

Converting a non-believer?

ZX-14.com and DragbikeZone.com's "Mad" Mike Harris takes the 2006 ZX-14 for a spin in Sin City

by "Mad" Mike Harris

GETTING THERE...

Wow! I can't believe it's already Sunday! The day has finally arrived! I got up at 6:30 am and went downstairs to surf the web a little. I am surprised that I am not that tired since I went to bed at 1:30 last night, actually I guess that would be 1:30 this morning.

Boy, this morning started out with some excitement...

Christina and my son Mikey took a shower together and when they were done she let him run around without his diaper on while she finished up. I don't think that would have been my first choice but Momma knows best, right? Ha-ha... Me? I am downstairs looking for my damn glove that I gave to Mikey to play with the night before... Yeah, Dad is pretty dumb sometimes too.

Out of nowhere I hear this scream coming from upstairs. I rush up and open the door expecting to see my son bleeding or bruised, or at least with a broken extremity.

Nope, none of the above.

As I opened the door I saw a screaming wife and naked baby with poop everywhere! He had decided to artfully take a large dump right in the middle of the bathroom and walk around in it.

I proceed to grab him and hold him out and well away from me to give Mom a chance to clean him up. After all, "she" decided not to put a diaper on him right away, so I used my manly intuition and let her do most of the sanitizing.

Off to the changing table we go to get him cleaned up and dressed. I try my best to wipe him down but I smell it and I can't figure out why. The smell is faint and I figure it's just on my hands, so I get washed up. Finally I'm ready to leave.

We arrive safely at the airport and go through the entire bomb sniffing dog ordeal. Once I'm all



checked in I sit down and wait. I happen to look down and see a spot on my shirt. I almost scratch it to see what it is and then I

freeze in horror!

Oh my God, I have a big brown spot (yep you guessed it) right under my chin!

Well, Christina proceeds to start laughing so hard she almost drops Mikey. Boy, she sure thinks it's funny when it is on me and not on her bathroom floor.

I have already checked in my bags and I have no other shirts with me. Arrgh! I decide to go over and buy a damn "Iowa" T-shirt. I have lived in Iowa for over 12 years and I have never owned an Iowa shirt. Yep, thanks to my loving son and my wife. Christina has now called to tell HER mom on the cell phone and is she is still laughing hysterically. I am now the proud owner of an IOWA shirt. At least it's grey and black, so it does not look that bad. Well hugs and kisses and off to Las Vegas I go!



I'm sitting in the Denver airport looking like a hick dork in my cool Iowa shirt, waiting for the airplane. It has been delayed for whatever reason. They said "Security Reasons", whatever that means. I am figuring that nowadays they probably use that for almost every excuse. Well it's only a ½ hour delay and I made sure that my seat is still good - it is. They sold out the flight, and there are about 20 people left over, so no elbowroom for sure. Man I am ready to get to Vegas....

After landing, I find myself standing at the smoky carousels in the Las Vegas terminal. I wait for my bag with my leathers and gear.



NO BAG? Oh man, I walk around and around.

Still no bag. If I was back home at least I could shoot a Cow and have a set of leathers; the most I could hope for here is an Old Dancing Girl.

I start contemplating how much a set of racing leathers is going to cost me at the local bike shop. An alternative would be a Louis Vuitton shop somewhere here in Vegas. I then see one of the Airport guys and ask him about my bag, and he says, "Nope haven't seen it". This was before I even told him what my bag looked like.

I look around at some of the bags that he had pulled off the carousel and nope, no bag. I tell him it's not here and he points over to a room about 30 ft away and says "well, go in there".

I head over to the Lost Luggage room and they proceed to tell me that it should be here. I couldn't agree with them more! Anyway, this guy is very helpful and walks out to the carousels with me and immediately finds my bag. It's under another bag that the first guy had shoved on top of it.

Whew! I thank the guy and off I go to find my ride to the hotel. I walk all around and yep, no one to be seen standing holding a "ZX-14" sign. Man with the way this trip has gone so far, maybe I should just turn around and head home.... Right! No way in hell I am doing that!

I decide to walk on down to the other end of the baggage area. If you have ever been to Vegas you know this airport is huge. I am almost at other end of the airport I spot a chauffeur standing there with a ZX-14 sign at his side.

I walk up to him and say, "Here I am. I know you were looking for me".

