



**We were out for a nice summer's** ride on Washington State's Olympic Peninsula, heading back home, rushing to catch the Port Townsend ferry. I could see the ferry at the dock, but I needed gas.

My Kawasaki ZX-12R, though astoundingly fast, was truly The Lincoln Continental of motorcycles. It ate gas, and I had none left.

We pulled into the gas station just before the ferry terminal and hurriedly filled up. I looked around me as we completed our transaction.

There was a cluster of Cruisers and Goldwings fuelling up as well. A whole gang to be exact. Seems as though they were operating at a slightly different pace than we were. Princesskiwi got onboard her Kawasaki ZX-6R and we were set to go. Just as we began to pull out of the gas station, ferry only a few hundreds of yards away, an awful thing happened. I heard a song. I could hear it right through my helmet. Through my damn earplugs I could hear a song!

The song was blaring from one of the stereo equipped Goldwings, and it went like this...

"On the road again... goin' places I ain't never bin.... Goin places....."

Just as we manoeuvred to pull out onto the road we were cut off by a slow moving caravan of Touring bikes, Customs and Cruisers sauntering along at 5mph. "Shit!", I cursed in my helmet, "We're never going to make the ferry now!"

As I remember this, I snap out of it and look down at myself. I'm not wearing my normal leathers. Instead I'm wearing jeans and a Harley Davidson jacket.

I'm sitting astride a 2005 Vulcan 1600 Nomad. Oh my God. I'm one of them. NO!

It's true. I've never been a cruiser rider. I've logged tens of thousands of miles on every kind of Sportbike around, but almost none on a cruiser. The last cruiser I rode was Princesskiwi's Boss's fully tricked out Harley something or other. True to the stereotype, it had broken down near our house and he had to abandon it. He'd just pumped \$15K worth of chrome engine mods into the thing. I rode it back to our place where the hunk of iron promptly puked all of its oil onto our driveway. I rigged a temporary fix and then limped the sorry bike, with my fillings rattling out of my head, back to his house. I couldn't get it away from me, or anything I owned, fast enough.

Just not my cup of tea. Shaky and loud, and oily, oh so oily! Good to cruise the strip if said strip is close to your house and you have a box off parts nearby to replace what falls off.



I was interested in seeing what Kawasaki offered. I've never been sure if what the OEMs call the metric cruiser market (read: Japanese knock off of a Harley) exists because the engineers over there want to edge into the US market, or could it be that they are so crazed and obsessed with everything Americana, from Elvis to snowboarding, that they feel they have a need to conquer the American Chopper.

Or perhaps it's something much more basic than that. Perhaps our White Lab Coat Clad friends in the Orient truly DO want to ride bad assed choppers? I mean, what could be more threatening than a group of 4'8", 110 pound guys dressed in leather pulling up in front of the local biker bar?

I suppose they want some basic things taken care of; like say, starting for instance. Not leaking a quart of oil every block you travel? How about getting the bike back to your house with all the parts you left your garage with? This is something that only several bottles of Sake and a few soused Japanese engineers could explain to us (off the record, of course). The big four have a knack for refining and rebuilding whatever we can make Stateside. Better, stronger, faster. That is something we can't argue.

Which is true? Or if both are, I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. Probably a chicken and the egg scenario. Anyway you slice it, according to KMC the "metric cruiser market" is BIG. The Cruiser market accounts for 32% of the motorcycle market. That is 1/3 of all motorcycles sold are 900cc+ cruisers, and the segment is growing. Historical sales show large growth from 1995 to 2004. What gets companies like KMC and the other OEMs into this game, and why we see bikes like the Rune and the Valkyrie being churned out, is this little fact: The Metric cruiser segment of the market is expanding faster than the overall market.

Perhaps owners are tired of a lack of reliability? Statistics indicate that consumers are migrating towards these more refined, highly engineered Cruiser knock offs.



So there I was, sitting with a bunch of guys on board a bunch of Cruisers... The riding group was pretty diverse, but most of them were there to ride cruisers. They were all Cruiser guys. The only person in the group I could relate to was Mike from Citybike Magazine. Mike's a fellow Sportbike rider, and he teaches track days. It was his first time out on a Cruiser as well. The other fellas were interested in things like tassels, sissy bars, and big-assed windscreens. Mike and I were interested in handling, braking, cornering...

One of the first things you notice is that the Vulcan comes stock with hard saddlebags. I managed to stuff my whole backpack and then some into just one side of the bike with plenty of room to spare. Unlike a Sportbike, there's tons of room on the Vulcan to store stuff. The gas tank's surface is big enough to set up a small hibachi and BBQ some ribs while you ride. Certainly not what Sportbikers are used to. I didn't have to worry about folding my insurance papers origami style to get them to fit with my wallet under the seat ala ZX-10R or ZX-6R.



Sit on the bike and stand it up. Heavy. Oh so heavy. And platforms for my feet! Yo... I'm pimpin' now! Odd... Hmm... well, off we rode!

