MOTO PORCH

Kawasaki Vulcan 900 Buyer's Kit

Years covered: 2006 to present

A midsize V-twin cruiser with fuel injection, belt drive and a low seat. It comes as the Classic, the Classic LT (windshield and bags) and the Custom (lower, chopper style). Reviewers like the range and styling and find the brakes weak. We found no well-documented mechanical problem.

First bike? The seat is low and the engine is easygoing, but the bike is heavy and the front brake is weak. Sit on a Classic and a Custom first, since the Custom's riding position is stretched out.

Generations

Classic and Classic LT (2006 to present)
903cc fuel-injected V-twin, five-speed, belt final drive. The LT adds a windshield, saddlebags and a passenger backrest. Factory codes are VN900B (Classic) and VN900D (LT).

Custom (2007 to present)
Same engine with a 21-inch front wheel, forward controls and drag bars (code VN900C). Listed from 2007 in one reference we opened; we did not confirm the exact first year.

Known problems by year

Weak brakes, no ABS on tested bikes
Years: At least 2014 | Concern: medium
Rider's 2014 Classic LT test called the front brake woefully underpowered next to its rivals and noted there was no ABS. Rider's 2013 Classic review lists single-disc brakes with two-piston calipers at both ends. We did not confirm whether later model years changed the brakes or added ABS, and we did not test the 2006 to 2013 bikes ourselves.

- [ ] Check: Ride it and test the front brake hard in a safe spot. Check pad thickness, rotor wear and brake fluid condition, and plan for more stopping distance than you expect.

Safety recalls on record

Recalls are repaired free by a dealer. Ask the seller for proof the work was done, or have a dealer check the VIN.

- [ ] 2011: tires:tube (NHTSA #11V313000, listed for VN900D) - confirm by VIN

Vulcan 900-specific checks

- [ ] Confirm which version it is. The Custom has a 21-inch front wheel and a cramped, forward-control riding position. Sit on it before you buy.
- [ ] The seat is low, but the bike is heavy. Check that you can hold it upright and walk it back at a stop.
- [ ] Check the drive belt for cracks, missing teeth or frayed edges, and ask when it was last replaced.
- [ ] On a Custom with fold-up pegs, look for scrapes that show it has been ridden hard in corners.
- [ ] On a Classic LT, check that the windshield, mounts, saddlebags and backrest are solid and that the clamps work.
- [ ] Test the front brake and rear brake. Rider found the front underpowered, so check pads and fluid.
- [ ] Cold start it and check that the battery stays charged at a steady idle and when revved. Ask about any past electrical repairs.
- [ ] Ask for valve adjustment records. Rider's 2013 test lists a 15,000 mile interval.
- [ ] Ride it at highway speed. Rider found vibration through the floorboards on a 2014 LT at 70 to 75 mph, but called vibration muted on a 2009 test. Decide if you can live with it.
- [ ] Look for fuel-injection or fuel-system trouble if it has sat unused: rough idle, stalling or hard starting.

Before you go

- [ ] Ask the seller not to start or warm up the bike before you arrive. A cold start shows problems a warm engine hides.
- [ ] Ask for the VIN by text and run a recall check at nhtsa.gov/recalls before you drive over.
- [ ] Ask for a photo of the title. Confirm it is in the seller's name and is not marked salvage, rebuilt or flood.
- [ ] Bring a flashlight, a rag, a tire pressure gauge, and cash or a payment plan you have already agreed on.
- [ ] If you are a new rider, bring someone who can ride the bike for you on the test ride.

Paperwork

- [ ] VIN on the frame (steering head) matches the VIN on the title.
- [ ] Title is in the seller's name, with no lien listed (or a lien release in hand).
- [ ] Title is not branded salvage, rebuilt, flood or junk.
- [ ] Seller's ID matches the name on the title.
- [ ] Service records, receipts or a logbook, if any.
- [ ] Both keys are present.