He laughs and says, "Nope that was a couple hours ago; I am waiting for Gabe". He tells me I can catch a ride with him as soon as the last person shows up. By now I am just like "cool, as long as I have a ride to the hotel."

The driver and I chat and enjoy the scenery in the airport and he tells me stories of famous people that he has met or seen here. I decide to hit a couple of slot machines since there is one every 5 feet in the terminal. I throw 10 bucks in and bam! I double up and cash out. Gabe has still not shown up so I cruise around to another machine and throw another 10 in and bam! I double my money again.

I see Gabe waiting for his bag and I cash out. Maybe this will be a good trip after all. I am 20 bucks ahead and I have only been in Vegas for less than an hour...

THE STRIP...

Oh what a great morning it is! I snap a quick shot of the sunrise. This is going to be a great day!

I would like to set this up a little so everyone has a full understanding of the conditions. First off, even though Kawasaki went all out on this event and everything about it was top notch, this event was **not** planned by a drag racer. On Monday the corrected elevation was 3600 ft above sea level, yes that is **Three Thousand six hundred feet**. On Tuesday the corrected elevation was 3100 ft above sea level. The temperature was 75 on Monday and 65 on Tuesday. Anyone who knows anything about racing on any kind, knows that those elevations are not good for horsepower. I would also like to share that all of the bikes were full of fuel. As far as I could tell by the gauge they were full up, on both days.



The bikes we tested were also "BONE STOCK", I mean as if you had just pulled them out of the crate and drove them to the dragstrip, oh and filled them up with as much gas as you could fit in them right before you got to the track.

Anyone who drag races motorcycles knows that the first thing you do is put a strap on it and then go from there. With the help of Brock Davidson and Scott Valetti we put the bug into the Kawi Crew that we wanted 1 or 2 of the bikes at the very least to have a front fork strap on them. This was to no avail. The only answer we got was NO. KMC wanted to limit this intro to totally "stock" testing, which was really kind of frustrating, or more so disappointing for the drag racing crowd in the group.

Fish gives me the pass for the dragstrip on the first round, Woo Hoo! Man this is still unbelievable, the time has come and it seems like I have waited for a year for this day. The first thing I notice as I climb on the bike is that in stock trim the Ninja seems tall, but not as tall as my stock 12R. Maybe 1" shorter in stock trim with me on it. The bike feels very light. Even though everyone knows it is a few pounds heavier, it feels totally different compared to a 12R. It feels like the lower center of gravity has shed the pounds even though the 14 has actually gained weight in areas other than the engine and frame.



Ryan Schnitz and Rob Muzzy go over the bike a little, filling me in on the launch light, the shift light, the tach and the gauges. Everything looks good. It is not only good looking, but it also looks very functional. In my opinion the Launch/Shift Light is way too small, but WOW, very cool that it even has one. Can you say this bike is meant for drag racing! So off I go, ready for my trip down the old 1320...

Man, I cannot remember the last time I launched a totally stock bike. I go up to do a shake down run and rip off a 10.93 (man I suck!), then a 10.80, and then a 10.62. Well, there go all of my dreams of running 9.9 anything on this stock ZX-14. Sometimes reality sucks. The entire time I am thinking "man, I wish I could lower and strap this bitch!". Well, I either lost one of my timeslips or it got eaten alive by the time slip fairy...

Fish is up with the next group and I give him a couple of pointers like, "go that way" and "shift" and, and, and, umm... well that's about it. I knew that with Rickey and Ryan, he would be in good hands. I have to say Fish did very well. On all 4 of his passes he went faster, with a final pass of an 11.05! Not bad for someone who is Big and has "never" been down a dragstrip before! With a few more passes I am sure he would have been down to the 10.8's.

My next session I did not get any time slips but all four passes were in the 10.60 range. One thing that comes to mind from when I took Rickey G's class (Thanks Karl, UDAMAN!) ... he kind of makes me forget what the heck I am doing. I keep trying and trying harder and keep doing worse and

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worse. So, on my last set of passes I just go up there and rip one off... 10.604@137.39, time was at 1:26 pm in the afternoon, my second pass 10.431@137.40 and the time was 1:30 pm.

Now that felt much better and the bike came out smooth it carried the front wheel just past the 60' mark and this run was a very good pass. The next pass was a 10.716@135.29 this was while missing a shift and going into damn limiter while going into 2nd.


Damn Foot shifters!!! (That's for you Bergie/Rick) That pass was done at 1:33 pm.

