



KLX300 First Impressions – Review One

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I promised a review when I had chance to spend some time on my new kwak so here it is.

I'm not going to bore you with the usual oft repeated specifications and plagiarised facts and figures. Rather this is a personal opinion of a new KLX300 after I have done about 750 miles since taking delivery.

I bought it from Bavins of Diss, Norfolk and have been pleased with their service. List price was about £3,800 but I got an excellent deal for cash. ET James were about the only other Kawasaki supplier in the country that had one left. What I didn't realise was that, unlike a car, you can't just go along to dealer, ask for a new bike – the dealer goes off to Kawasaki and they get a bike delivered. With offroad and competition bikes, they are manufactured at

the start of the "season" (around Sep/Oct) and the dealers get the bikes to sell. Once they're gone – that's your lot mate until next season!. So it took quite a bit of phoning about to find one. ET James had one (Mid-Wales) and Bavins of Diss had one too. They were about equidistant from me (Matlock, Derbyshire) – but as Bavins promised a better deal for cash – they won the toss.

Peter Bavin brought the bike up on his truck for £50 – which I was well happy with as riding the bike back would have been time consuming and just about as costly. I also got a Paddock Stand – totally invaluable.

The bike as standard is not road legal. You need a Dipped Beam, Horn, Brake Light, Speedo and appropriately legal tyres. Provided is the Kill Switch, the main light, trip counter and the rear light. Contrary to various things I've read, you do NOT need indicators – but if they are on the bike they must work (particularly for an MOT). I had a stock road kit installed by Bavins. Horn, Brake Light, Main light dip beam switch and Speedo. The whole lot set me back about another £100 or so, plus about £70 for the two tyres but it was obviously necessary. The numberplate is the "legally required size".. mmm probably snap off at some point but I haven't replaced it yet with anything smaller.

It arrived with Bridgestone Gritty tyres which are road legal and almost indistinguishable from the stock tyres. Apparently the Motocross tyres have 16mm of tread height, whereas the road legal tyres have 12mm. What I do know is that the stock tyres have Not for Highway Use writ large on the tyre wall and thus are easy prey for the local politzia. I have done about 750 miles now and the rear is wearing down. I have heard that the Gritty tyres are prone to this, so I may look at the Pirelli P21's or some other alternative when it comes time to change.

The first night I impatiently swilled some petrol in from a five litre can I have had since the petrol "crisis" a few years ago and kicked it over. Being a four-stroke you can't just kick at it until it starts like you can a two stroke. The instructions for starting it are printed on the tank and to be honest sound horrendous. The reality is that you should develop a feel for where Top Dead Centre (TDC) is and give it one firm kick all the way down. It does require some choke when it's cold., although I generally click the choke off within a minute of use or I tend to forget it's on. Tick-over can be adjusted via a plastic knurled knob on the carb. I ran out of petrol the following morning on the way to work – fortunately – reserve got me to the petrol station. Watch the tank!! – or you'll be having such a good time mingling about you'll run out somewhere inconvenient.

When cold it starts very easily. When it's hot its maybe a little harder to start – although to be fair the only time I've had trouble is when I've been tired; when the bikes been dropped and stalled or when I'm in an awkward position to be able to kick it over positively. There is no decompression lever – it has

auto-decompression which is excellent and simple. An electric start would be a dream – but as it would add about 8-10kg to the overall weight, I am somewhat ambivalent.

The weight of the bike is around 100kg and it feels light. I have to get the damn thing down a set of stone steps and through a gate whilst doing so (backwards) – then to run it back up a wooden plank to get back out on the road. Not the best scenario but I don't have a garage. It is locked up tighter than a tick though at night with four professional bike chains / ground anchors and an alarm – through a locked gate with three padlocks. I am not taking any chances and of course I have guns in the house 😊

When riding on the road, the bike handles perfectly. It really is the Fred Astaire of its class. In the dry it can be flicked around corners with ease. In the wet, when knobbles are making about four square inches of contact with the wet road, it still handles positively and with perfect manners.

Off road – well it positively leaps to life and skits over rough ground with precision and stability. Even on water-eroded trails with much exposed loose stones up to the size of a hat, it never feels as though it's going to let you down or do anything unexpected. It is very forgiving of mistakes and the suspension set on default settings (Setting 12 front and rear on a 1 to 16 position) means you get a firm ride, with little or no front wheel chatter except at higher speeds in excess of 60 mph on the road.

I confess I haven't yet played about with the suspension settings though so I won't get into the pros and cons here now as I am hardly experienced enough to do so.

The stock bars are not up to much. First time out offroad in Linacre Woods near Chesterfield, I dropped the bike taking a corner and the bars twisted out of shape. They were not much good after that so I spent £30 on some Renthals and at the same time threw the plastic green handguards away that came with it. They look like green ears and would be little use other than to fend off small flies and twigs. Acerbis metal reinforced handguards and a crossbar pad for the bars completed the look. The clutch and front brake levers I loosened off so they can move in the event of a crash.

