



# Limited Time

*We Rode The Kawasaki 454 LTD For Six Months. Is It The Best Entry-Level Tourer?*

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**S**tewart Thomas looked relieved as I pulled into Kawasaki Motors Corporation's U.S. headquarters on the 1989 454 LTD. Stewart is the public-relations technician for Kawasaki. After signing out the light-cruiser test bike to RR in January of 1989, he was starting to wonder if we'd ever bring it back.

Gee, Stewart, we only had it 6 months, 14 days, and 3 hours.

**I**n the May 1989 issue of RR, Bob Carpenter posed the question, "Is the Kawasaki 454 LTD the best entry-level touring bike?" That's a valid query. After all, Bob and Patti put 7200 cross-country miles on the 454 after it was introduced in the '85 model lineup. Does it still hold up as a lightweight tourer?

The LTD has a four-stroke, vertical in-line, twin-cylinder engine that displaces 454cc. It is liquid cooled for

more constant engine temperature. There are four valves per cylinder and two Keihin constant-velocity carburetors.

The bike's curb weight is just 438 pounds, with a low center of gravity. That means it has big-bike feel, without great weight. You can generally expect cruiser handling when a bike has a rake of 31.5 degrees. True to form, the 454 flopped into turns a bit, especially at low speeds. Other than that, it felt solid and sturdy at speed. I appreciated the Twin rumble especially.

The 454 has a disc front and drum rear brake. Call me a whiner, but I felt as though the drum didn't stop quickly enough. Later I rode another Kawasaki bike with an identical brake setup, but a different footpeg/brake-pedal relationship. It was much easier to stop. Since the 454's brake pedal is adjustable, that's my fault. Just another reminder that a bike isn't really "yours" until you've

fiddled with it and adjusted it to fit you perfectly.

The front forks have a generous travel of 6.3 inches. Two oil-damped spring shocks make up the rear suspension. Besides being attractive in a functional sort of way, they have an adjustable preload. I rode with it in the softest position.

The California biker press has said much about Kawasaki's ability to build excellent transmissions. Based on the 454, I agree wholeheartedly. The clutch lever has a sure feel. The gear shift taps in with a pleasant *snick*, letting you know that you're in gear or in neutral. The sixth gear helps control the typical buzz of a small, two-cylinder engine.

Perhaps it's just because I rode it so much, but the throttle response seemed just right. There wasn't a flat spot on takeoff, but it didn't jerk my arms out, either. Don't misunderstand—this is not a blindingly quick bike. But it does get



right along.

We remarked in May that the 454 test bike was a California model and that, since it was tuned for sea-level touring, we'd have to see how it did at altitude. I rode the 454 to the U.S. International Grand Prix race at Laguna Seca Raceway in Monterey, California. On the way I took the light cruiser over 4183-foot Tejon Pass on Interstate 5, and it didn't even breathe hard.

Our test bike wasn't a cold-blooded creature, either. It started quickly and ran as well cold as anything we've tested lately.

As a rider, I found the 29.3-inch-high, camelback seat very comfortable. It was especially so when I bunged something to the pillion as a backrest. Taller riders may find the 454 cozy.

I did, however, spend a short time as co-rider on the LTD. It wasn't short enough! Maybe my passengering tastes have been spoiled by the luxo-tourers, but I consider the 454 a solo machine. After all, the carrying capacity is just 332 pounds. With Terry and I both aboard, we're past that limit.

**W**e rode the 454 LTD for 3613 miles during its summer-long stay at RR. It averaged 52.4 miles per gallon. The best tank got 57.8 mpg; the worst, 44.9 mpg.

At 3319 miles, the clutch cable broke near the motor end. While that's a bit soon for a clutch cable to break, it happens. Cable replacement was simple and took about half an hour.

In terms of maintenance, the 454 used 1/3-quart of oil, but no engine coolant had to be added. We filled the battery once; it was easy to get to and easy to lift out of the bike.

Kawasaki bills the final-drive belt as "virtually maintenance-free." We should have dusted it off with an air compressor a few times, but we didn't. That's especially important when you go off-pavement, as we did on the Old Ridge Route in California.

