KMC 50th Anniversary 1966 - 2016

Coming to America

Surprisingly, the birthplace of Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. was not the Golden State but old-town Chicago.

IRVINE, Calif. (Mar. 1, 2016) -- Exactly 50 years ago today, on March 1, 1966, American Kawasaki Motorcycle Corp. (AKMC) opened for business in Chicago, with a modest sales office at 208 South La Salle Street and a two-story parts warehouse at 2860 North Lincoln Avenue. Formerly the site of a meat-packing plant, the warehouse needed serious renovation, but the price was right for a company trying to gain a toehold in a vast new country. Welcomed by Tony Watanabe with Ted Tazaki, who led the charge to establish the Chicago office, just 50 people attended the grand opening, held at the nearby Continental Hotel. But it was the right crowd, including the banks, trading companies and distributors that would support the company’s early efforts in America.

Like other Japanese manufacturers in the early 1960s, the parent of AKMC, Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd. (KHI), viewed America as a highly attractive place to grow its brand. The industrial giant had already joined the motorcycle industry in 1961 by adding a factory to build engines for Meguro in Japan, and now was ready to grow further as a complete bike manufacturer. Although KHI was already well established in heavy industry, tapping the promising United States motorcycle market would prove anything but easy. Japanese competitors were already operating here, and KHI reasoned they would be hard to beat. But despite some early setbacks, a small group of eager young executives and managers were committed to improve on the AKMC’s initial two-percent market share.

AKMC had previously engaged several regional distributors to cover virtually the entire country, and thus selected Chicago as a central location that would be convenient to all. One address was devoted to paperwork and another to parts, while machines were to be shipped to distributors directly from U.S. seaports. Increased interest in motorcycling on the West Coast caused AKMC to move its headquarters to Gardena, California on November 1, 1966. Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) was formed through a merger with AKMC in 1968, leaving the short-lived Chicago offices as the historic starting point for Kawasaki in America.

Today KMC has nearly 1,100 dealers in all 50 states and offers a wide range of products in five categories, including streetbikes, off-road motorcycles, ATVs, MULE™ utility vehicles, and JET SKI® personal watercraft. Many of the 4-wheel product and personal watercraft are assembled at Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing Corp., U.S.A. in Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Legend of the Samurai

Fifty years ago, Kawasaki’s powersports heritage began with this scintillating two-stroke twin.

IRVINE, Calif. (Mar. 4, 2016) – Early on, Kawasaki executives quickly learned that American customers wanted far more than just getting from Point A to Point B on a fun little machine. The open roads and huge continent invited bigger bikes with more performance – much more. So, in a brazen move for the time, a twin-cylinder, rotary-valve two-stroke motorcycle called the A1 Samurai was created, soon to be followed by the larger A7 Avenger.
Both bikes were specifically designed for the United States market under the leadership of the president of American Kawasaki Motorcycle Corp., Royozo Iwaki, but before launch they needed to be proven on America's roads. In February 1966 a factory engineer from Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd. arrived with a Samurai prototype, and American Larry Beall, a future Kawasaki sponsored racer, signed on as test rider. With a budget of just $2,000, the test ran from Oklahoma City to New Mexico, with most of the route in Texas.

The trip was successful, and within months A1 production bikes – along with Kawasaki's first production road racer, the A1R, began arriving at dealers. They were fast. Their performance matched that of the British bikes twice their size. Word of this performance began to spread among dealers, customers and the press. When Jim Deehan won the Open Production race at Willow Springs Raceway aboard an early A1 Samurai – the first road race for a Kawasaki vehicle – the floodgates of interest in the Kawasaki brand burst open. Kawasaki's unique brand of daring, in-your-face attitude had arrived.

After five decades of rapid-fire growth, Kawasaki still owes a huge debt of thanks to the forward-looking A1 and A7 twins. Their success directly paved the way for the incredible 1969 500 H1 and 1972 750 H2 triples, which in turn enabled the audacious 903cc Z1 of 1973, the long line of Ninja® supersport bikes and now, the mind-bending Ninja H2™R model.

Here's how the original A1 Samurai and A7 Avenger motorcycles compare to the current Ninja® 300 sportbike.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1966 A1 Samurai</th>
<th>1967 A7 Avenger</th>
<th>2016 Ninja 300</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engine</td>
<td>Two-stroke parallel twin</td>
<td>Two-stroke parallel twin</td>
<td>Four-stroke parallel twin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>247cc</td>
<td>338cc</td>
<td>296cc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>Twin 22mm carburetors</td>
<td>Twin 26mm carburetors</td>
<td>EFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooling</td>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Air</td>
<td>Liquid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting system</td>
<td>Kickstarter</td>
<td>Kickstarter</td>
<td>Electric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmission</td>
<td>5 speed</td>
<td>5 speed</td>
<td>6 speed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claimed dry weight</td>
<td>320 lbs</td>
<td>320 lbs</td>
<td>362 lbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brakes, front/rear</td>
<td>Drum/Drum</td>
<td>Drum/Drum</td>
<td>Disc/Disc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Going Big**

In 1966, Kawasaki leapt from making small-displacement 2-strokes to a big 4-stroke parallel twin in a single bound.

**IRVINE, Calif. (Mar. 18, 2016)** – Fifty years ago, if you wanted a big-bore, high-performance streetbike, you looked to the British or American brands. With the exception of a 450cc twin from a competitor, in the mid-1960s there weren't any such offerings from a Japanese manufacturer. Enter the Kawasaki W1. Based on a 1950s BSA design and built by Meguro for the Japanese market, the W1 was a 624cc overhead-valve 4-stroke parallel twin. As such, it looked much like the leading British bikes of the time, and with most domestic sales being small bikes, it was a rousing success in Japan.

Nonetheless, the W1 was an enormous reach for the young motorcycle division of Kawasaki Aircraft Co., LTD., as it leapfrogged the company from small-displacement transportation machines directly into the American market's premium segment: large-displacement motorcycles. Here in America, the original W1 – later superseded by the twin-carbureted W2SS streetbike and W2TT scrambler – sold for five years, facing stiff competition from the established motorcycle companies the entire time. Making the task even harder for the W1 were Kawasaki's own A1 and A7 2-stroke performance demons, and finally the raging 500cc H1 triple.

To the delight of racers in America though, the W1 engine provided just the sort of powerbase needed for flat-track racing, where big 4-stroke twins dominated. Thus, modified versions of the W1 engine were soon powering the dirt-track racers that barnstormed the ovals at Ascot Park and other venues. Remarkably, this same synergy continues a half century later with the Ninja® 650 sportbike-based flat trackers that helped Kawasaki win the 2015 AMA Pro Flat Track GNC1 manufacturers championship.

Honoring the original W1 and embracing an emerging retro movement in motorcycling, Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. introduced the W650 in 2000. With a classic gear-driven overhead camshaft and vintage styling, combined with modern features including electric starting, an engine balance shaft and front disc brake, the W650 merged the soul of the original W1 with easy-to-use modern technology.

The Lime Green Color Scheme

*Kawasaki Racing Green was derived by a paint and design genius known as “Paint by Molly” in a little shop in Brea, California.*

**IRVINE, Calif. (Mar. 25, 2016)** – As racing celebrated the 75th running of the Daytona 200 on March 12, it’s also worth celebrating the birth of the iconic Lime Green racing colors for Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC), which started as an “in your face” challenge to the competition on Daytona’s high banks during the 1969 Daytona Bike Week.

At the time, superstitions and folkways were common at many tracks, Daytona included, where you simply didn’t race a green bike. However, in full attack mode to win races, capture headlines and grow US market share, KMC flat-out ignored convention. When the gates opened, here came the factory with a truckload of enormously bright green 250cc A1RA and 350cc A7RA factory racers for a team of talented riders including Ken Araoka, Art Bauman, current KMC employee Walt Fulton III, Dick Hammer and Cal Rayborn. The event marked the first
KMC 50th Anniversary 1966 - 2016

appearance of KMC’s now-famous livery, which was expressly designed to shake up the ranks, challenge the status quo, kick butt and take names.

How the Lime Green color scheme came to exist is as bold as the color itself. At the direction of KMC National Sales Manager Don Graves and National Marketing Manager Paul Collins, Akashi designer Chris Kurishima, and LA-area custom painter Rollin Sanders – better known as “Paint by Molly” – developed multiple options including the now-famous wild green and white combination. After much discussion by KMC management, the color was approved and supported by part of KMC’s annual promotional budget. At Daytona in 1969, KMC’s first Lime Green team drew a huge amount of attention and signaled the arrival of Kawasaki factory racing in an emphatic way. Interestingly, KMC’s current “Flying K” logo, penned by KMC advertising guru Nick Nichols, also debuted at the event.

