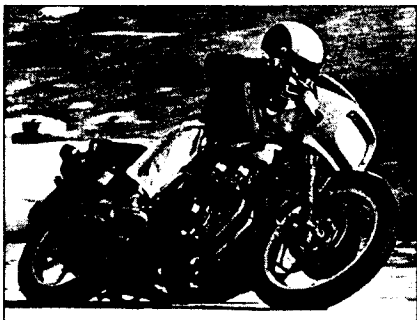


UNDER \$1500



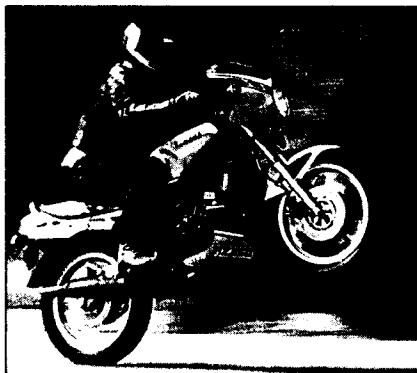
KAWASAKI GPz550

"750s Beware! Here Comes the GPz550" was the cover blurb attached to *Motorcyclist's* exclusive test of Kawasaki's new GPz550 back in February '81. The GPz set new standards with a blazing 12.57-second, 104-mph quarter-mile speed. It worked in the twisties or on the long haul, thanks to good ergonomics, 51-mpg highway mileage, a 4.0-gallon tank and a reasonable saddle. And it started a new styling trend. Later that year, we uncrated a GPz550 on Thursday, made a few modifications on Friday (see November '81), went to the racetrack on Saturday and took home the 600cc-class winner's trophy in the Nelson Ledges 24-Hour on Sunday.

In 1982, the GPz's twin-shock rear suspension was traded for a Uni-Trak linkage and a single damper. Price rose to \$2749. In 1983, the price climbed again to \$2799, which was \$500 more than Suzuki's new and quicker 16-valve GS550ES. Still, testers found the GPz easier to ride fast and more comfortable than the new Suzuki. In 1984, the price was boosted another \$100 to pay for a host of engine and chassis improvements and a new look. Quarter-mile performance quickened to 12.37 seconds at 107 mph. However, the arrival of the Honda VF500 Interceptor, Yamaha FJ600 and the 600 Ninja eclipsed the middleweight hot rod of the early 1980s. Its last year was 1985.

After our old-versus-new cover story last November, we got lots of letters from GPz550 owners relating how much they still enjoy their GPz550s and how well they hold up. With the cascade of technology that has been poured into the 600 class in the 12 years since the GPz first landed, it is impressive that it's still so much fun to ride, even to those of us exposed to all the latest golly-rockets. The GPz550 is an excellent buy, with prices firmly under \$1500 and some even below \$1000.

Issues tested: Feb. '81, May '82, Sep. '83, Feb. '84, Nov. '92



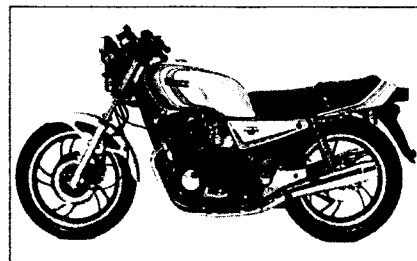
YAMAHA RZ350

The 347cc "Roberts Replica" sold for \$2399 (1984) to \$2499 (1985) when new and has retained its value well; it was the last two-stroke street bike imported into the United States—or at least 49 of them—thanks to its twin catalytic converters. Why is a smoky little twin with a ring-ding exhaust note so prized? The 12.85-second quarter-mile time and 104-mph terminal speed will give you an idea. So will Kenny Roberts' signature on the small fairing (missing on the red and white '84 model). And if you grew up riding high-performance two-strokes, you don't need numbers to give you an idea of the fun of a two-stroke. Weighing in at 390 pounds with the 5.2-gallon fuel tank topped off, the RZ350 upheld the reputation that two-strokes earned for light weight, even with catalytic converters, a radiator, exhaust-system power valves and dual horns.

The low weight, 54.5-inch wheelbase and low center of mass create an extremely responsive machine that is fun to ride on the tightest roads. Triple discs provide high-performance stopping to match the top speed produced by the reed-valve-inducted engine. The engine turns in the same snappy power delivery that two-strokes were famous for, meaning that it's peaky. Keep it above 6000 and it will please you; below that it'll wheeze. If that sounds like a hassle, you're aren't a candidate for two-stroke street-bike ownership. The RZ350 is fairly smooth and provides a compliant ride with the stock suspension (which some owners firm up for more stable high-speed handling). The seat is a bit thin for long rides, but you can get 200 miles on a tankful at the 38 to 42 mpg the RZ gets at moderate throttle settings.

A new-looking RZ350 may bring over \$1500 (we have seen asking prices as high as \$2500), though you can find examples in good condition for as little \$1000.

Issue tested: July '84



YAMAHA XJ650R SECA

When it was announced that Yamaha's XJ650 four was coming to the U.S. for 1980, we felt the bike's then-sporting stance, shaft drive and twin-cam 653cc engine would make a fantastic package that U.S. enthusiasts would fall in love with.

We were half right. It was a fantastic package, but U.S. riders never fell in love with it. Instead they bought the Seca's cruiser sibling, the 650 Maxim, and even the faired turbocharged derivative (which was heavier and actually slower). Yamaha's critically successful 650 was never a sales success.

But in the end, history has vindicated us. Today we see quite a few 650 Secas on the street but fewer Maxims and almost no Turbos (which became quite popular when the price was dropped below \$3000 after several years of collecting dust in warehouses). The five-speed 650 Seca became popular with city messengers who appreciated its reliability, responsive power, strong brakes (dual discs and a drum), comfortable European riding position, long-range fuel capacity (5.1 gallons) and predictable, agile handling. Features like dual horns, a big eight-inch headlight and a built-in chain lock told you this was a motorcycle intended for use.

Motorcyclist tested it hard back in 1982—on the racetrack, for over 3000 miles of touring, on dozens of hard weekend rides and at the dragstrip, where it posted a best run of 12.92 seconds and 103 mph. We were impressed with whatever it did. Through it all, the 650 Seca turned in almost 47 mpg, improving by about 5 mpg on the highway.

Since it never became popular, it has maintained a price level that makes it attractive a decade later—one of the reasons that messengers (who view motorcycles pretty much in dollars and sense, with day after day of hard use) favor the machine. If you can find one in primo condition, you might pay \$1500, but in good condition it will probably be a few hundred dollars less.

Issue tested: March '82