

The Kawasaki 2006 Versys – The Coolest Bike You Almost Didn't Have...

For reasons known only to executives at Kawasaki, some their best performing and most stylish looking bikes are never exported to the States. The Versys was one such bike. Released in 2006 in Europe and Canada as a dual sport bike, it was never intended to be sold in the US market.

But wily American riders, taking note of the videos and Versys rider comments available on internet forums, deluged Kawasaki USA with emails and phone calls demanding that the bike be sold in the States or explain how they could import it from Canada! Knuckling down to the pressure Kawasaki, the bike was released in 2007 in the US.

A fusion of functions

The Versys at first glance looks like the offspring of a runaway sportbike that eloped with a trail dualie. It's no mistake since the Versys engineering team wanted created a bike that blends both of these styles together. "Versys" means "versatile system", and this bike truly attempts to blur the boundaries between a rugged adventure tourer and a racy sportbike to produce a practical piece of modern transportation.

Tech Overview

The Engine

The Versys has a stock with a 649cc, fuel-injected, liquid-cooled, four-stroke DOHC parallel twin engine. Based on the popular 650 platform, it borrows both the engine and a trellis frame design from the Ninja 650R. But then things start to get interesting.

The Versys' engine has a bore and stroke of 83.0 x 60.0 mm like the Ninja but with compression ratios of 10.6:1 compared to the Ninja's 11.3:1. Plus the Versys has been retuned for better low-end to mid-range torque power (61 N-m (45 ft-lbf) @ 6800 rpm) with a max of 64.8 horsepower.

While the Ninja does offer higher overall torque numbers (45.5 vs. 42.0 ft-lb), the torque output on big V remains virtually unchanged between 3800 rpm to 8400 rpm. The throttle response is smooth and the power remains constant though all the gears.

It also has new liquid-system cooling system that is 12% larger radiator for those longer, hard-riding road trips.

The crankshaft and transmission have been modified so the length of the bike is shorter. And the engine has been remachined to a more compacted overall height with width. It also has a new camshaft design with new 272 Deg inlets and 260 Deg exhausts with a connector between the header pipes.

This bike has a digital fuel injection system with 38mm Keihin throttle bodies and an automatic fast-idle system. It has a redesigned six-speed cassette-style gearbox that is both slimline with a powerband that reduces unnecessary downshifting.

The Suspension & Muffler

In front there is a beefy 41 mm inverted Showa telescopic front fork. The whole system can be adjusted for height using the triple clamps, spring preload or by moving the rebound damping.

The unique styling is also seen on the rear where an offset "gull-wing" swingarm is laid out with the exposed, laydown rear Showa shock. The shock has 5.7 inches of travel. It also has stiffer springs to compensate for dual purpose riding. Under it all sits an auto-style under-the-body stubby exhaust muffler shaped like a bullet.

The Brakes

In front it has two 300mm brake rotors Tokico calipers and in the rear there is another Tokico unit which controls the single 220mm rear disc. The Versys has thicker brake pads (5mm) and uses a patented Kawasaki petal design rotors to improve braking cooling.

Chassis/Frame

The V has a smaller overall shape (just 83.7 inches) due to its updated chassis and frame. The modified trellis frame has been updated to match the new suspension with a rake of 25 degrees and a trail of 4.3 inches. The sub-frame has been made stronger to carry a load of luggage or a passenger.

The Versys had a tight turning radius part due to its slightly wider (33 inches) handlebars which makes getting around in busy parking lots a breeze.

With liberal ground clearance of 7.09 inches the “V” can handle both potholes and speed bumps with poise. And this do-everything bike is still able to travel along city streets, gravel roads and logging trails with equal ease.

The Wheels

The bike comes with stock 6-spoke, 17”, alloy, supersport-style wheels and a set of Dunlop Sportmax D221 tires with the same tire sizes (120/70-17 front and 160/60-17 rear) as the sportier Ninja.

Rider Comfort

The Versys has been called a “practical pleasure”. With a seat height of over 33 inches (overall height is 51.8 inches), it is a tall bike for some riders.

But its upright seating makes it an extremely comfortable riding bike. Your weight is centered over your feet, with the knees bend with your hands up a natural posture on the handlebars. No more arm, neck and back strains that comes from riding the sports bike position.

With its slim profile, this bike makes a good choice for a daily commuter. The quick and responsive steering and narrow contour, means that riding it in urban traffic is trouble-free. The more upright, “heads-up” position, allows for a better view of obstacles and the road ahead.

With an average gas mileage of over 50 MPG, this bike is an excellent candidate for cross county road trips. But its shorty windscreen and naked styling while adequate for controlling wind blasts offers little protection from the elements. However, a wider, taller windscreen is available from Kawasaki.

The integrated instrument package showcases a large, white-faced analog tachometer with backlit LEDs for night riding. The digital display unit also includes the speedometer, fuel gauge, odometer, dual trip meter, and plus the normal warning lights.

The split-level seat is comfortable for both rider and passenger with its dual padding zones and rear grab bars. The shorty tank allows for better freedom of movement and the narrow but comfy seat reduces the “sore butt” syndrome experienced with other sportier bikes.

If you can't afford but the one bike, then you should seriously consider owning the Versys, “a fun to ride yet practical bike for the everyday world.”

SPECIFICATIONS:

Engine size	649cc
Engine specification	Parallel twin, 6 gears
Top speed	128mph
1/4-mile acceleration	secs
Power	60bhp
Torque	43ftlb
Weight	181kg
Seat height	33 inches
Fuel capacity	5 gallons
Average fuel consumption	48mpg
Tank range	152 miles
Frame	Tubular Steel
Front suspension adjustment	Preload, rebound
Rear suspension adjustment	Preload, rebound
Front brakes	2 x 300mm discs
Rear brake	245mm disc
Front tire size	120/70 x 17 in
Rear tire size	160/60 x 17 in