Soon afterwards, the first production Kawasaki motorcycle to wear Lime Green paint (“Kawasaki Racing Green” as it was officially known) was the 1969 F21M “Greenstreak,” a 238cc scrambler. And so ever since, Lime Green has been the go-to color for Kawasaki racing, including road racing, motocross and off-road – as well as on a variety of streetbikes, ATVs and Jet Ski® watercraft. Quite simply and brilliantly, what began as a shot across the bow of the competition has since served to define and represent the very soul of the Kawasaki brand.

Well done and thanks, Molly.

So Far. So Fast.

In March 1973, three Kawasaki Z1s and a small team of riders set 46 FIM and AMA speed records.

IRVINE, Calif. (April 1, 2016) – Priced at just $1,895, the 1973 903cc Z1 was both the world’s first air-cooled, DOHC inline four production motorcycle – and the world’s most powerful production bike. To prove its strength, Kawasaki aimed equally high by chasing the world’s toughest speed record – 24 hours on the high banks of Daytona International Speedway. On Wednesday, March 13, 1973, eight riders, mechanics from Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC), officials, equipment and three Z1s arrived at Daytona. Two bikes featured lowered handlebars, Goodyear racing tires and heavy-duty shocks for the 24-hour attempt, while the third bike sported limited engine mods and a full fairing in pursuit of one-lap, 10-kilometer and 100-kilometer closed-course records.

That afternoon, Team Kawasaki rider Yvon Duhamel readied himself for the one-lap record attempt. He accelerated the faired Z1 onto the tri-oval, took a single warmup lap, and then howled to a new record of 160.288 mph. The celebration was jubilant but brief, as the next morning Duhamel climbed back aboard the special Z1 and launched a standing-start attempt on the 10-km and 100-km world records. Barely 26 minutes later, the Kawasaki
had done it again, covering 10 kilometers at 150.845 mph and 100 kilometers at 141.439 mph. Three for three so far!

But the toughest challenge was still ahead. On Thursday morning, March 14, the 24-hour record run began, with team riders Art Baumann, Cliff Carr, Gary Nixon, Masahiro Wada and Hurley Wilvert, journalists Cook Neilson and John Weed, and KMC's Bryon Farnsworth targeting a steady 120 mph to grab the record while minimizing tire wear.

The riders rotated through 150-mile shifts, stopping for fuel every 37 minutes and new tires every six hours, thanks to quick work by KMC mechanics Jeff Shetler and Randy Davis. Finally, the late winter sunset arrived at 6:15 PM, leading riders into an inky Florida night. “At 130 mph it’s difficult to stay within the lines,” Farnsworth admitted.

Despite thick fog and one broken chain, both bikes raced through the night until finally, just after 9:30 AM on Friday, March 15, Kawasaki clinched the 24-hour record with the leading Z1 going 2,630.402 miles at 109.602 mph, beating the previous record by nearly 20 mph. In all, the three-day effort claimed 46 AMA and FIM performance records – setting an enormous benchmark for the Z1 in the process.


The Legend of the Green Streak

As the first production Kawasaki motorcycle to wear Lime Green paint, the 1969 F21M Green Streak paved the way for today’s KX™ motocross bikes.

IRVINE, Calif. (April 8, 2016) – In what would become one of the greatest brand-building moves in motorcycling, in 1969 Kawasaki took the bold gamble of repainting its existing F21M 250 Scrambler to the now-famous Lime Green color developed by Rollin Sanders, a.k.a. “Paint by Molly.” The color had already debuted at Daytona in March on the factory 250cc A1R and 350cc A7R road racers, emphatically showing that the Kawasaki name meant high performance. But while the factory road racers were not for sale, the production F21M was, making it the first Lime Green Kawasaki bike ever available to the public.

A competition scrambler, the F21M’s 238cc single-cylinder, two-stroke air-cooled engine boasted a power-inducing rotary-valve intake that helped establish Kawasaki’s performance reputation. By 1969 the model was already proven in competition because the previous year, Steve Hurd had won the Elsinore Grand Prix on a 1968 “red tank” F21M, giving Kawasaki its first major dirt win in America.

Emphasizing how serious a racer the F21M really was, each bike came with a spare piston, two sets of rings, a wrist-pin bearing, a spare clutch, a gasket set and various sprockets packed right in the crate. In short, for $875 privateers got everything they needed to race. Forty-seven years ago, Kawasaki was already going for it.

Riding an F21M is a highly intense experience. The engine bursts into life with a blast of high frequency sound, vibration buzzes through the steel double-cradle frame and bars, and exhaust waves rifle through the expansion chamber as the revs spike. The four-speed gearbox, short-travel suspension and drum brakes are just adequate to keep up with the raucous engine. Those were good times, but they were also wild times.
After three years of production, the F21M was replaced by the F81M before the revolutionary KX™250 – Kawasaki’s first production motocross bike – arrived for 1974. However, as a result of the 1969 F21M, all Kawasaki motocrossers have been Lime Green ever since, including the current KX250F and the other KX™ models. If you ever find one at a yard sale in Greenville, Greensboro or even Green Acres, grab it. Because the legend of the Green Streak lives!

Simply Smashing Samurai

On a blustery day back in 1966, the 250cc A1 Samurai demolished the Open Production field to win Kawasaki’s first road race.

IRVINE, Calif. (April 22, 2016) – Nearly 50 years ago, the 250cc A1 Samurai motorcycle won Kawasaki’s first-ever U.S. road race at California’s Willow Springs Raceway in dramatic fashion. And that’s because racer Jim Deehan and the Samurai didn’t just beat a field of 250cc lightweights, it beat the entire field of 250cc through Open Production bikes – literally the best and fastest streetbikes available at the time. From Honda to Suzuki to Triumph, on November 6, 1966, the Samurai vanquished them all in its very first competition outing. Here’s how it happened.

Attracting over 160 entries, the third annual U.S. Grand Prix at Willow Springs featured multiple classes from 50cc to 500 Grand Prix, and from 50cc to Open Production, plus sidecars – literally the entire range of motorcycle classes. Known today as “The Fastest Road in the West,” Willow’s sweeping turns, long straightaways and hardscrabble setting make it a serious track favoring high horsepower and brave pilots, and punishing those who stray offline and into the gritty desert. Frequently, unsettling winds and temperature swings add to the challenges.

And so it was that Deehan, a talented road racer and Kawasaki technician, took up the challenge to race multiple classes at Willow Springs on an overcast and breezy Sunday. He started the day by finishing second to Art Baumann in 350 GP on a Honda and winning 250 GP on a Yamaha. Switching from Grand Prix bikes to the new Samurai 250 streetbike, no one – probably including Deehan himself – could have anticipated duplicating his earlier performances in the big 250cc to Open Production race. After all, Open Production contained the heavy-hitter streetbikes of the time, including a formidable array of British twins with over twice the Kawasaki bike’s small displacement.

But Deehan was keen to try, and the production Samurai, after its lengthy and exhaustive development program, was ready for Kawasaki’s first-ever road race. The field launched up the straightaway, with Deehan using the Samurai’s 31 horsepower to drive toward the front, ultimately taking the historic win over hot-shoes Art Baumann on a Suzuki and Triumph-mounted Pete DeRosa. A Kawasaki win advertisement in the November 17 issue of Cycle News noted Deehan had made a “smashing entry into the U.S. racing circuit” for the Samurai.

That day, the same could be said for Kawasaki.
The Legend of the Mach III

With an audacious three-cylinder engine and the dragstrip wizardry of Tony Nicosia, the 1969 Kawasaki H1 immediately became a performance icon.

IRVINE, Calif. (April 29, 2016) – When it comes to performance, few motorcycles in the last 50 years created the impact that Kawasaki’s 500 Mach III two-stroke triple did in 1969. Coming right on the heels of the 350cc A7 Avenger, the Mach III (also known as the “H1” model) vaulted performance to new heights, at an equally amazing price of just $999. Sharpening its point, the H1 quickly set acceleration records, with Tony Nicosia making a ¼-mile run of 12.96 seconds at 100.7 miles per hour aboard the raging triple. A highly accomplished drag racer, Nicosia was also a Kawasaki service technician and development rider for the H1, which had been tested extensively in the Southwest – including near Nevada’s secret military base Area 51.

Such rider talent is essential in wringing the most out of a bike on the dragstrip, but the underlying machine has to be capable. The Mach III was. Its 499cc piston-port triple was like three highly tweaked two-strokes ganged together, with three Mikuni carburetors, three separate inductive pickups for its hot CDI ignition, and three individually tuned exhausts producing a kind of high intensity acceleration no other production bike could match. As a result, the language of the H1 – actually a rapturous howl! – immediately became spoken in high-performance motorcycle circles. And the H1 just as quickly became known to car guys, as many a Corvette, GTO and Mustang owners learned after encountering a Kawasaki Mach III.

