

Scorpio Rising

SCORPIO (OCT 24-NOV 22). SCORPIOS ARE lively characters, inclined to flair, exuberance and the good life. Easy to get on with, they are very forgiving and establish good relationships soon after acquaintance. Scorpios tend to get on well with younger people and generally offer the fortunate youngsters their valuable experience, but are quick to brake on dangerous situations. Older folk are also attracted to Scorpios for their qualities of honesty and thrifful simplicity. Famous Scorpios include Albert Einstein, Jacob Epstein and Nasti Brownstein.

That, I thought putting aside Madame Blavatsky's "The Stars and Other Hidden Influences On Your Life" (Geller Safraud £14.99), could have been written specially for the Kawasaki Z250 also called Scorpio. While other mags and papers have been falling over themselves to see who could get the worst pun out of the 'Sting In The Tale' accolade, all have ignored the astrological implications. I quietly researched the occult for good auguries and found nothing but auspicious signs.

The Scorpio is a handsome bike. In the same parallelogram style as the Z500 and Z1000 it avoids the grossness without looking small. The first time we saw it (contacts in the trade, say *no more*) we mistook it for a machine of much larger capacity. It's well proportioned and this sense of proportion is carried right through. Riding it that first time — long before anyone had written a test — left me eager for an extended trial, and when Simon returned from the official launch full of praise it only served to increase the desire.

Risking the pimply wrath of thousands (and I can hear the cries of Boring Old Fart now) I must say that this is a *sensible* bike. Often such epithets serve to damn with faint praise but in this case it is meant as a compliment of the highest order. In the design stage Kawasaki had any number of options open to them. A stepped up KH250 could have been fastest on the street. A slightly more civilised KL250 could have been a commuting fuel sipper. A clean sheet of design paper could have had them out Irimajiri-ing Honda for the most sophisticated engine. They did none of these things.

Back in '75 Kawasaki did give their designers a clean sheet but the brief was to produce the best 250 — not the best in any specific area, but the best all round. Late in '76 the first prototypes were flown in for assessment by Kawasaki UK — the machine being intended primarily for this market since we are the only country in the world to have a 250cc limit for learners. KMUK pointed out certain deficiencies and a Mk 2 prototype was created. This had a 180 degree crankshaft and different mountings to reduce vibration, among other things. Development continued until June 78, with UK personnel involved at every stage. The final result was the machine unveiled at the '78 Show: a bike designed for, and to some extent by, the inhabitants of these isles.

If I tell you some of the folks at KMUK were previously employed by such fabled factories as BSA and Norton you might think that the

Kawasaki may be joining the fray a little after their rivals but the new Z250 has been designed to be a winner right off the drawing board. The blurb says that it should shatter a lot of dreams, and you know, it could just turn out that way.

bike would have some emphasis on handling. You'd be right. The Scorpio is the first small Japanese bike I've ridden that doesn't weave or pitch. I know they've been getting better over the years, but they've really done it with this one. Frame, suspension and tyres all combine as they should for a first class ride. Why couldn't they do it before? The Japanese have mastered the technology but have been short on experience. With the participation of knowledgeable persons they have overcome this failing. We must also bear in mind the economics of this bike. It is not intended for a vast American market (or a Continental one) so Kawasaki had to make sure that it would appeal to punters in this country. One thing we are keen on is surefooted handling. The rattly, oily heaps of yesteryear may have been underengineered but they did go round corners. The Scorpio finally catches up.

Something else we've been screaming about for years is disc brakes that don't work in the wet. It must be a sign of our suicidal tendencies that we continue to buy such lethal devices. If there was an organised boycott of dangerous bikes manufacturers would be quick enough to make improvements as consumer action in the States has shown. The cynical negligence in this area by

Mill is very compact. Oil window has a friend just under the side panel — for the brake fluid. Front pot also has one — could it start a trend?



the big factories only serves to underline their profit making function. Let's face it, the only reason we're getting the Scorpio is because Kawasaki think there's going to be a lot of money in it for them. Luckily for us, the opposition is good enough to have forced them into pulling out all the stops in the attempt for market domination, and one of the things they've done is create a new pad material that works *all* the time.

