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**Exclusive: Two-Up Testing
Kawasaki's Leaner, Meaner
Voyager XII**



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1986 KAWASAKI Voyager XII

It once seemed that touring rigs would just keep getting heavier. Now here's evidence that "light" may be returning to the world of luxury.

We couldn't have been doing better than 30 mph when the big Chevy Blazer passed us, its huge mud tires picking up the slush and snow on the road and throwing it skyward once again. The faces inside stared in disbelief at our two motorcycles traveling on Interstate 8 in the blowing snow. We must have been quite a sight: Antonis Ricos on a BMW K75T so laden with camera gear he sat *in* the bike rather than on it, and a pair of *Rider's* finest—*RMTC News* Managing Editor, Ellen Payne, and yours truly—on the all-new, lightweight Kawasaki Voyager

MARK TUTTLE JR.





Kawasaki

Voyager

Kawasaki

XII. The words, "Well, how did I get here?" from a popular rock song kept going through my mind as I tried to guide the Voyager through a narrow track in the slush.

Riding pillion for the first time on an extended tour, Ellen didn't know she was supposed to be terrified by the state of the weather and was happily whistling and thumping the armrests. If her strange sense of musicality was annoying me that day, I kept it to myself, because a tour of the San Diego city, mountain and desert area was my idea. Since, in previous road tests, we'd already been everywhere nearby that wasn't snowed-in, I thought at the time that a trip to normally sunny San Diego and its outlying areas would be both relaxing and productive. Like someone more prophetic than myself once said, that's what I get for thinking.

At least the motorcycle was exciting. Everybody knew that Kawasaki would eventually have to offer an alternative to the anachronistic 1300 Voyager. I expected the company to lop off a few of the six-cylinder giant's 935 (wet) pounds, and maybe lower the windshield on its enormous fairing. But I certainly wasn't prepared for a completely new touring machine, one that early press releases claimed has a dry weight of only 699 pounds (701 in California).

This bike's light weight, combined with a brand new four-cylinder engine, chassis and accessories, is extremely good news from Kawasaki, especially in light of its other recent addition, the 1000 Concours supersport tourer. Both new motorcycles represent Kawasaki's growing appreciation of the depth and breadth of the touring market. This is an exciting enhancement of the company's sport focus of past years, a focus that has produced benchmark sportbikes like the GPz's and Ninjas.

We began our tour on Ellen's favorite road, State Highway 74, otherwise known as the Ortega Highway. Popular among the canyon crowd, Ortega is a twisty stretch of spartan desert turning to green, mountain highway. It runs east and west between Interstate 5 and Lake Elsinore. At a brisk but sane pace, the

Voyager XII eats up this kind of two-lane. The bike's steering requires only light effort and is, at the same time, predictable and confidence-inspiring. This helps keep it on its line through corners while allowing quick corrections should they become necessary. The transverse, inline engine configuration and the fuel tank's location under the seat are major contributors to the Voyager XII's stable handling. Unfortunately, ground clearance is limited when the bike is fully loaded.

We arrived at The Lookout Roadhouse overlooking Lake Elsinore just as the once-blue sky began to cloud. Like the Rock Store near *Rider's* offices, the Lookout is a popular gathering spot for the area's motorcyclists. Today they were elsewhere, but our two machines were reason enough for the wizened old man inside to peer curiously out the window. After taking a few photographs and donning a bit more insulation against the now chilly weather, we moved on through the town of Lake Elsinore to southbound Interstate 15.

A full-dress luxotourer should be ready to give its best performance on the freeway. The Voyager XII didn't let us down, winning high praise for its easy-to-read instrument panel and top-notch convenience features. The Clarion AM/FM, metal-compatible, cassette stereo is first-rate. Sound quality from the two fairing-mounted speakers is excellent. The only thing we missed was a separate pair of speakers for the passenger, since the volume Ellen needed to clearly hear the music was too loud for me. Ellen tried the remote control, located on the trunk behind and to the left of the passenger. With its buttons for radio station seek/tape program, volume, radio/tape select and mute, she found it convenient and fun to use. I'm still not sure that I like remote units. Ellen and I have, shall we say, *dissimilar* tastes in music, and if she'd been as stubborn as me, we would have had a battle of wills and rock bands.

