



TWIN ON THE CHEAP

KAWASAKI Z250B

Following an American theme, Kawasaki are offering a version of the excellent Z250 twin in less exotic trim at a lower price tag.

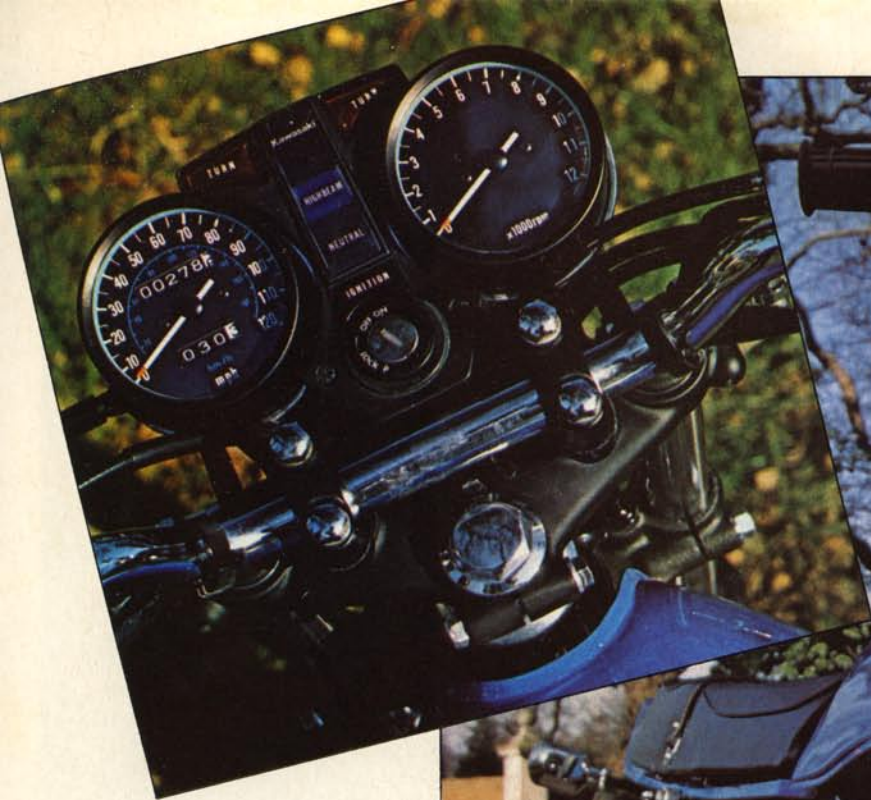
John Nutting wonders if it's worth the trouble.
Photography by Ian Dobbie.

You'd think that a relatively impoverished country like Britain would have been the first to provoke the introduction of cut-price motorcycles with more abbreviated specifications than their normal counterparts.

In fact it was in America three years ago that Yamaha, and later Honda, started offering bikes with less lavish equipment so that they could make them appeal to a wider

market. Sort of more mundane motorcycles for the masses, you could say.

It was felt that sales were levelling off and that the only way to improve sales was to build bikes that would be bought by Joe Public, who might not necessarily want



flash features like disc brakes, cast alloy wheels and exotic exhaust pipes. It's happening again now and manufacturers are now expanding their ranges with ultra-economical four-stroke singles.

In the more conservative atmosphere of Britain any sort of aggressive marketing policy has been rare up to now. But things are changing, and factories like Kawasaki are waking up to the fact that the general public, not just motorcycle fans, are wanting cheap and relatively mid-capacity bikes.

So among the 250cc machines recently introduced by Kawasaki was not only a four-stroke single roadster, the Z250C (why not Z250S, it's more logical), but a simplified version of the excellent Z250 twin launched last year.

The 'cheap' twin is being offered at £829, £70 less than the full-specification Z250. While this sounds like a good deal since it's also £70 less than the Honda CB250N, it doesn't look so hot when you realise that many dealers discount to the point where you can get a 250cc Honda, on the road with road tax, delivery and plates for £820.

