

Feature  
2007 Kawasaki Jet Skis

# COUNTER STRIKE



# We ride Kawasaki's new 250-horsepower four-stroke Ultra 250X and new Ultra LX

BY JOSH BURNS

PHOTOS BY HEATHER SELWITZ BRIGLIA/KAWASAKI

The rope-a-dope may be a tactic made famous by Cassius Clay in the ring, but Kawasaki may have just pulled its best Muhammad Ali impression on the PWC industry.

For those unfamiliar with the strategy, Ali used the rope-a-dope against George Foreman in The Rumble in the Jungle fight, allowing Foreman to basically punch himself out of energy, round after round. Ali, who appeared to be on the ropes and in trouble, came back late in the eighth round to deliver a shocking knockout to Foreman, and the term rope-a-dope was coined.

Kawasaki has been doing a little rope-a-doping of its own lately. Last year, the company cut down its 2006 lineup to a meager four craft - the smallest lineup in the industry. With few offerings and no new models for 2006, it seemed the Jet Ski manufacturer was on the ropes and possibly in a bit of trouble.

But Kawasaki is stepping into 2007 swinging, providing the most powerful watercraft in the industry: the 250-horsepower, supercharged four-stroke Ultra 250X. It is also offering another all-new model in the 160-horsepower Ultra LX. While the engine packages for each craft are different, they both rely on newly designed hull-and-deck platforms that vary greatly from Kawasaki's existing STX platforms used on the STX-15F and STX-12F.

Though Kawasaki does have two new models for the upcoming year, it's really the Ultra 250X that the company bubbles over with excitement when talking about it. If you're wondering if Kawasaki's new 250-horsepower supercharged four-stroke engine was intended to compete with Sea-Doo 215-horsepower RXT, you're not too far off base. But you get the feeling when speaking with Kawasaki employees that this craft wasn't meant to merely jab with the RXT - it was made to knock it to the canvas. To get a look at the



The 250-horsepower engine of the Jet Ski Ultra 250X relies on the four-cylinder four-stroke engine Kawasaki previously (and currently) uses on its four-stroke-powered STX-15F, though it features some significant changes to produce the extra 90 horsepower the updated engine makes.

rest of Kawasaki's lineup, flip to page 22, but otherwise continue on for more on the new Ultras.

## ENGINE

Though there are many new elements to the 250-horsepower engine on the Ultra 250X, the powerplant is based on the company's four-cylinder, four-stroke engine that has, up to this point, only been used in Kawasaki's STX-15F. For 2007, the naturally aspirated version of this engine will power the Ultra LX model, while a supercharged version of this engine will power the Ultra 250X. The platform features an 83mm bore and a long 69.2mm stroke, which combine for a 1498cc displacement, and it has a claimed 160 horsepower output.

The Ultra 250X offers an additional 90 horsepower over the Ultra LX because of a few key components, most notably the supercharger and intercooler. It's no secret to anyone who's followed PWC racing the last few years that Kawasaki-supported racers have been using supercharged versions of the 15F, some producing as much as 380 horsepower! Kawasaki took much of

It's a tight fit once the engine is installed into the hull of the Ultra 250X, but everything is, in fact, in its right place.



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Kawasaki moved its reverse lever from the right-hand side of the cowling to the left-hand side, and we couldn't be happier!

Kawasaki decided upon using a roots-type supercharger for this application and to cool the hot air from the blower, Kawasaki engineers designed an oversized intercooler (shown below) to keep the engine running at its peak.



Kawasaki features five-position adjustable handlebars on the new Ultra LX and Ultra 250X, which makes it easy for the operator to find the right bar angle for their height and the conditions.



To compensate for the added air being forced into the engine, Kawasaki installed larger fuel injectors (the green pieces along the fuel rail) on the 250X engine that provides as much as 1.6 times more fuel than the naturally aspirated version of the engine on the Ultra LX.

this information from its racing efforts when it went to work on this motor.

Up until this point, a centrifugal supercharger, just as the one Vortech offers for the 15F that is distributed by Riva Racing, has been the choice among most racers and other aftermarket companies. But after extensive testing, Kawasaki decided to go another route, using a roots-type blower instead. Kawasaki felt the benefit with using this type of supercharger is that it provides more power at lower rpm, unlike the centrifugal blowers used on the race craft that provide more boost at higher rpm. Kawasaki was more concerned with providing instant "hit" with the throttle and a linear power delivery up to top speed. At its peak output, the supercharger provides the engine with a maximum boost of 11.4 psi.

