For two years I've enjoyed riding my Kawasaki ZX-10R. From the moment I sat on the bike two Februaries ago at KMC's facilities in Irvine, I knew that my love affair with my ZX-12R was over.

The 2004 10R fit my 6'3 ½" frame like a glove. With all the power on tap I needed and a good 100lbs + shy of the weight of the 12, the 10R delivered the sportbike fix I had been looking for.

Some people might consider me to be an average to fast street rider, and others say I'm just another "Ricky Racer" from some obscure website. So, you might ask, what the heck am I doing here? I suppose it may be that because of Bikeland there are few things that go on in the motorcycling industry that don't pass across my electronic desk. I'm here because I represent you, Joe Average. I'm just some guy who loves to ride motorcycles.

Today I'm sitting in a room with 8 journalists. I won't say 9, because I don't include myself in that group. The journalists here are professionals. Me, I'm just some guy… just like you. I enjoy riding the streets, I've done a few track days, but by no means am I a professional rider. I'm certainly not a professional writer. I mean, come on… the sitting guy next to me just finished riding Rossi's bike… Me? I just finished doing the taking out the garbage, going to work and taking out the garbage, going to work.

I pinch myself to make sure this is real, and to mentally prepare myself for the solid waxing I'm positive I'm going to get as the pros prepare to kick my ass all around the racetrack. Most passed will surely be my title, but hey, at least it's going to be fun!

I love my 2004 ZX-10R. It's handling, though a little dicey at times, is pretty amazing. The power is there, and short of the front wheel recall, it's provided me with thousands of miles of pleasure. Time marches on, and no sooner was the 10R crowned King of the liter class, Suzuki came along and spoiled the party. The 2005 GSXR 1000 cleaned the 10R's clock, and pretty much every other bike out there. With consistent top place finishes in last year's AMA season, Suzuki sent Kawasaki back to the drawing board. I remember watching last year's race at Pike's peak, with a WFO Josh Hayes being passed like he was standing still by the GSXR.

Kawasaki's answer back is a totally redesigned 10R. The relaxed (for a supersportbike) seating position of the '04/'05 model is gone, and replaced by a more cramped, track-focused ride. This should have little effect on an average guy, but as a taller rider this really bummed me out. The pegs have been raised and the seat lowered, all part of the mass centralization concept employed by KHI's engineers.

KMC stresses that Kawasaki's new mantra is to focus on *application specific bikes*. They are no longer content with manufacturing streetable trackbikes, or trackable streebikes (if you catch my drift). According to KMC the all new (and it is all new) 2006 ZX-10R is a sharply focused track tool, complete with available factory race support and engine componentry for those with some more money to burn.

Styling wise KHI's newest liter bike is controversial. They eliminated what many (myself included) felt was a beautifully designed front end and replaced it with a fairing that incorporates two small teardrop shaped headlights, and a much larger ram air intake. Compare the front ends of the bikes side by each and you'll see just how radically changed the new 10R's bodywork is. Either you love this or hate this.

In North America the bike comes in 3 colors, Kawasaki Green, Black, and an Orange color with a slight pearl finish that makes you second guess if it might be Yellow. KMC insists the color is Yellow, "Solar Yellow" to be precise, but it looked pretty darn Orange to us. Out of the three colors offered, I found the black to be the be the best looking as it drew less attention to the larger spacing that now exists between the top of the headlights and the bottom of the windscreen.

Bikeland has the benefit of receiving support from three world renowned exhaust manufacturers, so it was a general cry of "they did what?" from the readership when the photos of the bike first hit this website. While other OEMs, including KHI, were moving onto shorter exhausts and bellypan systems, readers wondered why they were having an underseat exhaust showing up on a new model. I remember reading reports posted to Bikeland's ZX-10R section from more than one Bikeland member in 2004 that said that they were contacted by marketing research firms immediately after purchasing their '04 10Rs. The research firms asked new 2004 ZX-10R owners what they felt were loaded questions along the lines of "Don't you wish you had an underseat exhaust?" or "Wouldn't you prefer an underseat exhaust?" Fast forward to 2006 and now we have an undertail exhaust.