In addition, many bikes are bought with loans or hire-purchase over about three years, and the difference in monthly payments between the 'ordinary' Z250 with its smart seven-spoke cast alloy wheels and disc brakes and its more modest sibling is only £3. We wonder if many buy-



ers will consider the saving worth it.

In overall performance, handling and behaviour, there isn't much to choose between the two bikes. We still think that the Kawasaki twin is the best of the 250cc machines and that goes for the Z250B too.

It's still got the free-revving six-speed overhead camshaft engine that develops 27bhp at 10,000rpm. It's flexible, pulling from low revs, and economical, returning between 55 and 70mpg depending on use.

Thanks to the use of rubber mountings for the engine, the bike is surprising-

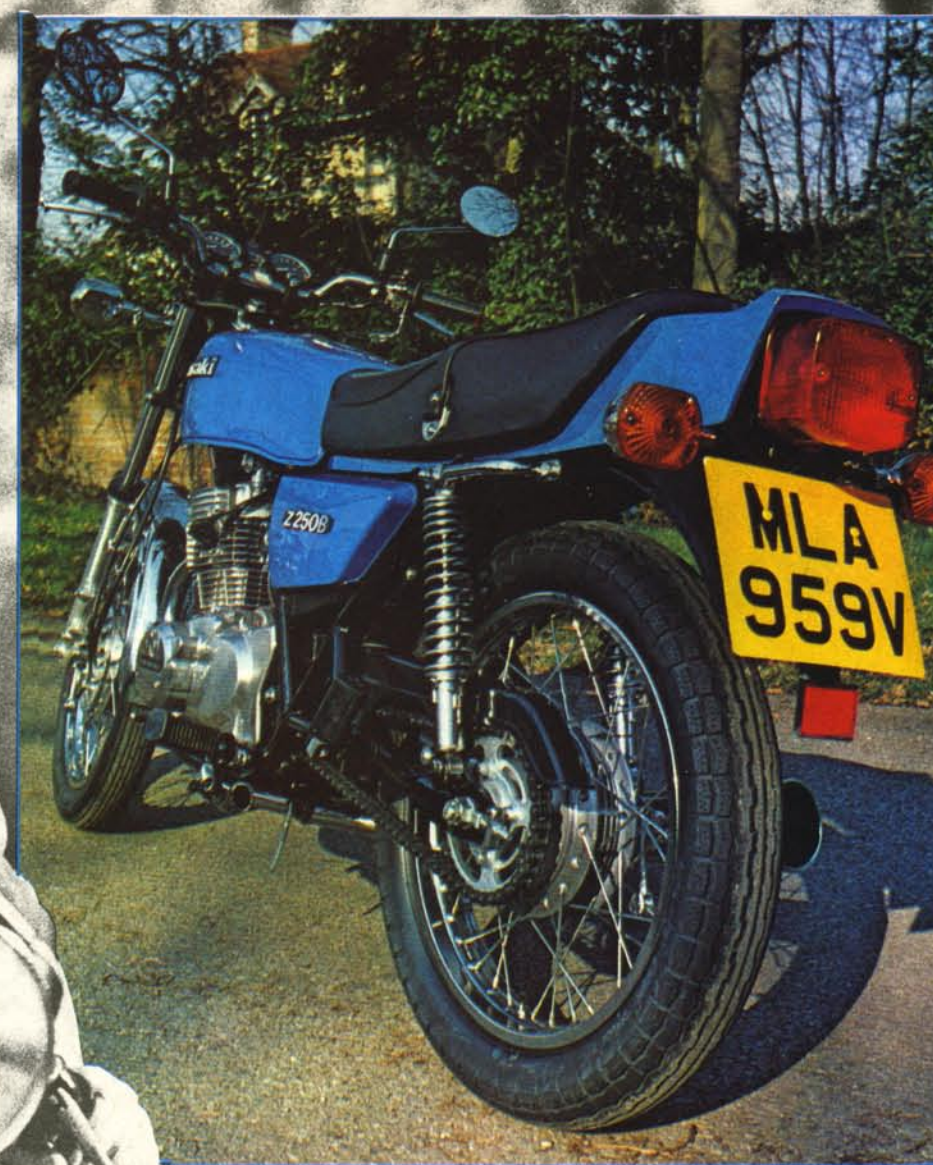
ly smooth, so any vibration developed by the roller-bearing supported 180-degree crankshaft is ably absorbed. If any go the way of the handlebar, there's another rubber support here too.

