

Motorcycle Sport

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ISDT in the Isle of Man ★ Testing the BMW Range
Racing in the MGP ★ One Track
Vintage Hill-climb ★ Book Reviews

Motorcycle Sport

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FRONT-COVER PICTURE shows one of the American entries in the International Six Days Trial, L. Laarson, on his 250 KTM. More photographs on pages 425 to 427



Press-on style of A. Savage (460 Husqvarna) in the Ilford Amateur's recent scramble at Noak Hill, Romford

No Prize For Britain

LONG BEFORE riders gathered in the Isle of Man for the 50th anniversary International Six Days Trial it became clear that Britain's role was going to be confined to that of host nation. We should like to be able to blame the machinery, but the works Jawas supplied were as good as the best. Certainly there was an element of bad luck when two of the team went sick the day before and a rider went out with a broken collar bone on the first day, but the plain fact remains that we were just not good enough. Most of our teamsters, very good riders at a national level, were out of their class when confronted with the top continentals and it is clear that if we are ever to do well in this event again it will take more than the limited amount of money available and the undoubted talents of team manager Ken Heanes.

What do we suggest? First: that the very best six riders are selected regardless of factory ties and their apparent unwillingness to ride for their country when there is more money to be made elsewhere. Second: that every effort is made to ensure that the riders arrive at the starting line fully prepared for the rigours of a six days trial by entering them in every preceding cross-country event. Third: that we recognize that an event of this nature takes more than six top-class riders to land the trophy, and we give them the support they deserve. The facilities available to the German and Czech riders at every checkpoint put the home country to shame, and that is not to criticize those who did help. They did their best, but without the facilities it was not enough.

Finally, a few random thoughts on the trial. The Japanese were clearly not in contention with only four entries out of 307 but the quality and variety of European machines more than made up for this and, with Rokon and Can-Am coming from the United States, there was an abundance of technical interest. The blight of this event is cheating and, although we kept our eyes open, the only known contraventions of the rules were promptly punished with exclusion—Valak, the Czech vase man, suffering more than mere personal indignity. We were impressed with the number of "followers" riding the course on machines similar to the contestants' and the top teams did not lack for support if they were unfortunate enough to stop by the road side . . . Of course the rules did not allow for them to receive help. We were impressed too with the press facilities, for there was no shortage of information available to journalists, and it was interesting and informative. Our particular thanks go to Peter Fraser, PRO for the trial, and the Murray Evans man on the spot.

ACU Licence Fees

THE DUST still hasn't settled over the decision of the ACU to increase some licence fees and to make it necessary for competitors to have licences for all ACU events (with one or two exceptions). It is no secret that the matter is still causing headaches to the ACU Competitions Committee. There have been several meetings on the subject. At the moment, the position is that any member of an ACU-affiliated club who rides in an ACU event is required to have a licence. The only exceptions are listed events such as the National Rally. A club is allowed to run one "propaganda" event a year for which unattached riders may enter without having a licence. Club members who ride in these events are required to hold licences.

The event to suffer most from this ruling is the closed-to-club trial, the trial in which, we were originally led to believe, members would be allowed to ride without a licence, provided it was also classified as a "propaganda" event. Alas, this is not so, for club members will still have to hold a licence to compete. The only way such an event may be run without the need for competitors' licences is to organize it purely as a social event with no marking and no results published. Which does rather take the fun out of it. Could not an exception be made for the closed-to-club trial? Often it is the only ride of the year for those who take part—the people who usually do all the dirty work in the major club events. Is not that payment enough for the ACU?

Riding the Range

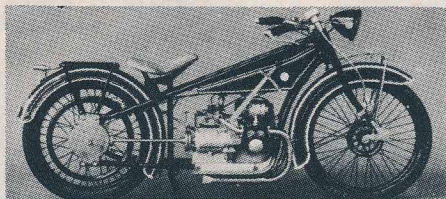
First Some Background . . .

IT WAS IN 1923 that the BMW (flat-twin, shaft-drive, then as now) first appeared. Power of the 500 R32 was modest, a mere 8.5 b.h.p. from the side-valve motor but it was light, at 122 kg (282 lb). In 1935 the first of the telescopic-fork models, the R17, was introduced. This one had a great deal in common with today's R75/6, though, giving 33 b.h.p. at 4,500 r.p.m., it cannot rate as potent by today's standards. Its weight, although creeping up at 165 kg (363 lb), was still low enough for that modest unit to push the bike along at just under 100 m.p.h. It was also offered as the 500 c.c. R5.