The Ridge Route runs over the San Gabriel Mountains in the Angeles Forest, just north of Los Angeles. This thin strip of twisting concrete, circa 1910, was widened several years later with asphalt. Amazingly, the asphalt is crumbling, but the concrete is still in great shape. In some places, however, the concrete goes away completely. That's when I got to try out the 454's capabilities as a dirt-road machine. It did pretty well, but the suspension reminded me

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## 454 Touring Accessories

**W**e added a touring package of windscreen, saddlebags and tankbag 1300 miles into our test. All three are marketed by Kawasaki for use on a number of bikes; none are specifically designed for the 454.

The **V-Fairing Windshield** is manufactured by National Cycle. It is made of 1/4-inch-thick, clear plastic, with silver and black stripes silkscreened on the lower portion to help hide clutch and brake cables. The V Fairing clamps onto the handlebar and fork tubes with matte black hardware. Installation time and ease was about average for any universal-mount windshield. We noticed less wind buffeting with the windshield installed. We expected to get slightly better mileage with the shield on. In fact, we got 2 to 8 miles per gallon less—whether due to the shield or some other factor, we're not sure.

The V Fairing Windshield, Kawasaki part number K46001-010, has a suggested retail price of \$102.95.

The **Tour Sport II Soft Saddlebags** unzip all the way around three sides. Each bag is held in place with one webbing strap with a D-ring fastener that wraps around the passenger-footpeg tube. The separate mounting system is a wide piece of Velcro with sturdy, rubber-coated-metal, adjustable hooks. You hook this piece to the seat and leave it on. We even washed the 454 with the mounting on, and it didn't harm it. The

bags themselves have a corresponding Velcro flap that tucks into a pocket on the bags' back when not in use. To attach the bags, you pull out the flap, stick it to the Velcro seat piece, and secure a webbing/D-ring strap that goes across the pillion. It's quick, easy, secure, and neat when you want to tuck in the flap, roll up the strap, and take your bags with you. The bags have a webbing handle on the top.

Even without separate rain covers, the bags were quite waterproof. After several months of sun and rain, the bags looked pretty good. That's not something you can say about all soft luggage.

The Tour Sport II Soft Saddlebags, Kawasaki part number K99994-303A, have a suggested retail price of \$85.95.

There's good news and bad news about the **Tour Sport II Tankbag**. The good news: Like its sidekicks, the tankbag has a leave-on mounting system. It stays on the bike, while you take the bags into your motel or tent. Two pieces of neoprene rubber go across the gas tank and attach to the sides with rubber-coated-metal hooks, snugged up with thick elastic straps with metal buckles. On top of the rubber straps are four toggle fasteners. You thread these through the corresponding oval holes on the four corner tabs of the tankbag, then rotate them 90 degrees to secure the



*The tankbag's mounting system permits you to untoggle the bag and take it away. No more jangling hardware when you walk!*



bag to the bike. We never had any trouble with these toggle fasteners coming undone when they shouldn't.

When it's time to fill up with gas or take your tankbag with you, you simply turn the four toggles and lift the bag off with the web handle. It's quick, simple, and you don't have jangling hardware hitting you.

The bad news? This system is really designed for flat, sportbike-style tanks. The little cruiser tank is angled and not square. We did some fancy adjusting—running the neoprene straps across the tank in an "X," turning the toggle tabs under, etc.—and finally got the tankbag to stay where it was for a few-hundred miles at a time. As it sank slowly toward the rider, however, we'd have to stop and readjust it. The stitching finally came undone on one strap from the extreme pressure we were putting on it, requiring roadside repair.

Since then, we've tried the tankbag

on the 454 LTD's sibling—the EX500. The tankbag works like a dream on that bike. (More on the EX500 in an upcoming issue.)