Differences between the Z250 and the Z250B mainly concern appearance and convenience. The disc brakes are dropped and replaced with a pair of drum brakes laced into spoke wheels that bare a remarkable similarity to those used on the earlier 250cc two-stroke triples.

It might be argued that Kawasaki have made a mistake in not using their excel-

Above: Simplicity is the keynote on the Kawasaki Z250B with plain paintwork and a two-into-one exhaust system.

Above left: There's no change in the instrumentation. The engine red lines at 10,000rpm and has a top speed of about 87mph.



lent sintered-pad discs after they've perfected them to the point where it is accepted that they work efficiently wet or dry.

Fact is though the 7.1 inch front drum on the Z250B is more than powerful enough. Its feel is different from the disc inevitably because of the servo effect of the two leading shoes. There is slight sponginess in the handlebar lever but it just takes getting used to as the brake still delivers the goods when hard stopping is needed. A smaller single leading shoe stopper is used at the rear.

The front brake did have one occasional fault. If you used it at very low speeds it would sometimes grab on, risking a locked wheel.

Instead of the original exhaust system with two silencers, siamesed two-into-one pipes are used that exit on the right, giving a clean line to the machine. Although it might be expected that this would improve the power characteristics of the engine, Kawasaki don't quote any. There's certainly no difference in the throaty note.

One advantage of the single silencer is that you can get at the drive chain more easily. That's what you first think. But it's not so easy because Kawasaki have left off the centre stand in their efforts to cut costs so lubricating the chain with a spray is more tricky, not to mention removing the wheels.

The net result of all the subtractions is that the dry weight of the Z250B is 15lbs less than the cast-wheel disc-brake version. That makes it 320lbs and about 25lbs lighter than the heavier two-strokes.

Such a difference isn't enough to perceptibly improve acceleration or fuel consumption so it comes with no surprise that the top speed and zero to 60mph figures were almost the same as last year's model. The bike is slightly overgeared in the highest of the six speeds and so can't reach the theoretical 95mph that equates to 10,000rpm unless you're flat

Above left: The Z250B weighs 320lbs, giving a saving of 15lb over the cast-wheel, disc-braked version. The loss of the centre stand is annoying when you need to work on the drive chain or remove the wheels. Above right: No pipe means slim looks.



on the tank. In normal circumstances and with the average rider, the Z250 can just hold 87mph flat out and happily maintain 70mph except into motorway gradients and strong head-

winds. Unlike the highly strung two-stroke two fifties, there wasn't any need to keep the Kawasaki revving hard to get the best from it. In town, it would plonk along quietly



KAWASAKI Z250B

Price inc VAT:	£829
Engine:	Ohc 180-deg twin
Capacity:	248cc (55x52.4mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp ratio:	9.5 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 32mm CV Keihin
Ignition:	Coils and cbs
Max power:	27bhp @ 10,000rpm
Max torque:	15.2lb-ft @ 8,500rpm
Primary drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multiplate
Gearbox:	Six speed
Final drive:	520 chain
Mph/1,000rpm:	9.5 in top
Electrics:	12v 10ah battery Alternator 35/35w head-lamp
Fuel capacity:	3 gallons
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic fork (f) Swing arm with 5-pos. spring pre-load adj (r)
Tyres:	Dunlop Gold Seal 3.00 S 18 F7(f) 3.50 S 18 K102 (r)
Brakes:	7.1in 2LS drum (f) 6.3in SLS drum (r)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	52.8ins
Seat height:	32ins
Grnd clmce:	5.5ins
H'bar width:	29ins
Rake/trail:	63deg/3.9ins
Weight:	320lbs dry