The discs (front and rear) are drilled, not to aid water dispersal as we have been conned into thinking in the past, but to prevent squeal. A little pressure on the lever has sintered metal grabbing drilled metal in a purposeful manner, a little more has it grabbing in an over-the-bars manner. At first the brakes seem insensitive, but on further acquaintance one learns to pull a shade more delicately and the natural balance is restored. There's an identical amount of retardation in the wet, so it is a good idea to get accustomed to brake action before riding in the rain simply because they might prove too powerful. If you're used to the 'give-em-ten-seconds-to-dry-out' routine and apply the normally needed extra pressure you could find yourself sliding down the road with locked wheels. And that won't be the fault of the tyres because like the rest of the bike they have been designed for a marketplace where it is as likely to rain as not. They're a dead spit of Red Arrows and work as well as the originals. For this relief much thanks.

It's a good job they grip too — the bike is such a joy to ride it becomes something of a challenge to discover the limits of adhesion and/or ground clearance. The first thing to touch down is the sidestand, a feat made much easier when carrying a passenger. The meaty bulk of Brennan made it easier still. Don't get the idea that it digs in too readily though, you have to be trying a bit to get it down and throughout such silly manoeuvres the bike retains its firm dependable feel. In fact, it not only looks like a bigger bike it feels like one. This impression has been built in without adding extra bulk or weight, it's just a function of that proportion I mentioned. This isn't a sleeved down 400 — with all the weight penalties that implies — it's a solus model, and one comes away with an overriding impression of *wholeness*.

The engine, which was intended to be both simple and powerful, performs its duties in such an unobtrusive way it might be easy to overlook its virtues. Without balance shafts it's compact and light, and free from the whirring noises that most balanced engines have. The 180-degree crankshaft and the engine's rubber mountings bring perceptible vibration down to a very low point, and there are no bad 'periods'. Without wishing to be insulting, it is very reminiscent of earlier Honda power units, only far less bulky. I don't think that's an insult anyway, as the Honda motors were very good, and the Kwacker is bang up to date, using plenty of roller bearings inside. There is no big power step, as one finds in other small engines, the power just keeps building up smoothly. If you're conditioned by the kick in the pants at

6000rpm syndrome this can seem disappointing at first, but a check on the speedo soon lets you know the Scorpion isn't selling you short on performance.

Oddly enough one of the bike's few dangers comes from the apparently ever-constant power. It's very easy to cruise along at 80 or so and imagine there's a lot more power to come, in case of overtaking difficulties (you know what I mean, the times you think you're about to end up as the filling in a Foden sandwich). But sadly such is not the case. 85mph is a possible cruise speed, but it's also practical top whack in ordinary circumstances.

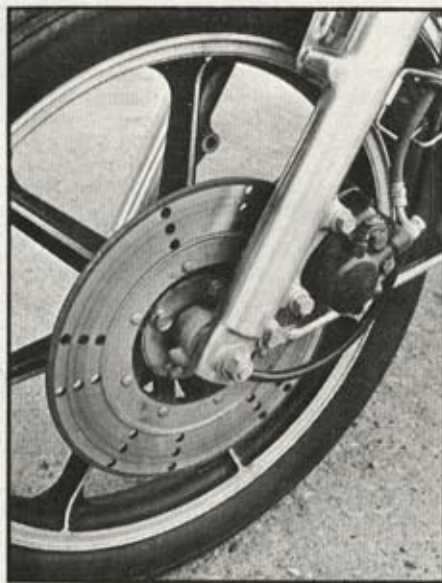
The bike will go faster; we achieved 90.9mph at the test strip, but the rider had a racing suit on and was in the time honoured 'Top Speed Run' position — flat on the tank with clutch hand on the fork leg. Acceleration up to 70 is good but tails off from there. If you're prepared to go into the red, acceleration is surprisingly rapid up to 80.

As one expects from riding impressions, the measured torque curve is almost flat, ranging from 12ft/lb at 5000rpm to 14 at 8500, which is the maximum. What this adds up to is a bike that is very predictable and safe without being slow. Maybe there's no great power step, but there's no corresponding slump — what power there is (and it's sufficient) is available all the time, and there's plenty of it from 3500rpm in all gears except top. The addition of a pillion makes little difference to pulling ability until fifth and sixth are reached, and even then the difference is only noticeable up hills and into headwinds.

