

'99 HARLEYS: WE RIDE 'EM • 5 ROYAL STAR CUSTOMS

M O T O R C Y C L E
CRUISER

EXCLUSIVE!

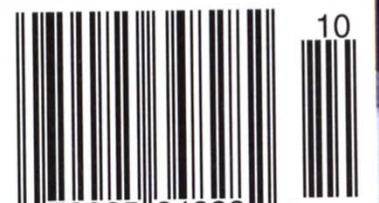
Past Perfect

**Kawasaki's 1999 Drifter:
Riding a new wave
in retro style**



**HONDA AERO COAST TO COAST
SISSYBAR BAGS • CHANGING HANDLEBARS**

OCTOBER 1998

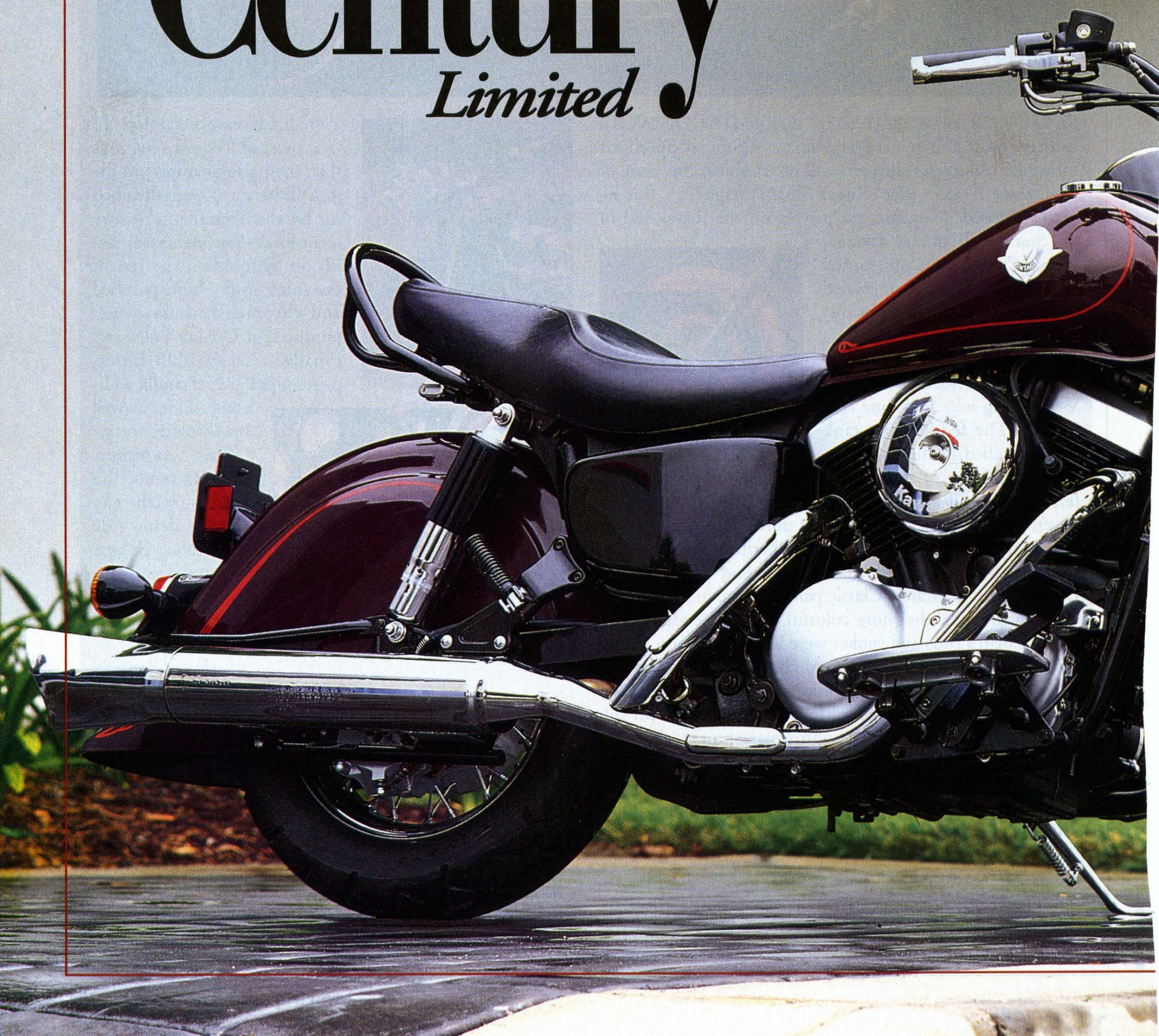


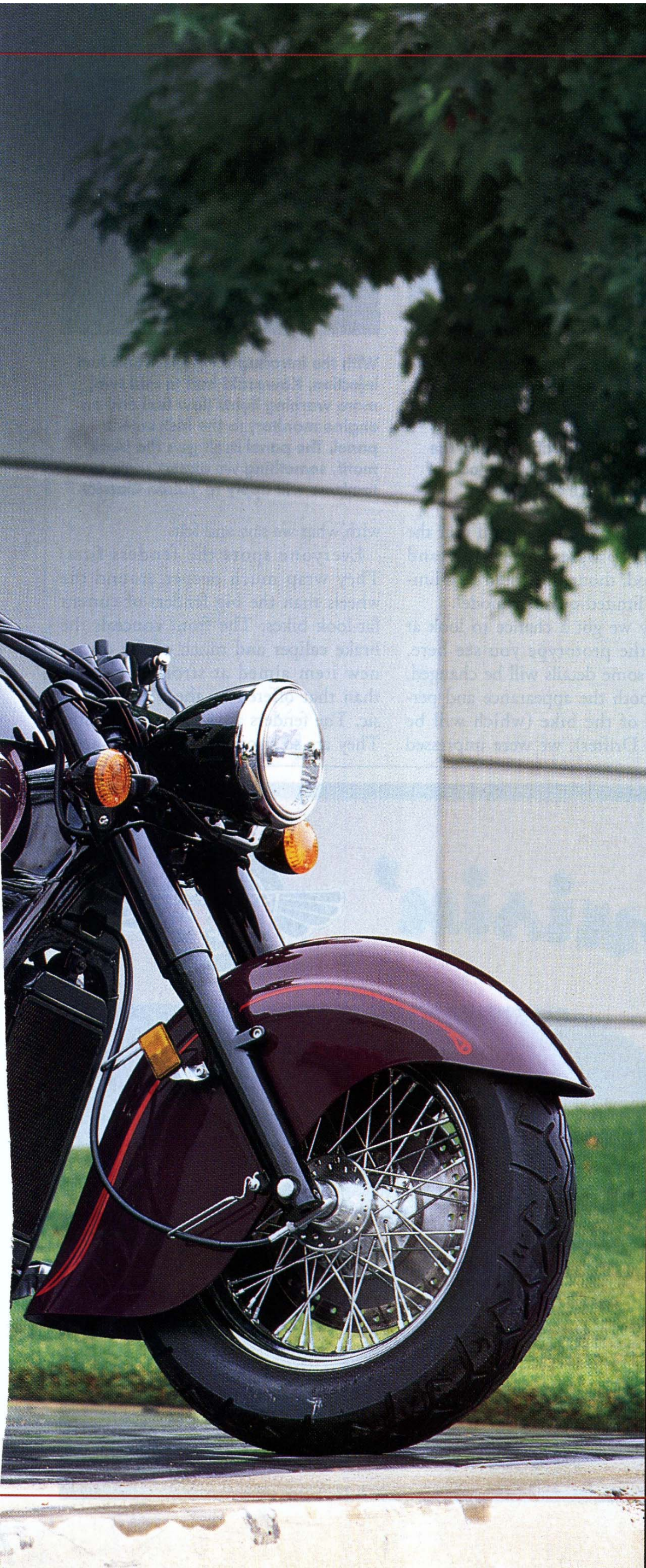
0 79025 34828 2 10

\$3.50 USA \$4.50 CANADA

A PETERSEN PUBLICATION

20th Century *Limited*





KAWASAKI DRIFTER

Going backward as well as forward

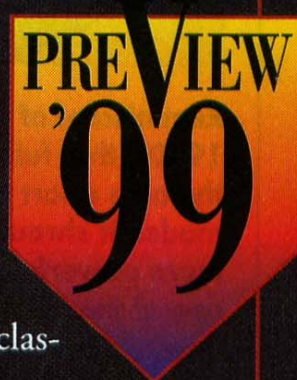
BY ART FRIEDMAN

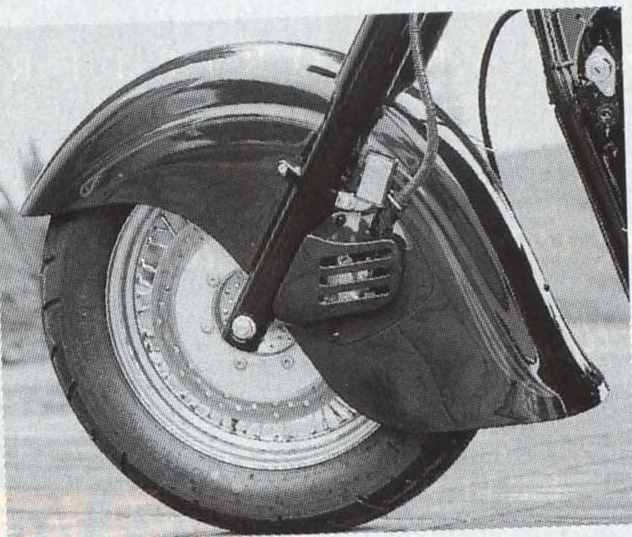
KAWASAKI WASN'T THE FIRST to think of it. It just paid attention. Many motorcyclists have longed for a cruiser with classic American styling in varieties not adopted by Harley-Davidson. There are traditional American lines that are older and, to many riders, prettier and more elegant than those lifted from post-war machines.

The appeal of that American alternative has inspired a number of attempts to revive the Indian marque, none of which has borne fruit to date. However, it has also prompted many riders to create their own renditions of bikes from that lost era of American style.

The motorcycle that inspired Kawasaki to produce the bike you see here started as a 1996 project concocted by Don Emde, Ken Boyko and Denny Berg. Emde, a prominent American motorcyclist whose family sold Indian Motocycles until the brand withered away in the 1950s, believed that the then-new Kawasaki 1500 Vulcan Classic was the perfect starting point for a modern motorcycle with Indian-like styling. He found Boyko, of Cobra Engineering, enthusiastic about the idea. They took it to customizing genius Berg, who turned it into a rolling, running reality.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRAN KUHN





Reminiscent of a luxury car from the 1930s, that full, sweeping fender sets the bike apart from any other current model. It shrouds the caliper for the more powerful front brake, which is one of the functional advances of this new/old motorcycle.

