



HOW TO SHIP YOUR BIKE CROSS-COUNTRY

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ROAD RIDER

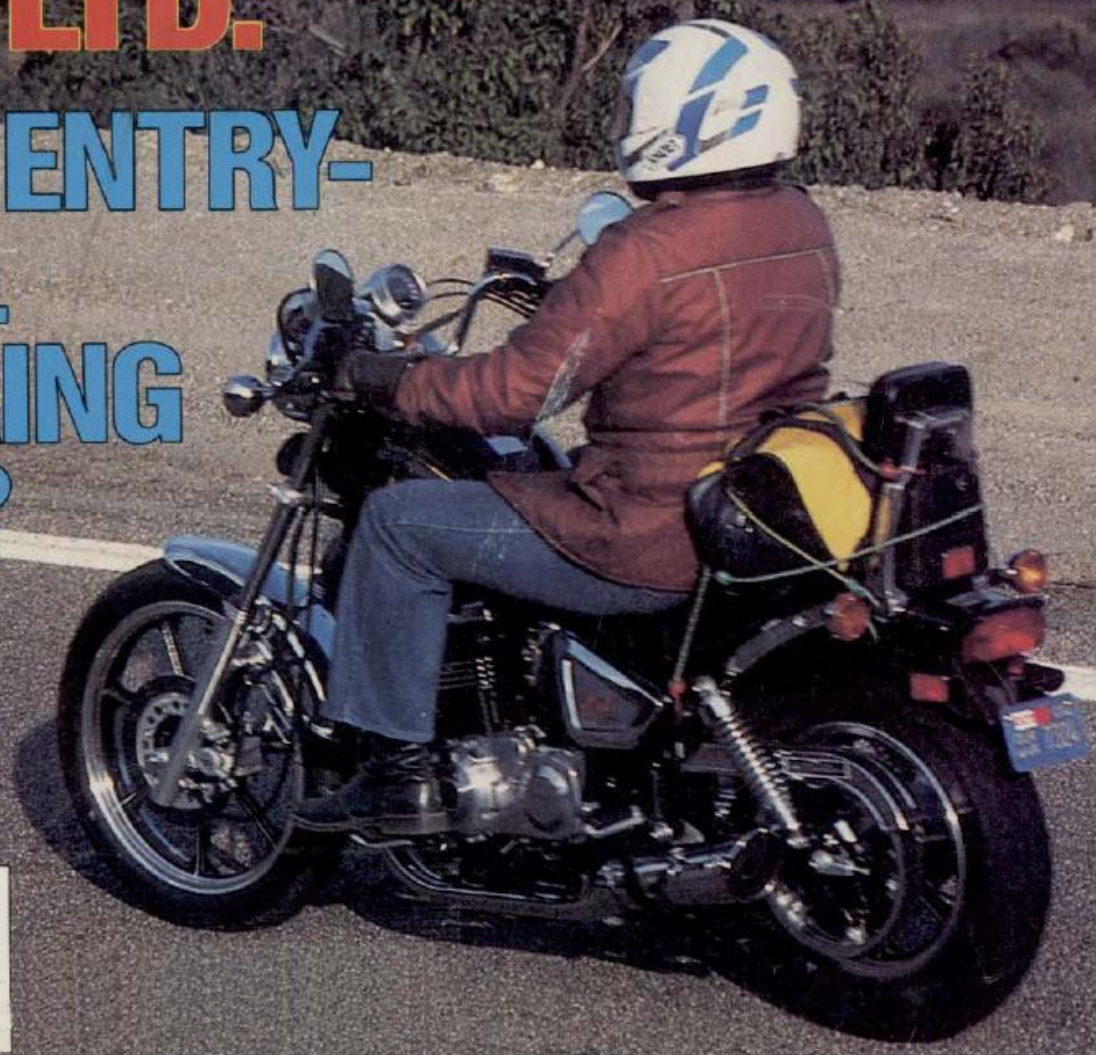
AMERICA'S FIRST MOTORCYCLE TOURING MAGAZINE

**Annual
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KAWASAKI 454 LTD:

BEST ENTRY- LEVEL TOURING BIKE?



WILL THE REAL Entry-Level Touring Motorcycle PLEASE STEP FORWARD

*Kawasaki's 454 LTD Began Its Career
As A Capable Mid-Size Traveler.
It Still Is.*

by **BOB CARPENTER**

For all our word-mongering virtues and sincere attempts to "get it right," the California biker press is probably the most fickle bunch of souls in the motorcycle industry. When a bike is first introduced, we dig out all our favorite adjectives and froth at the mouth about what a wonderful invention it is. If the same bike is back in the lineup the following year, we don't even want to hear about it.

