



SOMETHING ON THE SIDE

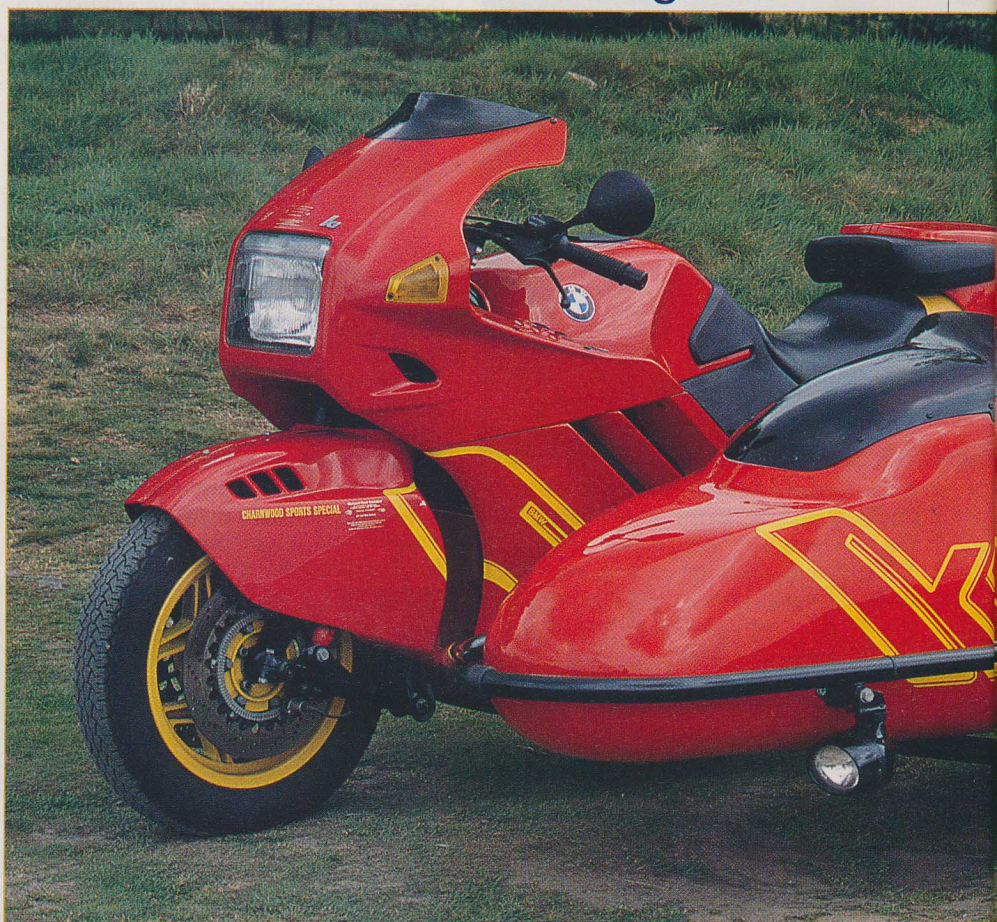
AUTOBAHN EXPRESS

K1 and Charnwood SS sidecar = 38mpg, 100mph Grand Tourer

I BELIEVE there's a saying that loud bikes save lives; presumably the same goes for cars. If *noise* helps people see you, instead of driving into you, then I suppose it's true. In that case, Jim and Rose D'Arcy's (of sidecar specialists Charnwood Classic Restorations) BMW outfit is so loud, it must be one of the safest motorcycles around! It is, though, loud in a way that even the most blinkered Eurocrat official would approve. It doesn't go wailing down the road on a 'race' exhaust alienating every non-, and a fair few pro-, motorcyclists en-route; it's more devious than that. I nearly said subtle, but subtle it most certainly ain't! I'm talking about the colour scheme.

BMW's K1 was a radical departure for a company entrenched in tradition, and it met, in Blighty at least, a cool reception from an even more firmly entrenched public. It was a bit too, how shall I put it?, *bright!* While some owners were still arguing that the only real BMW's were black, lined white, the German company launched their newest flagship. Not content with eye-grabbing primary colours, they made the styling also an extreme departure from the then norm, incidentally compromising generous luggage capacity somewhat, long considered a BMW asset.