Three years later the line had been smoothed out, rear plunger suspension added, and the 500 R51, 600 R66, 600sv R61 and 750sv R71 were introduced. The R66 was producing 30 b.h.p. at 5,700 r.p.m. The weight, of course, had continued its upward spiral to 187 kg (413 lb). War brought an end to civilian BMWs but the Army R75 was made complete with drive to the sidecar, with double gearbox including reverse. It, the complete outfit, weighed 420 kg (925 lb).

After the war the first BMW brought into Britain, in 1950, was the R51/2, a little-changed version of the twin-camshaft model introduced as the R51 in 1938. Two years later the first of the new range were on sale, the 500 c.c. R51/3, and the 600 c.c. R67/2. The difference, although not obvious, was considerable, for the motor reverted to a single camshaft and, although the weight was up to 11 lb on, for example, the 600 version, the power was down from 30 to 24 b.h.p. The motor was undoubtedly sweeter, though, and even at £600 (tax was rarely extra then) some were sold. In 1954 a sports version, the R68, was introduced and this was, perhaps, the immediate forerunner of the present-day machines. The engine, the most powerful yet, produced 35 b.h.p. at 7,000 revs, making this an unusually high-revving machine by BMW standards. Improved telescopic forks, full-width hubs and twin-leading shoe front brake were also features.

One year later the completely new "Earles-type" BMWs were introduced, the R50 showing a modest power boost on the previous 500 to 26 b.h.p., the R60 remaining the same as the older 600 at 28 b.h.p. and the R69, perhaps the best loved of all BMWs, contenting itself with the R68 engine. These were genuine touring machines having brakes and lights in advance of anything around at that time and suspension that, although not in the "Featherbed" class, was ideal for the touring rider. For the first time dualseats were offered on a BMW, although the comfortable, but chilly swing saddle was still available as an optional extra. These bikes continued virtu-



BMW in 1923—the 500 side-valve R32

ally unchanged until 1961 when the S versions were introduced, the R69S having a power output of 42 b.h.p. and the R60S 35 b.h.p. Of course the weight had gone up back in 1955, the R50 and R60 turning the scales at 198 kg (436 lb) and the R69 10 lb more.

In 1969 BMW really rang the changes, about the only thing remaining unaltered being engine configuration. Three new models were produced: R50/5 (32 b.h.p.), R60/5 (40 b.h.p.) and R75/5 (50 b.h.p.). Which is really where our story begins.

The /5 and /6 series

For the purposes of identification, we lump these two together. The engine. Gone was the old centrifugal oil system, in which the big end was lubricated by oil tossed in by an oil-thrower plate. In its place came an Eaton-vane pump working at high pressure. This was to have a fundamental effect on the engine; the old ball bearings were no longer necessary and in their place came plain sleeve bearings, bolted up with a forged one-piece crankshaft common to the BMW 2.8-litre car. The camshaft was moved from the top to the bottom of the engine, where lubrication was at its best, and this meant that the long-familiar pushrod tunnels were relegated to the underside. The iron cylinder barrel gave way to all alloy; the alloy cylinder head was retained, although in revised shape. The familiar two-fin rocker cover, identification mark of the old S models, was still there although it was fatter now to accommodate the rocker gear. This had, in fact, remained much the same with two bolted-up rocker blocks, but the bolts now ran all the way through the cylinders to the crankcase (they used to be threaded into the iron cylinder).

The clutch remained, in principle, the same—a single-plate unit using a diaphragm spring with a heavy flywheel bolted on to the rear of the crankshaft. The flywheel, as always, contained timing marks for ease of adjustment via an aperture in the crankcase. At first BMW retained the four-speed gearbox, clunk and all, but with the introduction of the /6 series offered a five-speed box, with the sleeves of the new box moving along two shafts with a new ratchet shift mechanism. Also included was an intermediate pinion on the kick-starter. The improved shift mechanism and closer spacing of the gear ratios produced a quieter change, BMW claimed.

Electrically BMWs moved into the 70s with a change from the old six-volt magneto/dynamo system to the 180 watt three-phase alternator. This was later upped to 280 watt and a semi-conductor rectifier fitted with the introduction of the /6 series. The lights, inevitably, improved tremendously and when the 6.3in lens was increased to 7.1in and a 603/55 H4 quartz iodine bulb fitted (again as part of the /6 series package), the lights could justifiably be considered as second to none. An electric starter was an obvious addition with the uprated electrics; originally 0.5 h.p., it increased to 0.6 h.p. with the wattage increase (the original starter would show signs of tiredness on very cold mornings). The battery is now 25 a/h, and is a massive unit that absorbs more than its share of free space under the seat and influenced the decision to discontinue the kick-starter from current models (although it is still available as an optional extra. Not an easy transformation, though, for the gearbox end plate has to be handed in and another substituted.)