The H1 model run lasted eight years, from the first drum-brake 1969-71 H1 and H1A versions, through the disc-brake KH500 swansong in 1976. Finally, the triple became a casualty of emissions laws and was replaced by the four-stroke KZ650 model. But what a run it was. Among its high points were those blistering early runs that Nicosia made at a special press demonstration at Lions Drag Strip in Southern California. Here personnel uncrated a brand-new H1 and put Nicosia aboard, where he soon scorched to the world’s first sub 13-second ¼-mile run on a production bike. Although brand-new, the H1’s legend was already secure.

In time, the audacious H1 became known by a number of nicknames, some of which are not repeatable here. However, all recognized the incredible performance of its seething three-cylinder, two-stroke engine, which helped make motorcycling an incredibly exciting sport in 1969 and beyond. Long live the Kawasaki Mach III.
The Centurion

Kawasaki’s most famous early production dirt racer was the 1970 100 Centurion G31M, a “beginner” 99cc two-stroke with dizzying performance.

IRVINE, Calif. (May 6, 2016) – Man had just landed on the moon, the film Easy Rider, (1969) premiered, and the Woodstock Music Festival had just occurred. It was a remarkable time in the USA. Then came the 1970 Kawasaki 100 Centurion G31M, 99cc of rotary-valve two-stroke dynamite wrapped in Lime Green racing paint. Before the advent of KX™ motocross bikes, the Centurion quickly developed a fierce reputation as a scrambler and dirt-track racer. No wonder: its small-bore engine produced a claimed 18.5 horsepower at 10,250 rpm. Priced at $560 and weighing just 178 pounds dry, the Centurion was offered as a beginner’s bike—but the performance was simply rabid, as anyone who rode one or even just heard the raspy exhaust note from the expansion chamber could attest.

As was typical for dirt bikes of the day, the Centurion featured a conventional fork with just five inches of travel and twin rear shocks with even less. The chassis used a double-cradle steel frame, small-diameter drum brakes, and 3.25-18 Dunlop K70 tires. But it was the chrome-bore engine’s amazing output that would most enhance Kawasaki’s growing image as a high-performance company, for each Centurion came with a handlebar tag citing the power output of that particular engine. It also came with racing number plates, engine spares, carburetor jets and gearing. Race ready, indeed!

From the 1966 Samurai A1 to the 1967 Avenger A7, and from the powerful 1968 F21M scrambler to the 1969 500 Mach III H1, each year Kawasaki had rolled out an incredible performance benchmark that sent shock waves through the industry. And the 1970 Centurion G31M was one of them, inviting young riders to compete in a wide range of dirt events on a bike designed for the task, rather than just converted trail bikes. For promotional purposes, Kawasaki even gave Steve McQueen six new Centurions while the actor was filming his epic movie Le Mans (1971).

With over 4,000 units produced during 1970-71, the Centurion was plentiful enough in its time but is surprisingly rare now, and as such is much appreciated by collectors. Guaranteeing that the Centurion will never slip into obscurity within Kawasaki’s heritage, its DNA lives on in the 2016 KX™100 motocross motorcycle, an amazing 46 years after the Centurion’s introduction created a new youth market. With the Centurion as part of its history and the launch of the Team Green™ racing team in 1981, the path for Kawasaki and young racers was indelibly set.
Coming Out Ahead!

In 1972, a massive “Come Out Ahead on a Kawasaki” advertising campaign aimed to make the Kawasaki name synonymous with fine motorcycles.

IRVINE, Calif. (May 13, 2016) – True to its daring form in developing and launching the 1969 500 H1 Mach III motorcycle, for 1972 Kawasaki announced a major three-year national advertising campaign supported by an aggressive $3 million budget. The campaign utilized 30- and 60-second network television commercials, print advertisements in enthusiast magazines, plus a dealer co-op program.

Created by advertising agency Cunningham & Walsh, the campaign featured riders having huge fun aboard various Kawasaki models, accompanied by the tagline “Come Out Ahead on a Kawasaki.” A catchy musical score made the radio and TV spots instantly recognizably and highly memorable, while the magazine ads included an array of three-page gatefolds, two-page spreads and one-pagers – all in full color. Supporting dealers in their individual markets was a combination of dealer-branded radio, television, newspaper and outdoor advertising.

The first print publication of the campaign was the February 1972 issue of Sports Illustrated, and by September the creative had run in more than a dozen national magazines, as well as on network television. As noted by Dale Stevenson, Kawasaki’s advertising manager at the time, the approach differed from what other manufacturers were doing. The intent was to broaden Kawasaki’s overall reach on a year-round basis, rather than just seasonally, “and to make the Kawasaki name synonymous with fine motorcycles in the eyes of the general public.” In sum, the goal was to put buyers – and by association Kawasaki itself – ahead of the competition. In its first year, the “Come Out Ahead on a Kawasaki” campaign consisted of the following:

**Television**
An average of three commercial spots per week (using a mix of 25% 60-second and 75% 30 second spots) ran on the following programs from March through September 1972:

- Sunday Movie
- Cade’s County
- Thursday Night Movie
- Mission Impossible

**Magazines**
In addition to the television commercials, Kawasaki ran an extensive magazine campaign in the following publications during the same period:

- Car and Driver
- Cycle Guide
- Dirt Bike
- Popular Mechanics
- Rolling Stone
- Cycle
- Hot Rod
- Guns & Ammo
- Cycle C.M.A.
- Sports Illustrated
- Playboy
- Cycle World
- Popular Cycling
- Psychology Today
- Motor Trend
- Road & Track
- A.M.A. News
- Cycle Canada
- Motorcycle Dealer News
Forty-four years ago, Kawasaki's daring advertising campaign perfectly framed the company's growing product line, its ambition to excel, and the commitment to put its customers ahead of the pack. And the approach hasn't let up since, with a huge amount of current product information and other data available on Kawasaki.com.

**Boom! Here Comes the Mach IV**

*Much more than just a Mach III 500, the 1972 Mach IV 750 was a smoother, more comfortable superbike. But it was also very, very fast.*

**IRVINE, Calif. (May 27, 2016)** – The launch of the 1969 Mach III 500 H1 motorcycle vaulted Kawasaki from its position as an aggressive upstart motorcycle company to the zenith of the sport almost overnight. Yet, Kawasaki's ambitions that spawned the H1 were hardly quenched by its success, particularly since the motorcycle industry was also growing at a rapid pace. In addition, the arrival of a certain Japanese competitor's groundbreaking four-cylinder 750 bike in 1969 had admittedly set a benchmark of its own. So what to do? Take the H1 and amplify it. This was war.

That's exactly what Kawasaki did for 1972. With 50 percent more displacement than the H1, the all-new Mach IV 750 H2 superbike substantially raised the bar for performance as Tony Nicosia set a production-bike ¼ mile record of 11.95 seconds at 115.38 mph at Fremont Dragstrip in California on March 11, 1972. Quite literally, the new H2 put on two wheels the company's tagline, “Come out ahead on a Kawasaki.”

The specifications were impressive: three air-cooled cylinders displacing 249cc each and fed by individually tunable 30mm Mikuni carburetors. Instrumentation included a 12,000-rpm tachometer and 140-mph speedometer that meant business. The big airbox and triple chromed exhausts delivered a wail at full throttle audible clear across town on a Saturday night. No wonder the H2 instantly owned the 750cc production class in both drag racing and road racing. In fact, on September 12, 1971 Ralph White had already given the H2 its first roadrace win, taking the checkers in the AFM Open Production class at Orange County International Raceway in California. Amazingly, this early-production machine was totally stock, having just been flown in for a dealer meeting!
Beyond once again blowing the roof off streetbike performance with the H2, Kawasaki sought civility with a roomier cockpit, wider seating, more compliant suspension, reduced vibration and more cornering clearance – all for just $1,395. While much bigger and badder, the H2 was also more refined, a philosophy that would define the four-cylinder, four-stroke Z1 juggernaut the next year.

With its production run lasting from 1972 to 1975, the Mach IV 750 H2 eventually became the leader of Kawasaki’s five-bike “Tri-Star” lineup that also included the 500cc H1, 400cc S3, 350cc S2 and 250cc S1 models. Now in keen demand by collectors, the H2 has earned its rightful place on Kawasaki’s performance pyramid – crowding in at the top!

**The Sizzle and the Steak**

*When Kawasaki launched the 1973 Z1, it was more than just a bigger, better streetbike. It was both velvet glove and sledgehammer, all in one.*

**IRVINE, Calif. (June 3, 2016)** – They called it “New York Steak.” That was the internal code for Kawasaki’s earthshattering 1973 Z1, the world’s first four-cylinder DOHC production superbike. Whereas previous Kawasaki streetbikes had carried names like Samurai, Avenger and Mach III, the new model was so big, so powerful and so commanding, that “Z1” just said it all.