On my last pass I ran a 10.404@136.86, this was my best pass of the day and here are the numbers incrementally.

.531	= RT
1.852	= 60 foot
4.634	= 330 foot
6.861	= 1/8 th mile
110.48 mph	
8.774	= 1000 foot
10.404	= 1/4 mile
136.86 mph	ran it into limiter before 4 th ...

Time was 1:37 pm

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This was done at 3600 ft with at least 4-5 gallons of gas in the bike and me weighing in at 240 lbs (with no gear on). Even though some of you may think that is not very impressive, I feel it is impressive, almost unbelievable for me riding under these conditions. Here are a couple of other numbers to compare to mine. Brock Davidson, 10.18... Rickey Gadsen 9.92... and Ryan Schnitz a 9.64...

Brock weighs in at 185, Rickey is probably 165 and Ryan weighs like 12 lbs maybe 20...

If you notice, all 4 passes were done within 10 minutes of each other! That is 4 passes per bike in groups of 4 with a cool down of 15 - 20 minutes in between, and then 4 hot laps again.

This is one of the most amazing improvements over the ZX-12R! These were not "take it easy leaving from a stop sign" type launches. These were Hard Core launches all done by motorcycle junkies that love nothing more than to rip on someone else's motorcycle! All morning I kept waiting and waiting for the bikes to start creeping or slipping, either on the launch or down the track at the top end of the Strip. None, Nadda, Unbelievable!!!

I am here to tell you that the ZX-14's clutch is so bullet proof the Army should use it for armor in their Humvee's! Kawasaki did everything in their power to make this clutch last, and it worked!

Yes, I asked on your behalf if the new clutch would fit in a 12R, and "No way!" was the answer.

I could probably go out and buy a brand new ZX-14 for the amount of clutches that I have bought over the last 6 years, or at least have one hell of a down payment on one!

In between the morning and afternoon groups I had the opportunity to hang out and watch the Kawi guys change the oil and put in brand new clutches. I wish I would have taken a couple of photos but I did not have the opportunity to. I closely examined the old the clutches. Unbelievable! Really guys (and gals) it is hard to describe...Wait! No it 's very easy to describe!

They were perfect! There was absolutely no wear via the naked eye to anything inside the clutch, and the oil looked great also. Rob Muzzy was sitting there and jokingly said "if you want send those used clutches up to me I will dispose of them properly", LOL... shoot I wanted them also and I don't even have a ZX-14 coming.

As I looked at the inside the clutch, I noticed that it is set up in a hydraulic format, where it pushes the pressure plate out, unlike the ZX-12R which pulls the pressure plate out via the puller shaft and clutch puller.

How many of those have failed over the last 6 years?? I have personally gone through 2-3 shafts and about 10 pullers.

The clutch pack is actually larger, more like the ZX-11. It also includes the small fiber and "chatter" spring all the way inside,



clutch to full engagement and it lifted the front tire off of the ground. I had to throttle it to keep it smooth, which for sure cost me ET.

After getting the clutch to full engagement you are just along for a very quick ride, the 1-2 shift was very smooth, not hard or clunky. I did miss a few shifts but that was due to me not getting my leg up in time to shift for whatever reason, almost all my error. Speed shifting this gearbox is smooth and solid, never a hard shift. This was for all of my shifts: 1-2, 2-3, and 3-4. For the stock set-up the gearing needs to be changed for me. I would shift into 4th about 50 ft before the traps, and I was shifting at an indicated 11,500 or as close to it without bumping limiter, which I did a few times.

and then standard fibers the rest of the way out of the clutch pack. I did forget to count the fibers and steels but everything looks thicker, which is much better to dissipate the heat.

THE OVAL...

The pressure plate will fit at any location, so no more trying to make it fit in only one slot while it is hot and turning and turning and turning. Kawasaki either read our minds or read our posts at Bikeland.org on the complaints about the ZX-12R. (They read the board.)



The clutch hub also has been changed; it now has some teeth/grooves missing. It has 5 grooves then 2-3 missing then 5 more then missing again etc... This goes on all the way around the clutch hub. My guess (since I am not a Kawi Engineer) and I forgot to ask them, is this lightens it up and then allows for more oil flow throughout the clutch pack.

By now, you have all read that this clutch is a hydraulic setup. When I first saw this in the photos I thought, "Man, what is Kawi thinking? That is a mistake", but I am here to tell you that the hydraulic clutch has so much feel and control I would swear it was a cable clutch. I do not know how they did it but you can feel it and slip it with excellent control.