Said another way: "If it ain't new, it ain't news."

Think of it as our way of participa-

ting in the vicious annual marketing cycle that has contributed so much to the industry's downturn over the past decade. Perhaps with a little more tolerance for worthy machinery, regardless of model year, the press might have performed a service by minimizing the tendency of the Original Equipment Manufacturers to sell motorcycles the same way VCRs and can openers are sold.

What is also a shame is that in the ever-popular quest for a one-percent increase in magazine newsstand sales, a

lot of very fine motorcycles end up on the short end of the editorial stick.

Bikes such as the excellent Kawasaki 454 LTD.

The Kawasaki 454 LTD was introduced in 1984. Though it wasn't given the full-trumpet treatment, the machine surprised just about everyone by going straight to the top of the sales chart in the 450cc category. It's been in the Kawasaki lineup ever since, virtually unchanged in any significant way.

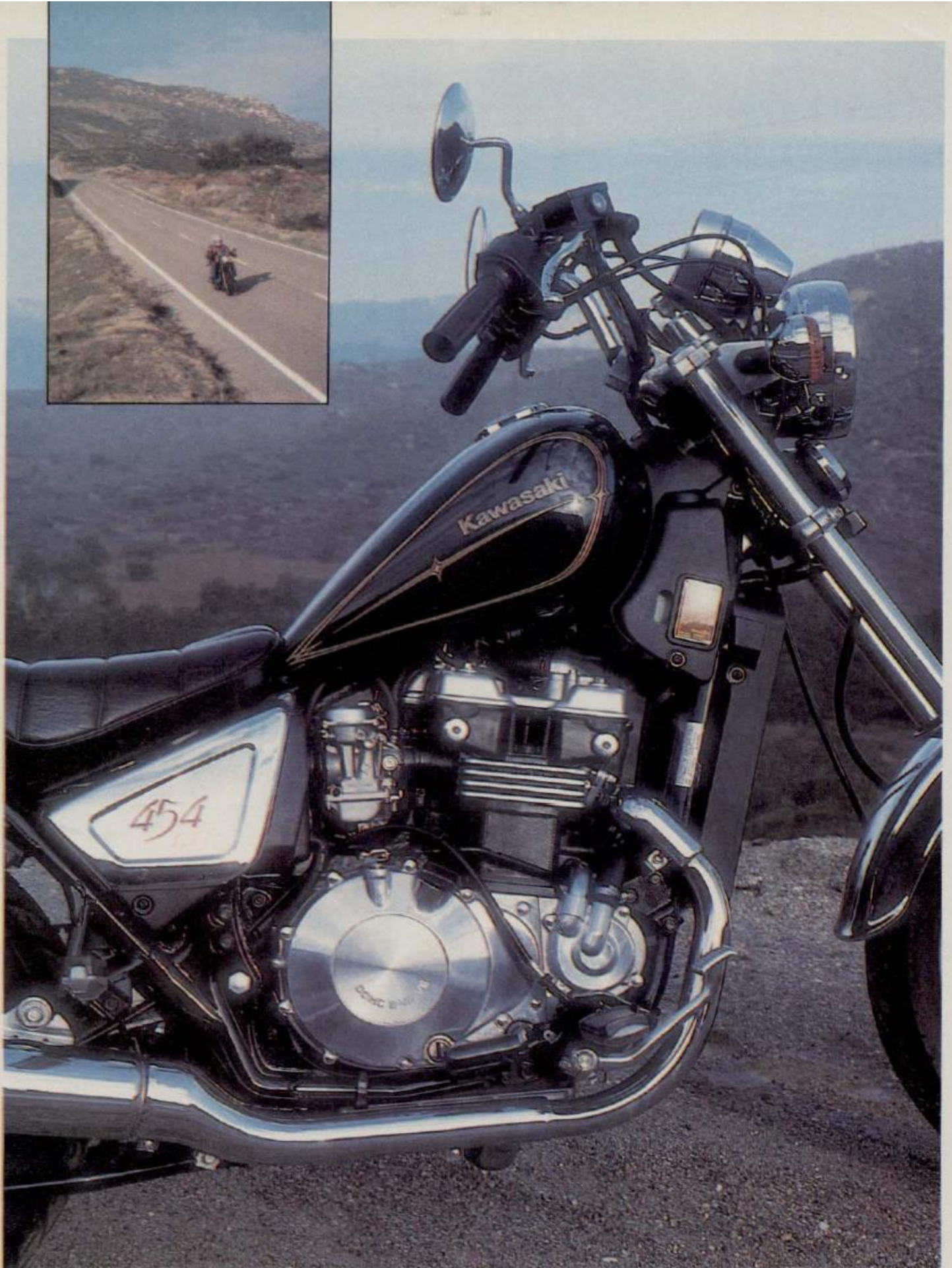
In 1985, shortly after the 454 LTD was made available to the press, *Road Rider* borrowed one, packed it up with all the usual necessities of Life-On-The-Road, and headed for Lake George, New York. If that sounds ambitious for a bike weighing less than a half-ton, with only two cylinders, 454 cubic centimeters of engine, and no stereo equipment, you haven't been paying attention. Over the past decade, mid-sized machinery has definitely come of age in the touring market. Today's 350cc to 650cc motorcycles are capable of just about any type of travel their

