

## All around on Versys

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With the success of bikes like Suzuki's V-Strom, Kawasaki came up with its own version of a stylish, comfortable and affordable all-rounder called the Versys (short for versatile system).

What Kawasaki's Versys is, is a solid commuter that's equally at home around town, on long hauls or back roads.

Throwing a leg over the Versys, I immediately appreciated the comfortable reach to the wide handlebars and relaxed riding position. The 840-mm (33-in.) OEM saddle will, however, challenge those who are of shorter stature (an optional gel seat will lower that by 50-mm or two inches).

Foam in the two-piece seat offered enough give to enjoy a long ride that didn't leave me with any noticeable tender spots the next day. The passenger seat is apparently padded with different foam (although I didn't carry a passenger to test it out) and equipped with generously proportioned grab rails.

The cockpit is protected by a manually adjustable three-position windscreen that I found provided optimum protection from the wind. Behind the screen is an instrument cluster that's economical and uncomplicated.

It's dominated by a white-faced rev counter that lights up like a

beacon at night. A complementary LED display features a digital speedo and graduated fuel gauge. Completing the panel controls are an odometer, dual tripmeters and clock.

The Versys is built on a steel trellis frame that's lightweight and compact. Rear suspension is courtesy of an all-new gullwing swingarm connected to a single Showa shock. Leading the way is a 41-mm inverted fork that's fully adjustable for preload and rebound damping like the rear shock.

Both forks and rear shock possess a combination of stiff springs and long travel that work well to cushion the rider on a variety of surfaces, from asphalt to mild gravel-and-occasional-pothole backroad.

The bike's Dunlop Sportmax D221 tires are wrapped around 17-in. rims and provide excellent grip. Dual 300-mm discs squeezed by twin-piston calipers and a 220-mm disc with single caliper slowed the bike with ease and control.

The one thing missing here is an optional antilock braking system that's currently only available in Europe.

Suspended from the frame is a 649-cc liquid-cooled parallel twin that borrows design technology from the Ninja 650R. Like its brother, it's been tuned for rider-friendly low to mid-range rpms. Peak output is achieved from 3,000 to 6,000 rpm (from 80-125 km/h). Its 38-mm Keihin throttle bodies help to provide smooth response and precise roll-on power.

You'll find that vibration typical of twin cylinders kicks in at about 4,500 rpm. While it makes itself known most notably through the saddle, the mirrors stay rock-steady.

Shifting through the six-speed gearbox is smooth and quick thanks in part to a supple clutch. Kawasaki's Positive Neutral Finder makes finding neutral a snap every time. An added bonus is the cassette-style transmission that can be removed in one piece for easy maintenance.

The Versys delivers the kind of torque to effortlessly boot around city traffic. Out on the open road it reveals sportbike aspirations, reportedly capable of 150 km/h. If you want to carve some twisties, it'll turn in a satisfying performance with its well balanced, flickable nature.

For light touring, meaning riding solo rather than two-up on this bike, throw on a pair of optional 34-litre Givi cases and go. The Versys is a miser when it comes to fuel consumption and can range for 300-plus km on its 19-litre tank.

Kawasaki's Versys has the kind of character to satisfy a newbie or a more advanced rider alike. On the whole, it's a versatile naked middleweight that lives up to its hype.

**Fact File**

**2007 Kawasaki Versys 650**

**As tested (before tax):** \$8,999

**Engine:** 649-cc liquid-cooled parallel twin

**Fuel system:** 38-mm (2) Keihin DFI

**Transmission:** six-speed, chain final drive

**Horsepower:** 64 bhp @ 8,000 rpm

**Torque:** 45 lb.-ft. @ 7,000 rpm

**Options:** Saddlebags, low gel seat

**Brake Front:** dual 300-mm petal discs/two-piston caliper

**Brake Rear:** single 220-mm petal disc/single piston caliper

**Seat height:** 840 mm (33.0 in.)

**Fuel capacity:** 19 litres (5.0 gal.)

**Dry weight:** 181 kg (399 lbs.)

**Basic warranty:** 12 months

**Competitors:** Suzuki V-Strom 650, BMW F800

**Strengths:** Comfort, style, versatility

**Weaknesses:** ABS not available