The clutch had absolutely zero chatter at any launch RPM. I listened to many of the riders leave and there was no chatter from anyone, all different levels from bogging off of the line to super high rpm slipping. There was only one person who even came close to any kind of chatter, and he almost killed it off of the line one time and almost flipped the bike another time. He had very little if any experience at launching a bike, and no it was not Fish. Either way the bike still performed despite the lack of rider experience.

So how many people want to take the World's most Powerful Production Motorcycle around The Las Vegas Speedway? Hmm... Ok you can all put your hands down now. I was lucky enough to be one of around 30 journalists to take on this incredible feat. I had visions of running this bike up to 186mph wide open for 5 laps on this 2 mile tri-oval. Well as the old saying goes "if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans". He might not have laughed, but he sure had one heck of a smile...

Personally I would not change a thing about this clutch pack; it is very smooth and very controllable. It had all the feel that I needed and the rider had complete control even down track past the 60' mark.

I would like to start by saying I now have the utmost respect and admiration for anyone that can take any 2 wheeled machine at 175 mph + down the front stretch of anything and toss that bike down into corner #1 without ever missing a beat. Just think about it.

Here is where I noticed another difference between the 12R and the 14. Near the end of slipping the clutch on my 12, the lever almost pulls itself out of your hand for a final engagement. If you have ever drag raced your 12R you surely have felt this before. On the 14 I noticed this "pull" was not there. The 14 was totally smooth the entire transaction from the initial friction point at your launch to total engagement upon clutch release.

You may say, "Oh, Mike you're just a wuss", but I am here to tell you before this day I have never once in my life been scared by a motorcycle. I have been a little worried, and I have been, "Oh shit, hang on", but I have never been outright nervous. Even earlier this year when I crashed my wife's R1 on a corner, I knew instinctively it was going to happen. I just took the best line and crashed.

This difference actually caused me some problems during some of my runs. I was used to the clutch lever popping or pulling out of my fingertips close to total engagement, and here is where I let my fingers snap the

When Fish and I went out in the van for the sighting lap, I was very excited and still had visions of going 186 down the straights. A couple of the guys were joking about the crash marks on the track's concrete barrier walls



and you could almost hear a change in the tone of their voices, though I still had nothing but excitement in my head!

They told us they were going to split us into groups and take us around the oval on the 14's for a couple of shake down laps to get us comfortable. I was already ready to go, but Fish gets the nod on the first group. They set up and off the first five go. I hang out with Extremelean and as the group comes around I see Fish falling behind slightly. I joke to XL how he must be nervous out there on the big track. Laughing, I tell him that we need to razz Fish good later. The Second lap comes around and he is falling behind about the same and I again joke to XL that we really need to give Fish a hard time.

My turn is coming up, so I start to get ready for my warm up lap around the Las Vegas Oval. Man I am excited and ready to go, as we go off of the pit road and into turn one, everything is great, go through turn two and hit the gas hard down the back straight. Coming down the back straightaway and getting ready to hit turn 3 that is when it starts to hit me, very fast, corner, BRICK WALL...

"What? Come on Mike, what are you thinking!"... coming into turn 4 it seems to be a very tight corner and I honestly think it is tighter then the other 3. Out of turn 4 and into the tri-oval, clipping along, but I am 3rd in line and I notice the first 2 bikes pulling away, and I am coming up on another large brick wall going into turn 1. Again I get the feeling deep down in my stomach that something was wrong. I come out of turn 2 and hammer it hard down the back straight again, and my hand starts turning off the throttle...

I really do not know what the hell is going on. We are motioned to go in to the pit lane. I apologize to the two guys that were behind me about not keeping up with the lead bikes. They both are like "sure, no problem, I didn't even notice"

Yeah, right... I think they were just being nice about it. I go over and tell XL that "Umm... let's just forget about the dogging that I was going to do to Fish about how slow he was going. I sit down and try and think about what is keeping me from twisting the throttle and getting that bike down the straightaway at top speed? Nothing, I figure! Okay, when I go out and make my 5 laps it should be no big deal.

Fish is up first and I take a couple of photos of him, and by himself it seems like he is going along pretty good. He looks like he is having a blast. When he comes in he tells me the front end felt really sketchy in turn 4, and that he felt nervous going around the track and could not put his finger on why he felt weird about it, but he did get up to 150 or so on the front straight. I am thinking at this time, ok maybe I was just worried about nothing and I am going to go out and rip it up.