EQUIPMENT

Mirrors, self starter, 120mph speedo, 12,000 rpm rev counter, steering lock, locking fuel cap, locking seat, trip meter, tools, side stand.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed:	87mph
Calculated Top speeds at 5th max:	95mph
4th power:	85mph
3rd power:	73mph
2nd power:	60mph
1st power:	47mph
St. ¼-mile time:	33mph
0-to-60mph:	16.8 secs
Av fuel consumption:	10.4secs
Tank range:	62mpg
Speedo correction at 60mph:	190 miles
Importer:	n/a
	Kawasaki Motors UK Ltd, Deal Avenue, Trading Estate, Slough SL1 4SH

at minimal revs. Most times it wasn't necessary to use more than four or five grand on the rev counter to see off the most aggressive car drivers.

Metering on the finely tuned Keihin constant-velocity carbs was clean except for a glitch at very small openings that resulted in Jer-

kiness when filtering through traffic.

With six speeds on tap, there's no need to worry about having the right ratio for any particular situation. Most times, you could use any one of three gears as they're pretty close. The gear-change action is light and crisp but the transmission was marred by the clutch. Like last year's test bike, it had plates which would stick overnight. When the bike was fired up from cold on the electric starter it would sometimes stall when bottom gear was engaged.

Handling of the Z250B is as good as ever. The reduction in weight hasn't spoilt the bike's natural stability and pleasant steering. The suspension is a good balance between ride comfort and pitch control so there's no need to worry about abnormal behaviour on bends. Tyres are Japanese made Dunlop Gold Seals, the rear one being a special K102 version with racing style pin holes in the tread for water dispersal, and offer grip that is at least as good as European equivalents.

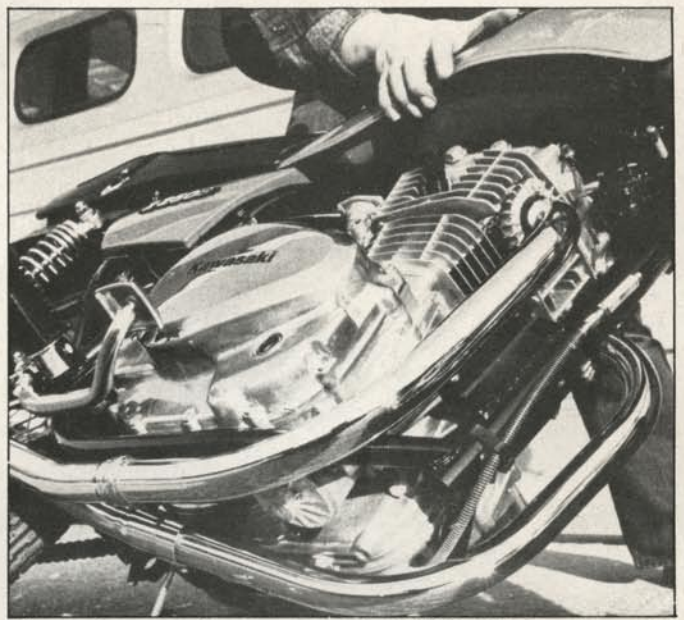
The most striking impression of the Z250B is that the changes have improved the appearance of the bike. With plain colour (red or blue) tank and side panels along with a silver finished (instead

of black) engine, the bike looks cleaner and more tidy. Perhaps the classic look is going to be in fashion this year.

