WE RIDE - KZ650 BONNEVILLE WINNER

BIG BIKE

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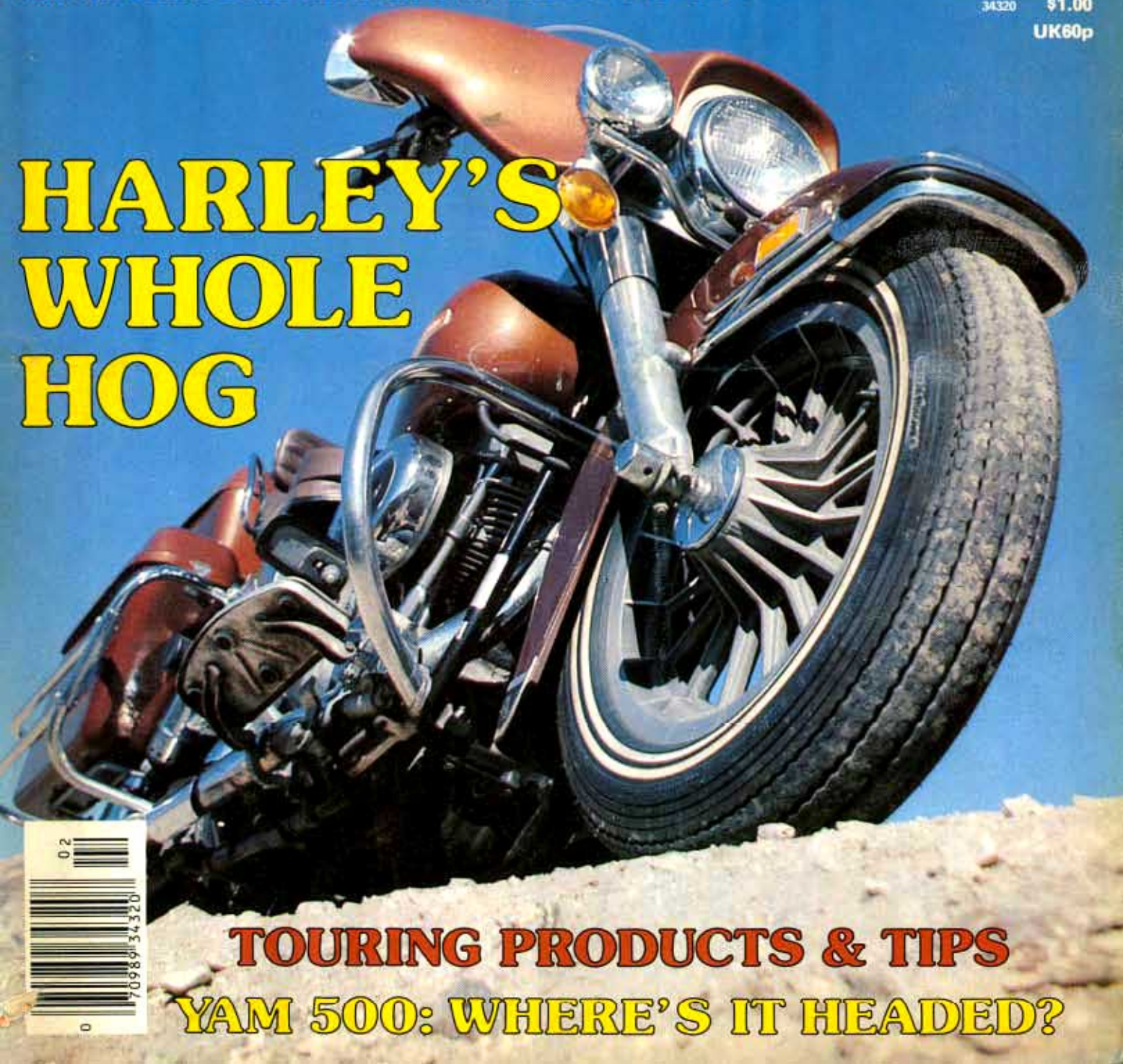
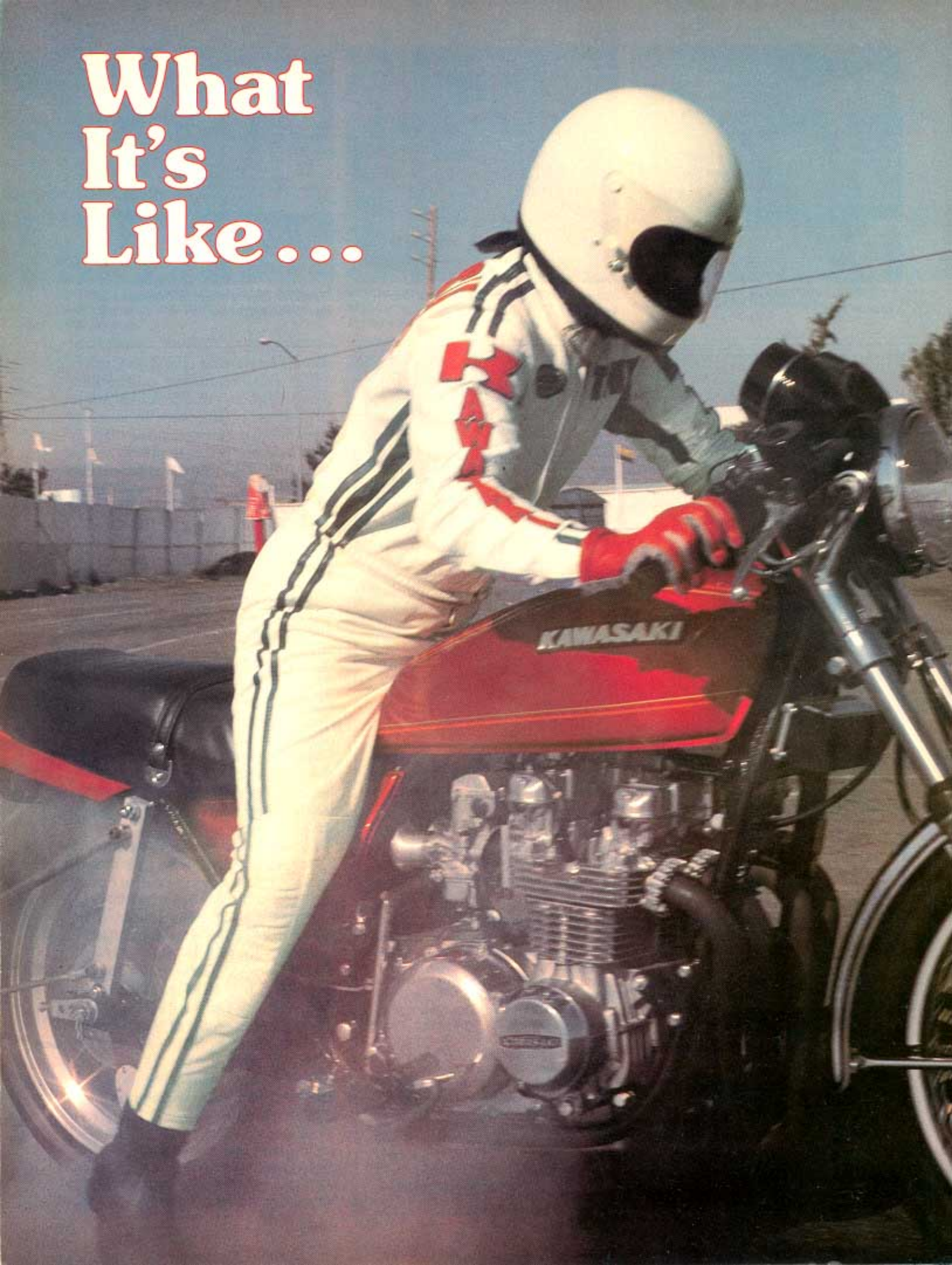


