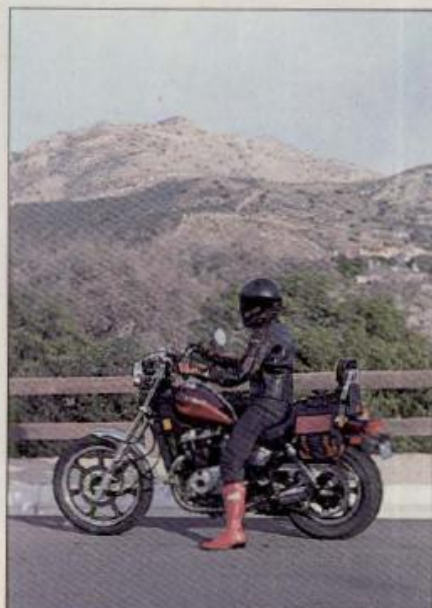




## KAWASAKI 454 LTD

**Rolling**  
S t a r t



With four valves per cylinder, dual overhead cams, liquid cooling and a six-speed transmission, the 454 has more to offer the entry-level rider than mere basics.

● MERRILL PIERSON



### 1986 Kawasaki 454 LTD

Retail Price: .....\$2,199  
 Warranty: .....12 mos., unlimd. miles  
 Service Interval: .....800, then every 5,000 miles

#### Engine

Type: .....Transverse 2 cyl.  
 Displacement: .....454cc  
 Bore & Stroke: .....72.5 x 55mm  
 Valve Train: .....DOHC, 4 valves per cyl.  
 Carburetion: .....Keihin 34mm x 2  
 Lubrication System: .....Wet sump, 3.6 qt.  
 Ignition: .....Electronic  
 No. of Gears: .....6  
 Final Drive: .....Belt

#### Electrical

Charging Output: .....238 watts at 6,000 rpm  
 Battery: .....12V, 12AH

#### Chassis

Frame: .....Diamond cradle  
 Suspension, front: .....Telescopic, adj. air pressure  
 rear: .....Dual shocks, adj. spring preload  
 Brakes, front: .....Single Disc  
 rear: .....Drum  
 Wheels, front: .....Cast, 2.15 x 19 in.  
 rear: .....Cast, 3.00 x 15 in.  
 Tires, front: .....100/90 S19  
 rear: .....140/90 S15  
 Wheelbase: .....58.5 in.  
 Seat Height: .....30.4 in.  
 Wet Weight: .....441 lbs.  
 Load Capacity: .....329 lbs.  
 GVWR: .....770 lbs.

#### Touring Performance

Fuel Capacity: .....2.9 gals.  
 Gals. to Reserve: .....2.4 gals.  
 Average MPG: .....50.8  
 Range to Reserve: .....103 miles  
 RPM at 60 MPH: .....5,400  
 Estimated top speed: .....105 MPH

#### Instruments

Speedometer, odometer, tripmeter, tachometer,  
 temp. gauge; indicator lights for turn signals,  
 neutral, high beam, oil pressure, headlamp out

It's a big decision. Picking out your first motorcycle is like choosing your first date. You don't pick just anyone. There are certain requirements—height, build, weight, personality. You know it's not going to be forever, but you want to achieve a certain level of hormonal excitement. Your first bike should be less of a mystery than your first date, though. Sure, there are things you just won't know for sure about either one until you go out. But you really don't have access to as many hard facts about a person as you do about a bike before you try them out. They don't issue consumer reports about people. And you can't walk up to someone and ask them what their displacement is. Too rude.

Some things in life are meant to be mysterious. Your first motorcycle doesn't have to be one of them. You want a bike that excites you, has enough power to keep

you interested during a long-term relationship, doesn't have so much power that it'll intimidate you, fits you well, has a low center of gravity, and most of all forgives you during your break-in period.

The Kawasaki 454 LTD will fulfill those requirements and more. One of the first things to consider about buying a new bike is the fit. Do your feet lie flat on the ground when you're seated? Are the handlebars below your shoulder line? Does the weight feel comfortable for you to manage and does the center of gravity feel low enough for you to handle the bike? When I was searching for my first motorcycle, it was important that I could pick up the bike myself if I dropped it. Knowing that I had the upper hand made me feel more in control when I was riding and made me feel freer to ride by myself on country roads where I really began to learn

how to handle a motorcycle.