Stanley Takagi from KHI in Japan told Bikeland that the dual undertail unit provided the space engineers needed for increased volume they required for the system. He told us that much discussion was involved in the decision process over choosing an undertail exhaust, and that there were

power gains from the unit. He also stated that the choice of the dual undertail exhaust was partially for styling purposes, and that they felt it looked more aggressive than a single undertail unit. Additionally Russel Brenan of KMC in Irvine stated that the 4-2-1-2 undertail solved the problem of locating the new dual Euro-III emissions compliant catalytic converters, which now reside in the header. When asked why KHI had not gone with a bellypan type system found in their new 650 Ninja, we were told that they did not have the physical space to accommodate the new catalytic converters needed to meet new global emissions requirements with a bellypan system.

Takagi stated that in addition to the power and volume gains, the dual exhaust help integrate the new rounded aerodynamic tail section. The redesigned tail section is supported by an all-new cast subframe and is designed to make the 10R undraftable by eliminating the air pocket behind the bike.

When we weighed the 10R at Burnaby Kawasaki's showroom before I left for this trip, by our wet measurements the '06 unit weighed approximately 29 lbs more than the '05 version. KMC stated that there is only an 11 lb weight difference between the bikes dry. Their "dry measurement" is apparently wet, minus fuel. We are not sure where or how the difference in the figures factors in. I am sure more than one member of this site will take the time to confirm and correct the initial weight figures we came up with. We are curious.

All debating aside, even if the new 10R is slightly heavier and has an underseat exhaust, it is a faster machine, and much faster.

Don't be fooled by Internet smacktalk. This bike was specifically design to be on the racetrack. KMC and KHI worked extensively with the Haydens and with Doug Chandler to design the new 10R. It was with their input that the weight of the bike was relocated. The 2006 10R has a higher center of gravity and sports a larger rear tire than its predecessor.

Tommy Hayden told me that he felt the new bike was considerably better handling-wise than the older model. He felt that the older model's weight distribution and chassis made for unstable transitions in corners, and that the bike wheelied too easily, robbing it of the drive needed for better corner exit speeds. He felt that the new chassis was considerably better and had addressed the major handling issues that he felt was holding the bike back.

The way the bike delivers its power has been changed. When questioned, reps could not give me a rear wheel HP figure, but openly stated that the US model 2006 ZX-10R made 175PS and 184 with ram air (@ 11,500rpm). The power delivery is more linear and low-end and midrange torque has been increased. The new bike is far less wheelie prone as it puts more of its power to the ground.

This took some getting used to. The 2004 built power and allowed you to feed the throttle out the tight twisties with almost V-twin like performance similar to the Ducati I used to own. That attribute is gone. A steady hand to meter the smooth throttle brings the power on evenly. The flat spot and lurchy "hit" is gone.

In 2004 Bikeland tested the 10R on the road. It rained like the B'Jesus in the middle of our road ride, yet we still had an amazing time. KMC felt it best to introduce the '06 10R at a racetrack. They felt that you simply could not experience the power and handling capabilities of this bike riding it on the street. Everyone there agreed. We all wanted to keep our driver's licenses intact, so the track excursion was welcomed.

So now I find myself sitting in the paddock area of the California Speedway. I've never been to this track. In fact my track experience is very limited. Like I said, I'm just an average guy. I head out for our first morning session. Our group takes it slow. We need three full laps to bring the OEM Dunlop Qualifiers to temperature. Then we go. I chuckle in my helmet as I fly down the front straight and into the first chicanes.

There isn't much more to say about this next bit; a bit of a no-brainer… the Ohlins damper was great. They should've had this on the '04/'05.

KMC states that they have completely redesigned the transmission to address the shifting issues people complained about with the older bike. They also claim to have reworked the slipper clutch (I felt the original one was fine) and the '06 unit worked wonderfully. It saved my ass twice on two botched downshifts. I was way out of sync as I jammed it down through the gears at a buck forty.. a poorly (read late) timed handful of brake and the slipper clutch vacuumed up my horrible riding error. Without it I would've been on my ass!

The brakes on the bike are vastly improved. Gone is the vague feeling many members complained about. The new radial pump master cylinder gives the brakes firm and immediate grab.

My first two sessions were pretty bad. I was all over the track and having Tommy and Roger fly past me in midcorner certainly didn't help my confidence. I watched what they were doing and checked out their lines, and was determined to do a little better.