HARLEY'S WHOLE HOG

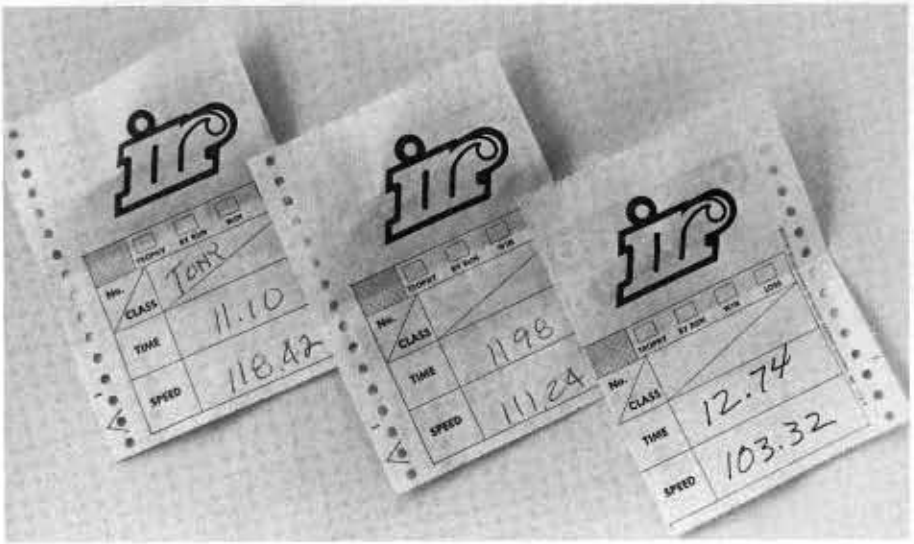
TOURING PRODUCTS & TIPS

YAM 500: WHERE'S IT HEADED?

What It's Like...



It set its class record at the Salt Flats; it runs a high ten quarter; and all the go-fast parts are available



Tony's best time for the day on the Bonneville Bike; Don's best time on the same bike; and best time for the day on the stock Kaw650. All passes were at Fremont Racetrack.