Previous to 1969, BMW thinking had been sidecar biased, all bikes being made with sidecar lugs (usually on the "wrong" side for this country) and all the parts apparently being made with the possibility of attaching a sidecar. For example the Earles-type front forks had optional trail adjustment for sidecar use and the frame is, or was, robust enough to take a Canterbury Carmobile. The /5 series saw the end of the days of the sidecar. For too long, they felt, the bikes had been carrying a weight penalty and the new machines were for solo use only. The frame, previously of massive tubing, was now a lighter-gauge double cradle, the bolted-up subframe looking almost too skimpy.

The shaft had been enclosed since 1955 and this practice was continued in later models with the rear bevel housing bearing a strong family resemblance to the older unit. Long-travel telescopic forks, introduced in the last year of the pre /5 bikes, were intended for solo use. BMW did not go for any of the fashionable "skinny" look, choosing to enclose the sliders in rubber gaiters, as they had done back in 1954 on the R68. They succumbed to fashion with the rear suspension, though, and allowed the lower springs to appear. Brakes continued to be twin-leading-shoe drum on the front and single-leading-shoe at the rear until the /6 series saw the adoption on all models of the disc brake that had been offered in 1973 on the newly introduced 900s. Last year these were modified by the lacing of the discs with holes to allow rapid removal of water.

Some things on BMWs never change. The wheels are still quickly detachable although not, as before, interchangeable, for the front wheel is 19in and the rear 18in. A pump is still offered as standard, now securely tucked away below the hinged dualseat. The tools still remain as a model of what a motorcycle tool-kit should be and will cost £25 to replace should you lose them. The footrest hangers are serrated and adjustable for position. The exhaust pipes still seem to blue, and the paint job is still as good as any around even if it is not really in the class of older BMWs.

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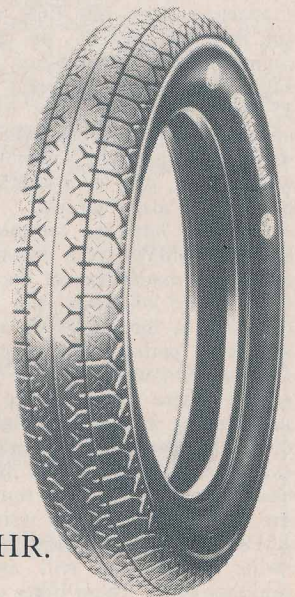
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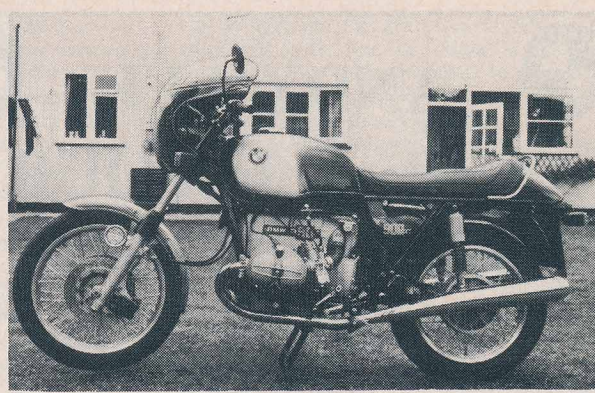
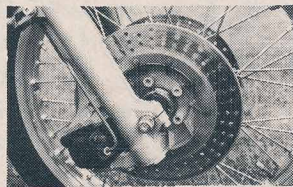
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We mentioned the 900. When we visited the factory at Berlin some years ago the designers were beginning to recognize that the pressures of the market were such that 750 c.c. was not enough. They quite clearly did not want to have to produce a more powerful motorcycle but recognized that they had to stay in business. So we saw the arrival of the R90/6 and the R90/S, the two largest bikes ever made by BMW (although if we are to believe the rumours, not for long). With benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to imagine why they were worried, for the big BMWs won friends wherever they went. The latest versions of the R90/6 and the R90/S produce, inevitably, more power than previous BMWs, the /6 a claimed 60 b.h.p. and the S 67.

BMW's had arrested the tendency to increase in weight and the 600 and 750 weighed 205 kg (452 lb) with four gallons of petrol aboard. The /6 models, with the extra weight of disc brakes, had crept up by 10 lb—and that was also the weight of the new 900/6—with the R90S being 10 lb above that. These figures are “ready for the road”, with a full tank, a factor which is not clear with the figures for earlier models . . . so perhaps the weight has actually fallen a little . . .

We have not tried to describe in detail the specifications of the machines we have on test; the specification list, included, will tell the reader all he needs to know about the new bikes. On the following pages



Extra instruments, extra disc for the fastest BMW, the R90/S

readers will find road impressions of the four new models.