After lunch we returned to the track and had a chance to try out Dunlop's latest Sportmax GP track tires. Grip was up enormously. Cornering was much easier, but the bike felt squirrelly down the straights with the stickier rubber, and several riders complained about it. Its turns out that Kawasaki used up all of the 55 series Dunlops testing at Autopolis, so we had to run a 50 series. KMC states that Dunlop will make a specific track tire to fit this bike.

Paying attention to Tommy's lines helped. With some practice and a few more laps under my belt I managed to keep a few riders off my tail for the next few sessions. I sucked, but not as badly as I thought I did.

The highlight of my day was a bit of personal training from Doug Chandler. I talked to Doug about my lack of confidence on some of the corners and he offered to take me out, give me some pointers and show me some lines. After Doug following me for three laps, it was my turn to keep up to the Superbike Champion. What a difference it made! It was an amazing experience. My lap times got faster and I hung with him as best I could. When he got tired of training me, he left me in the dust and took of to play with the Haydens.

Amazing to watch these guys with a front seat view back it into almost every corner spitting rubber off the spinning tires. It is really humbling. It makes you realize just how fast a pro rider is. And remember.. these

guys were riding OEM ZX-10Rs, complete with mirrors and turn signals. It was too cool!

Later that night, on the way to dinner, Doug and I talked about motorcycling, and Kerry Bryant. Doug told me about how Kerry T-Boned a cow after losing a game of chicken (the cow won). I told him about Bikeland's ride with Kerry on the 2004 ZX-10R. The rainstorm. Papa smurf.

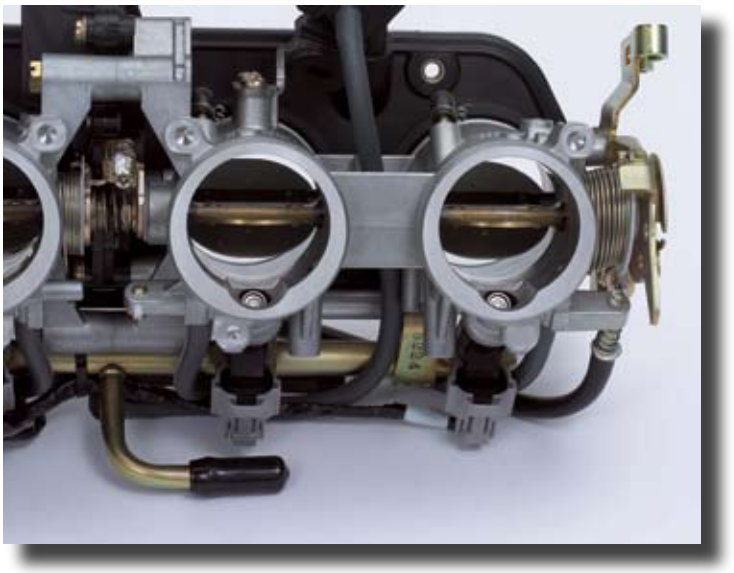
It seems so long ago. This is what it's come to. They reworked a ridiculously fast bike and made it even faster. It's easier to ride. It isn't intimidating in the least. The power on tap is incredible and it's handling is much better than the previous bike.

KMC told us that they were listening to what YOU have to say. Performance wise, I couldn't agree more. Their engineers have seemed to address almost every complaint filed online in Bikeland's forums. From worm~hole's "Read my lips… Large easy to read analogue tach and a digital speedo" to Redelk's brake complaints. From complaints about shifting, handling, the clutch, the levers, the twitchy steering, they've covered every base.

Aesthetically, they seem to have gone their own route. Certainly the changes they made to aesthetics (and I'll include the exhaust in the aesthetic section) have been questioned by most people who frequent the forums. I'll leave the final decision up to you, the consumer. You have to decide if you like the looks of this bike. I cant decide that for you. I can only tell you how it rides. That's no mystery. The bike is a 10 for performance. The rest is up to you.

The million-dollar question is, should you keep your old 10R or should you trade up? The honest answer is "I don't know". If you're a taller rider like myself, trading might not make sense if you plan on using the bike as a commuter or a street/ canyon carver. For short trips it's fine, but the cramped ergos will need a fix. I'm sure the aftermarket will solve this pretty quickly. Dropping the pegs an inch will work wonders for a tall guy's knees.