KZ650 Bonneville Bike

BY DON PHILLIPSON

I

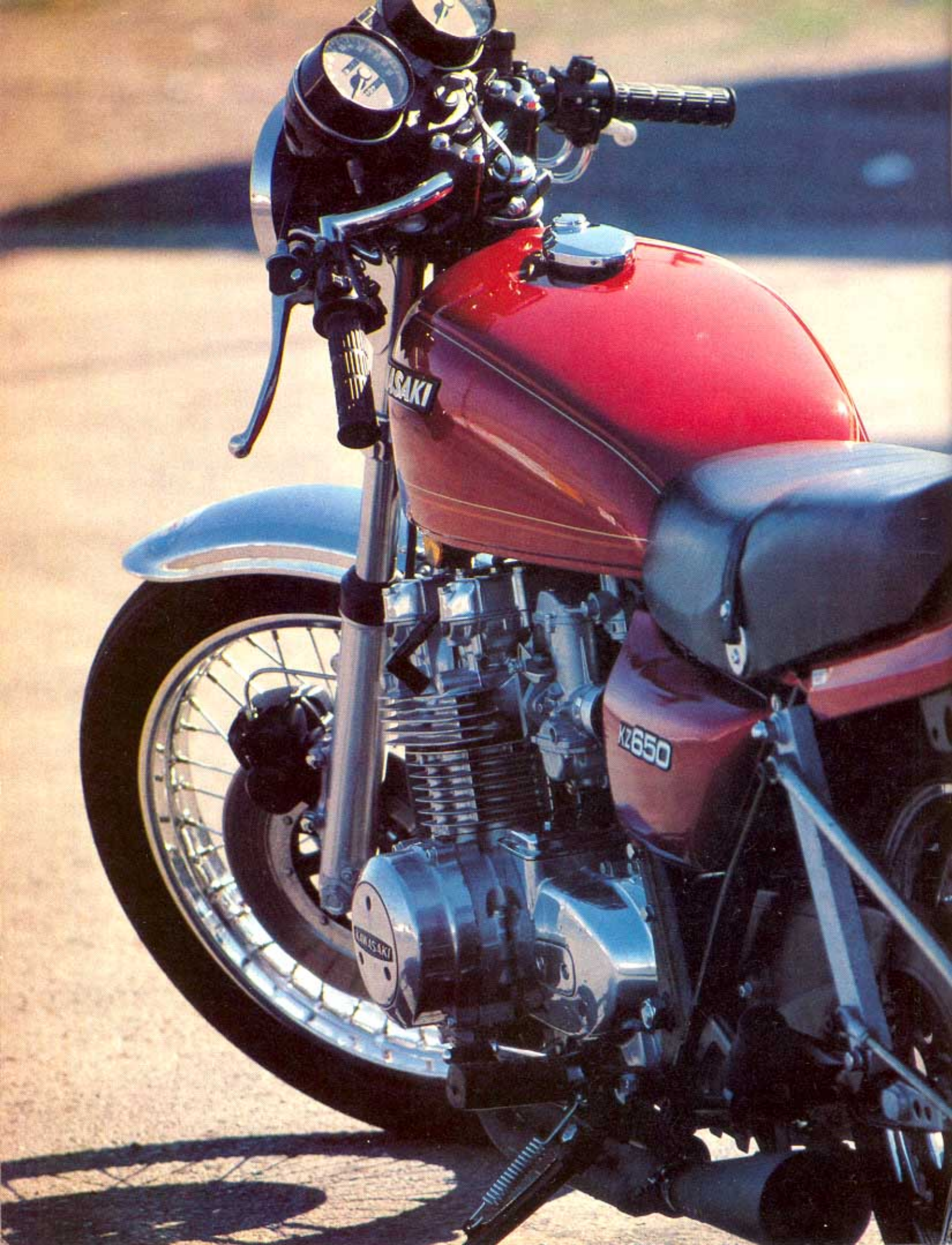
". . . we were cruising, for a short while, at 90 mph. Not nearly as fast as we would go tomorrow in only a quarter of a mile . . ."

