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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Simply Smashing Samurai

*On a blustery day back in 1966, the 250cc A1 Samurai demolished the Open Production field to win Kawasaki's first road race.*

**IRVINE, Calif. (April 22, 2016)** – Nearly 50 years ago, the 250cc A1 Samurai motorcycle won Kawasaki's first-ever U.S. road race at California's Willow Springs Raceway in dramatic fashion. And that's because racer Jim Deehan and the Samurai didn't just beat a field of 250cc lightweights, it beat the entire field of 250cc through Open Production bikes – literally the best and fastest streetbikes available at the time. From Honda to Suzuki to Triumph, on November 6, 1966, the Samurai vanquished them all in its very first competition outing. Here's how it happened.

Attracting over 160 entries, the third annual U.S. Grand Prix at Willow Springs featured multiple classes from 50cc to 500 Grand Prix, and from 50cc to Open Production, plus sidecars – literally the entire range of motorcycle classes. Known today as "The Fastest Road in the West," Willow's sweeping turns, long straightaways and hardscrabble setting make it a serious track favoring high horsepower and brave pilots, and punishing those who stray offline and into the gritty desert. Frequently, unsettling winds and temperature swings add to the challenges.

And so it was that Deehan, a talented road racer and Kawasaki technician, took up the challenge to race multiple classes at Willow Springs on an overcast and breezy Sunday. He started the day by finishing second to Art Baumann in 350 GP on a Honda and winning 250 GP on a Yamaha. Switching from Grand Prix bikes to the new Samurai 250 streetbike, no one – probably including Deehan himself – could have anticipated duplicating his earlier performances in the big 250cc to Open Production race. After all, Open Production contained the heavy-hitter streetbikes of the time, including a formidable array of British twins with over twice the Kawasaki bike's small displacement.

But Deehan was keen to try, and the production Samurai, after its lengthy and exhaustive development program, was ready for Kawasaki's first-ever road race. The field launched up the straightaway, with Deehan using the Samurai's 31 horsepower to drive toward the front, ultimately

taking the historic win over hot-shoes Art Baumann on a Suzuki and Triumph-mounted Pete DeRosa. A Kawasaki win advertisement in the November 17 issue of *Cycle News* noted Deehan had made a “smashing entry into the U.S. racing circuit” for the Samurai. That day, the same could be said for Kawasaki.



1966 250cc A1 Samurai

# KAWASAKI "SAMURAI" WINS AT WILLOW SPRINGS

**Jim Deehan, overall winner in the heavy production class at Willow Springs, shows trophy to Mr. Ryozo Iwaki, President of the American Kawasaki Motorcycle Corp.**

*Willow Springs, Calif. - Nov. 6, 1966: A production model Kawasaki 250cc "Samurai" today swept the field and placed first overall in the heavy production class. Competing against machines in the 250cc class and up, the stock Samurai, ridden by Jim Deehan, made a smashing entry into the U.S. racing circuit.*

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AKM Samurai Win Ad

## **ABOUT KAWASAKI**

Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd. (KHI) started full-scale production of motorcycles over a half century ago. The first Kawasaki motorcycle engine was designed based on technical know-how garnered from the development and production of aircraft engines, and Kawasaki's entry into the motorcycle industry was driven by the company's constant effort to develop new technologies. Numerous new Kawasaki models introduced over the years have helped shape the market, and in the process have created enduring legends based on their unique engineering, power, design and riding pleasure. In the future, Kawasaki's commitment to maintaining and furthering these strengths will surely give birth to new legends.

Kawasaki Motors Corp., U.S.A. (KMC) markets and distributes Kawasaki motorcycles, ATVs, side x sides, and Jet Ski® watercraft through a network of approximately 1,100 independent retailers, with close to an additional 7,700 retailers specializing in general purpose engines. KMC and its affiliates employ nearly 3,100 people in the United States, with approximately 300 of them located at KMC's Irvine, California headquarters.

Kawasaki's tagline, "Let the good times roll.®", is recognized worldwide. The Kawasaki brand is synonymous with powerful, stylish and category-leading vehicles. Information about Kawasaki's complete line of powersports products and Kawasaki affiliates can be found on the Internet at [www.kawasaki.com](http://www.kawasaki.com).