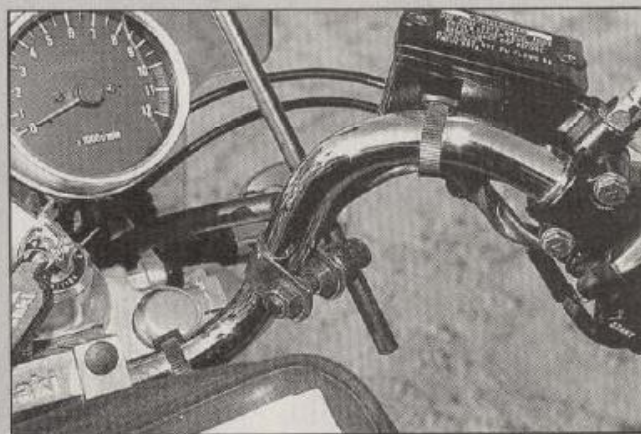
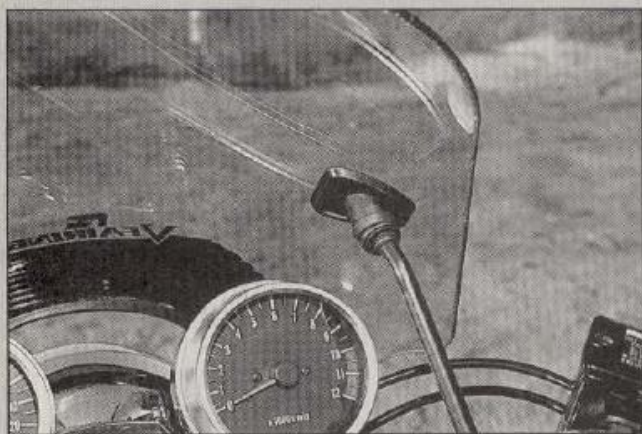
Mounting problems on the 454 aside, we liked this tankbag. It is compact, zips easily, and has a clear map pocket on top with a Velcro fastener along the entire width. It looks clean and simple, just right for 454's profile.

The Tour Sport II Tankbag, Kawasaki part number K99994-302A, has a suggested retail price of \$47.95.

All of these accessories can be ordered through your Kawasaki dealer.



*The V Fairing, right, is designed by National Cycle exclusively for Kawasaki. Black-and-silver stripes help hide cables.*