We get the camera mounted on the bike facing rearward, and I am ready to go. A couple of guys have taken their turns and they are like "cool, no big deal" This calms any or at least most of my concerns. Brock Davidson is up and I take some photos of him while I am waiting for my turn. He comes in and says "wow that was awesome!", but he was a little slow and he feels on his next session he will be much faster.

I am up and ready to rock! Off I go out of the pits and up onto the banking of turn 1... up through the gears and off I go down the back straight! I

hammer it hard and as I come into turn 3 and again my nerve is gone and the bike just feels weird. I fight through this and around turn 4 and into the front stretch, I hammer on it and get up to 140 or so, and slow down into turn 1 again. I then go hard down the back straightaway and the same thing happens again going into turn 3. I was just not comfortable and actually I was very uncomfortable going into turns 1 and 3.

On lap 4 I decide "what the hell" and I just stay on the gas coming out of turn 3 and pin the throttle exiting turn 4 going into the front of the tri-oval. I watch my Speedo trip over the 155mph mark and, oh shit! Here comes turn 1! I hit my rear brake right before going into turn 1 and point the bike, and roll off of the throttle some. The bike just goes through the corner into #2 and then down the back straight I decide to sit up and take it easy going into turn 3. As I am going through the turn "taking it easy" I glance down and notice I am going 125 or so... Holy Crap! I am doing 125 sitting up and cruising around this turn, so I tuck in and wind it up going down the front of the tri-oval again. I brake pretty hard going into turn 1 and again sit up and cruise around turn 1 and 2 checking out the track. I slow down going into the pit lane, and come in as my session is over.

I decide it is probably best to let Fish know that I honestly wanted to go faster but I just could not do it. I told him the straights were great but the corners just bugged me out! The bike and tires were completely stable, but I just felt very weird. As we were sitting there talking I let him know about my last lap and I could not believe that I was just sitting up and cruising around the track at 125mph and it seemed like it was 30mph. We both laughed and he told me he did the same exact thing! All in all I am very happy that I tried the oval and if I would have had more time I might have lost that nervous feeling and found my edge, but I was here to Drag Race and that is when I decided to head over and finish up the day at the Strip, leaving the rest of the oval time to Fish.

The next day some of the other journalists were talking about the High Speed oval. They were saying that they had the same feeling that Fish and I had the day before. These are Motojournalists that ride and evaluate bikes for a living, and even though it did not make me feel all warm and fuzzy about my performance on the Oval, it did make me feel a little better that Fish and I were not the only ones who felt a little nervous or strange going around the big 2 mile oval.



BACK TO THE STRIP..

That night we had a few drinks and the morning came way too early.

I am determined to get to the Dragstrip and beat yesterday's times! There are two busses leaving; one at 9 am and one at 11 am. I thought about sleeping in but I decided I was here to Represent and that is what I was going to do! So 9 am it is, and it is cloudy and rained like hell last night. With fingers crossed we are ready to go. As soon as the door shuts on the bus, yep, the rain starts.

The entire way there Fish is just like, "I am going on a street ride I don't care if it is raining or not". Hell he had rain gear anyway, so he was good to go. Me? On the other hand, I was pretty content on searching for that dancing Indian to kick his ass...

The Bus Driver laughed and told us how lucky we were. It only rains in Vegas like 10 days out of the year and this was one of them. I did not find it funny at all, while the bus driver was thoroughly amused at himself, hmmm... I think I can drive a bus anyway, but he's lucky... I didn't know how to get to the Race Track.

Well, it rained the entire way out to the track and it was still raining when we pulled up. Kawasaki tells all of us there will be no street ride in the rain because all the bikes had fresh tires. As most of you know brand new tires and fresh rain on roads do not mix. Yep, back to the hotel we go. I guess I could have slept in after all.

We hang at the hotel and finally the big guy smiles on us and makes that Indian stop dancing.

We get to the track and there we gear up and split up into two groups. Fish heads off with a few riders to the road group, and I go with about 15 or so other riders to hit the Dragstrip again.

Today the temperature was 65' and the corrected elevation was 3100 ft. The air was a little better and we had a slight tail wind. The ET's went down and the MPH went up for most of us.

