

PREVIEW '85

**New from the folks
who brought you the
900 Ninja: a baby
Ninja, a half-a-Ninja,
and a V-Twin
cruiserbike that
is no Ninja at all**

KAWASAKI

The celebrated arrival of the 900 Ninja last year signaled an emphatic victory for Kawasaki. For over 11 years, Kawasaki had relied almost exclusively on its air-cooled, two-valve-per-cylinder engine technology; and while many of these engines produced remarkable horsepower, some fresh new designs from other corners of the Orient had begun to relegate Kawasaki's motors to middle-of-the-road design status. And we all know what happens when you sit in the middle of the road too long: You get run over.

But since its introduction, the Ninja has been doing the steamrolling. The 900 is little changed for '85, but Kawasaki has expanded on that four-valve-per-cylinder, liquid-cooling Ninja theme.

Witness the 600 Ninja, a liquid-cooled, inline-Four, 16-valve middleweight weapon with 16-inch wheels at both ends and a frame that obviously reflects GP racing influence. The 600 Ninja is further proof that Kawasaki is capable and, more importantly, willing, to build narrowly focused, cut-and-thrust sporting machines.

Kawasaki has also realized the impact of V-type powerplants on the marketplace, and has responded with its first V-Twin model. Called the Vulcan, this 699cc, 55-degree V-Twin cruiserbike features liquid-cooling and four-valve, twin-plug heads, and it promises low maintenance through hydraulic valve adjusters and shaft final drive. And yet another new streetster is called the 454, a liquid-cooled, eight-valve, belt-driven, parallel-Twin cruiser that displaces—you guessed it—454cc.

This '85 model-line signifies a giant step for Kawasaki, one that has leaped over the median divider and landed the company directly in the fast lane.

Though the GPz550 will still be available in 1985, the 600 Ninja represents Kawasaki's new generation of sportbikes. Both bikes share the same 52.4mm stroke and have similar central cam-drive arrangements and bottom ends, but the parallels end there. The Ninja's chassis looks like something Bimota would build. A heavily triangulated frame draws a straight line from the steering head to the boxed swingarm junction instead of using a circuitous backbone. Suspension is via a single-shock Uni-Trak system in the rear and a new anti-dive fork in front. A removable seat cowling is optional, and aluminum handlebars are standard. The 16-valve, liquid-cooled engine is said to produce more than 75 hp and rocket the Ninja to the high side of 135 mph.





The Vulcan, an enterprising, 699cc, 55-degree V-Twin that boldly goes where no Kawasaki has gone before. Liquid-cooling, eight hydraulically adjusted valves (using a system similar to the Honda Shadow's) and shaft drive highlight this cruiser. Connecting rods share a common crankpin, and rubber engine mounts and a counterbalancing system smooth vibration. The chassis is done in classic cruiser motif: twin-shock rear suspension, laid-back ergonomics, porky rear tire and long front end, sans anti-dive system.



Filling the void left by the departed 550 LTD, the 454 parallel-Twin brings Ninja technology to the middleweight cruiser class. Sporting liquid-cooling, four valves per cylinder, a six-speed gearbox and belt drive, the 454 is claimed to produce nearly 50 hp and weigh under 400 pounds dry.



Kawasaki's KL250 offers a single-pot slice of Ninja know-how. Like the dual-purpose KL600, the 250 features two counterbalancers to combat vibration, single-shock Uni-Trak rear suspension, a removable aluminum sub-frame and a front disc brake. Claimed horsepower for the 250 is 28 bhp at the crank, and dry weight is 257 pounds.