

FIRST RIDE!

Bikeland takes the 2007 ZX-6R for a Spin...

by Neale Bayly

All rightie then Bikeland chums. I am sure you have all been eagerly awaiting news from the World launch of the ZX-6R, and I figured I better get out of bed and get typing, before Oliver gets on the phone and melts my ear. Labeled as the ultimate track day, Kawasaki chose a day and a half on the smooth sinuous roller coaster that is Barber Motorsports Park for the test. Slipping on a pair of super sticky Bridgestone BT002 mediums, and allotting each journalist two mechanics to fiddle with all our little adjustment knobs, all I had to do

was go out and twist the throttle and try and remember what happened to let you guys know.

For 2007, the Big K has aimed the new six at the racetrack, with the addition of lights, horn, turn signals, and headlights a bit more of an afterthought. This thing is for winning championships, and owning your local track day. If you can't get a quart of milk and a packet of gummy bears under the seat, Kawasaki doesn't care. Hey, you can always wear a backpack or borrow your Dad's Goldwing if you need luggage space.

As their first totally new middleweight for ten years, Kawasaki has made sure they have delivered something seriously special. Using ex 125cc and 250cc Grand Prix hero Tomomi Manako for development, the new ZX-6R has absolutely wicked corner speed potential. Barber racetrack is something





of a local track for me, and charging over the blind rise through turn 13 heading back to the front straight, I have never been on any machine that carried so much corner speed through this section. During our first day of riding, with temperatures struggling to make it over 40 degrees, it was darn right scary to be in Virgin territory like that. By day two, with warmer temperatures and more familiarity, it was beginning to make more sense though, but it still just about took my breath away. Dragging my boot all the way from turn 13 to turn 14a, the 6R just rails at the wildest lean angles and feels totally at home doing so.

With our own suspension techs, and the bikes pretty well dialed for Barber, I only need a few changes to calm the front end down. There is no steering damper, and it did get wild coming over turn four a couple of times, but not enough to soil my shorts. Overall, though the bikes manners are impeccable, even in the cold weather I equaled my fastest time around Barber on a six hundred. With some warm weather I am positive I could have come away with a personal best

time without too much trouble. The bike is that good.

Brakes are what you would expect: Predictable, able to stop a charging rhino with one finger, and only fully exploitable by total nutter. Ride position is pure sport, but even as small as the bike is, it is quite possible to get under paint and out of the wind, if like me you aren't over the six-foot barrier. Now Oliver, that's another thing, as he would definitely be leaving body parts hanging in the breeze.

Bike sounds great, makes good power all the way through the range, and will even pull from 3000 rpm if you need. Not enough for decent racetrack progress, but more than adequate for general traffic conditions out battling the four-wheeled masses I feel. Fueling is perfect, and there isn't a situation on or off the throttle where the bike gives any trouble. Coming to a dealer near you for \$8999, and available in the choice of four colors, Kawasaki has just gone and moved the bar a few notches higher in the 600cc bike wars and made it a whole lot of fun to boot.