Like other companies building products for Kawasaki Vulcans, Cobra was asked to take its custom Vulcans to the 1997 Kawasaki dealer meeting that fall. There, the bike dubbed the Super Chief received such an enthusiastic reception from both dealers and Kawasaki designers and engineers that the company decided to explore the feasibility of building it even before the meeting was



The pretty two-into-one fishtail muffler gives the bike an authoritative but muted exhaust note that won't be confused with the standard Vulcan's rumble. Black rails around the fender and saddle reflect the look of the period the bike emulates.

over. Not long after, we heard that the project was progressing rapidly and looked good, though it would be a limited-time, limited-quantity model.

Recently we got a chance to look at and ride the prototype you see here. Although some details will be changed, affecting both the appearance and performance of the bike (which will be called the Drifter), we were impressed



With the introduction of electronic fuel injection, Kawasaki had to add two more warning lights (low fuel and an engine monitor) to the instrument panel. The panel itself gets the black motif, something we expect some customizers will apply to Vulcan Classics.

with what we saw and felt.

Everyone spots the fenders first. They wrap much deeper around the wheels than the big fenders of current fat-look bikes. The front conceals the brake caliper and much of the disc, a new item aimed at stronger braking than that offered by the Vulcan Classic. The fenders are a very rigid plastic. They are so strong that we could actu-

**NEW
FOR 98**

EASY Cruisin'



Ace Leather's Extra Large Saddlebag ensures plenty of cargo room for your traveling needs. Manufactured from heavy grade leather and top quality hardware. Hard ABS backing makes the bag hold its shape. Not an import! Made in the USA.

