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Two entries into the quarter-litre field

A TALE OF 250S

By Jeff Morgan // Photos by Ed Gatner

The entry level segment is one that has been ignored by the motorcycle industry in the past, but in recent years this seems to have been rectified. This is a good thing for the business, as these 'starter' bikes help get people into the sport who might otherwise be reluctant to jump on a full-size sportbike.

More and more companies are embracing this concept. Honda, for example, has its CBR125R and a race series dedicated to this bike. For the average person on the street the CBR serves as a first step into the sport bike world, but it will be outgrown quickly once the rider starts looking at any longer distance riding. Some riders in such a position will not be ready to jump up to a 600cc sport bike or something similar. This is where the 250 comes into play.

Two such entries into this market are the Hyosung GT250R and the Kawasaki Ninja 250R. The Ninja has been around for several years now, but the most recent incarnation is completely fresh after receiving a welcome facelift. The GT250R has remained largely unchanged since its release in 2005, but it does not appear to be at all outdated. These two bikes are designed for the same market, but they could not be more different in terms of their feel and size.



In 2008 Kawasaki decided to redesign the Ninja 250 for the first time since its inception in the mid 1980s, and this fresh new look is greatly appreciated. The previous version of the Ninja was looking stale and outdated, but that has been completely rectified by the redesign. From a distance, the Ninja 250 could now be easily mistaken for its bigger brothers. It is not until you get up close that you realize that this is only a 250cc machine.

Don't be fooled into thinking that this is only a cosmetic redesign. Kawasaki looked to improve the entire bike, and improve it they did. In the engine alone they changed 70 percent of the parts in an attempt to give the parallel-twin more power over the entire range, and they claim to have increased the power by 30 percent.

The free-spinning twin will never be accused of being loaded with torque but that is not the intention of this motor. It feels as though there is a lack of power off the bottom of the rpm range; that is until you hit 8000 rpm. This is when the little motor comes to life. The way the power comes on, and keeps

coming until you hit redline, is reminiscent of riding a 125 two-stroke.

The cockpit of the Ninja is cramped for anyone over 5'9", but not unbearable by any stretch of the imagination. One of our testers stands 6'2" and found it relatively comfortable despite the small size.

The fit and finish on the Ninja is, as you would expect from Kawasaki, top notch. All the controls are comfortable, well within reach and easy to use. The clutch is light and not difficult to use in stop-and-go traffic for prolonged periods of time.

Kawasaki opted for only a single rotor on the front of the 250 for braking duties and it is more than adequate when bringing the Ninja to a stop. The rear brake was equal to its front-end counterpart and performed well.

The Kawasaki features a non-inverted front fork and five-way adjustable rear suspension. Lighter riders will feel right at home with the softer settings.

Hyosung is quickly becoming a more recognizable name in the world of streetbikes and with models like the GT250R it is no wonder.

The differences between them are subtle, but they equal two completely different feeling bikes. Each have a good seating position, the Ninja is a little more compact compared to the Hyosung. These quarter liter machines handle well and would serve as good bikes for one to build their confidence on.

The characteristics of this bike are very different from the Kawasaki. It could be said that the Hyosung is less refined and it does have a rougher sort of feel to it, but in a charming kind of way.

As soon as you sit on the GT250R it feels kind of manly, for lack of a better term. Turn the key and push the starter button and the difference between the two becomes immediately evident. The V-Twin that Hyosung opted for in the GT-R offers a completely different sound and feel than that of the Ninja. It is certainly not a Harley V-Twin but it shares some of the characteristics that twins so often have; the lower revs, more torque and that certain "je ne sais quoi."

The overall layout of the GT-R definitely feels larger than the Ninja and would be best suited to taller riders or riders with a longer torso or arms. Shorter riders could find themselves stretching a bit on the Hyosung.



Kawasaki and Hyosung have paid close attention to detail with the slight edge going to the bike from the land of the rising sun. Components on both worked well but Hyosung was a little more aggressive in suspension and braking.