THE FAST ONE: The R90S

THIS is the bike that flies in the face of all established BMW tradition. Potent, sleek, almost “flash”, with the accent on eye-appeal and performance. And is it any worse for that? No, say the thousands of customers, for whom the R90S is presumably the most desirable motorcycle in the world. Yes, say the men who want a bike that exemplifies traditional BMW virtues of low-down torque and pulling power. The original R90S was smoke grey and black. The smoke on the tank and mudguards faded into black with elegance and style; and then, with the arrival of the /6 series, BMW went over

to a new flame orange scheme. Reaction was instantaneous. Many felt that the bike had been “tarted up”. All this is in passing, for our test machine was in “traditional” smoke grey. If I were a rich man . . . this would be my choice of colour.

Part of the package includes the new electrical controls. Coloured plastic ears on the master unit look less substantial than the discontinued large but functional black knobs. In fact the logic in using such a system is clear, for now every major control is at the rider's fingertips whereas before he needed to lean forward to the ignition switch to bring in the lights. The left-hand cluster houses the dipswitch/headlamp flasher with the horn alongside and, just

SPECIFICATIONS

BMW R90S

Engine: Output 67 DIN-h.p. at 7,000 r.p.m.; max. torque 55 ft lb (7.6 m.kg) at 5,500 r.p.m.; bore 3.54in (90mm); stroke 2.78in (70.6mm); capacity 54.78 cu in (898 c.c.); compression ratio 9.5:1; 38mm type PHM Dellorto carburetors; fresh-air supply via Micronic air filter.

Transmission: 1st gear 4.40:1, 2nd gear 2.86:1, 3rd gear 2.07:1, 4th gear 1.67:1; 5th gear 1.50:1. Final drive ratio 3.00:1; optional 2.91:1.

Tyres/wheels: Front tyre 3.25 H19, front rim 1.85 Bx19. Rear tyre 4.00 H18, rear rim 2.15 Bx18.

Brakes: Front: Perforated double disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm). Rear: Light alloy solid hub simplex drum brake, dia. 7.87in (200mm), width 1.18in (30mm), swept area 16.59 sq in (107 sq cm).

Dimensions: Length 85.8in (2,180mm), width 29.1in (740mm), handlebar width 24.8in (630mm), height (unladen) 47.6in (1,210mm), seat height 32.3in (820mm) with BMW fairing, wheelbase (unladen) 57.7in (1,465mm).

Weight: With full tank and in road trim: 474 lb (215kg), max. permissible weight 877 lb (398 kg).

Electrical system: 12-volt battery system, alternator output 240 Watt three-phase current, 7.1in (180mm) headlight lens dia. with H4, 55/60 Watt bulb, starter 0.6 h.p.(DIN).

Fuel tank capacity: 5.28 Imp. gals, 0.55 Imp. gals reserve.

BMW R90/6

Engine: Output 60 DIN-h.p. at 6,500 r.p.m.; max. torque 52.8 ft lb (7.3 m.kg) at 5,500 r.p.m.; bore 3.54in (90mm); stroke 2.78in (70.6mm); capacity 54.78 cu in (898 c.c.); compression ratio 9.0:1; 32mm type V64 Bing constant velocity carburetors; fresh-air supply via Micronic air filter.

Transmission: 1st gear 4.40:1, 2nd gear 2.86:1, 3rd gear 2.07:1, 4th gear 1.67:1, 5th gear 1.50:1. Final drive ratio 3.09:1; optional 3.20:1.

Tyres/wheels: Front tyre 3.25 H19, front rim 1.85 Bx19. Rear tyre 4.00 H18, rear rim 2.15 Bx18.

Brakes: Front: Perforated disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm). Optional: perforated double disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm). Rear: Light alloy solid hubs simplex drum brake, dia. 7.87in (200mm), width 1.18in (30mm), swept area 16.59 sq in (107 sq cm).

Dimensions: Length 85.8in (2,180mm), width 29.1in (740mm), handlebar width 24.8in (630mm), height (unladen) 42.5in (1,080mm), seat height 31.9in (810mm), wheelbase (unladen) 57.7in (1,465mm).

Electrical system: 12-volt battery system, alternator output 280 watt three-phase current, 7.1in (180mm) headlight lens dia. with H4, 55/60 watt bulb, starter 0.6 h.p.(DIN).

Fuel tank capacity: 3.96 Imp. gals, 0.55 Imp. gals reserve. Optional: 4.84 Imp. gals.

BMW R75/6

Engine: Output 50 DIN-h.p. at 6,200 r.p.m.; max. torque 43.4 ft lb (6 m.kg.) at 5,000 r.p.m.; bore 3.2in (82mm); stroke 2.78in (70.6mm); capacity 45.4 cu in (745 c.c.); compression ratio 9.0:1; 32mm type V64 Bing constant velocity carburettor!; Micronic filter.