Have your dealer contact

**PARTS
UNLIMITED**

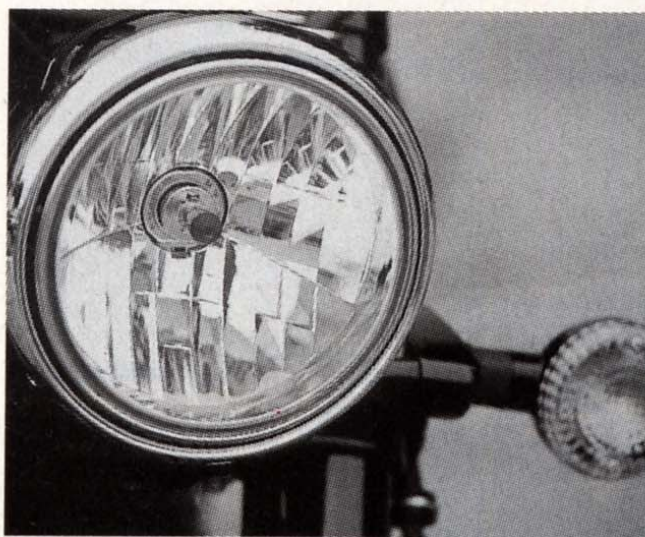
See Parts Unlimited's Cruiser 98 Catalog for more Ace Leather Products: saddlebags, tool bags & tank panels.



Part # DS110811
Size: 15"x 12"x 8"



Vulcan 1500 owners who are tired of using mirrors to see the oil level window will welcome the repositioned one making its debut on the Drifter. We'd be even more enthusiastic if you could check the level with the bike on the sidestand instead of upright.



Accurately incorporating the look of the pre-war period, Kawasaki picked a unique headlight lens and set it (with a chromed rim) into a deep, black headlight shell. The fork covers, headlight supports, and even the turn signal stalks got the blacked-out finish.

