



The Kawasaki KT330...



Words and Photos supplied by
Toon van de Vliet from Noppen nieuws

The Kawasaki KT330 is a very special trials bike built by Don Smith, European trial champion of the sixties (1962-1964 - Greeves and 1969 - Montesa). He started the project when the Japanese began showing an interest in the trials market for the very first time. That interest didn't last for long though, when they found out that trials wasn't a particularly big market. Needless to say, that makes this 'works prototype' KT330 very rare.

Don Smith was a phenomenal character, truly one of a kind. He was a constant smoker, even when he was riding, and besides that he enjoyed not only the Scottish landscapes and scenery but also the locally produced whisky, blended and malt in all their forms. 'Smithy' (he had many nicknames...) loved the pleasures of life in all forms! (Clearly a long lost relative of that other Scot called Smith who smokes, drinks and dabbles on a KT, if only he could ride they might be brothers - Ed).

The 'Don' was the complete opposite to Sammy Miller, who as an Irishman never touched Guinness beer or Bushmill malt whiskey at all. But Don Smith stepped in as a development rider for Montesa, after Sammy Miller did the first Spanish job with the legendary Sherpa in 1964. Smith, and Pedro Pi, were responsible for the successful Cota 247 made out of the early Cappa and Impala machines. But not many people know that the Dutch Montesa importer Henk Vink had already started the Montesa development in 1965-1966. And after Don Smith won the 1969

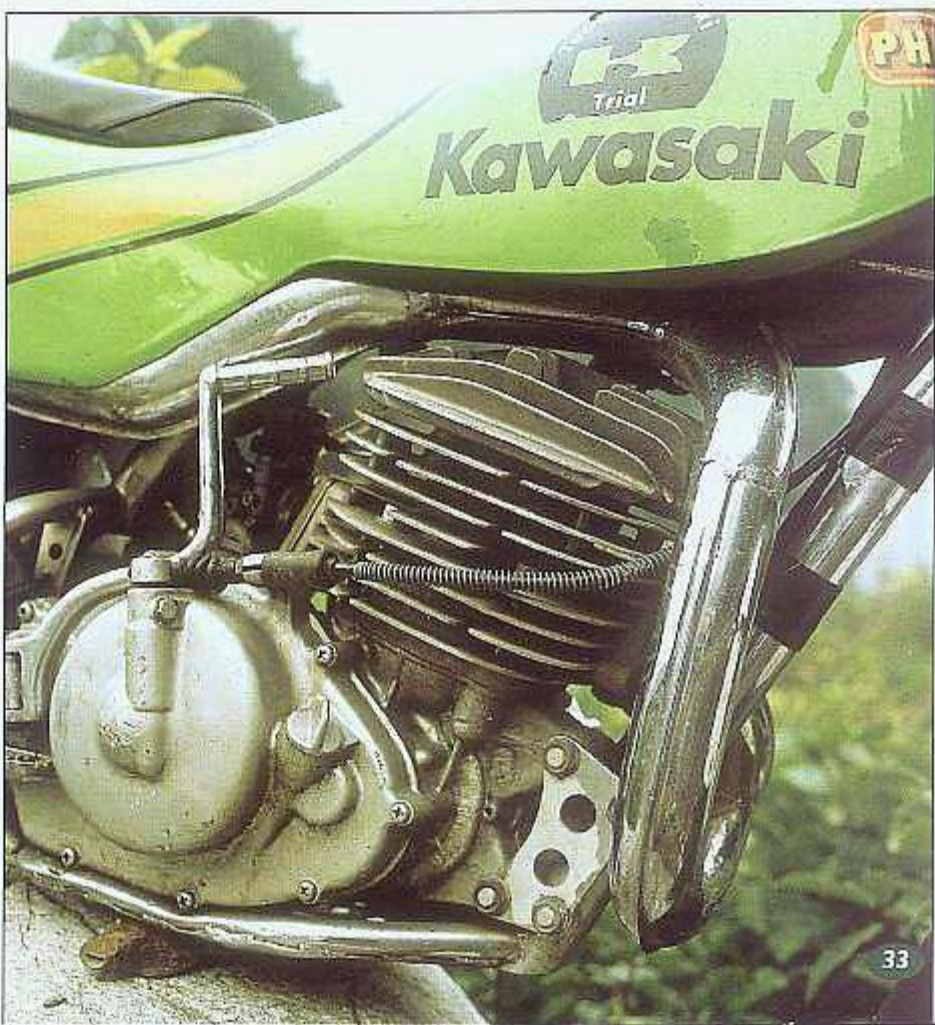


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Scottish Six Days Trial on the Cota 247, the Spaniards took over the job themselves. So Smithy was unemployed again!