Several crucial factors led to the development of the big Z1, a huge undertaking for a company that had previously focused on two-strokes. First was that manufacturers of two-stroke road engines were facing challenges due to new United States emissions laws; second was that Kawasaki project leader Sam Tanegashima believed a premium four-stroke engine would look and sound more substantial than any two-stroke; third was a keen desire to further expand Kawasaki sales and market influence; and fourth was that a certain Japanese competitor had already launched a four-cylinder bike.

The Z1 was originally developed as a 750cc model, but the changing market meant a bigger bike would be a better competitor. So the original design was revised for greater displacement. Engineers pushed it to the maximum, eventually determining that 903cc was the largest displacement that could be integrated into the existing design. The final production engine’s output was pegged at 82 horsepower at 8,500 rpm – dramatic in a day when anything over 50 hp was considered robust. It was tested to extremes, with thousands of high-speed miles ridden by Yvon Duhamel, Bryon Farnsworth and others at Willow Springs and Talledega, across America and in Japan.

Everything about the Z1 was supersized, from its robust engineering and displacement to its roomy seating, and from its big chrome-plated megaphone exhausts to its linkless 630 drive chain, the largest ever fitted to a production bike. In a time of escalating street performance, for $1,995 the Z1 was ready for anything – from the morning commute to pushing a touring fairing across the prairies, to carving up the backroads or scorching around the racetrack. It is no wonder that the Z1 developed such a huge following, so fast.

Some interesting Z1 trivia: the intricate roller-bearing crankshaft was built up from nine separate pieces; the enormous drive chain had an automatic oiler with a dedicated tank and pump; the Candy Brown paint scheme was developed by Rollin Sanders (“Paint by Molly”), who also invented Kawasaki’s iconic Lime Green color; and
in Cycle magazine’s historic 1973 Superbike shootout, the Z1 topped every other competitor by hitting a record 110.70 mph through the dragstrip lights.

Meet the new boss!

Over four decades ago, the success of the Z1 propelled Kawasaki to the forefront of motorcycle engineering, with its robust platform establishing a platform for dozens of important models to follow. The Z1 also built the feisty “Z” brand heritage within Kawasaki that continues today with the Z1000, Z800 and Z125 PRO motorcycles.

The Sizzle and the Steak live on.

so I’m traveling,” he’d explain. This and other ads in the campaign showed Kawasaki products in

Let the good times roll.®

IRVINE, Calif. (June 10, 2016) – Kawasaki was on a rocket ride at the end of 1972, with blistering ¼-mile records for the Mach III 500 H1 and Mach IV 750 H2, national race wins, and an AMA 500 Motocross title to its credit. All of these successes targeted performance enthusiasts, as did the national advertising campaign “Come Out Ahead on a Kawasaki.” The payoff? Kawasaki moved into the number-two sales position in the US.

Nonetheless, Kawasaki had its sights set broader and higher – to become a brand appealing to casual riders and families, while still maintaining the hardcore loyalists who lived for the wail of a high performance. In 1973, the path forward had two parts: 1) Expand the product range with casual recreational products like the Jet Ski® watercraft, commuter motorcycles and playbikes; and 2) Advertise that Kawasaki’s bandwidth was not only wide, but rooted in fun.

But how to do it? Created by advertising agency Cunningham & Walsh, the “Kawasaki lets the good times roll” tagline was an absolutely perfect fit. In February ’73, the new slogan launched in the form of two 30-second commercials aired on national network television and local spots in selected markets – mostly during sports shows, primetime adventure series and feature movies – plus one-, two- and three-page black-and-white and color print ads. TV and print reigned supreme for reaching consumers, and the campaign always showed Kawasaki Good Times in an amusing manner that was fun to watch. A gorilla commuting on a streetbike? Check. A trail rider motorboating through a river? Even better. Newlyweds riding side by side on their new Kawasaki motorcycles? Perfect!

Cunningham & Walsh went right on innovating with a series of earthy vignettes inspired by American artist Norman Rockwell, each including a first-person storyline. In one piece, Murray, the bored travel agent at World Wide Travel, comes face to face with a new Z1-B motorcycle parked in front of his agency. He imagines climbing aboard and returning to his Wyoming hometown, scooping up his long-lost flame Maggie, and taking her away. “Business got boring, relatable, real-life settings that inspired readers to imagine themselves in that exact same position.
Did it all work? Absolutely! Let the Good Times Roll” campaign was so effective that Kawasaki trademarked the tagline, and it soon became an essential part of the company’s DNA. It remains that way today, because 33 years later, the Good Times are still rolling strong.

**Jumping Jet Ski® PWC!**

**IRVINE, Calif. (June 17, 2016) –** Originally billed as "an entirely new sensation in the water sport world," in 1973 the Jet Ski® watercraft soon proved to be exactly that. Offering dirt bike-like performance and excitement on the water, the original Jet Ski stand-up watercraft could run with traditional ski boats, while turning circles around them in handling – and wave-jumping too. So fun was the little 6-foot 10-inch, 220-pound Jet Ski stand-up watercraft that it provided the backbone for Kawasaki’s development of the Personal Watercraft (PWC) market.

Getting the Jet Ski stand-up watercraft to market was among the first projects of the new R&D department of Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) in Santa Ana, California. After creating several prototypes, the 1973 WSAA (flat hull) and WSAB (V-hull) stand-up models were carefully launched on a trial basis, starting with a 1973 test program in Dallas, Texas. Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing Corp., U.S.A. in Lincoln, Nebraska later started full production of the Jet Ski watercraft in 1975 with lighter, stronger Sheet Molded Compound (SMC) replacing the hand-laid fiberglass of the early hulls.

In concept, the Jet Ski stand-up watercraft was deceptively simple and ingenious, with a compact fiberglass hull carrying an amidships-mounted 400cc two-stroke tandem twin and driving a high-output water pump with a steerable jet nozzle. A multi-position handlebar allowed the rider to kneel or stand according to preference. Designed with no external moving parts, the Jet Ski watercraft soon became a favorite with water-sports enthusiasts as well as rental outfits, which blossomed as the units became widely available.

Naturally racing followed, with Kawasaki helping to form an independent race-promotion and sanctioning body called the United States Jet Ski Boating Association (USJSBA). In 1981 the USJSBA held a national event in Lincoln, Nebraska offering an impressive $25,000 in prize money, and drawing 10,000 spectators and coverage by three TV network affiliates. Global interest in racing Jet Ski watercraft drove a name change to the International Jet Sports Boating Association (IJSBA) the next year.
The original stand-up Jet Ski watercraft enjoyed a tremendously long life, from Kawasaki’s initial 1973 models all the way to the final radical 800cc SX-R Limited Edition of 2012. And of course, multi-passenger Jet Ski watercraft grew even bigger over the same period, leading to today’s range-topping supercharged Jet Ski® Ultra® 310LX. Long live Jet Ski!

Green Monsters

IRVINE, Calif. (June 24, 2016) – Motocross was a firestorm in the early 1970s, with numerous Japanese, European and even American motorcycle companies all scrambling to develop the right technological combination to win professional races, in the hands of weekend warriors, and on the showroom floor. The challenges were many, including quickly evolving engine, chassis and suspension designs that would all work well together. Piston-port and rotary-valve two strokes, and pushrod and overhead-cam four strokes, from 100cc to over 500cc all battled for the winning edge, with more than a dozen manufacturers competing for customers’ attention in a fast-growing sport. Motocross truly was a melting pot of technology at the time.

Thanks to the excellent groundwork established by Kawasaki’s 1972 championship-winning prototype F12MX program, in 1974 Kawasaki launched an industry-changing lineup of KX™125, KX™250, and KX™450 motocross motorcycles – a complete range of race-ready machines all finished in Kawasaki’s characteristic Lime Green paint. It was the broadest, meanest and most technologically advanced range of machines of any Japanese manufacturer in the day.

- The KX125 used a new rotary-valve two-stroke engine evolved from the engineering lessons learned from the high-output 1970 100 Centurion G31M dirt racer. Weighing 199 lbs., with its electrofusion-coated cylinder and six-speed gearbox, the 1974 KX125 immediately became a threat to win any 125 motocross race.

- The KX250 anchored Kawasaki’s new MX lineup with explosive two-stroke power, – along with such innovations as fade-resistant Hammerhead shocks. Dent-resistant plastic fenders kept weight to 214 lbs.

