

2008 Kawasaki KLR650

Motorcycle Test: 2008 Kawasaki KLR650

MSRP: \$5,349

Metro Motorsports @ 6161 W Bell, Glendale, AZ
(Ridenow Powersports) provided the Motorcycle

by Kirk Johnson
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2008 Kawasaki KLR650

Bike Model Kawasaki KLR650

Engine type

Liquid-cooled, four-stroke, DOHC, four-valve single
Displacement 651cc

Transmission Five-speed

Fuel System Carburetion: Keihin CVK40

Final Drive O-ring chain

Brakes

Front brake:

280mm petal disc with hydraulic dual-piston caliper

Rear brake:

240mm petal disc with hydraulic dual-piston caliper

Fuel Capacity

6.1 gallons

Tire Size

Front tire: 90/90-21

Rear tire: 130/80-17

Dry Weight 386 pounds

Seat Height 35 inches

About the Bike

The good ole KLR650 has been around for 21 years now and there is a reason for that. It has been a very dependable and reasonably priced dual purpose motorcycle with the features riders want. In 2008, those reasons just got better. If you are a dual purpose rider, then a good hard look at this machine is a must.

The 651cc four-stroke single cylinder engine is powerful enough to get you down the road to any off road

playground. Not sure where that playground is. Not to worry – you can tour the back roads with this bike looking for just that escape. Couple that with the 6.1 gallon fuel tank and you can spend the day exploring without refueling worries.

Some other improvements include new suspension and brakes. Front suspension travel is reduced from 9.1" to 7.9". A redesigned UNI-TRAK linkage reduces sag and complements the new front suspension by reducing rear wheel travel from 8.1" to 7.3". The 2008 KLR650 features enhanced stopping power, thanks to a new 280mm petal-style front brake rotor that's similar to ones used on Kawasaki's Ninja sportbikes. Rear braking performance is also improved, thanks to a new rear brake caliper.

There is now a larger rear luggage rack and narrower tail section which makes it easier to mount saddlebags for those overnight runs. The new mini windscreen is taller and the shrouds larger. They have also revised the seat design with new urethane foam for greater long-distance comfort and increased the alternator output for extra capacity to power add-on electronic gadgets like the GPS. For engine improvements, they improved throttle response with revised ignition mapping, and revised cam timing contributes to improve high-rpm performance. A redesigned cylinder head boasts new intake porting for greater low-end torque and quicker throttle response in city traffic, as well as improved top-end power for high-speed cruising on the open road.

They've revamped a lot of other features to make this a much better dual purpose motorcycle for on and off road use. Please ask the support group at Metro Motorsports for all the details.

Test Ride

This is really a neat bike, but have to admit upfront that I didn't get very much time on this bike because it's new, off the showroom floor. Anytime you build a dual purpose unit, that being a street/off-road bike or a tour/sport bike or any dual purpose vehicle, you lose some of the



advantages of a unit that is purebred. That being said, if you can't afford five or six different motorcycles in your garage, then a multipurpose or dual purpose unit is just what is called for. This is especially the case for road and dirt. I live in Arizona and the possibilities are endless for finding great out of the way places to ride. If you like to explore, the thought of pulling a trailer and unloading and loading a bike at different locations is out of the question. And the thought of running down the highway on a 250cc scooter is out of the question.

I didn't get much off road time with this motorcycle, but having spent a good part of my life in the dirt over the years, I can tell you that this is a lot of bike. It's too big for what I like in the dirt bike, but it's nice having that 650 cc engine to get you up that mountain or river bank. You just don't want to try and conquer tough terrain that requires you to put your feet down for support. The 35" seat height is a long stretch for my 31" inseam. This is the perfect bike for touring fire break roads or abandoned logging trails for days at a time. The best part about the KLR650 is the ability to get there. Not that this is an ideal road machine, but it is a great vehicle to get you to and from many of these places. You can smoke down the road at any posted speed for hours at a time. On my trip back to the barn, I was on the 101 headed south running about 80mph just to keep up with the traffic and that was a breeze.

Believe it or not, that little windshield makes a big difference. I must admit though, this little 650 does vibrate. It vibrates about the same as the Sportster with a frame mounted engine that I used to ride. Your hands will tingle after a long haul when you remove them from the wide handlebars. But its ability to get you any place you want to go with style has its advantages.

Summary

What a great dual purpose motorcycle. You can spend all week on the bike commuting around town, running errands, going to and from work, or just spending quality time with a two wheel friend. Then when the time permits, disappear from city life and explore the surrounding world at will. Seat height seems a little high for me, but at the same time, with the clearance that

the 650 has you can climb over a curb like rolling over a pebble. One of the neatest things about the Kawasaki is the \$5,349 price tag. WOW, is that a great deal or what!

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