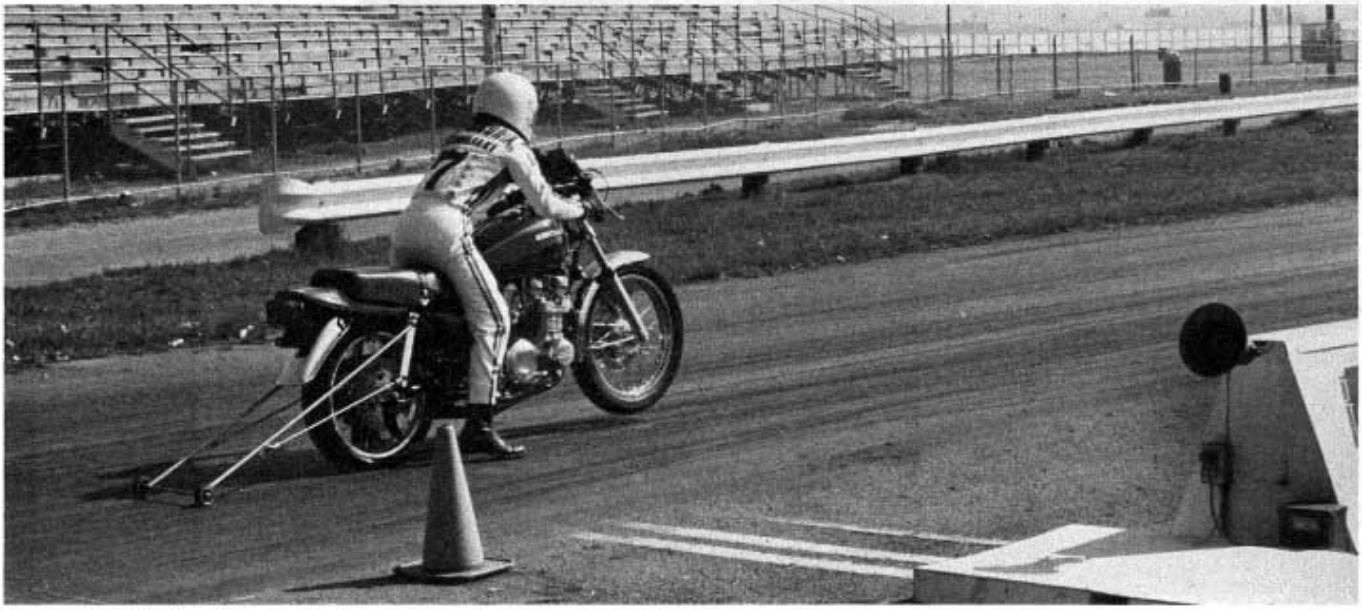
Highway 101 is a bore. Plain and simple. Above San Luis Obispo it is straight and flat. But we had to be in Fremont that night. On we went.

We were riding a KZ900, an LTD 900 and our faithful KZ650 test bike. We rode over 400 miles on the 650 that day, so we could ride a modified 650 the next day; to see how fast these 650s were capable of going, to see what it takes in the way of modifications to make them do it, to see what it felt like to ride a very quick 650 in the quarter-mile.

So the highway passed beneath us. Despite the road, the stock 650

Goodyear slick is warmed up for traction.


KZ650



Front wheel in the air, rear tire just before it breaks loose.

was a pleasure to ride. Next to no vibration, comfortable positioning, a very good seat, power when you wanted to pass or power just to gas it and break the monotony.

Kawasaki has a sure winner in this motorcycle. We rode it over 2000 miles. As we were to find out, just unbolt the mirrors and it was also a very good drag bike. On the highway or through many quarter-mile passes, the bike was always stone reliable.

Also as we were to find out, the basic machine's reliability showed through in modified form. Denco's modified 650 ran qualifying at Bonneville, Bonneville itself, and nearly 150 passes at the drag strip without an overhaul, and without a valve job. As for the engine, it required only basic tuning of the carbs, a change in plugs, and a reset on the timing.

"Denco's modified 650 ran qualifying at Bonneville, Bonneville itself, and nearly 150 passes at the dragstrip without an overhaul . . ."

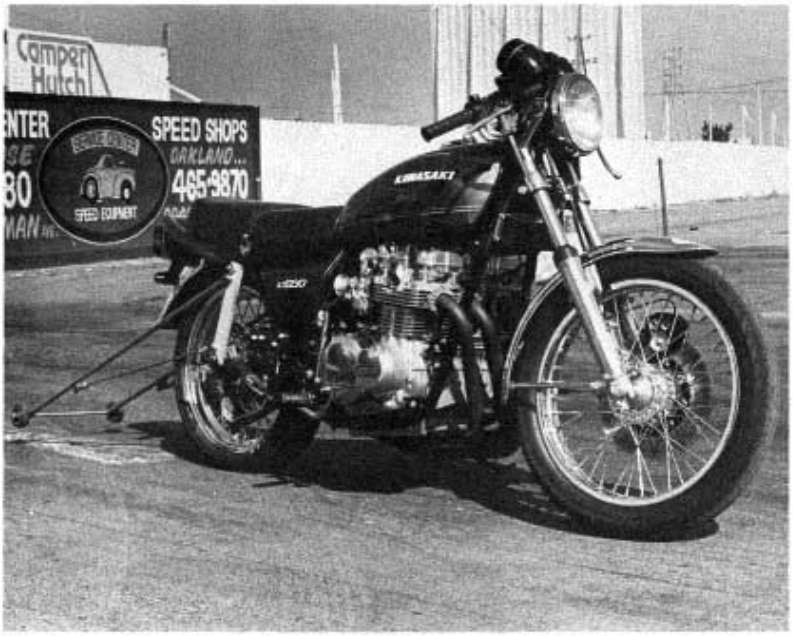
But, at that moment, on the ride to Fremont, south of San Francisco, we were still enjoying a fine 650 road bike. We had not yet dragged it. And even though we could tell it was quick, we could not tell how quick.