To compensate for the added pressure put on the engine as it is force-fed more air via the supercharger, Kawasaki reduced the compression ratio to 7.8:1, as opposed to the 10.6:1 compression ratio of the naturally aspirated version of the engine on the Ultra LX and STX-15F.

To keep the engine operating smoothly and reliably, Kawasaki designed an all-new, oversized intercooler to cool the air coming from the supercharger. The super-

charger itself gets very hot as it builds up the boost of air that is delivered to the engine, and the water-cooled open-circuit intercooler reduces the temperature before being sent to the engine for maximum performance and reliability.

The extra air being sent to the engine via the supercharger does little good if there is not extra fuel to combine with the air as it is sent to the engine, so Kawasaki installed larger, 60mm fuel injectors on the 250X engine that can deliver up to 1.6 times more fuel than the Ultra LX and STX-15F.

Kawasaki also decided to fit the Ultras with a much larger fuel tank that holds 20.6 gallons of fuel, which is 3.7 gallons larger than the tanks on the STX models. While this means the high-horsepower Ultra 250X won't need to stop at the fuel dock quite as often for fill-ups, it also means the Ultra LX, which uses the 160-horsepower engine, might just be an ideal touring boat since it can stay on the water arguably longer than most. One important note for the 250X is that, unlike other craft on the market that utilize blowers, it will run on 87-octane gasoline and does not need premium, 91-octane gas.

To manage the engine timing, a new

ECU is used on both craft. The ECU not only controls much of the engine timing, but it also controls both of the craft's new security systems, which we will get to a little later in the story.

## HULL

For both the Ultra 250X and the Ultra LX, Kawasaki went back to the drawing board to redesign a new hull-and-deck platform. It was arguably long overdue since the STX hull has been utilized for a number of years, and fortunately, Kawasaki engineers used the opportunity to address some key issues and make some noticeable upgrades.

First off, the hull of the new Ultra is designed to provide a smooth ride, but offer the ability to corner aggressively. The fiberglass-reinforced plastic (FRP) hull is actually 10 inches longer than the previous 122.8-inch STX hull. Aside from being longer, the hull also features Kawasaki "Quattro KSD" (Kawasaki Splash Deflector), which features one more splash deflector than the STX-15F hull to provide a dry ride.

The new hull features a deeper 22.5-degree V-angle design that Kawasaki says should provide better grip and offer precise turning. The sharper bow angle of the hull

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(Right) The handle at the stern of the craft make deep-water boarding a cinch.

is also designed to offer a smooth ride in rough waters. The chines have also been revised on the hull to provide high-speed stability for the craft.

To complement the hull changes, the Ultras also feature new sponsons to increase straight-line stability as well as bite hard in the corners. Kawasaki actually goes as far as saying it designed this hull to offer more of a lean-in cornering style that is similar to riding motorcycles, a product that Kawasaki knows quite well.

Back at the pump, Kawasaki had to make some changes to handle the extra power made by the engine. A new 155mm pump is used on the Ultras, which is 15mm larger than the one used on the STX-15F. A new eight-vane stator is used (on the 15F it was a six-vane), and a new impeller is used to complement the engine.

#### TOP DECK

The top deck of the new Ultra models is where this new platform differs most noticeably from other Kawasaki Jet Skis. The bow of the craft is redesigned to feature a more aggressive-looking, sleek design. The bow hatch opens to access a removable front storage tray (which is nice but does not have any handles to grip it with), which removes to access a massive 53-gallon storage area that Kawasaki notes is the largest in the class. This huge amount of bow storage is a welcome improvement to Kawasaki's previously cramped storage space on the STX models. Upon opening the bow storage compartment, the gas fill is exposed, as well as Kawasaki's engine flush fitting, which is arguably the easiest system to find in the industry.

The cowling is a new design as well, and it features some notable updates. First off, the adjustable rearview mirrors are no longer attached to the hood, which Kawasaki changed in an effort to reduce the weight of the hood when accessing the bow storage.

The instrumentation is also redesigned



(Below) The bow storage compartment on the Ultra models is massive, as it features a removable tub and a 53-gallon storage area under the tub.



(Far right) The new glove box features plenty of room for a few drinks, and its Styrofoam drink holder is removable.