I must admit to more than a healthy dose of scepticism when Jim told me he was fitting one of his Charnwood Sport Special sidecars to a K1, especially as it was to be colour matched in red and yellow. I had already seen one of his two-seater chairs on a Yamaha FJ 1200, which it matched perfectly, and could not really envisage the German machine with the same chair. Still, the most unlikely pairings are made (think of the Triumph Tiger and Heddingham SS in MCS, March '95), so I packed my open mind along with my cameras and set off to Hugglescote.



Colour scheme: subtle, it ain't! Jim and Rose D'Arcy's K1/Charnwood SS sidecar outfit

As I rode up the drive behind the shop (surely the only shop in the UK specialising totally in sidecars?), there it was. *It* is perhaps not quite right: there *they* stood. You see, Jim was so impressed with the K1 after he chaired it up that he sold his Hinckley Triumph and bought another BMW to run solo. He claims it's as much to do with the retention of his driving licence as anything else!

After a coffee it was my chance to ride the beast. I approached this one with an extra degree of trepidation. You see, Jim

and Rose were off to Ireland in two days' time. Added to this was the fact that Jim had warned me that it tended to flutter through the steering at about 20mph. "Just power through it, it'll be OK", was his advice. Easier said than done. In fairly busy traffic as I left the shop, I must admit I did think of parking round the corner for an hour or so and pretend I'd ridden it. I was saved, however, when I turned left at the traffic lights, and everything else carried straight on. Relief!

As I accelerated up to 20mph, again, it

was like hanging on to the horns of a live beast. Thirty, and all was quietness and light; the flutter disappeared so completely that I had to slow just to see if it was still there. It was! Jim said that he had thought of fitting a steering

Once onlookers have widened their eyes at the spectacular colouring, they begin to appreciate the integrated styling of the outfit

the outfit sits low to the road. The front is kept in line by a set of leading-link forks, again from Wasp, set up to give very light steering. To suit the new forks, a wider front mudguard has been moulded, hugging the front so closely that, unlike many other alternative front ends, this one looks basically standard. Rear suspension is left to the OE shock, although Jim says that he may fit another at a later date.

Smaller rear wheels are of course the normal way of changing the gearing of a shaft-drive bike to suit sidecar hauling, although in this case the gearing remains similar to that of a standard machine.

"Because the K1 is normally fitted with a low-profile 17-inch tyre, the 15-incher makes little difference",

says Jim, "The revs at a given speed are almost identical on the outfit to my solo bike". This is testimony to the grunt of the 16-valve engine, as it proved itself willing to leap forward at any

throttle opening, barely noticing the extra weight, and didn't seem quite as buzzy as some other fours I have ridden.

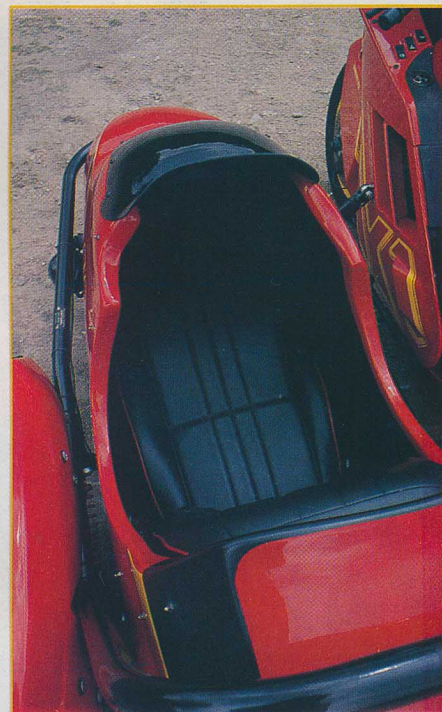
The sidecar, as mentioned, is a Charnwood Sport Special. It is made by Charnwood Classic Restorations themselves and is based on a chassis built to CCR's specification by Watsonian-Squire. It is fitted with a 13-inch alloy wheel, shod with a 155 section tyre, and suspension is taken care of by a leading-link type swinging-arm on double taper bearings. Movement is controlled by a normal spring over damper unit, and the whole assembly is mounted in a tubular frame of 1.5-inch diameter steel painted to match the body; in this particular case, the chair is mounted to bike with a Wasp sub-frame that has been modified to give a more rigid assembly.