Transmission: 1st gear 4.40:1, 2nd gear 2.86:1, 3rd gear 2.07:1, 4th gear 1.67:1, 5th gear 1.50:1. Final drive ratio 3.20:1; optional 3.36:1.

Tyres/wheels: Front tyre 3.25 S19, front rim 1.85 Bx19. Rear tyre 4.00 S18, rear rim 2.15 Bx18.

Brakes: Front: Perforated disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm); optional: perforated double disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm). Rear: Light alloy solid hub simplex drum brake, dia. 7.87in (200mm), width 1.18in (30mm),

Dimensions: Length 85.8in (2,180mm), width 29.1in (740mm), handlebar width 24.8in (630 mm), height (unladen) 42.5in (1,080mm), seat height 31.9in (810mm), wheelbase (unladen) 57.7in (1,465mm).

Electrical system: 12-volt battery system, alternator output 280 watt three-phase current, 7.1in (180mm) headlight lens dia. with H4, 55/60 watt bulb, starter 0.60 h.p.(DIN).

Fuel tank capacity: 3.96 Imp. gals, 0.55 Imp. gals, reserve. Optional: 4.84 Imp. gals.

BMW R60/6

Engine: Output 40 DIN-h.p. at 6,400 r.p.m.; max. torque 35.4 ft lb (4.9 m.kg.) at 5,000 r.p.m.; bore 2.89in (73.5mm); stroke 2.78in (70.6mm); capacity 36.5 cu in (599 c.c.); compression ratio 9.2:1; 26mm type V53 Bing slide carburetors; Micronic air filter.

Transmission: 1st gear 4.40:1; 2nd gear 2.86:1, 3rd gear 2.07:1, 4th gear 1.67:1, 5th gear 1.50:1. Final drive ratio 3.36:1; optional 3.56:1.

Tyres/wheels: Front tyre 3.25 S19, front rim 1.85 Bx19. Rear tyre 4.00 S18, rear rim 2.15 Bx18.

Brakes: Front: Light alloy solid hub duplex drum brake, dia. 7.87in (200mm), width 1.18in (30mm), swept area 16.59 sq in (107 sq cm). Rear: Light alloy solid hub simplex drum brake, dia. 7.87in (200mm), width 1.18in (30mm), swept area 16.59 sq in (107 sq cm). Optional: Perforated disc brake with floating calipers; dia. 10.24in (260mm), or perforated double disc brake with floating calipers.

Dimensions: Length 85.8in (2,180mm), width 29.1in (740mm), handlebar width 24.8in (630 mm), height (unladen) 42.5in (1,080mm), seat height 31.9in (810mm), wheelbase (unladen) 57.7in (1,465mm).

Electrical system: 12-volt battery system, alternator output 280 watt three-phase current, 7.1in (180mm) headlight lens dia. with H4, 55/60 watt bulb, starter 0.6 h.p.(DIN).

Fuel capacity: 3.96 Imp. gals, 0.55 Imp. gals reserve. Optional: 4.84 Imp. gals.

inboard, the on/pilot/headlight switch. On the right is the electric starter, which will not operate with the machine in gear unless the clutch is depressed, the engine kill switch and the tumbler roller type indicators switch. Even after over 1,000 miles on the two 900s that we tried I still had to look down to remember that it was upward for left, down for right. Logical choices, but I just could not get them right.

Also new are perforated disc-brake plates, two in the case of the S. The intention is that excess water can be more easily dissipated and, as far as we were able to tell in unusually dry conditions, it worked quite well. The brake also emitted a musical whistle. The brakes are as good as they always were and the twin discs pin the BMW down from any speed. In a way I miss the old drum brake, though.

Less obvious but very important is the introduction of new petrol taps with easily replaceable inserts. It has an added benefit in that the new tap will fit all models back to 1955 . . . Enough fuel must have leaked out of leaky BMW fuel taps over the years to balance the national debt. Also new is a change in the clutch gearing, making it lighter to use, but it is still prone to make for an unexpected leap forward at the moment of bite. It is a problem that decreases as the power of the motor decreases. A grease nipple has been added at the gear-box-end clutch arm.

The S, of course, boasts standard fittings that are all its own—a clock (tut, tut, it was 10 minutes fast!), voltmeter, small handle-bar nose screen that played some part in

keeping the wind off at high speed but was not really a serious fairing. Twin mirrors are standard, but shook below 3,000 r.p.m., which was 50 m.p.h. Finished in matt black are the levers and flashing indicator housings. The lockable seat (it shares a key with the ignition and steering lock but we were enjoined not to use the more fragile of the keys for the steering due to a tendency to snap off if left in the lock when the handle-bars are turned) had that rare luxury, a pump; also a small compartment in the rear for sandwiches. A lift-out tool tray houses as fine a toolkit as it is possible to find on a motorcycle. Even the dusting cloth has the BMW motif inscribed.