This compartment is also the location of the craft's Immobilizer security system.



on this model. It provides both a digital and analog tachometer, a digital speedometer, a cool new boost strip to show the approximate amount of boost delivered to the engine from the supercharger, a function to save the peak speed and rpm for the craft, along with all the standard functions such as clock, trip timer, hour gauge, fuel-level gauge, engine warnings, etc. While the features are cool on the craft, they are tough to read in some light conditions and seem some what crammed in the space provided. Certain readouts are easier to read than others, such as the fuel gauge, which is a little tough to read unless the craft is stopped.

Kawasaki made some major ergonomic changes to this new model as well, such as the handlebars on the new Ultras are adjustable to five different positions, making the bar angle more adaptable to stand-up or sit-down riding. Kawasaki also decided to change the placement of its reverse lever from the right side of the cowling (just under the throttle lever) to the left-hand side, which we feel is a great change since it makes close-quarters navigating more manageable.

The glove compartment was also redesigned on the Ultras, and it is now much larger than previous Jet Skis run-arounds. It is large enough to hold two

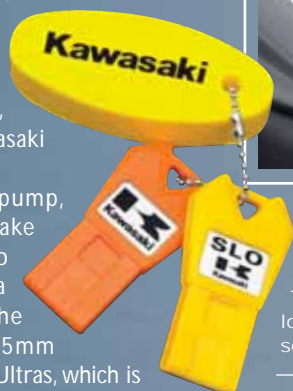
drinks, and it features a removable Styrofoam cup holder.

Upon opening this compartment, Kawasaki's Immobilizer system is accessed. It is basically an ignition-like security system utilizing keys to communicate with the ECU, and only the keys for each particular craft will start that vehicle. There are two keys that come with each vehicle, as the FPO (Full Power Operation) key allows the engine to operate at full power (the rev-limiter kicks in at 8900 rpm). The other key, the SLO or Smart Learning Operation key, limits the engine rpm to approximately 5800 rpm (about 40 mph) to allow novice or younger riders the chance to pilot the craft at a reduced speed to get comfortable with riding.

The keys are used in addition to the lanyard and their function as an anti-theft system is a good feature, but it is a little annoying when the engine's power is shut off for a minute or so, and a key needs to be reinserted to start the engine again. We would like the system much more if they keys didn't need to be re-inserted so often.

#### THE RIDE

To check out and ride Kawasaki's new craft, we were flown out to Las Vegas, where we stayed at the MonteLago Resort on Lake Las Vegas. The next morning, we were given free rein of Lake Mead (or at least a portion of it, because the lake is huge). We had the chance to test the craft in just about





The newly designed instrumentation on the Ultras has some cool features, but it's not the easiest setup to view while riding.

any way imaginable - and we made sure to make the most of this opportunity.

The morning was spent powering around the lake on the Ultra 250X. One grab of the throttle and you know this craft is the real deal. It accelerates very hard, and once the craft starts to hit the midrange power (somewhere in the 30-40 mph range) the boost from the supercharger comes on. A supercharger's power delivery may not feel quite as noticeable as a turbocharger, as the power delivery of a supercharger tends to be smoother and more linear. But the Ultra 250X certainly pulls hard from the first tug of the throttle all the way to its peak speed.

As for peak speed, well, Kawasaki representatives tells us that with a full tank of gas and an average-sized rider of about 190 pounds, the craft will have a peak of about 65 mph. Though we didn't get to put these craft to the test in front of a radar gun (we'll

have to wait for a shootout in the middle of next year for that), some crafty journalists were cunning enough to bring along a GPS unit, which read that the 250X traveled at a peak speed of about 66.5 mph with a full tank of gas, while the Ultra LX model ran about 52 mph at its peak speed.

Speed and power aside, the 250X handles very well. It's obvious the hull was designed to match the power delivery of the engine, as the craft carves through corners in an aggressive yet confident manner. Although we weren't given the exact weight of the craft, we do know it's closer to 1000 pounds than Kawasaki's previous STX models (the STX-15F has a claimed dry weight of 745 lbs.) But on the water the Ultra doesn't feel heavy and cumbersome. It corners and performs like a musclecraft three-seater. It manages to take chop bumps and boat wakes well, and it tracks straight through any rough water we encountered during the ride.

As for comfort, the new adjustable handlebars are just plain awesome. They make it easy to find just the right angle for the type of riding you plan on doing. The seat and rider area are nice as well, as the new seats seemed to provide plenty of comfort (though they are not quite as defined as on the STX models). Tossing on a passenger was no trouble at all, and all parties had no major complaints.