In the performance category, without a doubt, the '06 beats the older models. If you're racing, you'll need to upgrade, or prepare to be passed. If you spend most of your riding time hanging out at Starbucks then I suppose you'll need to trade too. For the latest and greatest, the underseat exhaust should be good for posing value if nothing else.



There you have it. Handling, performance? Kicks ass. Looks? You're on your own. I like the black one. For those of you into number's, here they are….

2006 Ninja® ZX™-10R
Features and Benefits

Key Features:
• Incredible Power-to-Weight Ratio
• Race-Oriented Performance
• Track-Tuned Handling
• Aggressive New Aerodynamic Styling

998cc 4-Cylinder, DOHC Engine
• Very compact, narrow and lightweight design.
• The upper crankcase and cylinder are a one-piece casting, which is more than two pounds lighter than using a separate cylinder and offers increased rigidity. A slanted casting process rotates the piece during casting to eliminate imperfections and excess casting material.
• Channels in the case mounting surfaces route oil to various parts of the engine, eliminating oil lines and saving weight.
• Crank axis, input shaft and output shaft create a stacked triangular layout that is compact, reduces engine length and lowers the center of gravity.
• Specially-shaped breathing passageways between the chrome composite plated aluminum cylinders reduce pumping loss to help increase power.
• A high-efficiency, liquid-cooled aluminum oil cooler uses specially designed internal fins to dissipate heat and cool the oil.

4-Valve Cylinder Head(KP)
• Compact valve train reduces cylinder head height.
• Intake ports and coolant passages developed using flow analysis for efficient cylinder filling and more power, and maximum cooling efficiency.
• Camshafts are carved from forged chromoly billet, which is more than one-half pound lighter than cast cams. The cams and tappets are treated with soft nitriding to prevent galling and seizing with the aggressive, high lift profiles.
• Single valve springs with oval cross sections are light and lower to reduce overall cylinder head height.
• Forged sintered aluminum spring retainers are half the weight of steel retainers and allow higher rpm.

Piston
• Forged Pistons(KP) are lighter, stronger and more heat resistant than cast versions. Flat-top design matches the compact combustion chamber and improves combustion efficiency.

Ram Air Induction(KP)
• Central ram air duct produces a straighter path to the airbox for maximum intake efficiency and provides the mounting surface for the instrument panel, eliminating brackets and weight.
• Flow analysis used to design efficient ducts to the airbox that also prevent water from reaching the air filter.
• Compact airbox and air cleaner are highly efficient and contribute to the compact riding position.
• High speed 32-bit ECU provides precise engine management.

TCBI Ignition with Digital Advance(KP)
• High-speed processor provides precise engine management.
• Spark plug-mounted ignition coils are compact and help reduce weight.

Titanium Exhaust With Butterfly Valve
• All-titanium exhaust provides the ultimate in light weight.
• Butterfly valve, located before the exhaust splits to the mufflers, is controlled by rpm, throttle position and gear position to improve low-end response and help smooth overall power. Optimum exhaust tuning is attained at all engine speeds to prevent blowback that can occur with high speed overlapping valve timing.

2006 Ninja® ZX™-10R
Features and Benefits con't

6-Speed Transmission
• The splines on the transmission shafts are barrel ground so the gears slide smoothly for improved shift action.
• Close ratio transmission increases circuit performance.
• A back-torque limiting clutch(KP) automatically disengages the clutch under hard braking and deceleration to prevent rear wheel hop during corner entry. Optional springs, spring retainers and shims are available to fine-tune the clutch for specific conditions.

Aluminum Twin Spar Backbone Frame
• Combination of pressed and cast aluminum components are welded to form the twin-spar backbone-type frame. By combining cast and pressed pieces frame weight is kept to a minimum while still providing high strength and stability with responsive handling.
• Twin-spar backbone design provides 600cc class width.

Uni-Track® Rear Suspension(KP)
• Short, compact frame allows the swingarm to be longer, which makes it easier to control rear wheel powerslides.
• Rear shock is fully adjustable for preload, compression and rebound damping. Ride height can be adjusted by adding /removing optional 1mm shims at the upper shock mount.
• Equipped with top-out spring that allows the rear wheel to better follow the road surface when the rear end is light due to hard braking.
• Small piggyback shock reservoir is designed to save weight.