Black, they say, is the only colour for a BMW. Not for me; give me this smoke grey or the delightful blue of the R90/6. The big motor needed little encouragement to burst into life but we were well aware that it would take some pushing if the motor failed, for there was no other way of starting. As a friend of mine said: "Why that's almost a Venom poking out each side." A strange comparison but one which does give some idea of the power of the beast. This is not just a motorcycle to look at. Another friend described his R69S some years ago as "The iron fist in a velvet glove". It is a description that applies even more to the S. From a tickover of 300 r.p.m. (yes, 300, too slow really, for the big engine shook badly) the motor responded with a lazy power that saw the tachometer needle chasing around to the 7,000 r.p.m. maximum as though it had a mind of its own. Yet the exhaust note remains quiet. The big BMW could be

rushed through the gears reasonably quietly (but still with the old clunk if the rider was clumsy or inexperienced) in a way that the man who made that first R32 would have considered barely possible.

There is no doubt that the upward spiral of engine sizes has had some effect on the BMW motor. Vibration is not really the word to describe what happens at low revs. It shakes, a heavy, powerful motion that blurs the mirrors but not the senses. It clears at 3,000 r.p.m., as we said, but as that is 50 m.p.h. in top it makes town work not quite right for the S. From 50 the big machine becomes a silkily smooth magic carpet, propelled by a jet engine. Top speed is around 120 but this has not been earned at the expense of flexibility and the machine is happy enough at 30 in top, the shaking only being really noticeable when the bike is accelerating. The handling is par for the *marque*. As all machines have a common frame and forks the only benefit of the S is the extra braking which can, we suppose, encourage extra liberties. The touring C66 Metzlers do as much as they can to help, being very good in wet or dry, but beyond that you are on your own.

Comfort. One of BMW's really strong points. The relationship of bars, footrests and seat is just about right, and the first two have some adjustment. The seat is undoubtedly the best of the range, being ribbed longitudinally and fairly well padded. The suspension is just as we would choose, firm enough to cope with the handling demands but soft enough not to rattle the teeth. As an added bonus the flat Dellorto

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carburettors are less inclined to foul the shins than the constant-vacuum Bings. In truth, that alone would swing us towards this machine were we to reach that crotch of gold at the end of the rainbow. It was, of course, oil tight, mechanically quiet and, for a very quick 900, economical, returning 53 m.p.g. during the course of the test. For £2,000 the customer is entitled to ask for the best of everything. He is as near to getting it with this machine as he is liable to be for a few years yet.

THE LONG DISTANCE TOURING ONE:

The R90/6

THIS is not really the story of a bike, more the story of the pleasure that a bike gave us on a weekend in August. Around Christmas we noticed that BMW listed a host of extras, most of which we had never seen. "Why not?", we suggested to Jeremy Frazer, BMW's ever-willing PR man, "put as many as possible on one bike and make it into an interesting package?" "Why not?" he responded, but it took until August to get the deal together, to get the factory to OK the deal, and to prepare and run the bike. The result was a TL package that in addition to the basic R90, adds clock and voltmeter (£38.74), lockable petrol cap (£6.23), raised bars (£15), touring screen (£36.22), mud flap (£2.09), panniers and carrier (£140), crash bars (£23.04) and sport lamps (£60). The prices quoted are for this country and, with VAT and labour the total package will set the buyer back £383.02. However, if the whole is ordered from the factory as the TL package it will cost a mere £277 which,

Extras on the R90/6—Krauser panniers at £140, touring screen at £36

added to the cost of the machine, £1,749, gives a grand total of £2,026. See how we save you money? The total is much the same as for the R90S and for the man who is concerned more with practical matters than charisma, it could well be the better buy.

So it happened that, on a very warm day in August (remember those days?), we collected a just-run-in 900 from Brentford, the first journalists to get our grubby little hands on it. (Don't ask us why but when we are anything other than the first we are usually presented with a story of how magazine X had thrown it down the road or run it without any oil.) It was magnificent. The Krauser panniers, lockable to the machine but quickly detachable by removing a brass pin from the rear and pushing a seat-belt-like catch, held 35 litres, the brochure said, almost eight gallons in our vernacular, which is a funny way to describe it. Better to say that they were very large and held the weekend luggage for myself and my wife, heated rollers and all. The rear indicators were neatly fitted into recesses in the boxes and, more important, large as they were, they did not take up the rear passenger's leg room. The fittings looked a little flimsy but survived a full-blooded ramming from an inattentive scooterette rider.