- The range-topping KX450 delivered heroic power that only top riders could fully utilize – among them, 1974 AMA 500 Motocross champion Jimmy Weinert. A plastic fuel tank and fenders helped pare weight to just 220 lbs., making the KX450 a motocross missile.
At their launch 42 years ago, the first KX motocross motorcycles made Kawasaki a powerful force in the most important racing classes. Every year since, the engineering and performance of the KX line has steadily improved, culminating today in the championship-winning KX™65, KX™85 and KX™100 two-strokes, as well as the AMA Motocross and Supercross title-winning KX™250F and KX™450F four-strokes. Although faster and stronger in every way, each KX model shares the same competitive spirit as the three original 1974 green monsters. Roost on!

Oh, Nebraska!

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (July 8, 2016) – Kawasaki’s wide-eyed performance is legendary, but an equally important form of innovation was the Lincoln, Nebraska assembly plant that opened in 1974. The plant was groundbreaking on several fronts, primarily as the first assembly plant in America for a Japanese motorcycle manufacturer. In subsequent decades, several other Japanese automotive and motorcycle manufacturers would follow Kawasaki’s lead.

The reasons for the creation of the Lincoln plant were both complex and important. First, in 1971 a devaluation of the US dollar substantially raised the prices of Japanese products. Second, a 10% import tariff meant to protect American products would likewise boost the price of Japanese imports. Third, Kawasaki needed to expand production capacity to meet growing retail demand. Finally, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd. (KHI) wanted to shorten the supply line between Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) and its dealers. Clearly, the Nebraska facility would be a win-win for everyone. But first it would have to get built.

Envisioned by KMC President Yoji “George” Hamawaki, plans for a facility in Nebraska were set into motion, with a large industrial building and many acres of adjacent land. Production finally commenced on the morning of January 22, 1975, and the first vehicle off the assembly line was a royal blue KZ400 parallel twin motorcycle. Gifted to Nebraska governor James Exon, it represented both the first Kawasaki vehicle and the first Japanese vehicle produced in the United States. The KZ400 was also distinguished as the first belt-drive production bike.
Kawasaki Motors Manufacturing Corp., U.S.A. (KMM) was incorporated in 1981 and assumed control of the Lincoln facility. Since then, KMM has expanded the scope of its operations not only with respect to Kawasaki powersports products, but robotic equipment assembly and rail car assembly as well. Known informally as the Kawasaki Production System, a “just-in-time” manufacturing process brings components together exactly when needed to maximize efficiency, reducing delays and overstock in the process.

How successful is KMM after nearly four decades? Very. Since its inception in 1974, the KMM plant has grown from 286,000 sq. ft. to almost 2.1 million sq. ft. today—a sevenfold increase—while employing over 1,900 workers. And that’s how they do it in Nebraska.

We Know Why You Ride

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (July 15, 2016) – In 1977, uttering the terms “internet,” “big data” and “social media” in a business meeting would probably earn you plenty of blank stares. That’s because print media and television were the undisputed kings of reaching customers. Harnessing these powerful communications tools, Kawasaki had already launched two advertising campaigns, “Come out ahead on a Kawasaki” in 1972 and “Let the good times roll.®” in 1973. Now it was time for the next step. In order to reach the most avid enthusiasts, advertising agency J. Walter Thompson created the “We know why you ride” campaign for 1977.

Unlike the previous two campaigns, which built Kawasaki’s brand image for general audiences, “We know why you ride” drilled straight into the veins of diehard motorcyclists like a double shot of espresso. “The silent road shimmers with sunshine and challenge,” started one ad. “You wrap your legs a little more aggressively around the sleek, pulsing power beneath you. And then the day explodes. Walk the curve, become the bike, rule the road.” Other ads burrowed deep into the technology that real riders care about: rpm; quarter-mile acceleration; power-to-weight ratio; rake and trail; and center of gravity.

Launched just in time for Kawasaki’s full transition to building four-stroke street bikes, and the new LTD model range, the campaign ran for two years in magazines read by young enthusiasts, firmly establishing how Kawasaki connects with highly passionate riders. These words were written over 40 years ago, but they’re still valid today: “We know why you ride. You’ve told us. And it’s the same reason Kawasaki builds bikes. Not assembly line piles of sprockets, chains and gears. Ideas. The essence of motion. The reason to ride. Performance machines that sing with the finely tuned joy of an engine embracing a road. Kawasaki.”

Television advertising allowed for even more dramatic development of this theme, with one particular Robert Abel & Associates-produced commercial, “The Ultimate Trip,” showing scenery flashing past while vibrantly changing colors through early computer graphics technology. “Kawasaki introduces a full line of fast, dependable four-stroke road bikes that will take you down any road the mind can travel,” said the narrator. Inspired by 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), the 30-second spot intended to imitate the vivid sense of freedom that motorcycling delivers, but its “psychedelic” nature soon got it censored by at least two networks! Even so, the “We Know Why You Ride” campaign proved yet again that Kawasaki was driven by passion.
Flight of the Lightning Bolt

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (July 22, 2016) – For over 100 years, the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah have attracted riders and drivers in search of world land speed records in a variety of classes. Until the 1970s most motorcycle records had been set by American, British and European powered machines – and then Don Vesco arrived from El Cajon, California. Over several years, the self-taught engineer and racer raised the record again and again with Japanese power, finally achieving 318.598 mph on a twin Kawasaki KZ1000-powered streamliner named Lightning Bolt.

Measuring 21 feet long and weighing 1,100 pounds with Vesco aboard, the turbocharged KZ1000 engines of this aerodynamically streamlined machine were enveloped in a steel chassis, which was outfitted with special high-speed Goodyear racing tires. Displacing 1,016cc and producing 300 horsepower apiece, the engines were nearly stock except for their custom-made turbocharger systems. The front and rear engines were connected by a toothed belt and drove Lightning Bolt through the rear engine’s gearbox. The liner was slowed by twin parachutes from near top speed to about 150 mph, after which a rear disc brake took over. In case of mishap, there was also a steel roll-cage built from 1 ½-inch chrome-moly tubing.

On the afternoon of August 28, 1978, Vesco set out to make the back-to-back runs required to claim a new record. With the twin KZ1000 engines running 27 pounds of turbo boost, Vesco completed the first run at 318.330 mph, after which he and his team turned Lightning Bolt around, refueled and repacked the parachutes for the necessary return run. With the winds still favorably calm, Vesco and Lightning Bolt sped across four miles of salt before clicking into top gear and hustling through the measured mile at 318.952 mph to claim the new FIM world record.

Always hungry for more speed, in September Vesco made an official one-way run at 333.117 mph. But there were still more surprises in store. He disconnected the front KZ1000 engine and put stuntwoman Marcia Holley into Lightning Bolt, where she broke the record for a single-engine, two-wheel vehicle, averaging 229.361 mph over two runs to become the “fastest woman on two wheels.”
Today Lightning Bolt is being restored by Don’s brother Rick Vesco, elegant in its retirement and a reminder of the tremendous performance bandwidth of the original engine design of the Z1 motorcycle. From street bikes to AMA Superbikes, and from police bikes to custom cruisers, drag racers, touring rigs and even world land speed record runs, the Z1 and the KZ900 and KZ1000 models that followed were simply out of this world for Kawasaki. And world-championship power for terrestrial heroes like Don Vesco.

Launching the Team Green™ Program

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (July 29, 2016) – Thirty-seven years ago the starting gates at amateur motocross events were full of red and yellow bikes, but not many green ones. So learned Kawasaki sales and marketing manager Chuck Larsen and district manager Dave Dewey after a visit to the Ponca City, Oklahoma races in 1979. The reason wasn’t that Kawasaki had no race bikes to offer, because the KX™ line was already in its sixth year. The root cause, Larsen learned, was simply that there weren’t enough hop-up parts, specialized tuning knowledge or committed riders to make the KX bikes widely competitive. Excited by new possibilities, after the races Larsen and Dewey formulated the basic idea for the Team Green program – right there in a rental car heading to Wichita.

Further research conducted by ad agency J. Walter Thompson helped define Team Green’s mission, including using amateurs to help develop future products; before long, the first KX™80 motorcycle was in the hands of young racers for evaluation. Under the management of Dave Jordan, the Team Green race team officially debuted at Ponca City in 1981, right where the idea had begun. It was an enormous launch party of sorts, with a fleet of KX bikes for sponsored riders, trucks and work stations, and plenty of parts and technical support all present. That weekend, Team Green changed amateur motocross for good.