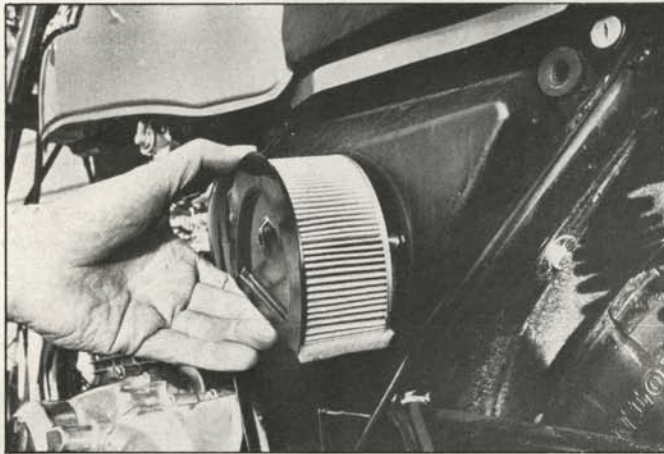
We can see no other reason for buying the Z250B in preference to the standard model. If Kawasaki had really wanted to sell the bike cheaper it should have been offered for under £800.

This might have been possible because pricing policy has no relation to the actual factory cost of the bike. It's for this reason that Kawasaki can price the Z400J, the new 398cc four based on the Z500, at much less than the bigger four although both cost the same to make in Japan.

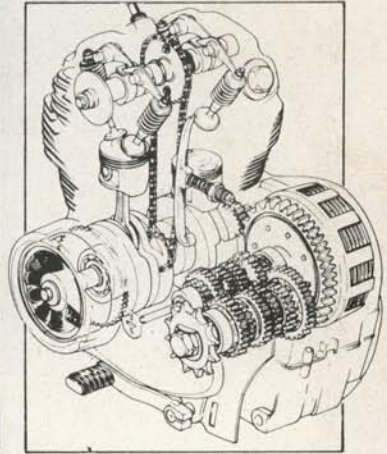
As it is the two twins are too close in price to make any difference.



The two-into-one exhaust system on the Z250B still leaves plenty of room for access to the oil filter under the crankcases.



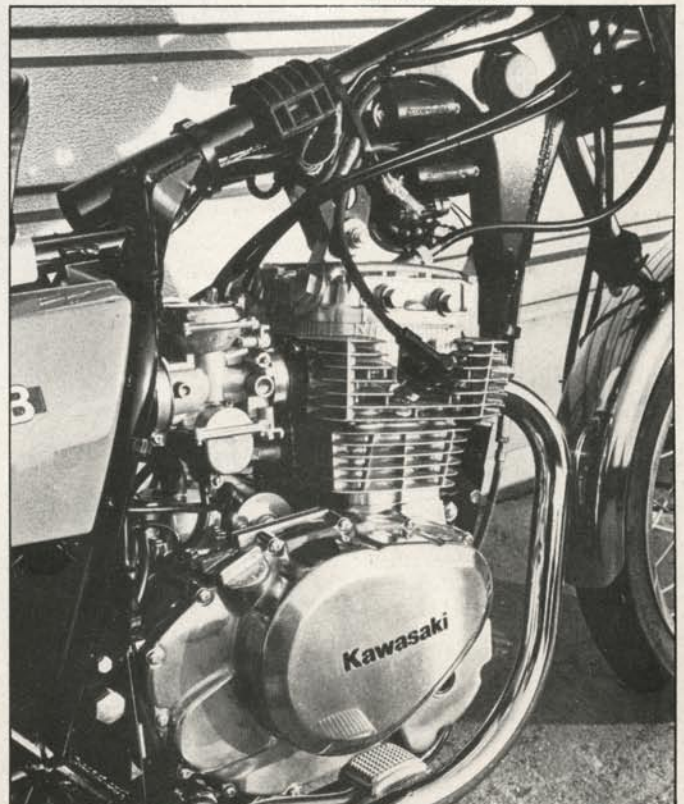
Air filter changing is as simple as this. Just pull off the side cover, remove a butterfly screw and take out the paper-element cartridge.



The Kawasaki's engine is simple in the extreme; no extra valves, no extra balancers.



This is the way two-fifties used to look; with drum brakes and wire wheels; they still work just as well.



Nothing much to talk about here except the frame. That's pretty straightforward too with a well gusseted spine and a single down tube.