We even managed to perform a towing evaluation with both the supercharged Ultra 250X and the Ultra LX. While the Ultra LX was great for both wakeboarder and spotter, the driver also noted that it was easy to find

the sweet spot with the engine (something that wasn't always as easy to do with the STX-15F while towing). While we thought it might be tougher to modulate the throttle on the supercharged craft, it actually rode very similar to the Ultra LX, as the boost from the supercharger didn't quite kick in hard at the lower speeds we traveled for towing. By looking at the boost gauge on the craft, the boost didn't come on until about 5000 rpm, which is just out of the engine speed for towing.

Ergonomically, there are some great new features on this craft. Aside from the bars, the newly placed reverse lever on the left of the cowling is a very welcome change. We also noted the new handlebar Kawasaki placed at the base of the seat at the stern, which assists riders in boarding from the water. The use of this handle and the retractable reboarding step make the process so easy that we wonder how a handle concept such as this ever escaped engineers in the first place.

The new Kawasaki Ultra 250X is the real deal. The 250 horsepower it produces is no joke, but it's not fair to say that this is all the craft has to offer. Kawasaki really did its homework when it came to all the features of this craft, and many of the updates made on the Ultra platforms are welcome adjustments.

The all-new Ultra 250X will be available in two color options of Sunbeam Red or Valiant Blue/Metallic Phantom Silver, and it will carry a suggested retail price of \$11,499. The all-new Ultra LX comes in one color of Jet White/Valiant Blue, and it will have an MSRP of \$9,799.

The Ultra LX features the same all-new hull and deck as the Ultra 250X, though it is powered by a 160-horsepower naturally aspirated engine instead of the supercharged engine found on the 250X.



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#### JET SKI STX-15F

The STX-15F is back for another year without any major changes. The 15F features the same four-stroke motor as the STX-12F, but with a longer stroke to increase its displacement to 1498cc. The craft puts out 160 horsepower and has been designed to deliver a smooth spread of power across the entire rpm range.

Aside from offering a performance-minded engine, the STX-15F has a Three-Star Ultra-Low Emission rating



#### JET SKI STX-12F

Back for its fourth year, Kawasaki's STX-12F is based on the same hull-and-deck and platform as the STX-15F. However, there are some key engine differences with the powerplant. The 1199cc, 125-horsepower 12F's engine has a smaller displacement that has a little less punch than the 15F but offers a little more fuel economy. There's also a small difference with the fuel-injection system on the 12F compared to the 15F, as the STX-12F uses smaller 54mm throttle bodies to inject fuel into the cylinders.

The STX-12F features Kawasaki Smart Steering (KSS) and the Smart Learning Operation (SLO). The 12F also features a magnetic-keyed ignition switch to prevent unauthorized use of the craft.

For 2007, the Kawasaki STX-12F is available in Candy Thunder Blue/Jet White and Firecracker Red, and at \$7,999, it is Kawasaki's most affordable runabout.

from the California Air Resources Board (CARB), which has even more stringent standards than the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA).

The 15F features the Kawasaki Smart Steering (KSS), a system that aids riders in completing a turn in off-throttle situations. The STX-15F also features

Kawasaki's Smart Learning Operation (SLO), which is a system designed to limit the top speed of the craft so novice riders don't get in over their heads.

The STX-15F will come in one color choice next year, which is Metallic Nocturne Blue/Jet White. The STX-15F will have an MSRP of \$9,499.



#### KAWASAKI 800 SX-R

The 800 SX-R returns to the Jet Ski lineup for its fifth year, and not much has changed other than new graphics and colors. The SX-R is again powered by the 781cc 80-horsepower, twin-cylinder two-stroke engine that features a bore and stroke of 82mm x 74mm. The SX-R utilizes twin BN40 Mikuni carburetors to provide fuel-air mixture to the engine, while a water-jacketed exhaust pipe keeps temperatures in the engine compartment down and helps to reduce engine noise.

The hull of the SX-R is constructed of fiberglass-reinforced plastic, and Kawasaki says the hull is designed "for exceptional stability yet does not sacri-

fice turning prowess."

The SX-R comes with a 4.5-gallon fuel tank and requires the use of premixed fuel. It also comes equipped with a freshwater-flush fitting to make it easy to rinse

out the motor's cooling lines after riding. For 2007 the SX-R is available in Lime Green/Jet White and Firecracker Red/Jet White, with a suggested retail price of \$5,999.



PWI