

KAWASAKI ER-6f

Fairing well?

Kawasaki's excellent ER-6 now comes with a fairing. Is it an improvement?

BY ADAM CHILD PICTURES BY DOUBLE RED

KAWASAKI'S naked ER-6n has already proved itself a class-leading machine.

Launched in July 2005, it boasts a water-cooled 650cc parallel twin engine in a lightweight chassis, all wrapped up in funky styling. It came top in our group test (MCN September 21), showing how much fun it is, how easy it is to ride and how cheap it is.

But for 2006, Kawasaki has brought out the ER-6f – a faired version. So does it actually make it any better? We found out at its world launch in wet and freezing conditions – a true test of the new bike's weather protection.

SO WHAT'S NEW?

THE fairing isn't a simple budget bolt-on – Kawasaki has used the distinctive Z1000 headlight and built the fairing around it. It exudes quality, the indicators fit flush and the clocks are new, featuring an analogue speedo and rev counter and a digital display for fuel gauge, trip, clock and water temp.

Kawasaki has made a few technical changes to compensate for the fairing's extra weight. The forks are now 10mm longer and slightly stiffer than the ER-6n and the rear suspension has been tweaked accordingly.

Those longer forks also affect the bike's steering geometry slightly. The castor angle and trail

have both increased slightly, as has the wheelbase, while the longer suspension means the seat height is 5mm taller, too – it's still fairly low at 790mm, though. The fairing means dry weight is up 4kg to 178kg, but it's still one of the lightest bikes in the class – 23kg lighter than Suzuki's Bandit.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

THE chassis and geometry changes are hardly noticeable, only becoming apparent in a back-to-back test with the unfaired bike.

The biggest difference is the effect of the fairing. Sustained cruising from 75mph (5500rpm) to 85 (6500) is no problem; the ergonomics are excellent and it is surprisingly comfy for a small bike. Taller riders may find the screen slightly low and opt for the flip-up screen, but for me (at 5'6") it's fine.

The only real downside is the mirrors. Fixed to the fairing rather than the bars, I always had 50% of the mirror filled with my elbows or shoulders however I adjusted them. As a consequence, you end up twisting your arm slightly to get a clear full view.

HOW ABOUT PERFORMANCE?

ENGINE tune and gear ratios are exactly the same as the naked model, with a quoted 69bhp. When we datalogged an ER-6n it reached a true 130mph, so once

we've datalogged them together the improved aerodynamics of the f should see a few extra mph.

Handling is almost identical to the n – it just feels slightly heavier. However, it's still very flickable, immense fun and very easy to ride.

ANYTHING ELSE?

LIKE the n, the ER-6f is available with ABS – we tested it to the full on slippery, almost frozen roads. You can feel the rear brake releasing and biting as the system works out how much force to apply. The ER-6 has always had class-winning brakes and the ABS system adds to the secure feeling.

WHO WILL BUY ONE?

WE reckon the ER-6f will have very wide appeal: new riders and those returning to two wheels, of all ages and both sexes. It's small, light and easy to ride but still has enough punch to put a smile on your face. It also looks the part and, with the fairing, is easily capable of a touring holiday around Europe. At under £5000 (£5295 for the ABS model) and only another £300 over the naked model it's priced competitively, too.

HOW DOES IT COMPARE TO THE OPPOSITION?

ON face value, it seems to have bikes like the Bandit 650 and Honda's CBF600 beaten. But if you look at faired middleweight bikes for £5000, you have to consider Yamaha's Fazer and Kawasaki's Z750. They're a few hundred quid dearer, but offer much more power and more fun.

The new ER-6f's most serious rival is the Suzuki SV650S – and that will be much closer to call. We'll bring you the definitive test shortly.

VERDICT

KAWASAKI'S ER-6 has already proved its worth. It's fun, light, looks funky, is easy to ride and has enough power to have fun. Adding a fairing has definitely increased that appeal, especially for those who want to do serious miles.

THE new fairing is a quality unit built around the aggressive Z1000 headlight





'The new fairing isn't a simple budget bolt-on. It exudes quality'

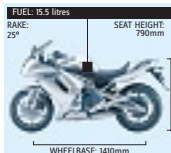


THE ER-6f should have a wider appeal than its naked brother

KAWASAKI ER-6f
★★★★★

COST: £4895
POWER: (claimed) 69bhp
WEIGHT: (claimed) 176kg
TORQUE: (claimed) 46ftlb

Availability: Now
Colours: Green, silver, black
New for 2005: New model
Insurance group: 9 (of 17)
Info: Kawasaki UK, 01628-856750



TECHNICAL SPEC
Engine: Liquid-cooled 649cc (83 x 60mm) dohc four-stroke parallel twin. Fuel injection. Six gears.
Chassis: Steel tube frame. 41mm forks, adjustable for pre-load, single rear shock, adjustable for rebound damping and pre-load. Brakes: 2 x 300mm front discs with four-piston calipers. 220mm rear disc with twin-piston caliper (ABS option £400). Tyres: 120/70 x 17 front, 160/60 x 17 rear.

