

The good, the bad



-and the speedy!

FOR A fistful of sterling Harley-Davidson offer a new twist to the spaghetti western theme: an American bike assembled in Italy and for £380 you can be the hero.

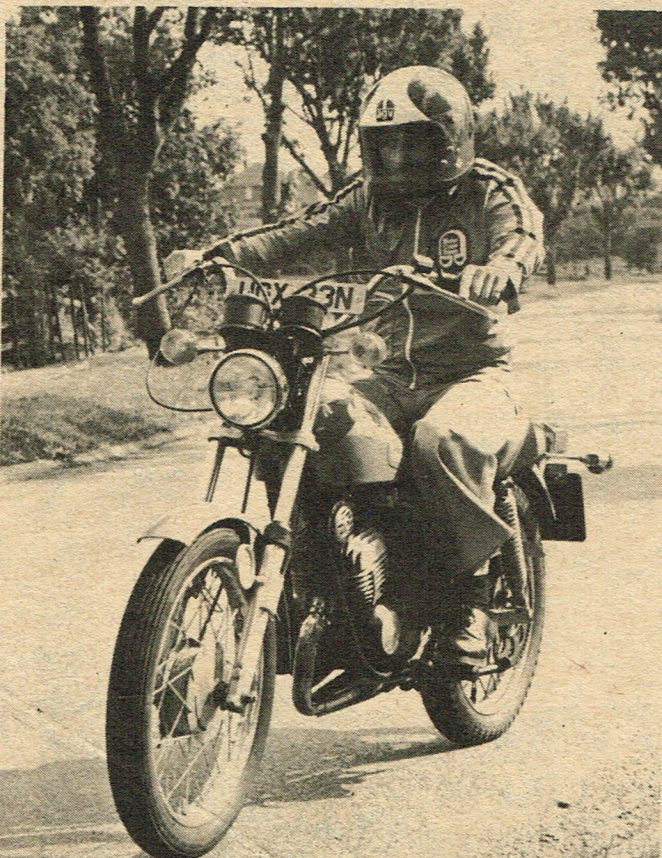
Made at their Varese factory Harley have launched in Britain the small capacity SS family. And I had quite an opening sequence with the 125.

There was an ugly feeling in my stomach when the local deputies stopped me for speeding. Whether it was the famous name on the tank or my special brand of crawling, the police changed their tune and took a big interest in the offending machine.

The 125 has two bigger brothers, the 175 and 250, yet it was not released here until later, in fact June of this year. But the Baby Glide is the apple of Harley's eye.

The good features overshadow the bad and the ugly went with that tense confrontation with the police. For the big UK sell Harley have gone for speed. First gear throws you forward to 30 mph without rev scream and the speedo holds firm at 75 mph.

According to Ray Stephens, Harley's sales office manager in London, it is not company policy to reveal claimed power outputs but it must be pretty formidable.



Comfortable and responsive . . . the butch riding aspect of the "Baby Glide" left no room for criticism.

Baby Glide is here! Harley-Davidson's SS 125 is put through its paces by Tony Smith

The engine itself has a chrome bore, claimed to give superior heat dissipation, longer life and more total usable power.

Standard equipment includes positive stop transmission, three way adjustable rear shock absorbers, a self closing throttle and full electrics.

Tested in town, over sprints and long distance jaunts, the 125 offered at best 88 mpg, at worse 69. So economy is not totally sacrificed.

The Italian baby — Pirelli tyres and 27 mm Dell 'Orto carb and all — finishes up at the dealers for £383.40 including VAT. Honda's

rival is £80 cheaper and Jawa fans could buy a new 350 twin for the same price.

So Harley-Davidson, your invasion of Europe has got to be a quality and wholehearted effort.

The 125 looks butch and bigger than it is with high US style bars and a pleasing lack of chrome. Instead, enginework is finished off in matt black to contrast with the bright orange of the test model.

The bars, and a well padded dual seat allowed for a more pleasing upright ride and with little vibration coming through the footrests I was as happy on 60 mile journeys as on six.

One the left side of the bars was the high beam light switch and horn and on the right the engine cut-out and flasher unit. Those traffickers however caused problems.

They were set so finely as to often remain on when I thought they were cancelled. After depressing either side the bevelled switch had to be levelled up — an annoying visual operation when thoughts should be elsewhere.

It was a quirk of the English climate that the tyres were never tested in the wet. But in the dry there was never any problem. The single leading shoes provided am-

ple stopping power front and rear.