The clocks (also 10 minutes fast—they



are going to have to do something about their clocks) and voltmeter were on very neat brackets and we soon became used to the luxury of seeing the time at a glance. The lockable tank cap was a bind really but the touring windscreen was a revelation. We had some rain, a lot of bugs and plenty of high-speed work. The screen kept us clean and dry and only affected handling above 100 m.p.h. The bars complemented the screen beautifully, the sit-up-and-beg position becoming less of a strain without the pressure of wind and extra control of the machine at low speeds was appreciated. The crash bars? One report suggests that if we suffer a collision such devices will break legs but we, at least, appreciated the benefit of having a tubular bar between us and bankruptcy. The mud-flap is, to our mind, becoming an essential on today's mucky roads. Which leaves the sport lamps. Wired to the main circuit, only one at a time could be used, the driving light coming in with

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the main beam and offering an embarrassment of light. Never have we had more light to play with on a motorcycle. The other lamp was for use in fog and could be included with the dipped beam if we so wished.

What has the S got that the TL hasn't, then? Only the extra discs and a super paint job. And even that cannot be more attractive than the deep blue of our 900. Even at this early stage the pipes has taken on their familiar blue hue, which was one up for the recently returned S had managed no more than a pale straw! It was, we felt, symptomatic of too far retarded ignition. Not enough to really affect performance but we were also troubled by the motor pinking under load, even with five-star petrol. A quick check on a stroboscope suggested that it wasn't that far out, though.

The bike arrived at the perfect time. The weather was fine and we had five clear days off. Where should we go? We thought of Europe; why not a quick flip to Austria to visit friends? Then there was a rally in Munich. In the end we went to Devon. We waited until the Saturday afternoon, to miss the holiday traffic. The bike was loaded, weekend luggage in the panniers, spare gloves, waterproofs and maps in the tank bag and just before four, we were away. Within the hour we were whispering our way around Andover, sparing a thought for NVT. Sixty miles were on the clock and it was getting cloudy. There seemed to be hundreds of bike riders on the road and they all had a wave for us. Our only problem were the dozens of heavily laden hay lorries. Not only did we have a job to pass

them but we were plastered with hay while waiting.

The next few days were a pleasurable return to places that held happy memories. Tarr Steps, with its deep rock ford, held no terrors for the BM but the light which said brake failure nearly precipitated heart failure during one of Devon's many steep descents. Perhaps brake fluid would be a better name? The level was on the low side and the float, which in the event of a shortage makes contact with the light terminal, did just that. These days the brake fluid reservoir is hidden under the tank, and it is tempting to ignore it. It took but a few minutes to remove the tank (at some risk of chipping the paint on the handlebar clamp) and check, but it was a bit of a bind. At the Valley of the Rocks with its many splendid bays, the BM threw a tantrum. Both the float chambers chose the same moment to pour petrol all over my boots, just as we were negotiating a hairpin. The resulting gymnastics, as I tried to regain my position on the slippery footrests, caused my wife to enquire what the hell was going on. We cured the problem in the right carburettor but the left one was to persist throughout the trip, although we partially cured the problem by having the fuel tap half on.

Apart from its petrol problem and the occasional winking of the brake light, the BM was a model of good behaviour. It started at the touch of a button, was very comfortable to ride, although I would say that this BMW's dualseat is one area where there is some room for improvement. The CV

Bing carburettors still dig in my shins, though. I think I could solve that if I owned one. While we're criticizing we must comment on the fly-back side stand. Old hands say that it stops doing it after a year or so but in the meantime it gave us a few anxious moments. The centre stand didn't help for it was not quite far enough over centre for our taste, although it was easy enough to use. Finally the horn was a pale echo of the superb old six-volt one. What-ever happened to it?

The difference between the sports and the touring 900 means little to the average touring man, no matter how fast he goes. The /6 was capable of 115 m.p.h. but, more important, would leap from 60 to 110 in top gear. The below-3,000 r.p.m. shakes were apparent but did not have such a marked effect on the mirrors. Above that the motor was a smooth power-charged unit. The single disc brake is, no doubt, less potent than the double but, in the end, most of us will rarely, if ever, feel the need for that extra stopping power and the double disc is available as an option if we do. Fuel consumption on the fairly quick ride to Devon worked out at 59 m.p.g., giving a range of nearly 300 miles in the just-under-5-gallon tank. To get much below that you really have to push it. And had we wrung our boots out and returned the residue to the tank it might have improved a fraction!

If ever a bike deserved the title GT this was it but, as the most unlikely bikes do have a 16 GT tag, this does not mean the same any more. Perhaps "Luxury Tourer" would be better? B.P.