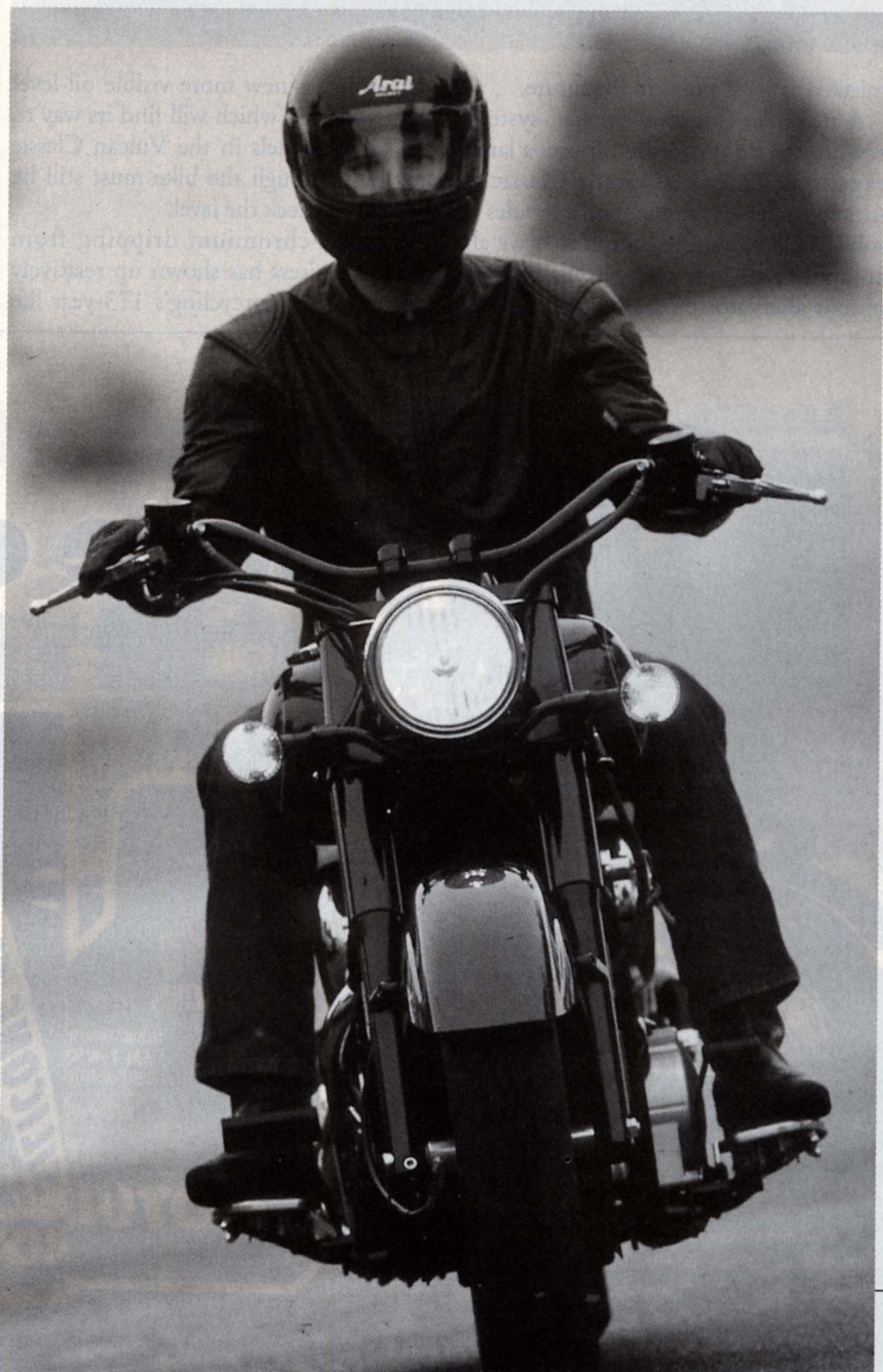


To give the fender the low profile available on a motorcycle without rear suspension, it was mounted to the swingarm and wrapped snugly around the wheel. Many of the pieces on this prototype, including the seat rail and shocks, will change.

ally grab them and lift the bike—and the fenders didn't flex. The rear fender mounts to the swingarm; a move that allows the fender to fit more snugly on the wheel and also permits the elimination of the rear sub-frame to provide a hardtail-like profile. The dual saddle is sort of cantilevered, creating an appearance like the old sprung-type saddles. Kawasaki still has to finalize the design of the seat rail. Though a dual saddle will be standard, Cobra already has a solo saddle in the works.

The engine and chassis are basically lifted from the Vulcan Classic, but with some key changes. For one thing, the engine gets electronic fuel injection. Although Kawasaki certainly