In addition to the standard switches for the self-canceling turn signals, horn and hi/low beam, the left handlebar has all the same stereo controls as the remote. Especially novel and convenient among them is the radio/tape button. It allows a tape to be in the deck when the radio is playing. A press of the button silences the radio and gets the tape rolling. If a tape's playing, pushing the button stops the tape and starts the radio. There's also an optional CB and intercom available, but neither were ready in time for our road test.

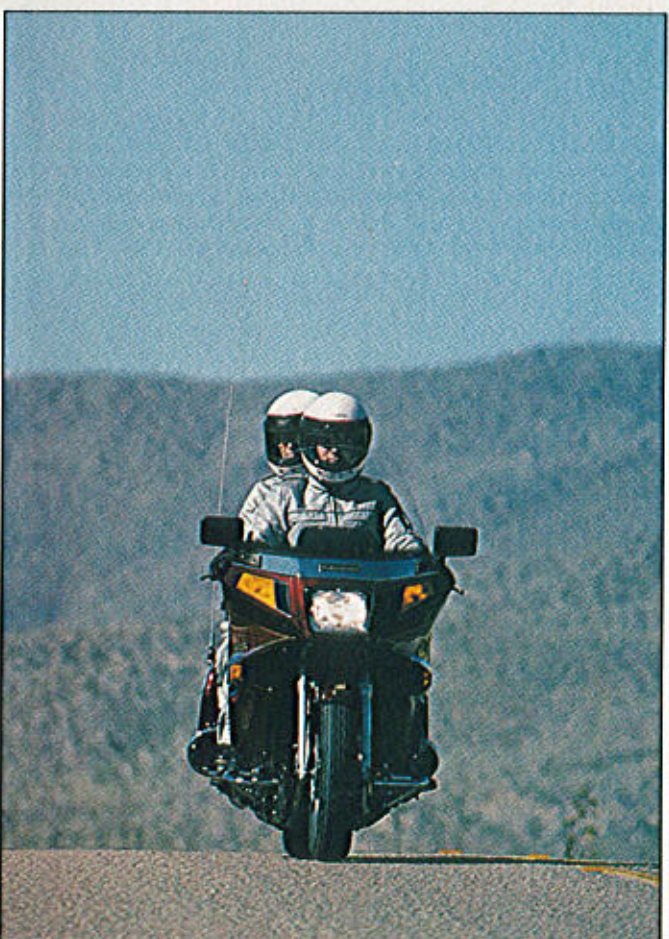
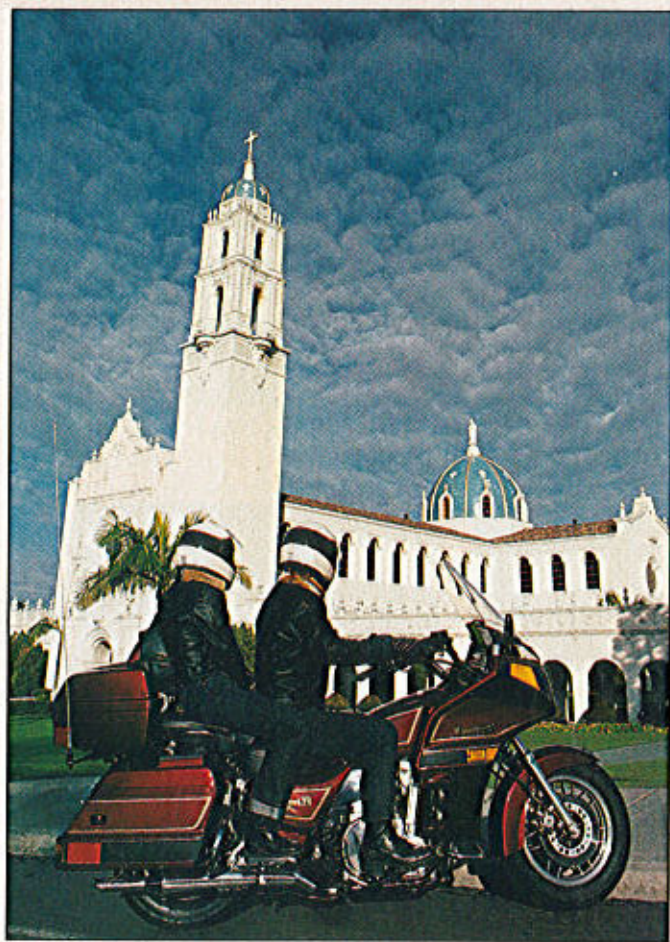
We had changed into heavy winter gloves back at the Roadhouse, and by the time we reached my hometown of Escondido they were proving a little warm for the ambient temperature. Though the gloves didn't affect my use of the stereo controls, they did make me wish for a cruise control so I could move my right hand into the air stream occasionally.