Then as now, the mission of the Team Green racing team and its support program was to help amateur racers succeed, and thus permanently connect them to the Kawasaki brand. Jetting or spark plug issues? Technicians were on it. Bike not hooking up? Let’s try this tire or gearing. Suspension needs adjustments? The Team Green staff had answers. Predictably, it didn’t take long for the distinctive Kawasaki Lime Green colored bikes to multiply on the starting gate and podium. But there was a twist, because while assistance was primarily intended for Kawasaki riders, Team Green trackside support would also help riders of other brands. This may seem counterintuitive, but the rationale was simple: Make Team Green the home for every racer wanting to excel.
Over the years, Team Green race team members have included Billy Liles, Jeff Emig, David Bailey, Jeremy McGrath, Ricky Carmichael, James Stewart, Ryan Villopoto and many others. At various times the series included women's motocross, ATV and off-road racing too. This year, Team Green is supporting 50 local, regional and national amateur motocross events for riders aboard the KX65, KX85, KX100, KX250F and KX450F motorcycles. Find out more at www.kawasaki.com/racing/team-green.

**Good Times™ Magazine**

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (August 5, 2016) – Ever since the launch of the H1 500 Mach III motorcycle in 1969, Kawasaki has refused to do anything halfway. Its Lime Green racing colors also flew in the face of convention, as did its Z1 superbike, achieving 24-hour world speed records, innovative advertising campaigns, and Kawasaki's other efforts to build a unique and powerful brand. Debuting in 1983, the Good Times™ magazine was an equally ambitious experiment in direct marketing for Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) that soon grew to an enormous circulation of 2.2 million — similar to today’s ESPN The Magazine. By comparison, even the top motorcycle magazine of the period enjoyed scarcely 25% of this circulation.

Good Times took its name from Kawasaki’s successful advertising tagline, and delivered an upbeat, product-oriented message to Kawasaki customers, owners of competitive brands, motorcycle magazine subscribers, Kawasaki dealers, and anyone else who wanted to subscribe. Best of all for its readers, the magazine was free. Produced until the mid-1990s, Good Times was KMC’s shout out to anyone interested in powersports products. It didn’t matter whether the subject was street riding, dirt riding, ATVs or Jet Ski® watercraft, Good Times covered it all with articles and photography that inspired readers to take action for themselves.

The genesis of Good Times was KMC’s interest in delivering a substantial amount of content to a much bigger print audience than motorcycle magazines could deliver. It also derived from an internal publication called K-Line, which had been the voice of the company since the 1960s. Averaging about 32 pages per issue, Good Times was published twice a year in full color under the supervision of KMC marketing director Mike Vaughan, who, along with Henry Fiola of The Webb Company in Minnesota, had helped develop the concept for KMC vice president Henry Noda.
It worked. “Good Times was enormously successful.” Vaughan recalls. “Dealers told us people came in with the magazine clutched in their hands saying, ‘I want this motorcycle!’” Naturally, Good Times was as innovative as Kawasaki itself. To give motorcycles, ATVs and Jet Ski watercraft cover exposure, later editions featured two covers—one in front and another in back, essentially turning Good Times into two separate magazines. Ultimately though, widespread use of the internet resulted in ink on paper no longer being the best way to reach customers, and so after a decade Good Times magazine had run its race. Fortunately, today its spirit lives on through KMC’s website and its social media presence.

---

**Tale of the Warrior**

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (August 12, 2016) – Just as the 1973 Z1 motorcycle launched Kawasaki into the four-stroke Superbike era, the 1984 Ninja® 900R sportbike, also known as the GPz900R, massively advanced the breed with a sophisticated combination of aerodynamic styling, a racetrack-bred chassis, and liquid-cooled four-cylinder performance. With dual overhead camshafts, 16 valves, semi flat-slide carbs, and an internal counterbalance, its 908cc inline four produced liter-bike power for the time. It could also burn down the quarter mile in 11.18 seconds at 121.65 mph, as tested by Cycle World, and top out at 151 mph, making it the quickest and fastest production Kawasaki motorcycle to date. Equally important, the new Ninja 900R made riders look and feel great, with crisp handling, superb performance at high speeds, and forceful braking.

Technological advances abounded for Kawasaki within the Ninja 900R, including the first use of a new “diamond” frame that used the engine as a stressed member, a racing-derived 16-inch front wheel, and an anti-dive fork with air-assisted springs. The wind-cheating bodywork set the Ninja 900R motorcycle apart visually, and its one-year-only red and charcoal paint scheme made the ’84 model unmistakable.

In addition to these features, what really set the Ninja 900R apart was its name: Ninja. Mike Vaughan, the Director of Marketing for Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) at the time, had lived in Asia and knew about Japanese mythology and the Ninja warriors, legendary for their strength and stealth. He had named his Columbia 22 sailboat Ninja a full decade earlier, and when product planning started considering names for the new street bike, Vaughan immediately thought, “Ninja!” It took some doing for the name to work its way through corporate channels, but after that, it was perfect. The Ninja name first appeared in the US market only, then expanded internationally.

The Ninja 900R worldwide press launch occurred in Monterey, California on December 7, 1983. Riding opportunities included a drag strip competition at the Monterey Jet Center, followed by open lapping on the fast, original nine-turn Laguna Seca course. Others in the mix on the racetrack included the GPz750 Turbo, the GPz1100, and none other than 1983 AMA Superbike Champion Wayne Rainey. Recognizing the significance of the event for Kawasaki, Hiroshi “Henry” Noda, Vice President of Marketing at KMC, and Dr. Ohba, the President of Kawasaki Heavy Industries, LTD (KHI) at that time, were also present.
After earning numerous “bike of the year” awards, the Ninja 900R would soon be joined by the 1985 Ninja® 600R model, the original “600 class” supersport with a new-style perimeter frame that would influence sportbike design for decades. And today, the complete line of Ninja® sportbikes includes the Ninja H2™ and Ninja H2™R, Ninja® ZX™-14R, Ninja® ZX™-10R, Ninja® ZX™-6R, Ninja® 650 and Ninja® 300.

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (August 19, 2016) – Besides the Ninja® sportbike and KX™ motocross lines, perhaps no motorcycle model name has become more important to Kawasaki in the United States than Vulcan®. The first in a series of models extending over 32 years – so far! – was the 1985 Vulcan. Launched in 1984, its liquid-cooled V-twin engine design was a breakout for Kawasaki, representing the company’s first American-style cruiser. In fact, the Vulcan was the first Kawasaki model designed from the ground up as a cruiser, in contrast to the previous decade's products, which were all developed from existing streetbike architecture. It was an essential move because the cruiser category was clearly moving toward V-twins, with various Japanese competitors either there already, or on the way.

“We were looking for a name with a ‘V’ in it that would indicate a V-twin engine, while also saying something about the motorcycle itself,” explains Mike Vaughan, Director of Marketing at Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) from 1979-90. “As the Roman god of fire, Vulcan seemed logical.” After Vaughan suggested the name, there was no dissention – it was absolutely the right call for Kawasaki’s new cruiser.

The first Vulcan – known officially as the VN700A – was specific to the American market. It arrived during a time when a tariff existed on 700cc and larger motorcycles to protect American motorcycle manufacturing interests, so the first model actually displaced 699cc. The Vulcan 750 was introduced in 1986 when the tariff ended. Apart from simply being a V-twin, the Vulcan represented a new generation of V-twin motorcycles, with dual overhead camshafts, liquid cooling, and shaft drive. So right for the US market was the original Vulcan that the model lasted for more than twenty years, until 2006.

Kawasaki’s V-twin cruiser ideology was too strong to be constrained to just one model. For 1987, the Vulcan 750 was joined by the big Vulcan 1500, which would enjoy a 22-year production run of its own in various forms, including the retro style Drifter® motorcycle. Then came the Vulcan 800, Vulcan 1600, Vulcan 2000, Vulcan 900, and the latest edition, the Vulcan 1700. All retain the original Vulcan’s mission of muscular V-twin performance, a refined and comfortable ride, and characteristic Vulcan styling and quality. The 2016 Vulcan lineup includes two 1700cc Vulcan 1700 models (Voyager® tourer and Vaquero® bagger), three 900cc Vulcan 900 models (900 Classic cruiser, 900 Classic LT light tourer, and custom-look Vulcan 900 Custom), and three 650cc Vulcan models (streetwise Vulcan S ABS, racy Vulcan S ABS Café, and exclusive Vulcan S ABS SE).
FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (August 26, 2016) – The same passion for innovation that drives Kawasaki engineering has also propelled its marketing and advertising over the years. Sometimes, the best result comes from far out, innovative thinking, just like with groundbreaking products like the 500 Mach III H1 triple and supercharged Ninja H2™R motorcycles.

This was exactly the scenario in 1989 when Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) launched an inventive print advertising campaign informally known as “Hangouts.” Over two years, a dozen well-known bike hangouts were identified – from Marcus Dairy in Danbury, Connecticut to The Rock Store in Malibu, California – with two-page ads created around riders congregating there. In what must stand as one of the earliest forms of social media, the ads were run months ahead of time, announcing the exact location and date and enticing riders to come.