The body is unashamedly based on the Squire single-seater, although the large spoiler across the back and the modern-looking bulge in front of the cockpit tend to disguise this fact. It is hand laid in glass-fibre, with extra thickness at stress points, and the fact that it is made by CCR allows a great degree of control over the finished result. It is also available in coloured gel-coat finish or, as is more normal, the colour-matched finish as seen in my photos. Paintwork is executed by nearby Dream Machine, who did a good job matching the colour and graphics of the K1.

damper, but he'd got so used to it that he hardly noticed the problem any more.

Once on the open road, I noticed that my palms were sweating! Now, I may have been a little nervous, but this was ridiculous. It was only then that I noticed that the heated-handlebar switch in the lefthand side of the fairing was turned to full. Hey! I was even confident enough to reach across and switch it off

Fitted with Wasp 15-inch cast wheels at each end, wearing a 125 section radial tyre on the front, and a 145 on the rear,



"To ride in a Charnwood Sport is to experience a true motorcycling 'feel', with a small flip-up to deflect gales over your head ..."

Inside, comfort is provided by a car-type reclining seat which tilts forward as one unlocks a small lever, to give access to a cavernous boot space. The body is not provided with a lifting boot lid, although this may be a possibility on future models, nor does it have the luxury of a conventional screen.

To ride in a Charnwood Sport is to experience a true motorcycling 'feel', with just a small, heavily tinted flip-up to deflect air over your head; a helmet is definitely recommended! The passenger also has a small shell, moulded into the body beneath the bulge, handy for all those items that normally fall down at the side of the seat.

Riding around the Leicestershire lanes to Beacon Hill, a local beauty spot, for the photos, I found my nervousness began to evaporate. I wouldn't say that I felt really happy on some of the narrow, bumpy roads I chose; the twitchiness of the steering meant that I was rather on edge. Having said this, an outfit with 100bhp on top and a fairly aggressive riding position is not really ideal for this type of going. Bumps tended to knock me off line, when I would overreact, spending the next few yards zig-zagging to the next bump.

My return journey was on smoother, faster A and B roads. This was more like it! At the higher speeds possible everything started to work together, allowing spirited cornering in spite of the empty chair. Acceleration was phenomenal. Not many cars would be able to stay with a vehicle of this type, yet when it came to stopping, the ABS brakes, a first on an outfit for me, were amazing. Although it's fitted with a





Boot with seat folded



Mountings to the sub-frame

sidecar brake (the pedal is mounted on the chassis), I found that the bike's standard brakes were more than enough to pull the whole plot down from speed in an impressive and undramatic fashion. Jim has the pedal set so that he can effectively 'heel and toe', ie, dab the brake for a left-hander, whilst changing down with the heel of his boot. I left such antics well alone.

The riding position for anything other than dawdling was just what the doctor ordered. A forward lean to the tubular bars combined with a comfortable seat and easy-to-use controls to make a machine I would be very happy to use to

pop over to the Alps for a weekend. Indeed Jim had just returned from a weekend in Scotland and confirmed that the performance would suit autobahns to a tee. Whilst on this trip he also kept a note of fuel consumption, and found the outfit returned a surprising 38mpg, giving a range of about 150 miles; the potential of 100mph cruising means that here we have a true Grand Tourer.

I must admit that in the past I have written that I am not too keen on modern BMWs. This K1 and Charnwood Sport Special could change all that. I even grew to like the colours! Perhaps it's significant that this model appears to

be less than popular

Charnwood Classic Restorations can be found at 107 Central Road, Hugglescote, Coalville, Leicestershire (tel. 01530 832357). Apart from manufacturing the Charnwood Sport Special in single- and two-seat styles (prices start at £2,150 for the single-seater), CCR also make Gemini saloons and replica Watsonian Bambinis. They are, in addition, agents for Watsonian-Squire and Heddingham, and if older chairs are your thing then they also have a large stock of sidecars suitable for just about any age of machine, as well as spares and a full restoration service.

MIKE PAYNE