Though Antonis was getting a little nervous about the steadily graying sky, I was ecstatic. This was my old neighborhood. I was on a good motorcycle, and my passenger wasn't complaining. Both pilot and passenger seats are comfortable. After riding for about four hours, Ellen was still happy with the seating position we had set before leaving. The trunk on the Voyager XII adjusts fore and aft to one of three positions, and the passenger seat to one of five, also fore and aft. The latter seems to benefit the pilot more than the passenger, since the position of the pilot's small backrest is altered when the passenger moves the pillion. This, in addition to two-way adjustable handlebars, good footpeg placement and an adjustable windshield, makes the Voyager XII comfortable for a wide range of riders. The pilot's seat measures a low 29.5 inches off the ground. The passenger floorboards have vibration-absorbing rubber on their tops, and Ellen reported about mid-day that the passenger armrests and grabrails are at the right height and work well.

Promising myself I would stop and say hello to my family at the YMCA on the return trip, we blew through Escondido and

Clockwise from top left: The Immaculata at the University of San Diego. The Hotel del Coronado in Coronado. The Voyager XII against a snow-capped mountain and desert panorama. The view of Lake Elsinore from The Lookout Roadhouse.



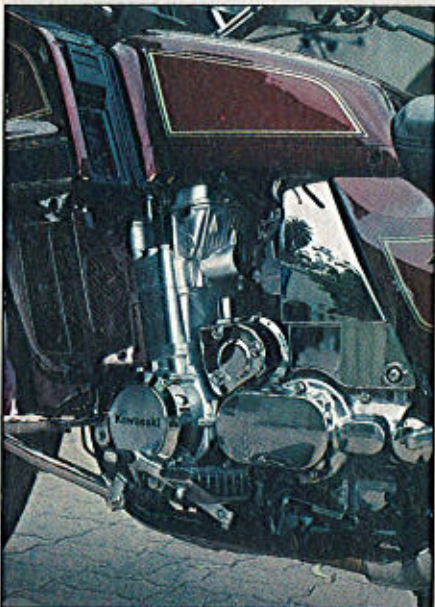




The Voyager XII's instrument panel uses easy-to-read analog gauges and convenient overdrive indicator and low fuel warning lights.



The left handlebar houses remote switches for the stereo. Large bar-end damper weights eliminate grip vibration.



The 460-watt alternator is air-cooled and mounts behind the cylinder bank to help narrow the 1196cc, 16-valve engine.



Passenger's stereo remote control, like the handlebar control, still has room for the optional CB and intercom controls.



Two Schrader valves for air suspension are conveniently located beneath the cover in the right side of the fairing.



made our way over Del Dios Highway (S6) through beautiful Rancho Santa Fe to Del Mar. Even the low-rent homes in this area are enough to make anyone on a typical writer's salary drool, and we stopped and admired several along the way. The weather by this time was showing some mercy and warming up a bit, though we didn't really mind the cold.

Wind protection is best described as above average. Though a mere shadow of the massive unit on the original Voyager, the new fairing envelopes all but the rider's feet in a still pocket of air. Vents at chest and knee level can be opened or closed and aimed in a multitude of directions. The windshield is low enough for a rider of average height to look over, and is vertically adjustable over a one-inch range. A big knob just to the left of the instrument panel adjusts the headlight level. There's a snap-closure pocket on the left and a locking pocket on the right, the source of my only complaint with the fairing. The locking pocket narrows about halfway through its length, making it difficult to use for storing more than about four cassette tapes. The snap-closure pocket doesn't have this problem, but leaving tapes in a pocket that doesn't lock makes me a little nervous.