The campaign was conceived by Scott Young, the Executive Creative Director at Bozell, Jacobs, Kenyon & Eckhardt. “Motorcycling is only partly about bikes and how you feel on them; it’s also about sharing with other people,” he explains. “The idea was to find a series of places where motorcyclists hang out, and then write about what it would be like to be there. Since the ads were set in the future, no photos were available, so we hired illustrator Bruce Wolfe to portray them.”

The first Hangout event took place at Marcus Dairy on April 16, 1989. No one at KMC or the agency knew how it would turn out, but what happened exceeded expectations as over 7,500 riders arrived, attracting coverage by the New York Times. Other locations would include Alice’s Restaurant near San Francisco, California; the Old Spanish Trail Restaurant in Bandera, Texas; the Logan Inn in New Hope, Pennsylvania; and the Lookout Roadhouse near Lake Elsinore, California.

About six events were held per year during riding season, with a unique Wolfe painting and Young’s experiential copy anchoring each ad. The paintings were also reprinted as posters, available for purchase at Kawasaki dealerships. Young was surprised to see one picturing the Steamboat Springs, Colorado vintage road races in an Isle of Man pub during TT week in 1992.

Although the first Kawasaki “hangouts” were truly free-flow affairs, later in the campaign, KMC added hospitality and test rides to directly connect attendees with Kawasaki products. But at the end of the day Hangouts was all about, well, motorcycles and hanging out - which meant it was…just perfect.
FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (September 2, 2016) – It’s an awesome urban legend that the Beastie Boys wrote “(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (to Party!)” on a cocktail napkin in five minutes in 1986. Well, something similar happened – although not quite so fast! – when Rocky Mountain Kawasaki’s Joe Masek, Bill Gray and Jeff Mills attended an August 1980 dealer meeting in San Diego, California. While discussing the merits of the new KLT200 three wheel ATV for farm and ranch work, the trio hatched a concept for an even better four wheel machine, with Masek and Gray tossing out ideas and Mills sketching them on – yep – a cocktail napkin. The concept would eventually become the first side-by-side for Kawasaki, the 1988 Kawasaki MULE™ 1000 four-wheel utility vehicle.

According to The Glint of Chrome in Young Men’s Eyes, when the trio showed their work to KMC Research and Development (R&D) director Misao “Lyndon” Yurikusa, they described it as “a vehicle with four wheels that could carry two people and heavier loads than an ATV.” The original drawings specified a 250cc to 440cc four-stroke engine with electric starting, a 500-pound capacity bed plus front storage, running and spot lights, an automatic transmission, and later four-wheel-drive capability. Mr. Yurikusa was so enthused that he became the project’s most ardent supporter during its multiyear development.

The first prototype was powered by a 340cc two-stroke snowmobile engine so noisy that it reportedly scattered cows and pigs during farm testing, causing engineers to search for a four-stroke alternative after all. They eventually adopted the liquid-cooled 454cc parallel twin from the 454 LTD cruiser. Fast forward to 1987, and after plenty more R&D work, the production model was nearing completion. Codenamed “Pony” in Japan, it had yet to receive a name for the United States market. Bob Lehner from Bozell Advertising, Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A.’s agency at the time, suggested “MULE” – an acronym for Multi-Use Light Equipment. The name stuck.

Launched in 1988 to strong acclaim, the MULE™ side-by-side lineup soon included a 4WD model, the 535cc MULE™ 2010, along with an easy-on-the-turf 2020 model for golf courses, an industrial-spec 2030 model, and a compact 500 model. The three-cylinder diesel MULE™ 2500 arrived for 1999, with the four-passenger 3000 following for 2005. The range has since grown to include 27 different models in four lines, including the 812cc MULE™ PRO Series, 993cc MULE™ PRO Diesel Series, 401cc MULE SX™ Series and 617cc MULE™ Standard Series.

Now nearly 29 model years on, it’s definitely been a great ride – for a MULE™.
Two-Time World Champion

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (September 9, 2016) – After carrying riders to two World Superbike championships, the Ninja® ZX™-10R motorcycle has earned a place among the best supersport bikes ever created. It’s been a long time coming. The Ninja ZX™-10R’s story actually began with the 903cc 1973 Z1, the world’s first DOHC inline-four production motorcycle, then pushed dramatically ahead with the liquid-cooled 908cc GPz900R Ninja® sportbike of 1984. Kawasaki launched its first full-liter superbike, the 997cc Ninja® 1000R, for 1986, and followed up with the 998cc ZX™-10 for 1998 and finally the ZX™-10R (officially known as the ZX1000-C1) for the 2004 model year.

The rest, as they say, is a glorious blaze of Lime Green racing history. Upon its introduction, the Ninja ZX™-10R immediately won a Best Superbike award from Cycle World magazine. Its compact 54.5-inch wheelbase and 24-degree steering rake made the handling of the new “10R” more akin to a 600cc supersport than any previous Kawasaki model. Also contributing to its extraordinary punch were slender physical dimensions, and innovations like pressed-aluminum frame rails and a titanium exhaust system that kept the weight down to 375 pounds dry.

But that was then. Since its launch, the Ninja ZX™-10R superbike has pushed ahead technologically, incorporating significant redesigns for 2008, 2011 and 2016. The level of technology now available on the box-stock Ninja ZX™-10R ABS KRT Edition would have blown the minds of factory race teams a decade ago, including Kawasaki Launch Control Mode (KLCM), five-mode Sport-Kawasaki Traction Control (S-KTRC), a Kawasaki Quick Shifter (KQS), three power modes, a five-axis Bosch Inertial Measurement Unit (IMU) for improved cornering management, an inverted Showa 43mm Balance Free Fork (BFF), an Öhlins® electronic steering damper, Kawasaki Engine Brake Control, a Kawasaki Intelligent anti-lock Brake System (KIBS), and front Brembo® brakes with monobloc calipers. And that’s just some of it.
So complete is the Ninja ZX™-10R that Tom Sykes used it to grab his first FIM Superbike World championship in 2013, with teammate Jonathan Rea claiming a title of his own in 2015. At press time, Rea and Sykes were 1-2 in the 2016 standings. But it’s really no wonder, because while the Ninja ZX™-10R is a street bike, it also reflects decades of lessons hard-learned by the Kawasaki Racing Team on the world stage. All of which makes it the most incredible Ninja® motorcycle yet, when 1st Street becomes Turn 1 at the track.

The Glint of Chrome

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (September 16, 2016) – As Kawasaki celebrates 50 years in the United States, it’s fascinating to look back at the 25th anniversary in 1991 for perspective. At that time, a slender 16-page softbound book entitled The Glint of Chrome in Young Men’s Eyes detailed numerous people, product, and racing high points from 1966 through the silver anniversary. Although the book contains just eight photos and one illustration, thousands of words take readers on a deep dive into the colorful events that defined Kawasaki’s early years in America.

For instance, outside of racing, Kawasaki products had multiple brushes with fame through sports and entertainment. Mark Spitz, the world’s most decorated swimmer after the 1972 Olympics, organized a celebrity JET SKI® watercraft tournament while 1976 Olympic decathlon gold medalist Bruce Jenner appeared in a JET SKI® watercraft film of which photos were featured in Newsweek, Time, Sports Illustrated, and People magazines. In 1978, Ted Mondale, son of US Vice President Walter Mondale, raced a KX™250 motorcycle for Beltway Kawasaki in Washington, D.C. After, Tom Cruise rode a 1984 GPz900R Ninja® sportbike in the movie Top Gun (1986); he bought two Ninja® 1000 motorcycles and four JET SKI watercraft from Burbank Kawasaki in California. Finally, from 1985 to 1986, Catherine Bach, star of the television series Dukes of Hazzard, served as Kawasaki’s official ATV spokesperson.

Many enthusiasts know Kawasaki’s pivotal early products like the Samurai A1 and mercurial Z1 superbike, the Ninja® sportbike and Vulcan® cruiser, the JET SKI watercraft and MULE™ utility vehicles. But what was the best-selling model? In September 1, 1991, that honor went to the little two-stroke KE100 dual-purpose bike, with 211,727 units wholesaled. For its part, the thrilling 500 Mach III H1 was the 10th best-selling bike in 1991, with 69,279 units wholesaled in aggregate.

In racing, as the silver anniversary concluded Scott Russell had just won the 1991 AMA Supersport title and Mike Kiedrowski had likewise claimed the AMA 125 Motocross crown. While in streetbikes, the Ninja® ZX™-11 offered
what *The Glint of Chrome* called “the most incredible internal-combustion performance ever offered to the public.”