The giant windscreen was set to the wrong height, so instead of protecting me from the wind for first 20 miles, I was buffeted like someone was repeatedly smacking me in the forehead with a 2x4. At our first stop we adjusted the screen and fixed that.



Then we fed some ground squirrels.

I was starting to get into it. While all the Cruiser guys were talking about this and that, (stuff I didn't know much about) Mike and I talked about the tires and the handling.

The bike felt twitchy at first, but after a few miles under my belt the Vulcan's size and weight disappeared under me, and it's understated mannerisms became strangely relaxing and pleasing at the same time.

Truly an easy bike to ride.

Feeding ground squirrels and looking at the ocean...

Was this what riding a cruiser was all about?

Next thing ya know I'll be wearing an open face helmet and smoking a Cuban as I head down the highway...

I thought about a guy I used to work with who was a biker. He was up on all sorts of drug charges. Spent several years in jail after being caught off the coast of BC in a fishing boat loaded with several tons of pot and coke. His helmet was one of those beanie things. He'd stopped by the butcher one day and picked himself up a set of pig's ears, and stuck them onto the helmet. Then when he saw the Man, he'd flip the pig the finger and take off. A real biker.

I guess we were being groomed to be more subtle, demure bikers...

We stopped for some food and I reflected on the 1600. Things that did catch my attention were things that didn't catch my attention at all. The bike started reliably all the time. Fuel injected. Nothing to think about. No choke. No carbs. Turn key... thumb starter... bike turns on (novel concept). No puddles of oil under the bike... Brakes had no problem whatsoever stopping the big, hefty bike.

Even though the Vulcan's seating position was positively alien to me, it could only be described as exceedingly comfortable. By the next leg of the trip I'd made myself at home on the big V-Twin, lazily putting around the countryside looking at the birds, the vegetation, the horses, the wildlife. I witnessed the biggest aloe-vera plant I've ever seen in my life! Must have been a good 15' tall!



Time seemed to waltz by as the hefty bike effortlessly chugged away...

I was beginning to understand what these bikes were about. While I had been riding around hunched over on my Sportbike, I now imagined these Metric Cruiser riders, dressed in white linens, spending their time floating around in hot air balloons, hang gliding, playing shuffleboard on the decks of yachts and hitting buckets of balls down at the local driving range. Ah, the good life!

Riding the Vulcan through the California countryside was kind of like kicking back in yer caddy convertible with a Big Gulp in one hand, yer leg out the open window and yer right arm around some hot chick's shoulder. "Oh yeah... super cool...!"

At about midday we came to the approach of Mount Palomar, and I knew it was going to get interesting. The first set of corners came up and as I leaned the 1600 in, the floorboards and some big hunks of (no longer chromed) something or other touched down in a not so graceful manner. I laughed. The group pulled over for a photo op and Mike and I were ecstatic. This was going to get fun!



We hung back from the rest and made it our mission to see just how well this big bike could corner. Watching a fellow Sportbike rider toss an 800+ pound bike like the Vulcan into a 15mph hairpin on Palomar is a blast. Sparks flew off the bike in every corner, every corner making us laugh harder in our helmets.

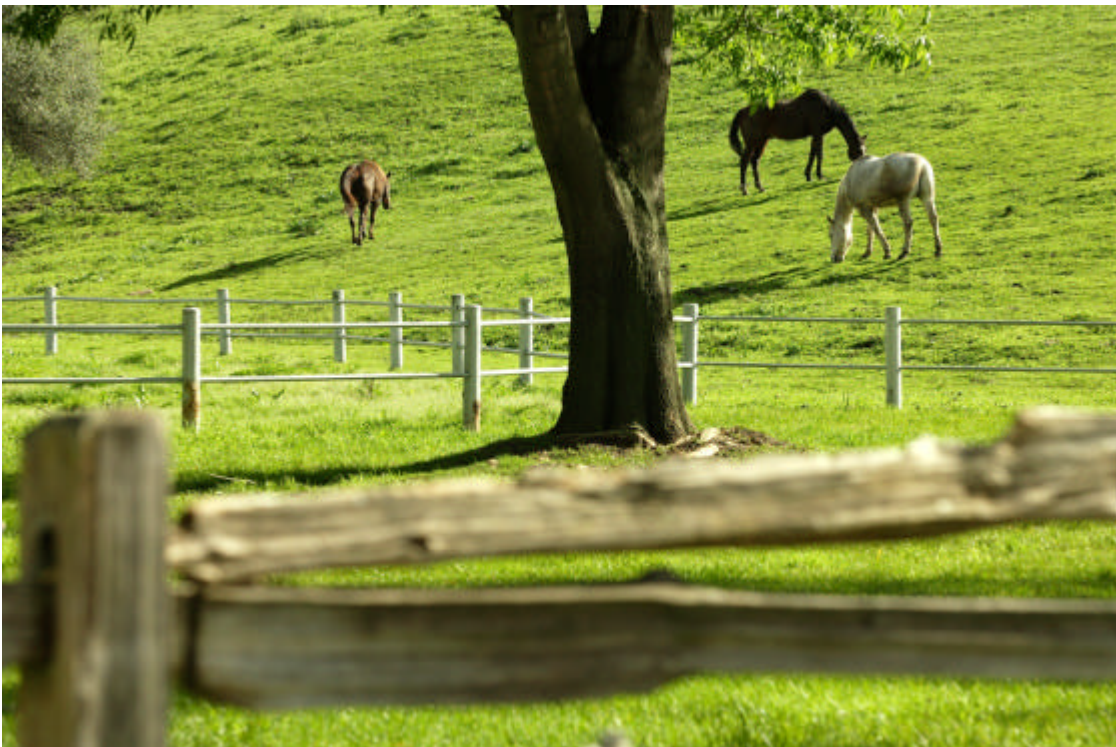
The Vulcan ate up the tight corners with ease, never losing traction or showing any sign of weakness.