From Del Mar we made our way down the coast on Torrey Pines Road (S21) past Torrey Pines State Reserve. Though it was getting late and steadily colder again, I decided to give Ellen and Antonis a thrill by stopping at the Torrey Pines Glider Port. Now, I'll be the last to claim that motorcyclists have all their hatches battened down, but these guys with their hang gliders are nuts. Torrey Pines Glider Port, though the name sounds high-tech, consists simply of a high cliff above the beach. The pilots just strap on a glider and jump off! It's really a must-see when you're down this way. Naturally, Ellen and Antonis had all kinds of romantic notions about Icarus and flying into the sun and all that, but I'll stick with the rushing wind whilst firmly on two wheels and on the ground, thank you very much.

The La Jolla Caves and Cove were just a few miles away, so after talking Antonis out of a cliff-hanging shot with gliders in the background we headed south. Passing the University of California at San Diego and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and Aquarium, we dropped down steep Prospect Street to La Jolla Cove, past Boomer Beach, and, just as the sun was beginning to turn the clouds and sky a beautiful crimson, down Mission Bay Boulevard to Mission Bay.

Now in the traffic of the city, I was beginning to really appreciate the engine in the Voyager XII. Though it is two cylinders and 100cc smaller than the powerplant in the 1300 Voyager, the new liquid-cooled, DOHC inline four with four valves per cylinder is no slouch. At home on the open road or in slow-moving traffic, the 1196cc engine possesses much of the same character as the 1300cc six—high-revving and powerful, but torquey and cooperative at lower speeds. The same semi-flat-slide carburetors used on the Ninja and other performance machines from Kawasaki do their job cleanly with minimal right wrist effort. Though roll-on comparisons would later prove otherwise, the Voyager XII feels faster than the 1986 Venture Royale 1300. It is faster than the Honda Gold Wing Limited Edition, by a significant margin, due in part to less bulk to push down the road. Thanks to rubber engine mounts and dual counter-rotating balancer shafts, vibration is virtually absent at any rpm. Hydraulic valve adjusters reduce maintenance, and driveline lash is stifled by two damping systems. The Kawasaki Positive Neutral Finder is a pleasant addition to an already outstanding five-speed gearbox with overdrive, and the hydraulic clutch is predictable and effortless.

We spent the evening exploring the sights of Mission Bay—Sea World, Fiesta Island and Vacation Village—and San Diego's Old Town, an interesting complex of shops, historic landmarks, museums and restaurants. Old Town is also the site of the first permanent European settlement in what is now California, an interesting bit of trivia should you need one in a pinch. True to San Diego's ancestry, Mexican food and margaritas ended our evening.

Further exploration the following day took us past the Uni-

Behind the Scenes

People assume the *Rider* staff lives the good life. As *RMTC News*' managing editor, I had the same delusion. When I eagerly volunteered to accompany Mark Tuttle Jr. as the passenger on the Voyager XII road test, I didn't understand why everyone snickered. This was to be my first company-paid trip, and I was excited. After embarking on my *mini-vacation*, I quickly learned my mistake.

The job calls for patience, stamina and commitment. Even though we had nice accommodations and ate plenty of good food, going on a road test is not an "E"-ticket ride. From early mornings with a disgustingly cheerful Tuttle to motorcycle antics that almost left part of me behind, I discovered the wonderfully exhausting life of a *Rider* road tester. I'm not complaining. I just want to set the record straight. These people earn their keep.

If you don't believe me or you just want to see how they put me through the paces, read the May 1986 issue of *RMTC News*. If you aren't an *RMTC* member and would like to receive a complimentary issue, please write to: *RMTC News*, 29901 Agoura Road, Agoura, California 91301. You might be surprised to see what you've been missing. □

—Ellen Payne

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versity of San Diego, then south along the Point Loma Peninsula to the Cabrillo National Monument. The monument commemorates the arrival of the first European in California, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, in 1542, and offers a panoramic view of the San Diego Bay, the city and Coronado, the next stop on our tour.

Several things about the Kawasaki make dealing with the numerous ons and offs of sightseeing a lot easier. Ellen found the two pockets in the lids of the saddlebags especially nice for the six pounds of trail mix and candy bars she brought to munch. A vanity mirror and a light inside the trunk that switches on when the trunk is opened are also useful. And the hazard warning light switch is easily used without removing your hand from the right handlebar grip, handy for the frequent stops and starts we had to make while photographing the Coast Guard lighthouse at Point Loma.