Walkaround

- [ ] Tires: check tread depth and the 4-digit DOT date code (week and year). Tires older than about 5 to 6 years should be replaced regardless of tread.
- [ ] Chain and sprockets (if chain drive): hooked or pointed sprocket teeth, kinked or rusty links, or a chain that pulls far off the rear sprocket mean replacement soon.
- [ ] Brakes: pad thickness, rotor grooves or lip, and brake fluid color (clear to light amber is good, dark brown is overdue).
- [ ] Fork tubes: look for oil on the tubes or below the seals, and pitting on the chrome.
- [ ] Drop damage: scuffed bar ends, levers, footpegs, mirrors, engine covers, frame sliders and the tank. Bent levers or a crooked handlebar mean it went down.
- [ ] Frame and subframe: cracks, kinks, fresh paint or welds near the steering head, footpeg mounts and swingarm pivot.
- [ ] Leaks: oil or coolant under the engine, around the cylinder head, the water pump and the drain plug.
- [ ] Fluids: oil level and color in the sight glass or dipstick. Milky oil can mean coolant mixing in.
- [ ] Steering head bearings: with the front wheel off the ground (or a friend leaning the bike back), turn the bars slowly. Notchy or a center detent means worn bearings.
- [ ] Wheel bearings: grab each wheel top and bottom and try to rock it. Any clunk means worn bearings.
- [ ] Electrics: headlight high and low, brake light from both the lever and pedal, turn signals, horn, neutral light, kill switch and side stand switch.
- [ ] Modifications: aftermarket exhaust, intake or wiring. Ask what was changed and whether the fuel system was tuned to match.

Cold start

- [ ] Feel the engine before starting. If it is already warm, ask why.
- [ ] Starter should spin the engine briskly. A slow crank points to a weak battery or charging problem.
- [ ] Watch the exhaust on startup. Blue smoke means burning oil. White smoke that does not clear after warm-up can mean coolant.
- [ ] Listen for knocking, loud ticking or rattles that do not settle as it warms up.
- [ ] With a multimeter: about 12.6V at the battery engine off, and roughly 13.5V to 14.5V with the engine at a fast idle. Outside that range, suspect the charging system.

Test ride

- [ ] Clutch: in a higher gear at low RPM, open the throttle firmly. If RPM rises but speed does not, the clutch slips.
- [ ] Shifting: every gear, up and down. Watch for false neutrals or jumping out of gear.
- [ ] Brakes: firm lever and pedal, straight stops, no pulsing.

- [ ] Handling: no wobble or pull with relaxed hands on a straight road.
- [ ] Throttle: smooth pickup, no stumbling, and the throttle snaps closed on its own.
- [ ] After the ride: look under the bike again for fresh leaks and check that the cooling fan runs when hot (liquid-cooled bikes).

Questions to ask the seller

- [ ] How long have you owned it, and why are you selling?
- [ ] Has it ever been dropped, laid down or in an accident?
- [ ] Do you have service records? When was the last oil change?
- [ ] When were the valve clearances last checked?
- [ ] How old are the tires, chain and battery?
- [ ] What modifications have been made, and do you have the original parts?
- [ ] Have all recalls been done by a dealer?
- [ ] Is the title in your name, and is there a loan on it?
- [ ] Has it been stored outside or through winters without being ridden?

Red flags: walk away if you see these

- The title is not in the seller's name, or the VIN does not match.
- The seller warmed the bike up before you arrived and will not let you see a cold start.
- The seller refuses a test ride with cash in hand or a second rider present.
- Fresh paint, new levers and new mirrors on one side only (a hidden crash).
- Milky oil, steady blue smoke, or a clutch that slips on the test ride.
- A story that changes when you ask the same question twice.

Price worksheet

List 5 to 10 comparable bikes (same model, similar year and miles) before you go.

Listing / source	Year	Miles	Asking $	Notes

Costs this bike will need soon (tires, chain, brakes, service, recall work, damage):

Listing / source	Year	Miles	Asking $	Notes

Negotiation script

- Before you go, find 5 to 10 comparable listings (same model, similar year and miles) and note their asking prices on the worksheet.
- Write down every item from your inspection that will cost money: tires, chain and sprockets, brake pads, overdue service, recall work, damaged parts. Get a rough price for each.
- Open with the facts, not a lowball: "It needs tires and a chain soon, which is about $X. Comparable bikes are listed at $Y. I can do $Z today."
- Stay quiet after your offer. Let the seller answer.
- Decide your walk-away price before you arrive and stick to it. There is always another bike.

Important

This kit helps you ask better questions and spot common problems. It is not a mechanical inspection and cannot tell you whether a specific motorcycle is safe. If you are unsure, pay a qualified mechanic for a pre-purchase inspection or walk away. Recall data comes from NHTSA; confirm open recalls for the exact VIN with a dealer or at nhtsa.gov/recalls.