II

". . . it is almost imperceptible, but if you suddenly gas it, even though you are already doing 130 mph, the rear wheel will break loose on the salt . . ."

During Bonneville Speed Week, the people from Denco made their first trip to the Salt Flats. They took along a KZ650, one of the first ones in the country. It had been modified and was running in the 750 class. They needed a 136 mph pass to qualify.

They had not made it. They had made several runs but were still



Just a few changes make the 650 look awesome.

Don is mulling over advice from the Denco people.

For such a fast machine, this engine is only nominally modified.

short. Dennis Dean, president of Denco, was discouraged and tired. Just couldn't get it. On their first trip to Bonneville they did not know what to expect. Tuning for the Salt Flats is different from tuning for anywhere else.

Salt on the plugs? Another little problem solved.

Friday. Last day of qualifying. Denco's modified 900 has qualified with Randy Milligan aboard. He has already gone back to the motel. The 650 has not qualified and it looks as though it won't.

Fatigue is getting to everyone. But Tony Nicosia says one more time. He thinks he felt something on the last run: The rear wheel, almost imperceptibly, was drifting at about 130 mph.

He runs again. He moves far back on the seat, over the rear wheel. He slides back and forth again for traction.

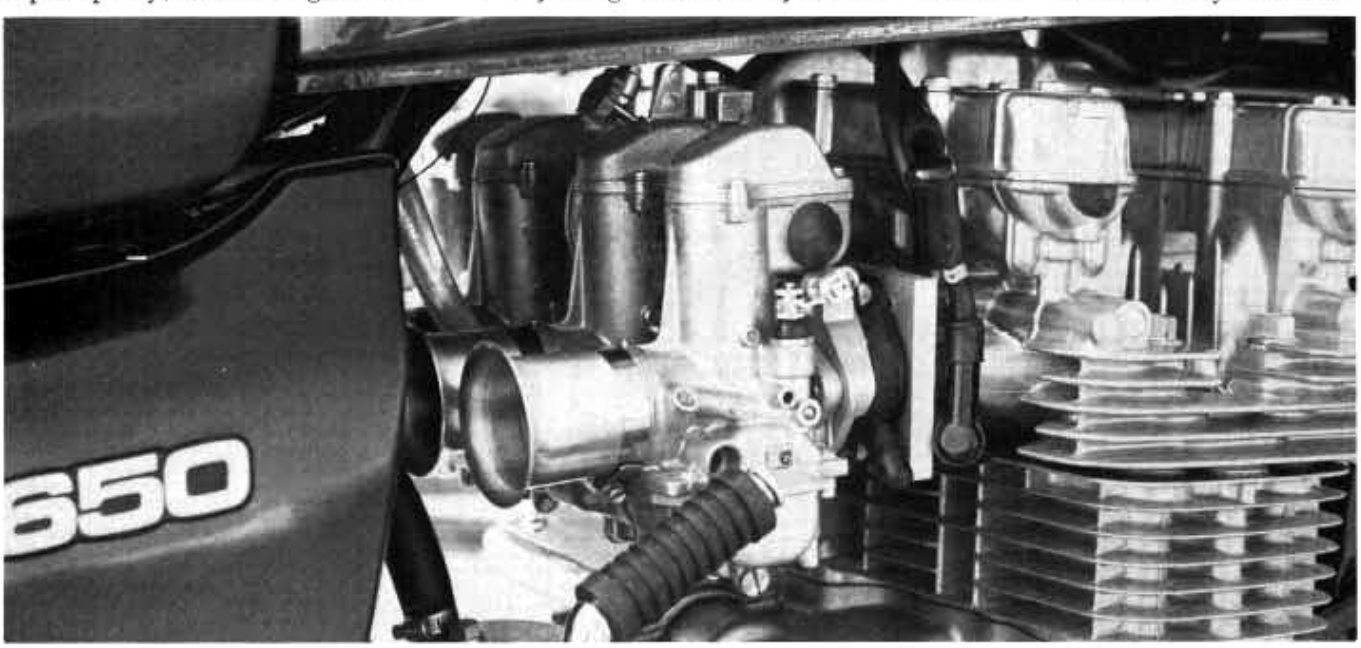
It works. 138 mph. Good enough to qualify. And it is the second to last run anyone will make during qualifying.

"They needed a 136 mph pass to qualify . . . they had not made it . . ."

All of the Denco people have been careful with this 650. They have next to no spare parts for the bike. There are none in the country. If anything breaks they either modify some KZ900 parts or quit. They are relying on the basic reliability of the bike. *Keep the bike, above all, reliable.*

On top of the problem with parts, the Denco people realize the bike must be kept reliable because of the nature of Bonneville itself. The rider has two miles to build up speed before he hits the mile-long trap. He has to be completely peaked out at that time if he expects to get a competitive speed.

Then a mile through the traps. About 24 seconds. Add that to the time getting to speed. All at absolute full throttle. The rider, the tuners, all must have faith that the bike won't seize, all must *know* that the bike is reliable. Any modifica-



Denco carbs and velocity stacks.