made this change with an eye on emissions, it has other potential benefits as well. The bike was noticeably smoother off idle and seemed to be stronger than the current Classic. Since it uses two throats, the EFI offers some of the benefits of dual carbs.

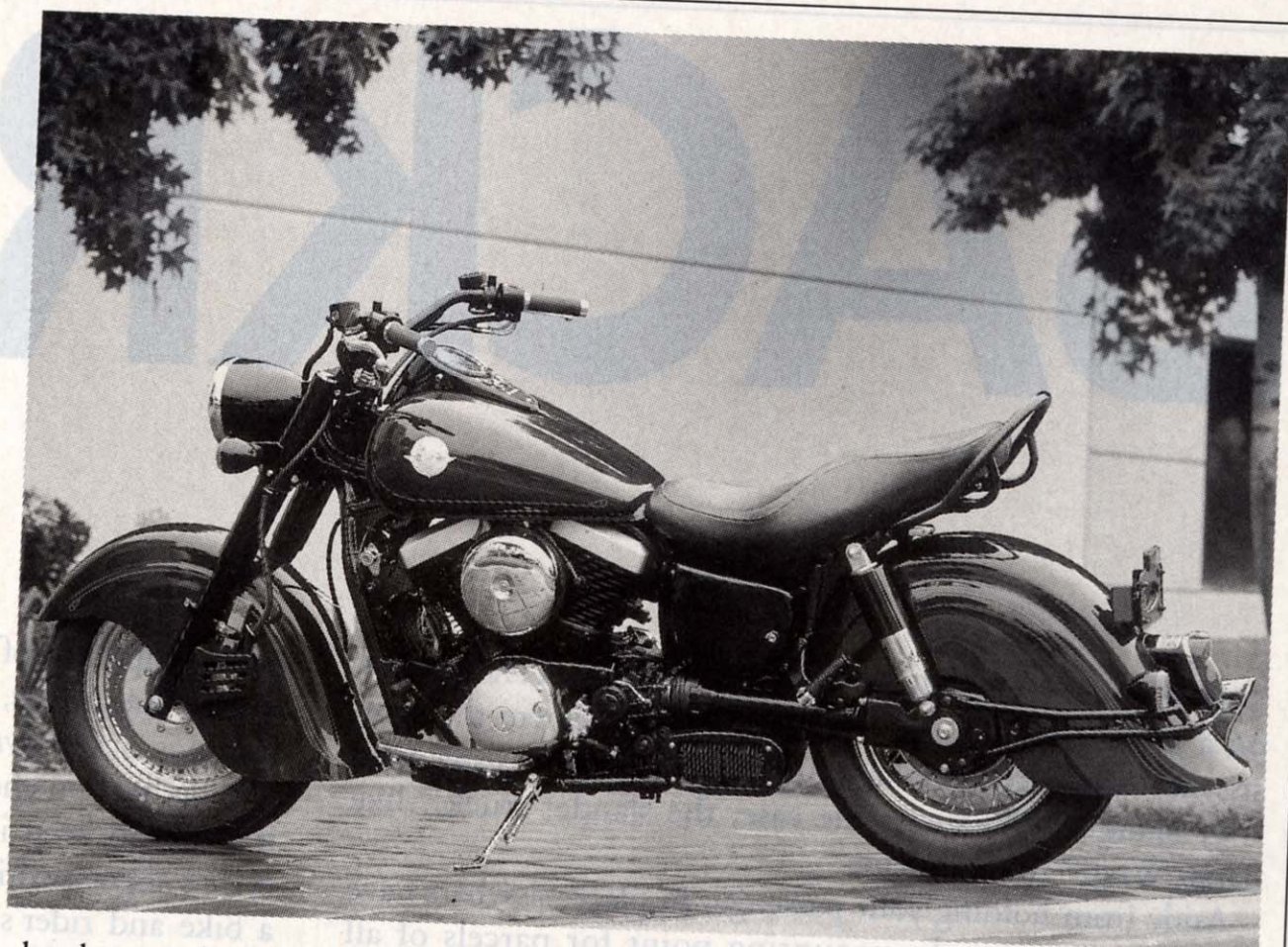
Kawasaki says that the camshafts fitted to the bike we rode will not be used in production. A rep told us that the engineers expect to be able to use more aggressive cams in conjunction with the fuel injection. What the effect will be on performance and fuel economy (the Drifter uses the 4.8-gallon tank of the Classic) remains to be seen in the final machine. Fuel injection has often reduced fuel mileage in motorcycles, although Harley's system has produced positive changes to fuel consumption. This bike certainly had a nice engine and throttle response. And we hope the final version works as well, because other models in the line will probably be fuel-