A section in the book entitled “The Next 25 Years” left the door open for advancement, admitting that, “It is difficult to even speculate the roads KMC will travel on their way into the next century.” Clearly, Kawasaki hadn’t met the future yet. *Cycle World* magazine calls the supercharged 2016 Ninja® H2™R superbike “the most powerful mass-produced motorcycle on the planet.” That’s some kind of new world!

---

**The Revolution**

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (September 23, 2016) – Back in the 1970s and 1980s, motocross riders had a few choice nicknames for four-stroke motocross bikes. “Thumpers” was a kind one, but less flattering labels like “anchors” and “sleds” also prevailed. As for some others, we’ll leave them to your imagination! Fortunately, this all changed for good as the four-stroke revolution began, ultimately including Kawasaki’s launch of the KX™250F in 2004 and KX™450F in 2006.

Built around high-revving, short-stroke single-cylinder engines with dual overhead camshafts, four valves, slipper pistons and liquid cooling, this new MX breed strongly borrowed from high-output supersport and superbike technology. Boiled down to the essence, they were slices off a road-racing engine. Sharing the lineup with Kawasaki’s 65cc to 250cc KX™ two-stroke models, the new four-strokes immediately expanded the appeal of the Team Green™ program for amateur racers, while giving pros a choice of battle weapons.

Pro racing victories for the KX250F motorcycle started immediately, with Ivan Tedesco winning the 2004 AMA 250 Supercross West championship, James Stewart sweeping the final round of the 2004 AMA 250 Motocross outdoor series, and Grant Langston taking the 2005 AMA 250 Supercross East championship. The KX450F model also scored quickly, as Stewart added an AMA 450 Supercross title in 2007 and an AMA 450 Motocross championship in 2008. Most incredible, though, was Ryan Villopoto’s four consecutive premier-class Supercross titles from 2011 to 2014. All told, the Lime Green KX four-stroke motorcycles won 25 AMA Motocross and Supercross titles in just over a decade.

After its initial launch, Kawasaki constantly advanced the KX250F, with a major redesign including an aluminum perimeter frame for 2006, and fuel injection and a Showa Separate Function Fork (SFF) for 2011. The KX450F debuted with an aluminum frame, then added a five-speed gearbox for 2007, fuel injection for 2009, and
selectable power modes and Launch Control for 2012. The KX250F motorcycle received a complete makeover for 2017, with more power, narrower dimensions, reduced weight and Launch Control, inspiring *Dirt Rider* magazine to call it "really fun and fast," and "more responsive and easier to ride." After a full redo in 2016, the 2017 KX450F also receives multiple upgrades, with *Transworld Motocross* magazine labeling it "one of the best-handling Kawasakis we've ever ridden."

Not bad, for a couple of thumpers.

![2004 KX250F](image1)
![2006 KX450F](image2)
![James Stewart's 2004 KX250F](image3)

**The Big, Bad 14R**

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (September 30, 2016) – Audaciousness. It must be in our blood, because in every decade for 50 years, Kawasaki has blasted the powersports industry wide open with a new kind of product that, to borrow from a certain famous TV series, “boldly goes where no man (or woman!) has gone before.” In 1969 it was the radical three-cylinder, two-stroke H1 500 Mach III motorcycle. In the 1970s came the all-conquering 903cc Z1 and the original stand-up JET SKI® watercraft. During the 1980s it was the game-changing GPz900R Ninja® motorcycle and the MULE™ 1000 side-by-side. In the 1990s arrived the astonishing Ninja® ZX™11, and today it's the supercharged Ninja H2™ and Ninja H2™R superbikes. But what happened in the 2000s, during the reign of Von Dutch hats and The Governator? The Ninja® ZX™14 sport bike, that’s what.

Up until the launch of the Ninja ZX-14 in 2006, the performance of sport bikes had grown steadily. That is, until this particular green overachiever blew them all to pieces. At a time when most superbikes displaced 998cc, here came 1,352cc of performance – 35% more than the fastest bikes in AMA Superbike racing. It gulped air through two huge Ram Air tunnels in the fairing. Its 11,000-rpm DOHC engine howled beneath an aluminum monocoque frame, and it sported the beefiest rear tire – 190/50ZR17 – ever fitted to a production Kawasaki sport bike. And was it quick? You might say that. The motorcycle media was eager to put the Ninja ZX-14 to the test. Soon after the launch, magazines began to put their time in on the Ninja ZX-14 at the local drag strip. *Rider Magazine* stated the Ninja had “unmatched power,” and *Motorcycle-USA.com* said “the ZX-14 is definitely a rocket-ship.”

After its launch in 2006, the Ninja ZX-14 received various minor improvements until 2012, when a second-generation model debuted as the Ninja® ZX™-14R. And this really was news, as the already dominant bike got significant advancements including a displacement boost to 1,441cc, three rider-selectable power modes, KRTC traction control, chassis and styling upgrades, and more. *Cycle World* magazine to craft a few choice lines after first riding the 2012 model. "The 14’s power dominates like King Kong in a parakeet cage," they wrote “Everything else is officially slow.” Now after a decade in the Kawasaki lineup, one thing has stayed the same throughout: the Ninja ZX-14R sport bike still offers that kind of thrilling street performance.
Sizzling Stand-Up

FOOTHILL RANCH, Calif. (October 7, 2016) – When the original Jet Ski® watercraft debuted in 1973, it truly launched a whole new way of having fun on the water. Its liquid-cooled 400cc two-stroke twin engine, pivoting handlepole system and ability to slice turns and skim over waves made it pretty close to a dirt bike on water. That fun amplified further with the introduction of the Jet Ski® 440 watercraft in 1977 and then the Jet Ski® 550 watercraft in 1982, whose larger engines and new high-capacity pump dramatically expanded the performance of the Jet Ski watercraft. No wonder Kawasaki’s 1981 and 1982 AMA Superbike champion Eddie Lawson grabbed the first production Jet Ski 550 watercraft in America and promptly left everyone bobbing in his wake.

Those early units were eclipsed again when Kawasaki debuted the Jet Ski® 650 SX watercraft for 1987. Now boasting a next-gen axial-flow pump and a 635cc engine – more than 50% larger than the original model – the 650 SX, along with the later Jet Ski® 750 SX model, bristled with water-vaporizing capabilities never before seen on a production Jet Ski watercraft. But pushing limits has defined Kawasaki ever since the 1960s, and so in 2003 the most audacious Jet Ski stand-up yet, the Jet Ski® 800 SX-R™, hit the personal watercraft (PWC) world like an asteroid. Its 781cc two-stroke engine – still a tandem twin but nearly twice the size of the engine in the original Jet Ski watercraft – developed immense horsepower and could accelerate harder than just about anything else on the water. And since it retained its single-passenger stand-up hull and pivoting handlepole, the Jet Ski 800 SX-R was sometimes equated to having a KX™800 motocross bike!

While the PWC market steadily evolved to focus on sit-down models with two- and three-passenger seating, incredible as it was, eventually the Jet Ski 800 SX-R model reached a zenith, and the last one was produced for the 2011 model year. After 38 years, the end of production for the stand-up Jet Ski watercraft was lamented by purists, who circled the wagons and continued riding existing models, hoping that the most radical solo PWC would someday return....

Fortunately, it now has with the arrival of the all-new 2017 Jet Ski® SX-R™ stand-up watercraft. Now packing a four-cylinder four-stroke engine adapted from the Ninja® ZX™-14R sport bike, this fuel-injected watercraft is light years beyond the original carbureted two-stroke models in sophistication, and its performance is even more spectacular. But one thing remains the same – the free-flying stand-up thrill of the original Jet Ski watercraft. Let the good times ride on!
KMC 50th Anniversary 1966 - 2016

ABOUT KAWASAKI

Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd. (KHI) started full-scale production of motorcycles over a half century ago. The first Kawasaki motorcycle engine was designed based on technical know-how garnered from the development and production of aircraft engines, and Kawasaki's entry into the motorcycle industry was driven by the company's constant effort to develop new technologies. Numerous new Kawasaki models introduced over the years have helped shape the market, and in the process have created enduring legends based on their unique engineering, power, design and riding pleasure. In the future, Kawasaki's commitment to maintaining and furthering these strengths will surely give birth to new legends.

Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) markets and distributes Kawasaki motorcycles, ATVs, side x sides, and Jet Ski® watercraft through a network of approximately 1,100 independent retailers, with close to an additional 7,700 retailers specializing in general purpose engines. KMC and its affiliates employ nearly 3,100 people in the United States, with approximately 300 of them located at KMC's Irvine, California headquarters.

Kawasaki’s tagline, "Let the good times roll.®", is recognized worldwide. The Kawasaki brand is synonymous with powerful, stylish and category-leading vehicles. Information about Kawasaki’s complete line of powersports products and Kawasaki affiliates can be found on the Internet at www.kawasaki.com.