Cooling off the engine with water.

tions they make cannot be too radical and they must be sure of those they do make.

During Speed Week the Denco KZ650 with Tony Nicosia aboard set the new 750 class record: 141 miles per hour.

They brought that bike back to Fremont to continue R&D on it.

That bike was sitting there as we decided to visit Denco; to find out how they made it go so fast and what it would feel like to ride it.

III

". . . we didn't have another head available, so all we could do to this one was clean it up a bit . . ."

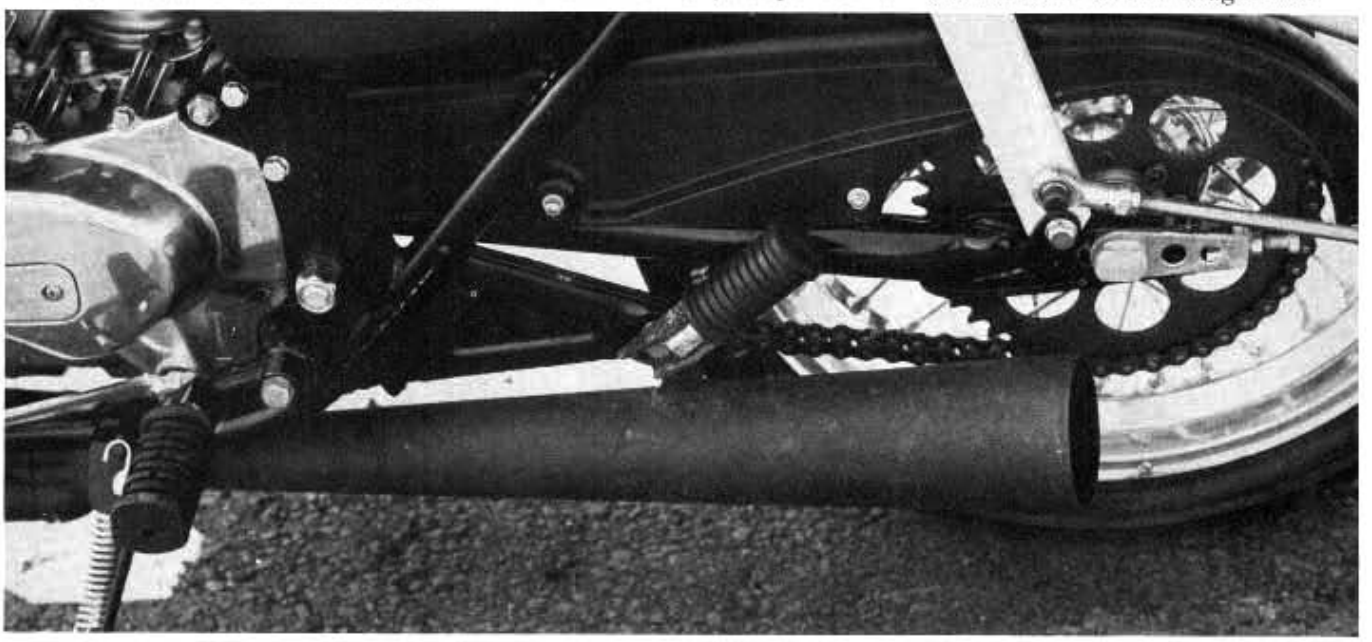
Kawasaki, introducing the KZ650, wanted to set a Bonneville record. And they wanted to do it with as stock-looking a bike as possible. That was the word Dennis Dean got from Kawasaki when they asked him to go to Bonneville.

". . . no spare parts for the bike . . . if anything breaks they either modify some KZ900 parts or quit . . ."

He was running with some handicaps already. There is no modified frame class. When you touch the engine you have a modified machine despite what you do to the frame (except for a fairing, no fairing is allowed). But since Kawasaki wanted a stock appearing bike, Denco shied away from lowering the bike, remounting fenders or changing suspension (all legal moves for this class).

And, as already stated, they were working with the handicap of not being able to experiment with parts. They started with modifications which were proven.

Engine. They installed Denco Power Notch Pistons. These are identical to Z-1 dome pistons. They bring the bike to a mild 10.6:1 compression ratio. They could not experiment with the head so they just cleaned it up. Stock valves were run. They installed CR150 cams, also identical to Z-1 drag cams.



Four-into-one pipe sans baffles.

Coming back from the first run, cruising at about 70.

For carburetion they chose four Denco 29mm smooth bore carbs with 50mm velocity stacks. Because these had not been produced yet specifically for the 650 they had to makeshift some adapters to bolt them to the manifold.

The stock KZ650 exhaust pipe weighs 34 pounds. Denco's pipe, (a four-into-one), weighs 11 pounds with the baffles in. They mounted this pipe with the baffles removed for that extra boost.

Though the stock clutch is very heavy-duty they chose to install Denco clutch springs and do a minimal amount of beefing up through welding.

Modifications to the electrical system consisted of bolting on a Denco Gerex CDI unit. They then advanced the timing two degrees over stock.

Changes to the chassis consisted only of adding cafe-style bars.