43mm Inverted Cartridge Front Fork(KP)
• Kayaba 43mm inverted cartridge fork provides exceptional rigidity.
• Equipped with top-out springs which allow the front wheel to better follow the road surface when the front end is light due to hard acceleration.
• Stiff settings suitable for track use.
• Fully adjustable for preload, compression and rebound damping.

Aluminum Wheels
• Six-spoke cast aluminum wheels are practically as light as race-specific wheels. The six-spoke design requires much less material between spokes so that rim thickness is thinner and lighter.

Radial Mounted Front Disc Brakes
• Radial mounted 4-piston front brake calipers. Instead of mounting the calipers with threaded tabs cast near the top of the caliper, the radial design utilizes integrated mounting points at both the top and bottom of the caliper, with the mounting bolts inserted through the rear of the caliper instead of the side/front. This makes the caliper more rigid, which improves brake feel over a wider range of operation.
• A separate brake pad is used for each piston. One large pad tends to deform with the heat generated by hard track style riding, resulting in a loss of brake feel at the lever. Individual pads provide increased cooling efficiency and can absorb more heat without deforming so they maintain consistent brake feel lap after lap.

Petal Design Brake Discs
• Improved cooling and warp resistance.
• First petal-type discs to come standard on a supersport machine.

Aerodynamic Bodywork
• The fuel tank has a unique concave top that allows the rider to tuck in further and improve aerodynamics.
• Three-piece front fender designed for aero efficiency.
• Different color panels create a sporty, aggressive image.

Advanced Electronic Instrumentation
• Multifunction odometer, tripmeter, clock and lap timer/stopwatch.

2006 Ninja® ZX™-10R Specifications

Engine Four-stroke, four-cylinder, liquid-cooled, DOHC, four valve cylinder head
Displacement 998cc
Bore x stroke 76.0 x 55.0mm
Maximum torque N/A
Compression ratio 12.7:1
Fuel Injection DFI with Mikuni 43mm throttle bodies (4)
Ignition TCBI with Digital Advance

Displacement: 998 cm3
Bore and Stroke 76.0 x 55.0 mm
Compression Ratio: 12.7:1
Fuel System: FI 43 mmx 4 x Mikuni
Lubrication: Forced Lubrication, wet sump with oil cooler
Transmission: Six speed, return
Final drive X-Ring chain
Primary Gear Ratio: 1.611 (87/54)
Gear Ratios:
1st: 2.533 (38/15)
2nd: 2.053 (39/19)
3rd: 1.737 (33/19)
4th: 1.524 (32/21)
5th: 1.381 (29/21)
6th: 1.304 (40/17)
Final Reduction Ratio: 2.353 (40/17)
Wheel travel, front: 120mm
Wheel travel, rear: 150mm
Tire, front 120/70 ZR17 (58W)
Tire, rear 190/55 ZR17 (75W)
Rake: 24.5’
Trail: 102mm
Steering Angle: 27’/27’
Suspension, front 43mm inverted cartridge fork with adjustable preload, stepless rebound and compression damping
Suspension, rear Uni-Trak with adjustable preload, stepless rebound and compression damping, ride height
Brakes, front Dual floating 300mm petal discs with four-piston radial-mount calipers
Brakes, rear Single 220mm petal disc
Overall length: 2,065mm
Overall width: 705mm
Overall height: 1,130mm
Wheelbase: 1,390mm
Ground Clearance: 120mm
Seat height: 825mm

2006 Ninja® ZX™-10R Specifications con't

Fuel capacity: 17 liters
Dry weight: 175kg

Maximum Power:

175 PS / 11,700rpm (EUR)
175 PS / 11,500rpm (USA/CAN/AUS)
164 PS / 10,000rpm (MYS)
106 PS / 11,500rpm (FRA)

Maximum Power with Ram Air:

184 PS / 11,700rpm (EUR)
184 PS / 11,500rpm (USA/CAN/AUS)
171 PS / 10,000rpm (MYS)

Maximum Torque:

115 Nm (11.7kgfm) / 9,500 rpm (EUR/USA/CAN/AUS/MYS)
86 Nm (8.8kgfm) / 5,200 rpm (FRA)

Color:
Lime Green / Flat Stoic Black
Ebony
Pearl Solar Yellow
MSRP $11,199