

Kawasaki Z1300

Now I have never been quite sure why Kawasaki built these, unless it was to show they had a sense of humour. It was meant to top Honda's CBX by matching its six cylinders, but with more capacity. Don't think it had four valves per cylinder like the CBX, but with 1300 cc power was never going to be a problem. The things were huge, and I think they weighed in at about 700 pounds wet. Not that this stopped them being used hard. I saw one racing in the proddy class at Snetterton.



Kawasaki Z1300-6

The rider looked perfectly normal - Nobody would have guessed he was a lunatic. He had taken the sensible precaution of welding half-inch plate over the ends of the crankshaft, just in case, you understand. Oddly enough, the Z13 went quite well. OK it was never going to win, but on a fast track like Snetterton, where power and top speed were important, it had a good try. Yes it was far too heavy, but it had lots of power, delivered very smoothly, which let the rider get away with anything. Mind you, it might have been a bit different racing it at Cadwell!



Arto - Signwriting

Racing a Z13 was bad enough, but using one as a stunt bike was even more loopy. Arto Nyquist from Finland was certainly loopy enough. I saw him at Brands Hatch, where he was filling in between truck races. I was in the stand opposite the pit lane, and could see the yellow Z13 parked by the garages. On the wall beside it was a man with his leg in plaster. He put on a crash helmet, and two men lifted him on to the bike, which he then "warmed up" around the Indy circuit. Back on the pit straight, he wrote his name on the track with the back tyre, then wheelied the bike the length of the straight. His party trick was wheelieing the bike past vertical, and breaking the taillight. Look at the next picture - I just got him at the point where it broke.

Next he sat facing backwards on the handlebars, and rode round the circuit with the back tyre lit up most of the time. And finally, he jumped off the back of the bike, and slid round the circuit behind the bike. This was made easier by the steel plates he had fitted to the plaster cast on his bad leg, and to the bottom of the clog he wore on the other side!. Absolutely barking.

In an earlier version of this site I suggested that Arto was Swedish. Ville Virtanen kindly emailed me to put me right, but had the excellent news that Arto is alive, well, still kicking, and still wearing clogs, though after 15 years or so I hope he is out of plaster.



Arto restyling tail-light

I spoke to a couple of people who had them as road bikes. They were quick in a straight line, very smooth, but overall not any faster than the Z1000 introduced at about the same time. Pretty thirsty though. I saw one the other day in my local bike shop. The shop owner was trying to get the thing to run right, but the electrics were shot, and the bike wasn't co-operating. An old one may not be a logical project, unless cash is no object.

Lottery choice is an early one in metallic green. Why on earth do I want one? Well for me, the Z13 marks the end of an era where it had looked like bikes would just get bigger and bigger. Nothing like it was seen again, and while much more powerful and faster bikes came along, they were built to cope with their performance. The Z13 was a hippo on steroids, and I love it for being excessive in every way.