Head-to-head

Yamaha MT-03 v Aprilia Pegaso Strada

BY PHIL WEST PICTURES BY CHIPPY WOOD

THEY'VE both got the same engine, but it's fitted in two very different packages...



YAMAHA MT-03

THE 660cc single-cylinder MT-03 is the new little brother to Yamaha's outrageous 1900cc V-twin MT-01, launched last year. That said, styling similarities apart (underseat pipes, angular bodywork, funky headlamp, wacky offset rear shock) the two have nowt in common. In a nutshell: the MT-01 is a big, burly, expensive beast; the MT-03 is a dinky, doddle-to-ride, affordable lightweight.

SO it should: it's the bang-up-to-date liquid-cooled, fuel-injected dohc four valver taken straight from Yamaha's XT660, that was introduced last year. It's a good 'un, too. It's flexible and smooth, throttle response is crisp, the gearchange is light and positive, it cruises happily at 75-80mph and tops out around 100.

THE styling is, in the words of my five-year-old, "wicked" (the brazen white paint is striking and reminiscent of LC and R1-Z Yams). Brakes and suspension are a bit budget, but there's that funky (and effective) headlamp, the natty dual-texture seat, MT-01-alike pipes and build quality/finish is good, though switchgear and instrumentation is fairly basic. Overall, for a sub-£5k Bike, the MT-03 is a nice thing.

THINK of it as a tricked up, funky, stumpy novice single. The MT-03 is dinky, stumpy and small; an absolute doddle to ride and handles well, too. Novices will love it, town trendies will bask in its chic, experienced riders will cane it. Its steering, grip and manageability mean you can position it on a sixpence, even at 85mph. So you take all sorts of silly liberties - sliding the rear into turns and generally playing the idiot. Great fun.

BEST for the uber-stylish novice, town-bound or female/small riders. A great handler and great fun, if a bit dinky.

Price: £4700 (est) **Engine:** Liquid-cooled 660cc 4v four-stroke single **Weight:** 174.5kg **Power:** 45bhp **Torque:** 41.5ftlb

APRILIA PEGASO

IT'S the new Pegaso, the latest version of the road-friendly 650cc single-cylinder 'trailie' which has been one of the constants of Aprilia's range for as long as anyone can remember. That said, name and basic layout apart, the new Pegaso has nothing in common with Pegasos of yore as in the past they were tall, street-fied trail bikes; the new Strada is a pure, manageable street bike.

What are these two all about then?

Er, that engine sounds familiar...

What else have they got?

Sum up the riding experience...

Our verdict

Specs

THAT'S right - it's the same as the MT-03's, although to Aprilia's spec. They may call it a 650, it might say Aprilia on the clutch cover and it might have different bits and bobs, but it's the same - and the first Yamaha-powered Aprilia to boot. Nothing at all wrong with that, it's probably the best engine in the class, anyway.

THE new Pegaso is pretty pukka, too. Swish details include Brembo brakes, funky RSV-style cast alloy wheels, twin underseat pipes, a funky headlamp and slinky bodywork. Overall, it's a classy bit of kit. The suspension, though, is an exercise in cost-cutting (but, this doesn't matter too much, as the machine is so waif-like) while neither switchgear, clocks nor mirrors are particularly clever...

THINK of it as a BMW F650 but with more go, better handling and bags more style and cool. In fact, the only bit of F650 that remains is that cohesive, well-rounded element. Street trailies are often ragged, vibey bitas. The Pegaso is a potent, polished smoothie. It's bigger than the MT and thus, for some, more realistic and versatile. If the Yamaha is a waiflike size 8, the Pegaso is a curvy 12, and we all know which we prefer most of the time...

LACKS MT's killer style and handling, but cool and versatile. An F650 for 2006 with added Italian style and panache.

Price: £4995 **Engine:** Liquid-cooled 660cc 4v four-stroke single **Weight:** 170kg **Power:** 50bhp **Torque:** 45.2ftlb