(continued on page 23)



In 1985, Patti Carpenter rode to New York and back on the first edition of the mid-sized Kawasaki.

Though somewhat dated these days, the classic "cruiser" styling offers an unusual benefit on the 454 LTD: the bike is as comfortable as it looks.



Specifications: KAWASAKI 454 LTD

ENGINE

size/layout: 454cc, four-stroke, in-line vertical Twin, liquid-cooled
bore/stroke: 72.5/55.0mm
valves per cylinder: four (two intake, two exhaust)
valve operation: chain-driven DOHC
valve adjustment: screw and locknut
compression ratio: 10.7:1
carburetion: two Keihin CVK34, "semi-flat" slides

DIMENSIONS

GVWR: 770 lb.
curb weight: c. 438 lb.
carrying capacity: c. 332 lb.
wheelbase: 58.5 in.
rake/trail: 31.5°/5.5 in.
ground clearance: 5.1 in.
seat height: 29.3 in.

SUSPENSION

front: telescopic fork, 40mm dia., 6.3-in. travel
rear: two oil-damped spring shocks, 4.3-in. travel

BRAKES

front: single disc, 9.29-in. dia. (swept)
rear: drum, 11.14 sq. in.

TIRES

front: Bridgestone Exedra 100/90x19 tubeless
rear: Bridgestone Exedra 100/90x15 tubeless

ELECTRICS

battery: 12V/12AH
alternator: 204W @ 6000 rpm
headlight: 60/55W

FUEL

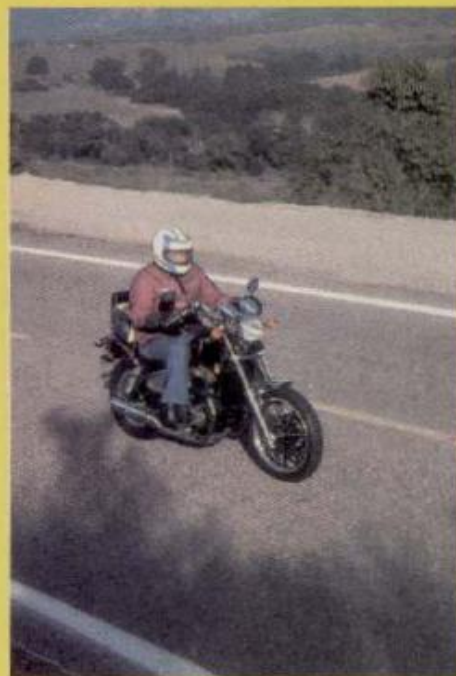
tank capacity (inc. reserve): 2.9 gal.
high/low mpg: 48.2/44.5 mpg
average mpg: 45.8 mpg
octane recommended: 87+ pump, unleaded

DRIVE TRAIN

transmission: six-speed
top gear ratio: 0.85:1
final drive: toothed belt
rpm @ 65 mph: 5700 rpm

MISCELLANEOUS

suggested retail: \$2,899.00
warranty: 12 months, unlimited mileage
color options: Metallic Starlight Black with gold trim



(continued from page 18)

owners are capable of.

Some 7200 miles of happy times later, the Kawasaki 454 finished that cross-country trip. No problems of any kind had been experienced along the way. The daily average had equaled that of most of our tour-test rides. Most of all, the lightweight bike had proved to be a pure pleasure to go touring with.

Four years later, nothing has happened in the motorcycle market to change that evaluation. The Kawasaki 454 LTD is still a solid contender in the mid-range, go-anywhere category.