On all counts, the LTD passed those tests for my 5-foot 3-inch, 115-pound frame. This is a matter of individual preference, but I think that this bike would be suitable for just about anyone as a beginner's bike. The LTD only weighs 396 pounds dry, and its center of gravity is low enough to make it feel even lighter than that. Its low 29-inch seat height and high, pulled-back handlebars make it easy to control.

There's no reason why you have to completely sacrifice your dreams of owning a Ninja, though. The 454's powerplant is exactly half of the 908cc Ninja motor. Both share the same DOHC, four-valve cylinder head, CV carburetors, internal counterbalancer and automatic cam chain tensioner.

As a result of this "Ninja-ness," the 454 is far from being a weak twin. There's enough power here to satisfy a first-time rider until well after he or she has mastered the basics of riding. And that's important, because if you're going to spend money on a new motorcycle, you're probably going to pay anywhere from \$1,200 to \$5,000. You should find a bike that you can grow into, not one you'll outgrow within a matter of months. Suggested list on the LTD is \$2,199, not bad for a bike that's more than an entry-level machine.

I strapped a pair of Bagman Santa Fe soft saddlebags and the matching toolbag to the sissy bar on the back of the LTD and took off for the California canyons. I was scheduled to meet *Rider's* new Associate Editor, Brent Ross, for a ride to Mount Baldy, one of the highest peaks in the San Bernardino National Forest. The Bagman bags are perfect for short day rides like this one, and their western leather detailing complements the cruiser styling of the LTD. The saddlebags themselves hold a rainsuit and a change of clothes for cooler weather. There was so much room for a tool kit behind the rear passenger seat on the LTD that I turned the toolbag into a carryall. All the stuff I usually carry in my purse fits into it, too.

The tool kit itself came in handy sooner than I had hoped. Tooling down the road in search of a restaurant, I saw a flash on the road and heard a horrible metal sound emanating from below me. Brent spotted the culprit in the rear tire, a skinny, three-inch metal rod which had pierced part of the tread and the sidewall. It would take a good yank with a pair of pliers to oust the offender. Opening the tool kit compartment, I noted there was a lot of room back there in case you want to add extra tools to the kit already provided for you. I was especially glad that the kit was so accessible. It makes checking out your motorcycle seem like a part of the ritual of riding and encourages beginners to take technical responsibility.

Through the curves, this bike definitely made me feel comfortable when I wanted

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to push a little harder than usual. Shifting is so effortless that even through a thin pair of boots, I could barely feel the shift lever. However, there is a moderate degree of drivetrain lash. The delay between the time the power is transmitted to the rear wheel caused the bike to lurch unexpectedly, especially in the lower gears.

The forward-mounted foot controls aren't as radical as they are on some cruisers. First-time riders might feel a little insecure about riding with their feet out in front instead of below them where they can be deployed quickly. That aspect of the pegs didn't bother me, but the laid-back seating position that they dictate did cause a considerable degree of back pain and exposed my legs to the cold. I wasn't the only one who complained about that. On back roads and for short blasts, you can relax. But any length of time spent on the freeway caused tension. The LTD would benefit from a fairing or windshield and a little ingenuity on the rider's part. (Bungee a sleeping bag on the back, utilize the passenger pegs when traffic is clear, or take a masseuse along for the ride.) Otherwise, for long-distance touring the LTD delivers a smooth, comfortable ride. There's plenty of room for a passenger in back, and the back rest should keep them comfortable.

The LTD has one disc up front and a drum in the rear. This isn't as flashy as the triple disc set-up on the latest super sport machines, but they do an effective job of stopping the bike smoothly and quickly.

The LTD has all the idiot lights and features you could want on a first bike. The only things I would add would be a fuel gauge and a better helmet lock, but that's nitpicking. You don't even have to worry about leaving your signals on or holding

them down when you're riding. They click off automatically.

The Kawasaki 454 LTD just goes to show that you can have everything in an entry-level motorcycle—fun, power, fit and features. Your first date may not have been as good as you'd hoped it would be. In contrast, if the Kawasaki 454 LTD is your first bike, it could very well be true love—in motorcycle terms, anyway. □