To be honest, the lights / kill switch / main beam dip switch and the horn all have separate switches and are impractical to use. I shall replace them with an aftermarket switch (see the picture right) that brings all these functions into one switch... when I stop riding the damn thing for five minutes 😊



I changed the oil and filters at 500 miles.

I should have done it after 100 miles I think, but I misread the manual. The manual is adequate, but like most supplied manuals it leaves you begging for a Haynes and as soon as I see one, I'll have it. 1.5 litres of Oil if you have changed the oil filter.

I was told by a chap at Moto Brox in Derby that the back suspension is worth stripping down about four times a year to grease and clean. I oil the chain regularly but probably not as regularly as I should.

How much does it do to the gallon? – I haven't run it dry yet, but the tanks apparently holds 2.6 gallon – about 13 litres. It appears to use 5.2 litres for about 70 miles of mixed riding. So this would extrapolate to about 150 miles. I have heard that 120 miles is more like it so I will keep you posted when I update this review at periodic intervals in the future.

How does it compare with a two stroke? I have only ever had two strokes. My last bike was a Yamaha YZ250. The powerband on that was typical for a two-stroke MX bike – nothing – then all! – I suspect the power curve when plotted had an almost vertical line at about three thousand revs.

The KLX300 is nothing like that and never does anything unexpected. It provides smooth controllable power with a torquey grunt that is perfect for trail riding. Drop it into second and wheelies are almost a snap – except I'm not good at wheelies ☺ .. yet!.. I have heard a tale though of a KLX 300 seizing up after a prolonged wheelie due to oil starvation – you have been warned!

The lights are adequate and the build quality is typical for a Jap bike. There isn't the feeling of quality like you get from the KTM EXC's – but then they are about £1.5 - £2k more expensive. No Brembo brakes / Talons / Renthals as standard here. You do get the feeling that they've perfected the art of strength and design with something that looks like it's been knocked up on a modern churn-em-out production line.

Long rides are not particularly comfortable. After about 20 miles you're shifting your arse cheeks about. After 30 you're lifting yourself off the seat for a few seconds after every few miles. It's not a bike designed for touring or long distance mile chomping on the roads. It will make the 80 mph as shown on the dial, but it's 150% focus!.. you'll find you shun the long A roads and dual carriageways in favour of the country lanes everytime. It simply isn't much fun above 60mph and feels slow compared to the traffic around you. In town, or on the tighter slower roads though and you'll leave those R6's behind almost without fail. It springs into life and you'd be no better off on the back of a Gazelle... but watch out for those unexpected hazards – farm tractors stopped across the road around a bend for example. The brakes are good – discs at front and rear – but they don't mean diddly on the road with knobbles.

The bike (being new) also came with a "Spares Kit". I have had one before with my Yam YZ – although as that bike was second-hand – so was the kit. This time – brand new and it arrives after the dealer has registered the sale with Kawasaki UK. Check out my website www.trailzone.co.uk for a complete list of the spares kit contents, in the off-road section.

So – did I buy the right bike?

Well – without borrowing a DRZ 400 ; a KTM 400 EXC ; a Yam WR etc – I probably won't know. I weigh about 13 stone so 300cc is perhaps a little on the low side for me. Some people have said they'd prefer the extra pull of the 400cc or even 600cc.

My feeling is "bollocks to all that". Power is not everything by a long chalk. The extra 20 kilos or so that the DRZ carries around means it's a heavier bike and more cumbersome. True you could strip stuff off it, but what's the point and anyway you ain't going to strip out the electric start now are you? Have a look at the following on the Internet. Check out www.planetklx.com

I **LOVE** the KLX. It's capable of so much more than a average trail rider like me is ever going to squeeze from it I'm sure. It looks the bollocks – sex on a stick. It handles with style, grace and charm and it delivers useable, competent power right across the range. I know two others who have KLX300's too - both have had other bikes – both rate the KLX.

Having seen the new 2003 KLX 400 – which is the result of a Kawasaki / Suzuki collaboration – it appears that the new KLX is simply a Green DRZ400. Whether this is true in fact remains to be seen, but it sure looks like a DRZ. If so I have a feeling it will be a sad move. I wouldn't have deplored the idea of a 400cc KLX – but if it IS simply a DRZ with Kawasaki livery, then it means the end of a great bike. After all – if I want a DRZ – I could buy a DRZ!

I suspect that the KLX 300 will become a much sought after bike, particularly if the new 400cc version is based on the DRZ. The 300cc version 2001 / 2002 is already very popular and difficult to obtain second-hand. I had a lot of trouble getting a new one, but to be fair it was late in the year to be looking for one.

All told a **top** bike! Totally recommended.

Rating: 95 /100

Pro's: Weight, Power delivery, Handling (particularly in corners), Easy to mod.

Cons: No electric start, Poor stock bars, would be better with KX forks as they have more adjustment.