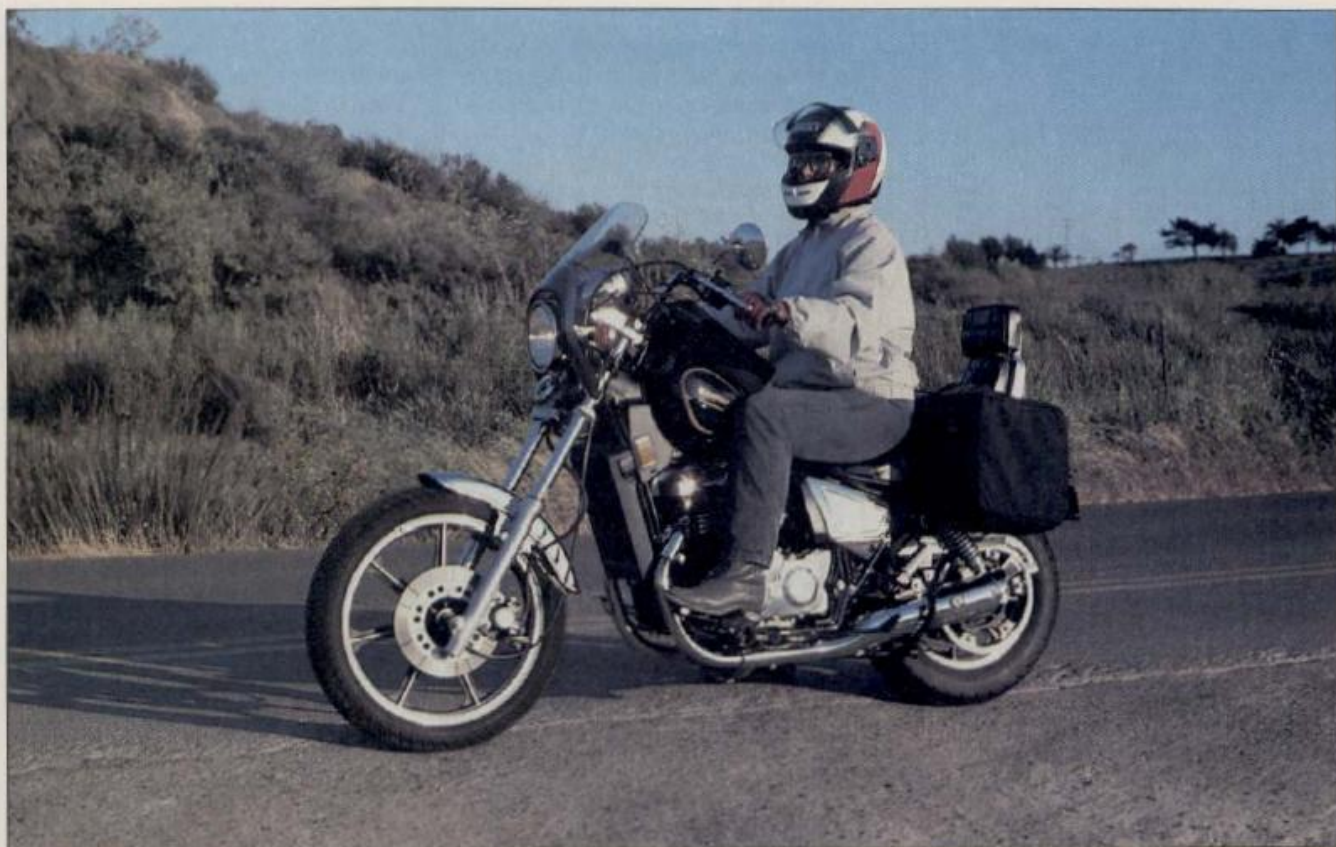


*The connecting rod has a ball joint that attaches to the shield at one end, left, and a handlebar clamp at the other end, right.*



*The saddlebags' large Velcro flaps, left, attach to the leave-on mounting strap. After pressing the hook-and-loops together, right, a webbing strap and D-ring fastener keep them secure.*





*The 454 LTD's low seat gives shorter riders confidence.*

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that the 454 was not designed as a dual-sport bike.

When you ride a bike for six months, you come to appreciate the small-but-excellent details. For example, consider the mirrors. Like the rest of the bike, the round chrome mirrors look a bit dated compared to today's super-duper-zippy sportbikes. Ah, but they work! They're steady and you can actually see to the side and in the lane behind you.

Another plus is the large-numbered, easy-to-read speedometer and tachometer/trip meter.

Conversely, there were things about the bike that I still didn't like after half a year. For example, the 2.9-gallon fuel tank went on reserve at about 120 miles. That's not an expansive touring range. I got really tired of filling the tank so often.

Another minor gripe: To remove the camelback seat, you must unbolt the toolbox, which is just over the rear fender. Finding your socket wrench and removing two bolts takes longer than undoing a key-lock seat.

Considering that the 454 is so ideal for bungeeing stuff on—with its camelback seat and passenger backrest—it's a shame that there aren't some built-in, pull-out bungee-cord hooks. The seat frame is wide and a little tricky to attach



*Watching the waterfowl at Newport Back Bay, a California wildlife preserve.*



bungees to.

Speaking of bungees, we managed to rip the sissy-bar pad by bungeeing a large cable lock to it. Call that a draw—our fault for manhandling it.

As we said in May, the Kawasaki 454 LTD is still a solid contender in the mid-range, go-anywhere category. It's a comfortable, affordable, solo tourer. Kawasaki's marketing folks understand this—the 454 LTD will be back for the '90 model year in classic ebony with

gold graphics, at a suggested retail price of \$3149 (\$250 more than the '89 model). That includes a one-year, unlimited-mileage warranty. Owners may extend that to two years for an additional \$166, or three years for \$200.

Otherwise, the '90 454 LTD remains virtually the same as the '89. After all, when you have a winner, why change the game plan?

Hmm. I wonder if Stewart at Kawasaki would let us test a '90 454 LTD for a few months...



*Instrumentation includes easy-to-read speedo and tach, engine temperature gauge, and turn/neutral/high-beam/oil lamps.*

### 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 (incl. reserve):** 2.9 gal.  
**high/low mpg:** 57.8/44.5 mpg  
**average mpg:** 52.5 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:** \$2899 (1989 model); \$3149 (1990 model)  
**warranty:** 12 months, unlimited mileage  
**color options:** Metallic Black/Gold Pinstriping (1989); Classic Ebony/Gold Pinstriping (1990)