

Riding Kawasaki's 250hp *Supercharged Ultra 250X!*



A Jet Ski Virgin jumps on-board the new 250hp Supercharged Kawasaki Ultra 250X

If I can drive a forklift, I can drive a Jet Ski

Well, that's what I kept telling myself! It's a beautiful, warm winter Sunday afternoon just outside Dana Point, California only minutes from Kawasaki Motors Corporation's head office and steps from the ocean. A couple of Bikeland members who happen to work at KMC - and shall remain anonymous - have invited us out for an afternoon of Jet Skiing. They pull up towing several new Jet Skis, and I have to ask... is this how you live your life everyday?



"We work at a toy company!" they respond.

And they do... making really cool fun toys for grownups. I spend some time

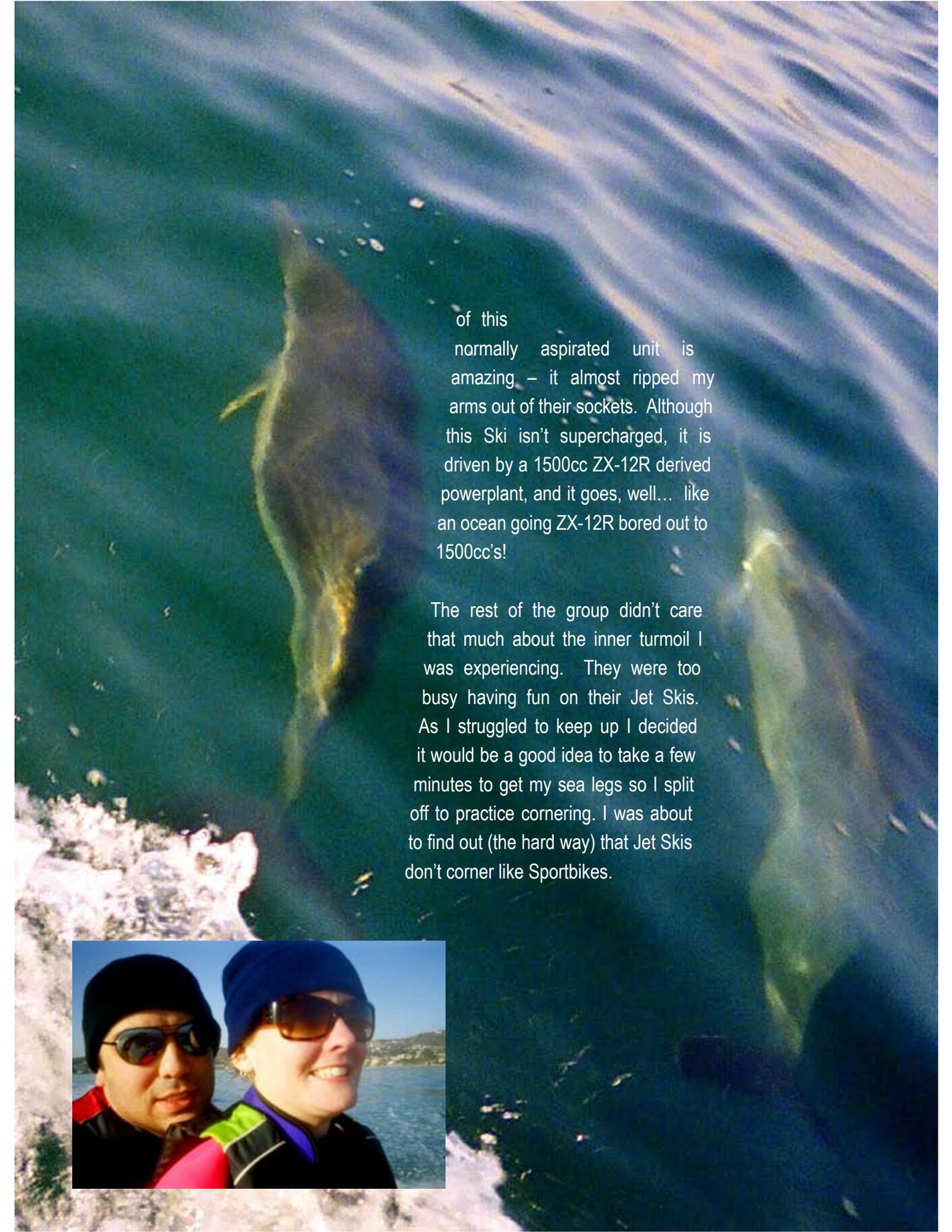
shoehorning my out of shape post Christmas body into a not so flattering wetsuit and we load the Jet Skis into the ocean.