So how did this Smith/Vink/Kawasaki connection come together you may ask? Let's go back a bit again...! Don Smith's time as a works rider for Greeves brought him the opportunity to visit several countries on the continent including Germany, Belgium, France and also The Netherlands, where he met the Dutch trials champion - Henk Vink.

Vink was competing on a Triumph Cub, having started with his father's James. Over the course of his career he collected eleven Dutch titles. His friendship with Don Smith saw him riding Greeves as well, and of course he helped Smith with the Cota and his contract with Montesa. Henk started importing Kawasakis in the mid sixties and did very well selling their road bikes. After a short spell with Ossa, Henk Vink wanted a Kawasaki trials bike for himself.



Opposite top: It might be called a KT but you'd be hard pressed to find any parts on this one that will fit the production bike.

Opposite bottom: The Whitlock-framed masterpiece is quite happy to balance on rock outcrops even without a rider. Those Kayaba forks look very trick indeed and you won't find them on any other bike.

Above: Henk Vink experimented with another Kawasaki prototype prior to the development of the KT, using a 350 Bighorn motor in a one-off frame. How rare is that!

Right: You can spot the KX-derived motor a mile off, a shrunken version of their 450 mill.

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and also to sell on the open market, and so Don Smith got involved again. By the way, Vink was also successful in the Amsterdam property market and became suitably rich and also famous. He was also famous in drag racing too, using (expensive!) twin engine, Kawasaki four cylinder machines and went on to become a world record holder.

He also lived life hard and fast, just as fast as his motor sport career. Henk died eighteen years ago, the day after his 50th birthday. His 50th birthday party was on a 20-metre long yacht - there was too much of everything and his heart stopped the next day. He has been remembered though for much more than his partying and in Holland there is a Henk Vink Trophy, which is awarded every year to a person who did something extra special for motor sport. Unfortunately his friend Don Smith has never received that award. I'm proud to say, that I was fortunate enough to win the Henk Vink Trophy in 1997.

But... back to the KT330. Don Smith originally started the project with motocross frames and 450 cc two stroke engines from Kawasaki. With help from British engineers the prototypes were entered in the 1973 Scottish and the team finished with good results - Richie Sunter winning the 500 cc cup. From those prototypes came the production KT250, but after three years of full Japanese works support, all further development work stopped. The KT250 existed and that was that.

The bike has a frame from specialist UK frame-builder Mick Whitlock, who built all the highboy frames for Sammy Miller's Bultacos and the first batch of Hondas. Whitlock frames also housed Yamaha TY engines and so why not a Kawasaki engine? The 330 cc engine (bore x stroke - 80 x 64.9 mm) is unique, it's a very lively engine with a lot of potential. A Mikuni carburettor with a reed valve inlet system helped the KT into a new trials-period. So did the special Whitlock frame with the laid-forward shocks. Also worth noting are the extremely plush set of air-assisted forks, which as far as we know are one of a kind Kayaba units.

Chrome plated frames were Mick Whitlock's trademark but they were also very light and that, combined with the handmade plastics and the use of other lightweight materials, made the total weight of the bike around 78 kilograms. At the time that was very near the lightest and certainly compared more than favourably with the Beamish Suzuki used by Malcolm Rathmell. The drum brakes were also special 'factory' items and they work!

A special bike built by a special man which ended up with a very special Dutchman - both men lived too short a time, but trials brought them together. The works bikes and (spare) parts went to Don Smith as a gift and he later sold them to Henk Vink. The circle was now complete!

More than ten years later we asked Henk Vink's widow for a test ride and she agreed. In case you're wondering, yes, she still owns the machine! As the only journalist in the world who has been allowed to ride the bike, I'm naturally very proud, but not as grateful as I am for having had the opportunity to get to know both these 'characters' very well.



The KT330 was an easy bike to manoeuvre with its punchy motor and only 78kgs to carry.