I had a total of 16 passes today and most of them were in the 10.4 - 10.5 range. My 1/8 MPH stayed right at 110 MPH, about 1mph faster then yesterday. One thing though, my 1/4 MPH it was up into the high 139's with a couple of passes in the 140 range. That's up from 136 -137 from yesterday. So, a 1 mph gain in the 1/8th and a 3 mph gain in the 1/4 over yesterday.

The day was full of struggles and pressures to get this stock bike down the track as fast as possible! Wow, I really had forgot how hard it is to ride a completely stock bike fast. Scott, Brock and I tried again in vain to have them let us put a strap on the front of a couple bikes (Brock brought his brackets and straps just in case, very nice) but the answer was the same as yesterday, "No we want to keep this test to a totally stock format".

Bummer.

I am very interested in seeing what this bike will do lowered with a front strap on it, and I am sure as soon as they hit the showroom floors, someone will have some numbers and then let the mod's begin.

Tuesday was a great day and here are the #'s incrementally from my best pass of the day.

.444 = RT
1.837 = 60'
4.618 = 330'
6.828 = 1/8 mile
111.76 MPH

.000 = 1000' did not register most of the day
10.319 = 1/4 mile
140.53 MPH

I know this bike has more in it even for a guy that is my size. Today the other big guys (210 lbs both of them) ran 10.20's, and I was very very close as you can see.

I think I can honestly say that at sea level with a strap, lowered a small amount, and only 1 - 2 gallons of gas the ZX-14 could easily run 9.9's all day long! I would love to have one of these motors and the platform to build it is out of this world! I have already heard rumors from Rob Muzzy (guess it's not a rumor if I heard it from the top dog!) that a 1560cc kit is almost complete. Now, can you say HANG ON! Bet you are not going to ride that one at stock height with no strap on it... hehehehe....

The bike is very smooth up top going 140+ straight and it feels rock solid.



I was kind of wishing that we had a 1, 2, 3...mile straight away to take this baby on. (Oh and the Top Speed Limiter removed... Hey Rob....hint hint)

This bike is a straight line animal, built for speed. The Cheetah of motorcycles.

I do have to admit I am not much into braking and I have never been one to do stoppies. Usually when I am hammering on the brakes very hard it means I am about ready to crash. The feel of the ZX-14's brakes is good. I would say about the same as my ZX-12R, maybe even a touch softer at high speeds. Almost like it is not enough but that could actually be deceiving because the bike stopped just fine and felt rock solid at 50 mph and below. I mean how often are you going to be going 150 and slam on your brakes anyway?

I did notice one unique thing, and that was the Engine Braking at high speeds. You can feel it. It seriously chugs you down before you ever even apply the brakes. This worked great for me. Did I mention that I am not much into braking anyway?

THE STREET...

So it is late and another rider and I head back over to the Oval to load up and head back to the Hotel. Our 2 days in "Paradise" are almost over. We roll up and I say to the Kawasaki guy, "man I wish I could have taken one of the bikes out for a short street ride..."

He says, "wait right here." Another one of the journalists and I hang out and the Kawi rep comes back and says, "Ok, you guys can go for a short, ride like 15 minutes and then come right back."

I say, "COOL!" and the other Guy says ok as well. I guess he went on the street ride yesterday but wanted to go again. Can you blame him?

So we gear up and I get on one of the road bikes. The Kawi rep tells our guide that we need to be back in 45 minutes or so. I am like, "All Right!!"

Off we go, riding into the sunset... literally!

As we left the Las Vegas Speedway the sun was going down and it really was going to be a beautiful end to the Great Sunrise that we had on Monday morning.

I notice right away that the seating position seems a little more upright then on my 12R, and the foot pegs seemed to be a little higher then the 12R, not much but I would say 1/2 to 1". That could be a little deceiving since I have removed the rubber cushions off of my foot pegs on my ZX-12R, but it was still comfortable.

As we pull out we head towards the Interstate the Kawasaki escort rider asks where we want to go, and if going downtown is ok?

I am like "Hell ya! Let's go!"

We pull onto the Interstate and we get on it a little. The suspension is set up pretty good for me and smooths out the road nicely, even in the rough spots. We go in and out of traffic and scoot along at about 80 mph. The seat is very comfortable and there is hardly any buzz in the handlebars at any rpm (that I could notice). We exit the Interstate and head for the famous Las Vegas Strip.

Man, the traffic is horrible this time of the night in Vegas! We arrive on the start of the "Strip" and cruise onto one of the World's most famous stretches of road. We pass the "Circus-Circus" and all of the drive through Wedding Chapels. I finally get a chance to check out the gauges on the ZX-14 at night. They look totally cool!