I've never really thought that much about Jet Skis. In fact, I never realized that the term Jet Ski (officially it's "JET SKI® watercraft", but that's a lot to type) was in fact a Kawasaki brand name... a brand name that's genericized itself to become synonymous with all small "Jet Ski" type personal watercraft. Today, the term "Jet Ski" is the water bound equivalent to "Velcro" (hook and loop fastener) or "Kleenex" (facial tissue) etc. I was about to throw my leg over a real "Jet Ski" brand Jet Ski... and not just any Jet Ski... Kawasaki's new 250hp 1500cc supercharged Ultra 250X.... but first I get a quick 5-minute lesson on how to drive one of these things, and start my day off cautiously on a standard 1500 cc non-supercharged unit.

Apparently I must be the only person on the planet who hasn't ridden a Jet Ski because everyone I've talked to seems to have at least one Jet Ski story. The controls on the Jet Ski are pretty much the same as a snowmobile; a kill switch lanyard tethers to your left wrist and you activate the throttle by pulling the lever on the right side towards handlebar. Steering is a little bizarre - to steer you have to be on the gas and just to mess you up a bit, even though the Jetski has motorcycle-type handlebars it doesn't countersteer, it steers like a car (unless you're in reverse, in which case the steering is reversed).

All of this messed with my impressionable Jet Ski newbie brain... as the others (all seasoned Jet Ski riders) took off I pinned it and tried to follow. The sheer power





of this normally aspirated unit is amazing – it almost ripped my arms out of their sockets. Although this Ski isn't supercharged, it is driven by a 1500cc ZX-12R derived powerplant, and it goes, well... like an ocean going ZX-12R bored out to 1500cc's!

The rest of the group didn't care that much about the inner turmoil I was experiencing. They were too busy having fun on their Jet Skis. As I struggled to keep up I decided it would be a good idea to take a few minutes to get my sea legs so I split off to practice cornering. I was about to find out (the hard way) that Jet Skis don't corner like Sportbikes.





Throwing a Sportbike into a corner... gear down... off the gas. turn in... apex.. crack on the throttle... on the gas....

Throwing a Jet Ski into a corner... off the gas... turn in... fall over... PK and I headed straight for the drink. When one of these things starts to tip over, there's no stopping it. We floated up and down in our life jackets, surrounded by a pod of curious dolphins... then paddled back to our Ski and hauled ourselves back on board.

"Oh yeah... I guess we should have told you it does that if you back off the throttle in mid corner!"....

Now they tell me?

Hmm... alrighty... Jet Ski... corner... stay on gas or it will capsize.

Now that I'd gotten wet, I managed to relax and about half an hour into the ride I was feeling pretty comfortable. The water was smooth like glass and the non-supercharged Jet Ski had way way WAY more than enough power for an inexperienced rookie pilot like me. We pulled up to a small group of boats and came to a stop where we found another pod of several hundred dolphins. I'd never seen a dolphin outside of an aquarium,



let alone hundreds... they surrounded our Jet Skis. The sea was crystal clear and full of the critters! I accelerated away and the dolphins kept up, toying with the hull of the Jet Ski and bobbing under its bow. I couldn't seem to shake them so I layed on the throttle. One by one the dolphins fell to the wayside, except for one who rode the crest of the wave in front of the Ski... 25mph, 35mph, 45mph! These dolphins can swim!

After another half an hour or so of Skiing we turned and headed back. It was at this point that everyone insisted that I try the Ultra 250X. I know when I'm in over my head, and I was already

convinced that hopping on board the 250HP version of this beast would not be in the cards for me. Not today. I know my limits and for the first time in decades I felt that fear that I had when I was a kid and I threw my leg over my first big-bore Sportbike. Fear, and an enormous amount of respect... but heck... if I can drive a forklift, I can drive a Jet Ski, right?

Peer pressure's a great thing, ain't it?

The mid ocean transfer between the Skis went smoothly. After a bit of a balancing act, I sat myself down on the 250hp beast, pointed it in a straight line, took a deep breath and pulled the trigger. The rush is unbelievable. Rocketing towards an indicated 70mph in the water with no helmet or any protective gear in a matter of seconds, I chopped the throttle and coasted to a halt. After a few seconds of regaining focus and recalibrating my mind to deal with the brutal acceleration, I did it again, and again and again. Packing a whollop of power, the 250X is like driving a thumbtack with a sledgehammer.... It's the oceangoing equivalent of, well, of nothing box stock out of a crate I've ever driven before, on two wheels or on four. Can this be legal?

The day was done, and I'd done it. No one got hurt, and no one lost an eye. Filled with supercharged-Jet Ski power, we floated back to the dock and loaded them up.

So there you have it... want to bend your mind and mess with your senses?

Forget the ZX-14 or the Hayabusa, and a R1 won't float. Get out on the water and pull the trigger on one of these.

Oh... be forewarned the eat fuel like a 1972 Lincoln Continental, so bring your gas card!