Lunch was taken at the Hotel del Coronado, located seaside in the resort city of Coronado. Before going in, we discovered that the helmet locks on the Voyager XII are too close together for use with two helmets, a design flaw I considered pretty serious since Ellen made me carry mine. During our meal the atmosphere at the hotel transformed Ellen and Antonis into temporary sophisticates. While they discussed the pros and cons of several nice cheeses, I wandered through the hotel in search of a debutante. First opened in 1888, the "Hotel Del," as it is affectionately called, could be a Victorian castle, with its turrets, cupolas and beautiful red roof. The interior is just as beautiful, making me wish our tour budget would allow a night at the grand old place.

It was not to be, though, so we packed the tents we had pitched on the patio and moved down the road. No trip to San Diego is complete without a visit to Balboa Park. We made this our final stop before heading for the mountains and desert. While headed for the park on Interstate 163, I noticed that the Voyager XII tends to track with the freeway's rain grooves. At times it was bad enough to require some real attention. Kawasaki spokesmen assure me that this is a result of the ribbed tires, not an inherent handling defect. If you're as sensitive as I am to this kind of behavior, you might want to try a non-O.E.M. front tire on your personal Voyager XII.

White, puffy clouds and sunshine had made most of the day pleasant, but now the sky began to look seriously stormy. Intrepid Antonis finished his photo session in Balboa Park just as the first drops of rain began to fall. We donned rain gear—a not-so-pleasant first for Ellen—and hit Interstate 8 eastbound. The rain continued to annoy all of us until our first gas stop of

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VOYAGER

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the day, just outside of Pine Valley.

Here I noticed a few things about the Voyager XII over Ellen's cries of "Hot bath, hot bath!" and Antonis' "My pictures, my pictures!" The only item I could see that Kawasaki has carried over from the 1300 Voyager is the wonderful dual-lever centerstand. This allows you to lift the bike in two small bites rather than one big gulp. The saddlebags are easily removed for accessing things like the rear tire pressure, and they don't rattle or shake when installed. The wide rear wheel needs a right-angle filler valve: Without it, putting air in the rear tire with standard air nozzles is close to being an exercise in futility. Though not as bad, the front could use one, too.

Just before He Who Governs The Rain let us have it, we pulled in to Pine Valley and the enigma of a brand-new, huge hotel in the middle of nowhere. Ellen got her hot bath while Antonis and I walked to the hotel restaurant to imbibe and shoot the breeze. After what seemed an eternity of starvation, Ellen finally arrived to shouts of, "It's snowing you guys, look!" Sure enough, little white flakes were slowly covering the ground outside the restaurant. Good food and better company made us forget about our impending problem for the time being, and except for a great rented movie on hot dog skiing, the rest of the evening was uneventful.

Naturally, the bikes and the road were covered in snow the next morning. During the night one of the saddlebags on the Voyager leaked, but it was easy to empty since the bags can be removed. The bike comes with saddlebag and trunk liners, but the opening in the saddlebags is a little small for a fully loaded liner. This caused Ellen some consternation when the time came to stuff her designated saddlebag. The trunk doesn't share that characteristic, and seems as roomy as any of the competition's. The latches are Gold Wing style and lock and unlock easily.

Undaunted by the snow, we jumped back on the bikes and Interstate 8 and slid our way to the desert and lower elevations. Though a set of integrated brakes might have been helpful to the novice rider in those conditions, I personally prefer separate front and rear brakes like those on the Voyager XII. The front dual discs with single piston calipers are powerful and linear, a real treat on a big machine that handles this well. The rear disc is also a strong binder. Perhaps a tad too strong. It's linear, but locks the rear wheel rather easily when a solo rider is aboard. It is, however, much better balanced in two-up conditions.