With the aim to keep the bike as stock looking as possible, Denco added only their own 530 chain and a pair of sprockets, a 17-tooth countershaft sprocket and a 48-tooth rear.

"Kawasaki . . . wanted to set a Bonneville record . . . with as stock-looking a bike as possible."

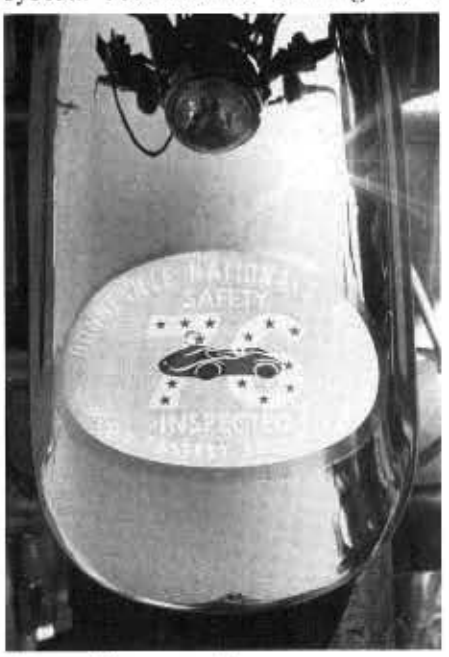
Tires, stock ones, were cut and worked on.

Because of the intention to keep the bike stock looking, Denco ended up with, in reality, a very close to stock (for Bonneville) bike. Those were the entire changes. With these changes it went 141 mph.

There were a few more changes to the bike after it came back from Bonneville. These extra modifications were done to the bike before we arrived in Fremont. It was how the bike sat as we saw it and rode it. But even these were minimal.

To the engine nothing was done aside from normal changing of plugs, carb tuning and timing.

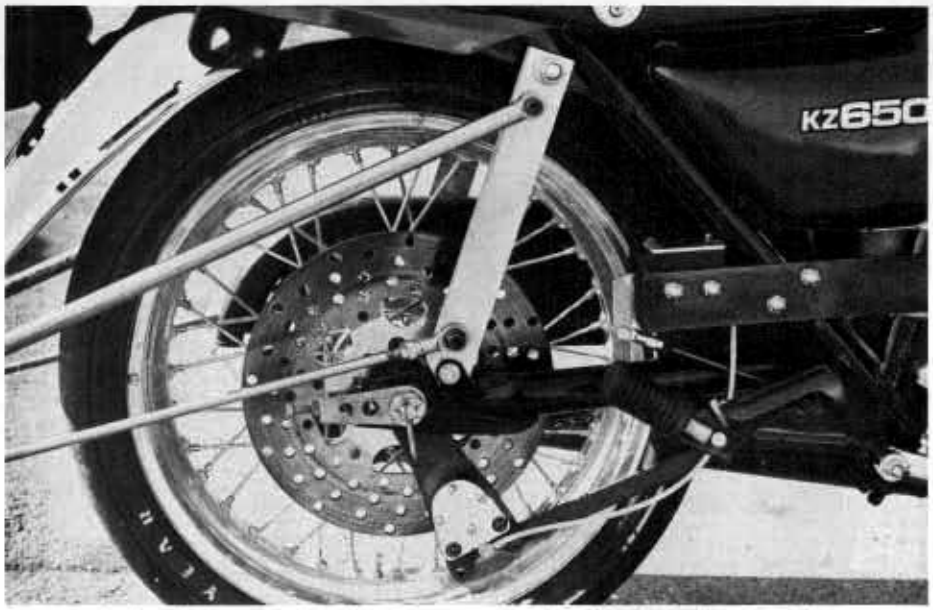
Visually, the most ovvious addition was the Denco wheelie bar and strut combination. This comes



Bonnevillian nostalgia.

Fork crown mounted cafe bars.

Tony is applying sticky stuff to keep people on the seat.



Strut and wheelie bar combination; Denco rear wheel kit including rear disc.

as a kit.

On the rear was now a Goodyear road racing slick. Also at the rear was an entire new rear wheel. The new one was a Denco rim, mini hub and disc brake setup. These also are available as a kit. Activating the rear disc was a single action disc brake caliper. The disc itself is made of Meehanite. This is a fine-grain iron material which permits the disc to be thinner yet still resist warping. Stock discs on most Japanese bikes are made of stainless steel, which work fine but are very heavy.

On the subject of weight, we have received word since we rode the bike that Denco mounted one of their front wheels to the bike and ran a 10.89 e.t. The Denco front wheel is 14 pounds lighter than stock and the rear is 16 pounds lighter.

"It was frightening and thrilling at once . . . Tony and Gordon . . . were consistently making 11.20, 11.30 passes . . ."

IV

". . . I thought watching Tony Gordon would help. I couldn't help thinking, as I watched, you must be kidding . . ."

Admittedly, I am not a drag racer. But I do enjoy a good quick bike, a good burst of speed.

So when the Denco people said try it, I said yes. That Bonneville bike sat there, looking like it wanted to go fast.