three, with the addition of lights for fuel injection and fuel level. The latter is needed since there is no reserve position with the fuel-injection system.

A special coating gives the covers for the cam boxes and crankcases a flat, as-cast appearance. A cast-aluminum tank badge also fits the period that the Drifter recalls. The chrome airbox covers stand out starkly against the muted finishes of the rest of the engine bay. The bike we rode was painted an elegant burgundy with pinstripes.

Kawasaki hasn't set a price yet, though with the current exchange rates, it hopes to sell the bike here for a price that belies its limited numbers and high-tech intake system. It may even be able to keep it under the price of the Nomad. Production quantities have not been determined either. "It will depend on what customers tell us," came the reply when we asked about production figures and future production plans. That was one of the reasons why we were offered this early look, to give Kawasaki some feedback (remember it is a prototype). Hopefully, every dealer will be able to order one. There will



also be good aftermarket support; we shot this bike at Cobra, where the process of fitting it for dress-up accessories had already begun.

We'd guess that the 1999 version of the Drifter will become an instant collectors' piece based on its ultra-retro style and limited availability. However,

if our quick rides on the motorcycle are an accurate indication of the final product, this isn't a motorcycle you simply put on display. To fully appreciate it, you need to experience the responsive engine and other forward-looking pieces under that nostalgic bodywork. This show belongs on the road. ☺

Experience the Difference!

Install Progressive Suspension!

418 Series Premium High Performance Aluminum body twin shock with springs.

Five position, externally adjustable rebound damping range allows you to dial in the ride you want. Spring pre-load can be easily adjusted with cam. Shocks come complete with springs. Specify black or chrome.

412 series Steel body twin shock with springs.

Spring pre-load can be adjusted easily with cam. Shocks come ready to bolt on. Specify black or chrome springs.

Cruise Control® Lowering Kits

Cruise Control® fork lowering kits are available for certain cruiser style motorcycles. They give you the choice to lower your bike one or two inches. These kits when combined with our shorter than stock shocks give a distinctive custom look to your motorcycle yet still provide an excellent ride.

Progressive rate fork springs.

Our famous springs have the ability to provide a plush ride over small bumps and absorb larger ones. This design gives you the best of both worlds!

Twin Shocks • Cruise Control® Fork Lowering Kits • Fork Springs



Available at your local Dealer.

www.progressivesuspension.com
e-mail: info@progressivesuspension.com
11129 G Avenue, Hesperia, CA 92345