The Vulcan 1600 opened my eyes up to a kind of riding I'd never been a part of; Slow, relaxed, enjoyable cruising. Power and torque, decent handling and brakes, mechanical reliability and enough storage room to bring along a case of beer and even smuggle an illegal or two. I can now begin to appreciate what this class of bikes is all about.

I still shudder at the thought of seeing those Cruisers blocking our access to the ferry. Hearing that song makes me want to grab a huge handful of throttle on my 10R and wheelie past all of them in the oncoming lane.

I guess I'll have to lighten up a bit, now that I understand why they're riding. I can appreciate it, and maybe see myself riding a bike like that sometime too...

But not for a while... no pipe and slippers bike for this rider... not just yet.



## **Vulcan 1600 Nomad**

### **SPECIFICATIONS**

MSRP: \$12,999

Engine: Four-stroke V-twin, SOHC, 8-valve

Displacement: 1,552cc

Bore x stroke: 102.0 x 95.0mm

Compression ratio: 9.0:1

Cooling: Liquid

Carburetion: Digital fuel injection with (2) 36mm throttle bodies

Ignition: Digital

Transmission: Five-speed

Frame: High-tensile steel, double cradle

Rake / trail: 32 degrees / 7.2 in.

Suspension type, front: 43mm hydraulic fork

Suspension type, rear: Dual hydraulic shocks

Suspension adjustments, rear: Air adjustable twin shocks, 4-way rebound damping

Wheel travel, front: 5.9 in.

Wheel travel, rear: 3.9 in.

Tire, front: 150/80 x 16

Tire, rear: 170/70 x 16

Brakes, front / rear: Dual hydraulic 300mm discs / single 300mm disc

Length: (overall) 99.0 in

Width: (overall) 40.9 in

Height: (overall) 59.3 in

Wheelbase: 66.5 in

Ground clearance: 5.9 in.

Seat height: 28.4 in.

Dry weight: 772 lb.

Fuel capacity: 5.3 gal.

Colors: Metallic Dark Blue, Ebony/Galaxy Silver

\* Price and specifications subject to change

### **Features**

- V-Twin Engine
- Engine displacement increased to 1,552cc for more torque
- Digital Fuel Injection is revised to suit the larger engine's needs and enhance performance
- Dual mufflers allow more clearance for saddlebags
- Liquid Cooling
- Maintains consistent engine temperatures for long engine life and sustained power during hard use
- Auxiliary fan keeps things cool during all operating conditions
- Four Valves per Cylinder
- Boosts low-end torque
- Provides maximum valve area for optimum flow
- Hydraulic valve lash adjusters require no maintenance
- Gear-driven Engine Balancer
- Counter-rotates at engine speed to cancel vibration
- Allows use of single-pin crankshaft without the heavy vibration
- Rubber-mounted Engine
- All but eliminates engine vibration at all speeds
- Five-speed Transmission
- Great around-town acceleration with relaxed highway cruising
- Positive Neutral Finder
- Just lift the shift pedal from first at a stop to find neutral easily
- 5.3 Gallon Fuel Tank
- Rounded-edge finish for clean, upscale look
- Large capacity for extended touring range
- Large, Adjustable Windshield
- Large windshield gives excellent rider and passenger weather protection
- Windshield is adjustable up and down two inches

- Heavy-duty chromed support hardware holds the windshield rock steady
- Hard Saddlebags
- Designed for easy packing, these saddlebags carry an amazing amount of gear
- Lockable, side-open design for smooth looks and quick access
- Soft, removable inner bags available as an optional accessory
- Passenger Comfort
- New floorboards, standard backrest and thicker seat provide maximum passenger comfort on long rides
- More Chrome for 2005
- New chrome engine guards help protect the engine
- Triple Disc Brakes
- Dual discs up front for maximum stopping power
- Large, single rear disc because touring bikes carry so much of the load on the rear wheel
- Shaft Drive
- Reliable, clean and quiet low-maintenance system
- Hydraulic Clutch Release
- Easy to operate, requires virtually no adjustment
- Adjustable Control Levers
- Fits variety of rider sizes and styles
- Electronic Speedometer
- Eliminates conventional cable-drive system
- Tubeless Tires
- Lower operating temperature extends tire life
- Air-Adjustable Rear Shocks
- Rebound damping is 4-way adjustable to tailor fit the ride