Being right here right now on the Strip in Vegas on a ZX-14! This just could not get much better!

As we are going down the strip we hit just about every stoplight we come to and we are about half way down the strip and it hits me. There is no heat coming off of this bike! I start watching the temperature gauge. It's in the middle and not moving, even in all this traffic. I do not know what Kawasaki did to change this from the 12R, but whatever they did to improve this, IT WORKED.

Just as I am really starting to enjoy all of this (the Kawi escort was giving





us a little tour and telling us all about The Strip), the other Journalist yells over and says "Hey they told us to be back in 45 minutes and we had better get back".

I am like "WHAT?"

Did I just hear my ears correctly?

We are here - in downtown Las Vegas - on motorcycles that no one *in the entire world has*, and this dude is saying, "Hey we need to head back" ???

This is totally unbelievable!

I could have stayed out all night long! I was having a really amazing time! Just being out on the road and enjoying this opportunity and riding this very well balanced machine. Lots of motor, tons of torque and a nice ride to boot, and hell when you're riding it you don't have to look at it anyway. (ha ha)

Sadly, we turn around and head back to the Interstate, back towards the track. As we are cruising down the Highway about 65 - 70 mph and I notice the fuel mileage is bouncing around between 52 - 53 mpg! I hit the throttle up and down some to make sure it is not broken, and nope, it sure as hell is getting 50 + mpg on the highway at 70 mph. That is going to be a huge plus for the sport touring guys. We hit the 70 mph speed limit and I bump it up to 80 mph and the bike is still getting 42 mpg. I hammer on it a little just to make sure and sure enough 40 + mpg at 80 mph. One of the other things I noticed at 65 mph was that the tach was loping along at about 2900 rpm.

ZX-14.com

We make it back to the track and park the bikes. I thank all of the crew for helping us for this amazing weekend.

As I was standing there behind the bike, in the darkness while its lights were still on, I noticed the tail light. At night it looks like this little "devil made me do it" face!

This was very fitting for my last view of this truly incredible machine.

WHAT I STILL DO NOT LIKE ABOUT THE ZX-14...

I am sorry to say but I still do not like the headlights. To me they just look strange. I really hope that they grow on me in the future, but I don't think they will.

The grills on the side really do look much better in person. Not like screaming killer, but much better than the photos show. I believe that with some paint, they will look much better. Not a big deal, but the sub-frame under the rider seat is a little strange being a solid piece, then going up under the rear seat like a standard sub-frame. You know it might look very good being polished, but until I see someone that does it I will remain kind of neutral.

All and all those are about the only things I did not like about the bike. It may be surprising to some, but these are some of the same things I did not like the very first time I saw the bike.

The funny part about this is that while sitting down at dinner with some

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of the head design engineers from the Kawasaki ZX-14 project, we discussed what I did not like about the bike. They actually asked me if I could redesign the bike “a la ZX-Mad Mike”.

What would I change?

At first I felt a little strange talking about what I did not like about this bike since they had just invited Fish and I out here, and spent a lot of coin for us to be able to evaluate these machines. After all I was here representing Bikeland, but I thought to myself, “what good would it do them if I just sit there and say I love everything 100% about this bike”?

What would I be?

Yep, a glorified “Yes Man”. Anyone who knows me, knows that I am far from being a yes man.

I told them that before I came here for the weekend, I did not like the grills and I also did not like the headlights, but now that I have seen the bike in person, the grills are not that bad, but I really do not like the headlights.

This is funny because Fish and I are exact opposites on that. He really likes the headlights and does not like the Grills, and I don’t mind the grills in person and still dislike the headlights.

The engineers let us know that when they showed the design of the bike to many of the employees at Kawasaki, they also had the same reaction as Fish and I.

The two items that really stood out to the employee’s were the lights and the side grills. They either hated them or loved them. Boy did I feel much better when the engineers were telling us the same thing.

If the 2008 ZX-Mad comes out it will have 1 or 2 headlights, and if the 2008 ZX-Fish comes out it will have smooth side panels...

All in all this is one hell of a drag racing machine, and even though the looks do not move me, these two days at the drag strip have! Mark my words, a new Sheriff is in town and his name is “ZX-14”. These bikes are going to litter the Dragstrip this year for sure.

I honestly feel that the ZX-14 is going to bring Kawasaki back to the top of the ultimate performance food chain.