Several features make the 454 an exceptional touring bike. First, the engine is a nicely over-engineered design that was taken from the earlier Ninja motor. When first introduced, the bike was referred to as "Half a Ninja," a term that never quite caught on, though the sentiment was accurate. The engine's bore and stroke dimensions are identical to the four-cylinder, 900cc Ninja of 1984, as is the four-valve, DOHC layout. Obviously, the 454 LTD does not share the Ninja's "peaky" tuning; however, it does manage to generate substantial excitement while remaining docile enough for

touring use. Over the years, both the Ninja and the 454 have earned good reputations for engine dependability.

Toothed, belt drive is also a huge plus for the long, lonesome highway. As applied to the Kawasaki, the belt has excellent longevity. (We met one die-hard 454 rider at Americade last year who had more than 75,000 trouble-free miles on his original belt.) It's also smoother than a chain, lighter in weight, and requires an absolute minimum of maintenance. The downside is that the entire swing arm must be removed to replace the belt, so it's a good thing they last quite a while.

The Kawasaki 454 LTD also features a counterbalancing system. It is a straight-forward system that works well. A fairly bulky balancer shaft with two offset, weighted lobes is turned by a gear on the end of the crankshaft. The turning lobes "counter" the piston thrust, thereby "balancing" the primary vibration usually encountered in a 180-degree vertical twin. The result is fairly smooth operation, and high-mileage comfort.

Add to the above: liquid cooling, fair to middling gas mileage, a saddle that treats a solo rider reasonably well and a

sub-\$3000 price tag—and you have what we believe to be one of the best entry-level touring motorcycles available in 1989.

To put that theory to the test, we decided to take a long-term look at this capable solo traveler. Based on just over a thousand miles on the RR test-bike, here is a first-look evaluation. Our plan is to hang onto the machine for a few months, take in some rallies, do as much traveling as we can sneak in, and prepare a follow-up report later this year.

The test bike is a California model. That means extra emissions control devices are required. As usual, performance and gas mileage suffer. Preliminary numbers indicate that the bike is averaging about 45 to 47 miles per gallon, substantially lower than the 53.4 mpg recorded on the 1985 cross-country jaunt.

Performance, measured in subjective get-up-and-go terms, doesn't seem to have suffered quite as much. The 454 LTD is a spritely piece of goods. Acceleration from stoplights is positive, and can be almost torrid if you want it to be.

For touring purposes, the better news is that strength on long hills, and passing ability are more than satisfactory. The bike is responsive under just about any sea-level circumstances. What happens at altitude with the CARB-dictated charcoal canister in the fuel line remains to be seen.

One feature that is rare among similar "cruiser" styled machinery intended primarily for the entry-level buyer is the Kawasaki's ability to fit a lot of differently shaped people. Ergonomically, the bike has managed to duplicate a lot of Harley-Davidson traits. Many Japanese models have *attempted* to copy the Milwaukee measurements, but few actually end up being as comfortable...for reasons that will hopefully remain unknown. The 454 LTD is an exception to the rule. Short riders, tall riders, riders with long or short inseams, long or short arms, seem to be able to "fit" the Kawasaki well. The bars curve up and come back to the rider in a Harleysque curve that permits the operator to hang on in comfort. The footpegs are positioned to accommodate long legs, but the saddle is low enough for the short-legged folks to touch down firmly. A roll of duffel lashed to the passenger saddle for an operator backrest results in a most comfortable riding position.

Speaking of saddles, passengers were not treated as well on the 454 LTD. The camel-backed seat can carry a passenger on a limited basis, but long trips would be decidedly uncomfortable. The bike is best used as a solo motorcycle.

For the budget-minded, one of the compelling features of the Kawasaki is its low (relative) price. It cost \$1999 when first introduced in 1984; this year the tag is posted at \$2899. Considering what's been happening elsewhere in U.S./Japan economics, a yearly increase of \$180 isn't all that dramatic. The bike still represents an excellent value, especially if compared with the season's crop of 250cc machines that were brought in around the \$2400 mark.

Reliability? Though the original 7200-mile voyage indicates that the bike has much to offer here, we'll reserve judgment until our long-term test is completed.

One thing is certain: no one around the RR Place considers their scheduled stint on the Kawasaki 454 LTD as "tough duty." It is a most enjoyable motorcycle to ride, and we're looking forward to spending some time with it. So we're off and running. Time will tell. We'll get back to you. 