It's heartening to see this effort going into a market area that's been either a peaky speed merchant's preserve or a lumbering commuter. I'm tempted to say Kawasaki are being 'responsible'. A few years ago there was talk of banning certain 250s because of their speed, and doubtless the sixteen year law was helped on its way by tales, however exaggerated, of 100mph L-platers that would throw you off as soon as look at you. Now, at the other end of the market, the factories seem to have been racing to see who could produce the grossest most irrelevant two wheeled pigs and (foretaste of things to come?) West German importers have fixed up a nice voluntary 100bhp limit, thus rendering useless at a stroke years and millions of pounds worth of

R&D. Do their right hands know what their left hands are doing? The Scorpion marks a return to sanity — it is a perfect learner's machine. The only thing against it is its price, but as a newly introduced machine it might have been priced high to avoid rises for a while.

As with its mechanics and frame, Kawasaki consulted a known authority when it came to the lighting. Cibie have a tie-up with the factory and their expertise has paid off — it comes shining through (sorry). The headlamp is suitable for nightwork on unknown country roads as well as main road riding. How do I know? Because I went out at night and found some narrow twisty unfenced, unhedged, unmarked and very difficult to pick out country roads solely for the purpose of testing it. (Would you do that for me? No, of course not. Why should I do it for you then? What do you mean I'm paid to do it?) The aforementioned lanes were navigable at a safe 40-50mph, which was fast enough for me, but it was possible to take main roads at speeds up to the legal max. The dip beam was perhaps a bit too scattered, but I've been spoiled by the real thing on my own bike and I'm not going to split hairs over Kawasaki's efforts.



Above: Pretty patterns drilled in the disc help to eliminate London Taxi Syndrome while the new pads get on with the job superbly.

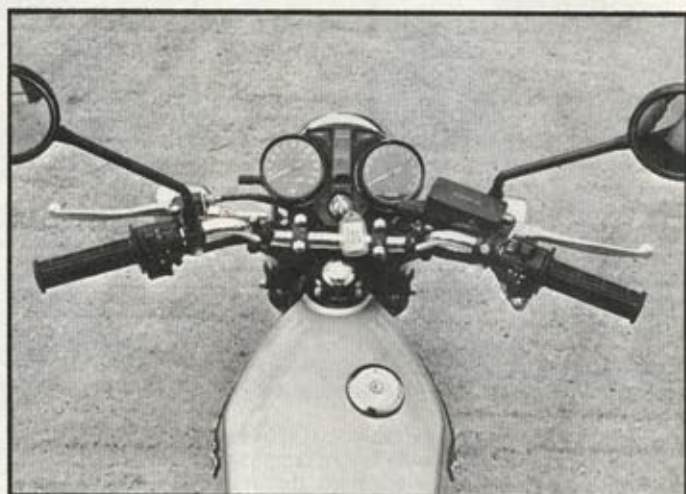
The more observant of you might have noticed there is something missing from the right hand side of the engine/gearbox. For the less perceptive, it's the kickstart. We're getting used to big bikes having no visible means of prodding, but it's something of a novelty on a 250. I suppose that bikers are now in the same position as car drivers a few years back. I can remember my Dad pontificating on the foolishness of automobile manufacturers when they started to leave crank handles out of the tool kit and close up the holes in the front bumper. It's only logical though, *n'est-ce pas?* How many times do you use the kickstart if you've an electric one? Moreover, the battery and charging systems of modern bikes are almost foolproof, as long as you look at the thing fairly regularly and keep it in good nick. So, farewell then kickstart. In a hundred years they'll probably look as odd as acetelyne lighting does to us now. Starting was no problem anyway. A dab of carburettor mounted choke on cold mornings and the mill would start firing first prod of the button. The only purpose a kickstart would have served would have been to free the clutch-plates before the first engagement of the day, which tended to be on the clunky side. Otherwise the clutch action was sweet, light and positive with no nasty grabbing or sudden take up.

The riding position is comfortable, all the controls are easily reachable and for the first time in ages the gear and back brake levers are in exactly the right places. Usually these items are either above or below one's foot, necessitating a large movement of the pedal appendage (plates of meat to you) to operate them. On the Scorpion the brake pedal lay in just the right plane — immediately under my foot. I know that most of these things are adjustable nowadays, but it is a pleasant change for a bike to be set up properly from the start.