Both bikes handled well and seem to be a perfect stepping stone toward larger, more powerful sport bikes. The Ninja did feel lighter while riding, despite having a claimed five-pound weight disadvantage. Not that the GT-R felt like a tank. It just seemed to have a bit more top-end weight; this could perhaps be due to the more stretched-out riding position.

As mentioned, our Hyosung test unit had a decent amount of mileage on it and could have used a fresh rear tire, which might have put the GT-R over the top for handling performance.

It would be remiss of us not to note that the Hyosung came to us via the good people at Oxford Scooters and a very generous customer who allowed us to use his personal bike for the test. We had to employ their help thanks to a great selling season for the Korean quarter-litre sportbike.

The Kawasaki came courtesy of Canadian Kawasaki Motors.

Both of these bikes hit the mark for their intended market and either one would be a good choice for anyone looking to spend their hard earned dollars on a bike that could take their riding to the next level. The decision between these two bikes would come down to which bike fits them best. Both manufacturers sold all the units that they could last year, so if you think you might like one of these bikes, get to your local dealer as soon as possible and see if you can get one on order, if it is not already too late. **IM**

The controls are simple, clean and well laid-out, but did feel a little unrefined for our taste. The clutch lever took a bit of energy to fully engage and disengage, and felt a bit grabby at times. This should not be a deal-breaker for any perspective purchasers since they will likely be on the larger side of the equation.

Hyosung one-upped Kawi by putting dual rotors up front to handle the duties of decreasing the velocity of bike and rider, and it performed those duties admirably. The rear brake on our tester left a little to be desired as it had a fair bit of mileage and could probably have used a bit of a refresher.

On the opposite side of the suspension factor, the Hyosung was sprung much firmer than the Kawi and is better suited to the overall layout of the bike. As stiff as the suspension is, it is still lively and not rock hard; the inverted front fork soaked up the bumps well and never really dove, except under hard braking. The rear end of the bike is well matched and performed equally well.

KAWASAKI NINJA 250R

MSRP: \$4,699 (\$4,849 - Special Edition Lime)
Colours: Special Edition Lime Green, KMT Candy Thunder Blue, KMT Metallic Diablo Black, KMT Sunbeam Red
Engine: Four-stroke, liquid-cooled, DOHC, parallel twin
Displacement: 249cc
Bore x stroke: 62.0 x 41.2mm
Compression ratio: 11.6:1
Carburetion: Keihin CVK30 x 2
Transmission: Six-speed
Frame: Semi-double cradle, high-tensile steel
Wheelbase: 1400 mm
Seat height: 775 mm
Overall length: 2085 mm
Overall width: 715 mm
Overall height: 1110 mm
Dry weight: 152.86 kg claimed
Front suspension/wheel travel: 37mm hydraulic telescopic fork
Rear suspension/wheel travel: Bottom-Link Uni-Trak® with five-way adjustable preload/5.1"
Front tire: 110/70-17
Rear tire: 130/70-17
Front brake: Single 290mm hydraulic petal disc with two-piston caliper
Rear brake: Single 220mm petal disc with two-piston caliper
Fuel capacity: 18.17 L

HYOSUNG GT250R

MSRP: \$5,195; Two Tone \$5,395
Colours: Red, Black, Two-tone Red/Black, Two-tone Black/Grey
Engine: four-stroke, air/oil cooled, v-twin
Displacement: 249cc
Bore and stroke: 57 x 48.8
Compression Ratio: 10.3:1
Carburetion: Mikuni BDS26 X 2
Transmission: five-speed
Frame: Perimeter Double Cradle
Wheelbase: 1445.26mm
Seat Height: 779.78mm
Overall length: 2080.26mm
Overall width: 759.45mm
Overall height: 1120.13mm
Dry Weight: 150.00 kg (claimed)
Front suspension: 41mm Upside down Telescopic fork
Rear suspension: Linkage type Mono shock absorber (Preload adjustable)
Front tire: 110/70-17
Rear tire: 150/70-17
Front brake: 300mm Semi floating double discs, two piston calipers
Rear brake: 230mm Single disc, two piston caliper
Fuel capacity: 17.03 L