However several black marks spoiled the general good impression. The special sealed beam Harley headlight was defunct on arrival and only a separate pilot shone forth. And no toolkit was provided.

Impact?

The test 125 was not a brand new machine and a nasty hairline fracture of the rear light casing had developed. It seemed to lengthen with extra riding. The kickstart rubber too kept falling off.

Starting always needed choke even after breaks of no more than ten minutes. That, I found was the rule rather than the exception after some unhappy early days.

Do Harley hope to Pearl Harbour the Japanese with the face value of their SS bikes? Or is it a case of offering an alternative under a famous name hoping for a spectacular impact? I feel there's a lot of both in their reasoning. Certainly the condition of my test model could not be expected of a brand new showroom machine. The fairest thing to say is that I hopefully got the one and only ill-prepared Harley in the company's hands.

A tip top SS 125 is about the most masculine nipper one could want. A rather high price precludes it from all areas of small capacity competition. But any better rival would have to be something special.

SPECIFICATIONS

Model: Harley-Davidson SS 125.

Engine: Single cylinder 123cc two stroke. Bore and stroke 2.21 x 1.97 inches. Compression ratio 10.8 to 1. Clutch multi-plate oil bath. Carburettor: Dell 'Orto. Primary Drive. 3.2.1. Helical gear. Final drive. Single chain. Gear ratios: first 28.09, second 17.69, third 12.77, fourth 10.26, fifth 8.20.

Electrics: Two volt battery, alternator, headlight, turn signals, tail-light, stoplight, horn, voltage.

Brakes: Single leading shoe, front and rear.

Dimensions: Wheelbase 54.5 ins, overall length 81.5 ins, overall width 33 ins, ground clearance 6.5 ins.

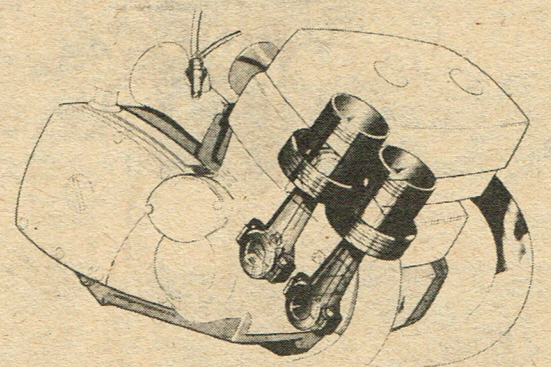
Capacities: Fuel: 1.76 UK gallons, transmission oil 1.3 pints, oil 3.2 pints.

Tyres: Pirellis 3.50 x 18 (rear) 3.00 x 19 front.

Price: £383.40 inclusive of VAT.

Importers: Harley-Davidson, London.

TOMORROW'S TWO-STROKE

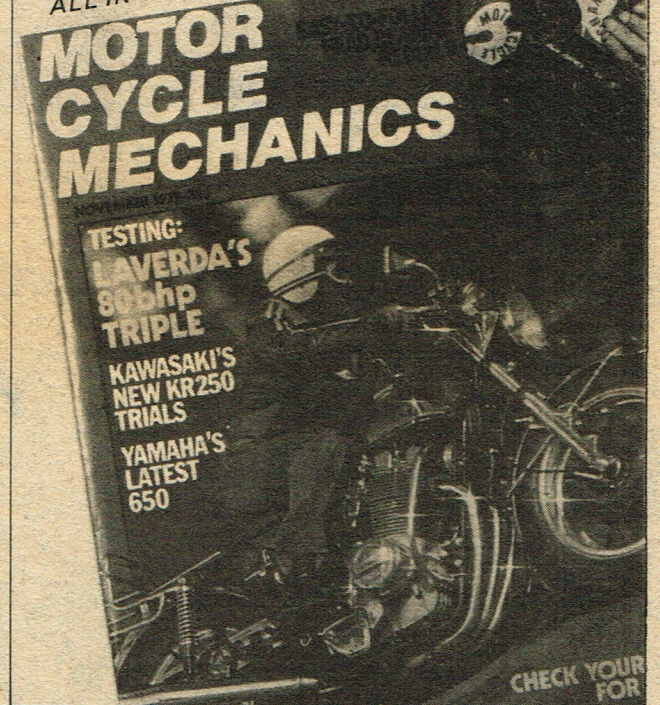


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