I knew most people involved with motorcycles, involved with big bikes, don't drag race. But most, as I did, had an interest in what it would be like to ride a professionally prepped and maintained, genuine race bike.

It was frightening and thrilling at once. We spent a couple of hours photographing the bike and watching Tony and Gordon make practice runs. They were consistently making 11.20, 11.30 passes.

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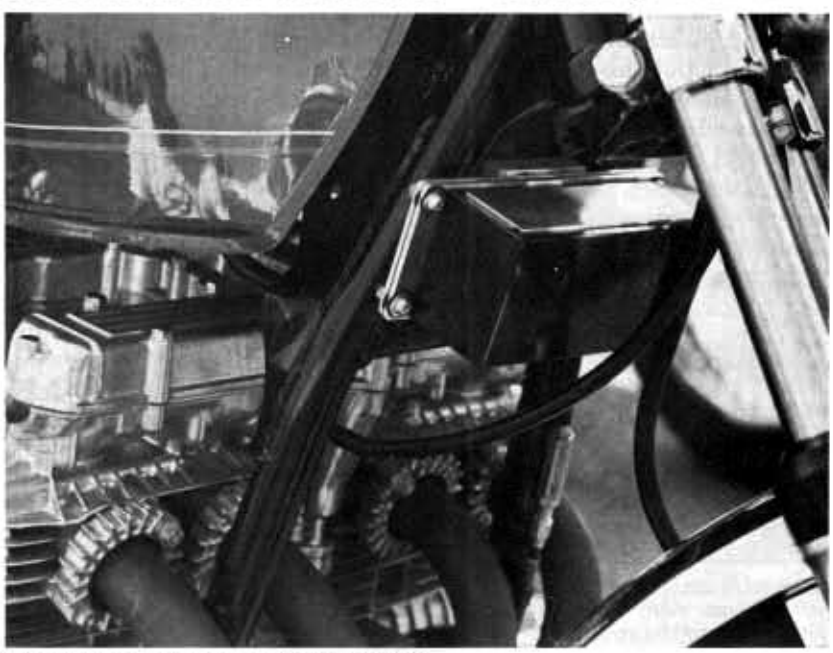

Their Gerex CDI unit sparked the bike.

Looking fondly down the quarter-mile straight.

Continued from page 47

Trap speeds of 114, 115 mph.

After lunch I discovered I had not been paying careful enough attention. I had missed subtle procedures: exactly where to sit; both feet on the ground, not the right one on the pegs; right hand encircling the throttle far forward so that full throttle would be the natural position.

I sat on the bike. Strut bars made it very rigid with the forks working. Cafe bars made you tuck in. Can't turn too sharp with the wheelie bar. Keep it idling at about 2500 rpm, lean pilot jets so it doesn't load up at all . . . *ignore your heart pounding, the sweat on your forehead . . .*

Minutes before Tony had made the best pass so far. 11.10, 118 mph. I had been watching very closely at the start. He had broken the tire loose and yet it was still pinned on the wheelie bar. He said he shifted at 10,500 rpm. And it had fishtailed as soon as he grabbed second gear, still pinned to the bar.

Third, fourth and fifth all good power shifts. Tucked in and looking only at the line.

They cooled the engine off and I made a couple of practice runs with a rolling start to get the feel of how the power came on and to learn what the track was like. Shutting off at an indicated 110 mph I was impressed by the bike's smoothness, even with no rear suspension.

Last minute advice before an official run. Wrap your right hand around more, there's more throttle there. Rev it to 6000 on the line to break the tire loose. Get your feet on the pegs as quick as you can. Power shift if you want to.

First pass. Rev it to 3500 on the line. Wheel doesn't break but I'm on the bar. My right hand is pulling harder than my left and the wheel is cocked when it comes down during the shift to second. It straightens out. It revs to ten five very fast, it seems all I am doing is shifting. It's over. That was great. I wonder what I ran, I know I can do better next time.

Coming back up the track at 70 mph, I feel like I'm creeping. Everyone motions to go again. Again? Till now it seemed track etiquette was to inquire what your time was. That means I did either very good or very bad. The former seems more probable.

Gordon comes over. Rev it higher on the line. Make sure you're giving it full throttle. That's all.

I'm nervous and I wish this were over and I'm revving it to 5000 rpm before I know what I'm doing. First light, second light, wrap your hand around, *rev it, it won't break*, use a little clutch, that's what it's for. The wheel breaks loose, I can hardly get my feet to the pegs to shift, front wheel cocked again, it fishtails wildly into second and I tuck in, ten five already, shift, ten five, shift, thirteen five, oh my god what happened, shift, ten five, shift, it's over.

Missed a shift. I feel like kicking myself all the way back to L.A.

"Eleven ninety-eight" someone says.

"You're kidding. With that screw-up. Lemme try again." No. Bike's too hot. Besides, it's time we hit the road to get back to home. And that's all you wanted anyway, to get into the 11s.

Yeah. But barely. Well, the ride home will be good, breaking that tire loose and power shifting in my mind for 400 miles and nine hours.