not qualified to comment on the virtues of the bike for one-day trials but as a woods fun bike it is very, very good. The standard of engineering is as one would expect from a Japanese giant and the bike has many worthwhile features which a novice rider should appreciate — the indestructible clutch and the well-less, almost crunch-proof DID rims, spring to mind.

The test bike has led a short but very active life. Chris Horsfield forced it round the Welsh Two Day to earn a gold medal and the top Kawasaki placing closely followed by John Gazeley and then Ian Hayden. This was a grand team effort and has well proved the model for competition. Untouched since that event, I have covered a further six hundred miles, mostly across country. The only malfunction being that of a frac-



Approved by the US Forest Service, the spark arrester.

tured weld on the silencer bracket. I have not found it necessary to lay one spanner on the bike.

To be totally honest the Kawasaki, like all others is no instant success machine. Their team win at the Welsh came about through care, experience, preparation, a good basic product and riding skill. Ian Hayden could be said to be a rising star but John Gazeley and Chris Horsfield have been around a long time. John and I were junior scramblers back in the early sixties, he rode Greeves and BSA if I remember rightly. Horsfield was an expert then. He did incredible things with a 500 Matchless. He also achieved

some success with a 250 James, which must mean something.

If forestry charges increase we could see more events out on open courses but everything points to the increasing use of private land for time trials. If this trend is realised then Kawasaki really will have a competitive bike to wear the tag 'UK Enduro'. When I left John Gazeley with his bikes after returning the test model he was muttering something about scramble type barrels and closer ratios for the gearbox and other little subtleties. Now as the man in the song says 'this must be the start of something good'.



SPECIFICATIONS FOR STANDARD KT250

DIMENSIONS

Overall length: 2,015mm.
Overall width: 835mm.
Overall height: 1,155mm.
Wheelbase: 1,305mm 51in.
Ground clearance: 310mm 12 1/4 in.
Dry weight: 96 kg 212lbs.
Fuel tank capacity: 5.5 lit (1.5 US gal)
Oil tank capacity: 0.25 lit (0.26 US qt).

ENGINE

Type: 2-stroke, single cylinder, piston valve.
Bore and stroke: 69.5 x 64.9mm.
Displacement: 246cc.
Compression ratio: 6.5:1.
Maximum horsepower: 16 HP @ 6,500 rpm.
Maximum torque: 1.9 kg-m @ 4,000 rpm.
Port timing: Intake: Open, 68°

BTDC; Close: 68° ATDC, Scavenging: Open, 53° BBDC; Close: 53° ABDC. Exhaust: Open, 76° BBDC; Close: 76° ABDC.

Carburettor: Mikuni VM26SC.
Lubrication system: Superlube (Oil injection).
Engine oil: 2-stroke oil.
Starting system: Primary kick.
Ignition system: Electronic CDI.
Ignition timing: 23° BTDC/3.7mm BTDC @ 4,000 rpm.
Spark Plug: NGK B7HS.

TRANSMISSION

Type: 5-speed, constant-mesh, return-shift.
Clutch: Wet, multi-disc.
Gear ratio: 1st, 3.25 (39/12); 2nd, 2.47 (37/15); 3rd, 1.83 (33/18); 4th, 1.22 (28/23); 5th, 0.79 (22/28).
Primary reduction ratio: 3.26 (62/19).
Final reduction ratio: 3.47 (52/15).

Overall drive ratio: 8.89 (5th).
Transmission oil: capacity 1.2 lit; type: SAE 10W30 or 10W40.

FRAME

Type: Tubular, double-cradle.
Steering angle: 68° to either side.
Caster: 63.5°.
Fork angle: 62°.
Trail: 79mm.
Tyre size: Front: 2.75-21 4PR; Rear: 4.00-18 4PR.
Suspension: Front: Telescopic fork. Rear: Swing arm.
Suspension stroke: Front: 175mm; Rear: 100mm.
Front fork oil (per shock absorber): SAE 10W 160-168cc.

BRAKES

Type: Internal expansion, leading-trailing.
Inside diameter: Front: 120 x 28mm.
Rear: 130 x 28mm.

Specifications subject to change without notice.

Engine Performance Curves

