



Bikeland's PrincessKiwi Explores Sonoma's Twisty Roads...

In May, Kawasaki Motors Corporation hosted a "female" riders' event in conjunction with the AMA races being held at Infineon Raceway.

It was a weekend in Sonoma, California, test riding a variety of Kawasakis through the amazingly twisty and beautiful roads of California's wine country. Watching the races at Infineon raceway from the Kawasaki suite, plus a close up view of the action from the pits.

90% of the attendees were women, and included some great female role models.

I packed all my gear and left on Thursday for San Francisco...

That night we were taken out for dinner at Avance, a very tasty Tapas place. Over dinner, I had a chance to meet some of the women that had been invited for the weekend. Friday was the first day of test rides and the bus picked us up at the hotel lobby. We headed to Infineon Raceway to pick up the bikes we would be riding around the back roads of Sonoma.

I chose a 2005 Z750S to start my morning off. It was a different riding position than the ZX-6R I have at home. This would be the first time I had ever ridden a "standard" or "UJM". The bike's seating position was upright, and I had more legroom. The seating position almost reminded me of my dirt bike, but the 750cc engine was more powerful than my little 350 single.

After a few hours of riding, our group stopped for a mid morning snack. Alfredo, who was escorting the ride with Greg and Justin, had been riding a 2005 Z1000. He offered to trade bikes with me! Cool! I hopped on the Z1000 for the trip back to the track.

As soon as I got on the Z1000 I felt comfortable – as if it was my own bike. I could get my feet down and it was really simple to get the bike up and going. I found it was easier to keep up to the front of the pack, lead by another Z1000 and a ZX-10R. I really enjoyed the extra power the Z1000 offered. The 1000 didn't seem noticeably heavier than the Z750S. The gearing was great through the twisting roads; it had more room in each gear than the Z750S. The Z1000's suspension was much stiffer. It had less "bounce" through the uneven road surfaces.

I would have added a full windscreen to the Z1000 if I was doing a lot of highway riding, which I try to avoid. I really enjoyed both bikes and the chance to go try some amazing roads on a completely different bike than what I have in the garage. I had a craving to grab the new 2005 ZX-6R and take it on the same wickedly twisty roads.

Maybe after lunch – I would grab the pewter ZX-6R for dessert. Yummy!

Some days you do get what you wish for, so after lunch I head out on KMC's all new 600.

The roads after lunch were curvy and coastal. The views were amazing! The winding road hugged the beautiful blue Pacific Ocean. What a treat to be out on the new 636 with a group of really confident female riders and a group of great guys from Kawasaki to guide us.



The first thing I noticed after I swung my leg over the 636 was that the new model felt like climbing onto a ZX-10R. The 2005 ZX-6R is taller and stiffer than the 2004 model. I loved the new slipper clutch. Kawasaki has put years of development into the 2005 model and the new ZX-6R has been redesigned from the ground up. The ZX-6R was now part of the new family of bikes developed by Kawasaki; its big brothers are the new Z1000 and the new ZX-10R. No wonder I want one...



The afternoon went by quickly – that is what happens when you are having too much fun! The ride ended at the track. I had a huge smile on my face when I climbed off the ZX-6R. Wow, I like that bike! We return to the Hotel to shower and change and then it's off for dinner at Guaymas for Mexican food!!

Over a Virgin Lime Margarita (don't bother drinking these they taste horrible – we switched to "real" ones later), I talked to another member of the KMC team about the new ZX-6R. We chatted about the ZX-6R's

slipper clutch. The Slipper Clutch lets the clutch "slip" until the engine speed matches your own speed. This lets you do some engine braking with the throttle and allows you to downshift aggressively and carry more speed into a corner without locking up the rear wheel. The slipper clutch is only activated when downshifting; if you shut the throttle the bike will still engine brake. I will have to get on the ZX-6R for the track day so I can play with the slipper clutch a bit more.

Saturday morning comes early and my goal today is to get on a Cruiser. I have never ridden a Cruiser before, and I am more than a bit curious. I decide to ride the Mean Streak 1600. This will be the biggest bike I have ever been on. I arrive at the track and look the bike over. It's big, low, and red. It looks like a lot of bike to take on the twisty roads I had just ridden the Z750S, Z1000, and the ZX-6R on.



The weather is great and the bike is warmed up, so I hop on. I do a high kick over the back of the bike, as if I was getting on a Sportbike, then I sit down on the bike – way down. I laugh in my helmet – okay, this is different, but it is going to be fun! I also had to laugh every time I went to put my feet on the foot pegs and they weren't where I expect to find them on my Sportbike. The 1600's pegs were low and forward.

The first bit of our ride is on the highway, and although the wind is buffeting me, the bike doesn't even flinch. The gauges are also different from a Sportbike's setup. The odometer and speedometer are where a Sportbike rider would expect to find them, but you have to look down at the gas tank to see the indicator lights, high beam and neutral lights. The Mean Streak has a lot of power. The big twin's throttle was twitchy and I think a part of that for me was that the grips were too big for my hand to get around. I am sure that with more time on the bike that would be something I would get used to, like the low seat, and the foot pegs.