We finally made it to sea level, where the only threat was from flash floods

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caused by the steady rain. No problem. We turned left at Ocotillo onto S2 and slowly made our way to Scissors Crossing. The large dips in the desert highway worried me—I half expected to see the unparted Red Sea over each one—and compressed and extended the suspension on the Voyager XII to its limits. The suspension is perhaps the best feature of the new Voyager. The dual shocks in the rear each have an easily used, four-position adjuster on top for rebound damping. Both shocks and fork have side-to-side equalizers for easier air pressure adjustment, and their Shrader valves are conveniently located in the right side of the fairing under a cover. The front fork has a range of 5.7 to 8.5 psi, and the rear shocks 21 to 36 psi. With both set at maximum air pressure and the shocks at the third damping position, the suspension gives the best ride in the business. With Ellen aboard and the bags full, the forks soak up everything from tiny pavement ripples to giant rents in the earth. The rear shocks do the same, and only bottomed when bouncing over some sharp-edged drainage ditches at about 30 mph.

That evening at the Desert Ironwoods Motel—a rustic resort just outside of Ocotillo Wells—we reflected on the truly unique weather to be experienced in Southern California. We had been at the beach in the sunshine and at the mountains in the snow, all in the same day. Now we were in the gorgeous, peaceful desert, much to Ellen and Antonis' chagrin. You have to be kind of a camper in Ocotillo Wells, and if you're used to the likes of Hollywood excitement, a bar stool at the Iron Door is a bit dead. Ocotillo Wells was my second home for quite some time, though, and I enjoyed every minute after a long time in the city. Thank goodness there were video games and *Blade Runner* on TV back at the hotel, or my two big-city companions might have mutinied. Given their apparent disdain for rustic environments, it seemed truly bizarre to me that Ellen and Antonis spoke so enthusiastically about visiting Nepal. Do they have video games there? Oh, well.

We awoke the next morning to pretty good weather, and I think I was carrying on a little about the joys of the desert and how happy I am that Kawasaki has finally joined the regal ranks of the serious luxury-tourers. The fit and finish of the motorcycle is excellent for a first effort, and it held up well through the onslaught of rain, mud and snow. Gas mileage at our last fill-up proved okay, with a high of 44, a low of 33 and a trip average of 37 over about 800 miles. After arriving back at the office on the following Monday we weighed the bike. With the 6.1 gallon tank full, the Voyager XII weighs 772 pounds, making it a veritable luxu-lightweight—though this does suggest that Kawasaki's dry weight figure is a bit optimistic. And the Voyager XII is light at purchase time, too: Sug-

gested retail price is \$7,399.

With this machine, Kawasaki has produced a potential breakthrough tourer. It's quick, nimble, plush and refreshingly gimmick-free. Because these qualities are concealed under very conservative styling, it's fortunate that an aggressive test-ride program is planned. The Voyager XII's looks may not catch the eye, but its on-the-road performance could very well capture the hearts of touring riders. □

1986 Kawasaki Voyager XII

Retail Price:\$7,399
Warranty:24 mos., unlimtd. miles
Service Interval:500, then every 3,000 miles

Engine

Type: Transverse, inline four cyl.
Displacement: 1196cc
Bore & Stroke: 78.0 x 60.6mm
Valve Train: DOHC, 4 valves per cyl.
Carburetion: Keihin CVK, 30mm x 4
Lubrication System: Wet sump, 4.2 qt.
Ignition: Transistorized
No. of Gears: 5
Final Drive: Shaft, 2.42 : 1

Electrical

Charging Output: 460 watts
Battery: 12V 20AH

Chassis

Frame: Tubular, double cradle
Suspension, front: Telescopic, adj. air press.
rear: Dual shocks, adj. air press.
and rebound damping
Brakes, front: Dual discs
rear: Single disc
Wheels, front: 2.50 x 16 in.
rear: 3.50 x 15 in.
Tires, front: 130/90 H16
rear: 150/90 H15
Wheelbase: 63.8 in.
Seat Height: 29.5 in.
Wet Weight: 772 lbs.
Load Capacity: 438 lbs.
GVWR: 1210 lbs.

Touring Performance

Fuel Capacity: 6.1 gals.
Gals. to Reserve: Warning Light: 5.1
Average MPG: 44/33 37
Range to Reserve: Warning Light: 189 miles
RPM at 60 MPH: 2725

Instruments

Speedometer, odometer, tripmeter, tachometer, fuel gauge, water temp. gauge; indicator lights for turn signals, neutral, high beam, overdrive; warning lights for headlight failure, low oil press., low battery electrolyte, low fuel; digital clock

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