The details have been well thought out, as they should be on a bike intended to make everyday hassles easier to live with. Oil level can be checked through a window in the crankcase, and the brake fluid reservoirs have similar instant checkpoints. The front brake res. is a square black box with screwed down top, which makes it less obvious to tamperers. The rear one, and the battery, can be checked and topped up *in situ*. The handbook is unusual in that it gives you proper

Below: Flat 'bars are narrow and aid the taut feel of the bike. Note flush fitting petrol cap, lockable of course.

Below: Room for more inside? Not a lot, but it does show you what a little glassfibre can do for the end of a bike.





If it's not stiff . . . never mind the tax disc here's part of the reason for good handling. Strategic gusset on a basically stiff frame.



Here's another — the damper. Spring rate and damping are well matched for a good ride. Zorst wails nicely at high revs.



information on how to do regular jobs (like the tappets and timing) rather than telling you to leave it to the Kawasaki dealer. On the other hand the 11 piece toolkit doesn't have a spanner big enough to undo the tappet covers.

The steering lock is a function of the ignition switch — turn it to the left to lock, one more stop and the parking lights come on. I tell you this to save you looking at the headstock, but if you should be casting your eyes over this area, take a peep at the gusseting. This must account for some of the good handling, but it can also be attributed to the triangulation visible all over the frame. The pillion footrest mounts are a good example — very neat brackets made to do the job and beef up the frame. There's only one obvious omission on the bike, and that is a passenger grab rail. The pillion can hold onto the lifting handle for the centre stand, or try to get a grip on the ducktail, but on a bike that copes with two up work so well it seems a shame that there is no proper provision. The last detail that deserves a mention is the mirror, or rather mirrors. These are the Kawasaki anti-vibration numbers, and are adjustable at the base, the rim and the reflector. They are angled so as to avoid elbows and if you can't get a good image in them there's something terribly wrong with your physique.

Though late onto the scene, Kawasaki are hoping to capture a lot of sales with the Scorpion. They have much on their side — it's a bike designed with the UK in mind, and it fulfills all the requirements — good handling, good braking and good lighting. It is also simple and light, easy to work on and fairly economical. It must appeal to learners, or first time buyers simply because of its 'togetherness'. In much the same way I can see it appealing to those people who want a light-weight to get to work on during the week and ride for pleasure at weekends. From the way it felt when toting heavy passengers, touring is a viable proposition either at home or abroad.

The Scorpion is good news for more than the biking world. I'm sure that a Japanese industry wouldn't create a model for this market unless they felt confident of sales. Sales means money money means the economy. Perhaps those boys know something we don't . . .

CHECKOUT

KAWASAKI Z250A1



Engine	sohc twin
Bore x stroke.....	55 x 52.4mm
Capacity.....	248cc
Compression ratio	9.5:1
Carburation.....	2 x 32mm Keihin
Bhp @ rpm.....	27 @ 10000
Max torque @ rpm.....	15.2ft/lb @ 8500
Primary drive	gear
Clutch	multiplate, wet
Gearbox.....	6 speed
Electrical system	12v alternator, 10ah battery, coil ign.
Lighting	35.35w headlamp

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	52.8in.
Seat height.....	31in
Overall width.....	29.1in
Ground clearance.....	5.5in
Weight (with 1gal fuel).....	353lb
Fuel capacity.....	2.9gal

EQUIPMENT

Indicators.....	Yes
Electric starter.....	Yes
Trip odometer.....	Yes
Steering lock.....	Yes
Helmet lock.....	Yes
Headlight flasher.....	Yes
Others.....	Cast wheels, twin mirrors, locking fuel cap

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	
(front).....	3.00 x 18 Gold Seal
(rear).....	3.50 x 18 Gold Seal
Brakes	
(front).....	9.06in disc
(rear).....	8.58in disc

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	
(prone).....	90.9mph
(sitting up).....	78.6mph
Standing 1/4-mile.....	16.6sec
Speedometer error	
(at indicated 30mph).....	28.7
(at indicated 60mph).....	54.9
Braking distance	
(from 30mph).....	35ft
(from 60mph).....	135ft
Fuel consumption	
(overall).....	55.8mpg
(ridden hard).....	46mpg

PRICE..... £899 inc. VAT

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Deal Avenue,
Slough, Berks.

Guarantee..... 6 months/6000 miles