Our group exits the highway and we hit the twisties. I had no idea what to expect from this bike... it was a nice surprise! The Mean Streak was easy to maneuver at slow speeds through tight corners. I thought it might be too big for me to move around, but I was wrong. I worked my way to the front of the pack so I could try the bike on the corners at a bit of a faster pace. For the Mean Streak's size, it was more sporting than it first appeared to me. It could lean. I scared myself the first time the peg scraped on a corner, but since the bulky bike didn't

seem to be affected by the scraping of the foot pegs I just kept riding it with the sound of scraping metal, a trail of sparks behind me. That made me smile inside my helmet.

I guess the biggest thing the Mean Streak taught me was that Cruisers are motorcycles too, and a lot of technology goes into building a Metric. I didn't feel like I was missing something riding this bike, it was a whole and complete riding experience. The Mean Streak also taught me that just because you are riding a Cruiser doesn't mean that you can't go out for a technical ride. Cruisers can lean, they have the power to go, and go fast. A corner is a corner on any bike. A good road is still a good road and still fun to ride even if you are not on a Sportbike.

Back to the Infineon Raceway for a later lunch. I take this time to wonder the pits to see if I can interview any racers. No luck today. I watch some of the races from the KMC suite and then our time at the track is over and we have to go.

We jump back on the bus, to the hotel shower, change and then on the bus to dinner at Frantoio, wow – what great food! I got to spend the evening talking about motorcycles with other women, while having some amazing food and wine. Cassandra, Pam, Molly, Laura, Valerie, and Rebecca topped off a great day with all the laughing over dinner. How could it get any better? Oh, yeah, I get to get up and do the same thing tomorrow!



Sunday morning I take the 2005 ZX-6R out. It is a bit damp out, but that is not going to stop me. I want to ride the ZX-6R for our track day on Monday and I wanted to get some serious playtime in on the bike. The rain holds off and it turns into a day of more amazing roads. As our morning ride ends my face hurts from smiling. I am having a blast. Did I mention I want the 2005 ZX-6R?

During a break I take some time to wander the pits to see if I can interview any racers. I meet up with Opie Caylor and interview him, Lee Acree and Josh Hayes. From the KMC suite we watch some of the races. KMC asks if anyone wants to go down to the Hot Pits, so I go for the full tour. I get right down to the track, one small barricade away from the racers. Very Cool, but the tour isn't over yet! Tommy Hayden wins, so off our group goes into the "media only" area of the winner's circle. Anyone want champagne sprayed on them? I think Tommy got some on my Bikeland jacket.

What a day... I'm exhausted, stay in and don't go to dinner. Tomorrow is our track day. I get a full night's sleep and in the morning I am ready to go!

Our group heads towards Infineon raceway for our track day, hosted by Monte and Bonnie from Sportbike track time <http://www.sportbiketracktime.com>

After our morning safety talk the riders are divided into groups. We are joined by a handful of Kawasaki dealers, but other than that the track belongs to us. I find a 2005 ZX-6R and head out with my group. This is where Tommy, Roger, Mat, Aaron, Ben, Jake, Neil, Miguel, Eric, and Josh were racing less than 12 hours ago. I follow the thin black lines left on the track from their tires to the places on the track I couldn't see from the stands.



The ZX-6R is a dream on the track. I love the sound of a 636 revving up to the high rpm and screaming like a banshee. The slipper clutch makes the bike even easier to ride aggressively. I work the bike to the edge of my abilities knowing it has so much more to offer a more experienced rider. I break for lunch feeling as if I have a real taste of what the bike can offer. I want to spend all day on the ZX-6R, it is so easy to ride. The mysteries of the lines of the track have been unlocked by the racers tire marks, and now I have even more respect for what goes into racing at Infineon.

My assignment after lunch is to jump on a ZX-10R and take it around the track. This will be my first real ride on the ZX-10R. I just hope I keep the front end down and don't do the wheelies that Josh Hayes was doing on the weekend.

The biggest difference I noticed between the ZX-6R and the ZX-10R is that I only used the first and the second gears of the ZX-10R. The bike goes really, really fast in first. The ZX-10R really seems to be about controlled braking. It was a bit more work to move the bike around, but not as much as I thought it would be. It was a completely different ride. I would like to spend more time on the ZX-10R, just to get more comfortable with the bike's power and adapting my riding to use all of that power.

The track day is over and it is our last time this weekend we will climb on the bus together. Cards are exchanged, along with promises to keep in touch. We all hope that KMC does this type of Women's event again soon.

I guess the most important wish of all is that I wish I had a bigger garage. Of all the bikes I rode if I had to pick a favorite it would be the 2005 ZX-6R. If I had the room, I would love a Metric Cruiser, the Z1000 and a ZX-10R for those days I need to go really, really fast.



For your own test ride experience check out Kawasaki's ROK calendar of events, to see what is coming to a town near you!

[Click Here](#) to see a list of 2005 ROK Events

Let the good times roll!