

1981 KAWASAKI GPZ550

SOLD: \$US2750 (\$3585)

During the 1970s, mid-sized bikes were the poor cousins of the family. Big-capacity bikes were fitted with the latest technology, but it took a long time for these goodies to trickle down to the smaller end of the range. Anybody who could afford it went straight to a 900 or 1000cc bike, but that was about to change.

Starting with the release of the Z500 in 1978, Kawasaki showed it could produce a competent mid-range bike. This trend continued with the introduction of the GPz550 three years later. *Cycle* magazine wrote that the new model was a "handsome, lightweight superbike complete with three discs, adjustable suspension components and 12-second quarter-mile credentials".

The 553cc transverse four-

cylinder, DOHC engine with two valves per cylinder was air-cooled and developed 58hp at 9000rpm. The 550 also looked the part as it was dressed in the same stylish livery as the GPz750cc and 1100cc – bright red paintwork with silver and black stripes, black finish on the engine, and a black chrome 4-into-2 exhaust system.

The bike offered at auction has twin shocks, but in the second year of

production the GPz550 was fitted with Uni-Trak suspension. Kawasaki had developed this monoshock system for its competition motocross and enduro range. The factory continued development for incorporation into its roadbikes. No longer the poor cousin, the GPz550 was one of the company's first road models to be fitted with what was then cutting-edge technology.

Interest in quality mid-

range road bikes was increasing in the early 1980s and the other Japanese manufacturers rose to the challenge. Honda released the CBX550, Suzuki the GSX550 and Yamaha the liquid-cooled XZ550.

This GPz550 had had the same owner from new and had only 8535 miles (13,735km) on the speedo. A swag of paperwork accompanied the bike including the bill of sale, receipts back to 1981, dealer brochure and extensive service records. The original owner's manual and toolkit were included in the sale.

This bike, from the Peter Hendricks collection, sold fairly cheaply at the Vintage and Antique Motorcycle Auction, Schaumburg Convention Centre, Chicago, Illinois, US.

From: Mecum

