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KAWASAKI G31M CENTURION

With 18.5 hp and number plates standard, the '70 and '71 'Baby Green Streak' dominated American 100-class TT and scrambles racing, and initiated a generation of young racers — Lawson and Glover among them — into the concept of the peaky, 2-stroke racer

I figured the email would generate some response. But what I got back was *way* more than I expected.

I'd sent the note to a handful of friends and folks asking what they knew (or thought) about a certain green Kawasaki 100 I'd been researching — the 1970 (and '71) G31M Centurion. My friend Tom White had super-clean example in his museum, and every time I'd visit I found myself kneeling down and taking a good, long look at the thing, not knowing much at all about it.





The green-meanie Centurion came out of the box just like this — no lights, no excuses. Below: The disc-valve system — and the lack of a carburetor — give the G31M two-stroke a decidedly unique look.



Kawasaki G31M Centurion



The Poska brothers raced against Kelly Owen for two years on Centurions; here they're shown at Ascot Park sometime in '71. "They were a couple of characters," remembers Owen.

"Number plates were standard, eh?" I'd always ask, and he'd reply the same way every time: "Yep, and the K70 Dunlops, 18-inch wheels and muffler-less stinger, too."

I'd ridden my buddy Paul Maslin's Suzuki TC90 Honcho growing up in the early '70s in Ohio. It was heavy and slow-revving, but pretty torquey, way more so than my SL70 Honda. When I first saw the little Kawasaki I assumed it had basically the same sort of engine as the TC, so I asked White — *totally missing* a major clue to the Centurion's personality tucked just behind its little cylinder.

"Not even close," he said with a grin. "This thing was a rocket! It revved to the moon, it was light, and it totally dominated 100cc TT and scrambles racing after it was released."

Thus began my education on what came to be known as the 'Baby Green Streak' — a nickname given the little Centurion due to its similarity to Kawasaki's 238cc F21M — and later, F81M — Green Streak.

"I remember the day a Baby Green Streak showed up at our local track," remembers Dave Boydston, AVDRA race promoter and owner of AMS Racing (amsracing.com), a vintage aftermarket firm. "Suddenly, you didn't see any more Honda S90s at the track! The things were bullets.

"I never owned one," adds Boydston, who owns several G31Ms and has restored thirteen of them (and a number of 238cc models), "but I remember seeing 'em in the shop. Each bike had a cool hang tag upon which someone at the factory had written that particular bike's



horsepower number. We'd go bike to bike and see which number was highest and yell, 'this one's mine!' There was even a dyno graph on each tag, if I'm not mistaken."

Those written-in numbers were plenty impressive, too, Kawasaki claiming publicly that the bike made 18.5 ponies — a whopping amount of power for a 100-classer. The keys to all this arm-straightening oomph were several: a combination of square dimensions (bore & stroke were basically 2.0 x 2.0 inches, which allowed higher piston speeds), fairly radical porting and exhaust design, and rotary valve induction.

The end result was plenty of power, enough to challenge machines more than twice its displacement. Stories of hopped-up Centurions staying with — or passing — 250-class Bultacos down the straights are legend in So Cal TT lore. But that power was not easy to harness. Not only did it live way, way up in the rev range, it lived in the narrowest neighborhood imaginable. "The Centurion's powerband seemed like it was 500 rpm wide," remembers White, "so the close-ratio gearbox was a must to keep it on the boil. It was super fast, but not at all easy to ride."

"Riding them fast required a steep learning curve," says longtime Kawasaki man Norm Bigelow. "You'd have to rev them to around 10,000 rpm, and when the power hit it was scary to kids used to fat and slow 125s from Europe — like myself! They also had a sound I'll never forget — an ear-piercing shriek only a rotary valver can make."

Engine longevity in stock condition was fair.

But since most of these bikes were raced and hopped-up, reliability suffered. "The things went through rods like it was nuthin'," remembers White, who'd already graduated to bigger bikes and AMA-level flat track competition by the time the G31M surfaced. "Everybody was modifying them for even more power — porting, pipes, more air. It was like a 10-hour engine for a top-level 100cc rider."

One of those racers was Broc Glover. "Yep," wrote Glover in response to my email, "a 100cc Green Streak was my first racebike. We bought it used from K&R Kawasaki in El Cajon, which was owned by Ken and Ruth Johnson (hence the K&R designation), NASCAR champ Jimmie Johnson's grandparents. Jimmie's dad Gary was a decent local D-38 racer who rode mostly an AJS, which K&R sold and specialized in. I was racing motocross on the thing, so we put a Trail Boss cylinder on it looking to get a little more bottom-end. We also had a 21" front wheel."

"That was Broc's first bike," says another longtime Kawasaki employee Bryon Farnsworth. "He used to drag it into his bedroom to work on it when he first started. That was, until his Mom found out and banned both to the garage!"

The Centurion pictured here is a first-generation '70 model, though one with a few '71 parts mixed in. It's a survivor, not a garage queen restoration. And that's somehow appropriate. A bike this competitive, this boisterous and this legendary should have some patina — even if only ruled the roost for a few years in the waning days before motocross — and 125s — took over the limelight. **RETRO**