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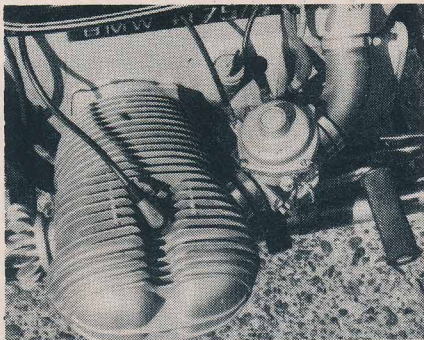
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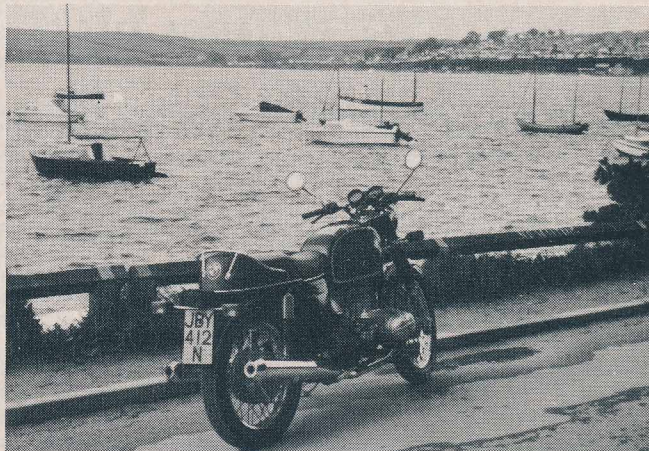
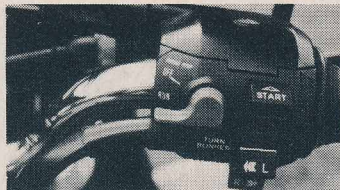
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The 750 has a Bing CV carburettor, shares with all others clearly marked fuel taps and rocking-action flasher control. A photograph taken at Rock, Cornwall



THE BEST-SELLING ONE: 750 R75/6

WHEN I was returning one of these BMWs to their place at Brentford I noticed a large "600" scrawled on a wall of the motorcycle office. What did that mean? "That's our monthly sales target in the summer – and we've been getting there." Which is not particularly illuminating, except that the simple (yet potently single-minded) "600" seemed to be standing in for the complex graphs and charts I might have expected in an obviously well-run outpost of German business efficiency; and it enables me to say that of these 600 sales the largest single contributor was the 750 c.c. R75/6.

Quite why, I don't know. The 900s are appreciably faster and more expensive, the 600 is very mild and – well, not cheap but at any rate nearer £1,000 than £2,000. And don't motorcyclists usually prefer extremes? Not in this case, apparently.

In Germany the standard tank is 3½ gallons, over here the bikes are delivered with the (German optional) 5-gallon tank, and the smaller tank is the one that has to be specially ordered. My 750 came with the big tank, the finish in black with white lining. (And here I should say that the tank was full of petrol – a fact of no great interest to readers who may be planning to hand over £1,700 or so to their dealer for a 750 BMW, because I doubt that *their* tanks will be full . . . though come to think of it, why shouldn't they be, with that amount of money changing hands? But I feel this sort of unobtrusive goodwill on the part of BMW (GB) is worth recording.)

I was going to North Cornwall the day after I picked up the 750, so I looked at the oil – a little dark but there was plenty of it – wrote out a route guide and taped it on the tank, and, well, that was it. BMWs tend to give you this sort of confidence.

I've always thought that a bike's riding position

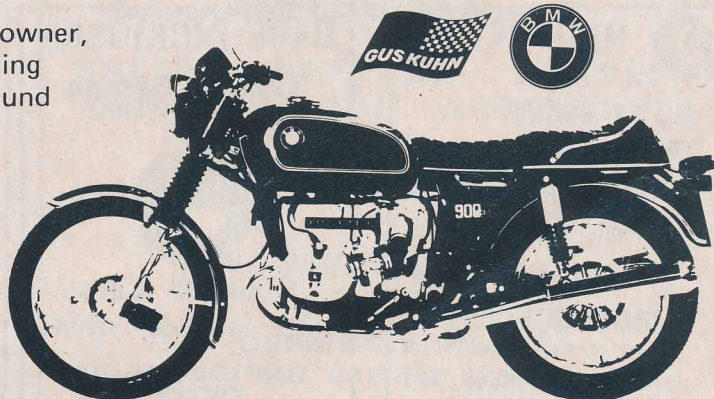
– rather, *your* riding position, as determined by the layout of the bike's footrests, seat and handlebars – was of great importance. A mediocre bike in an engineering sense, but blessed with a good layout, can be impressive – another bike with a reverse set of values very disappointing. And where motorcycles have in the main advanced enormously over the past (say) 10 years, I don't think that can be said of this particular aspect: handlebars have got higher and wider, tanks fatter, seats lower, footrests farther forward. Now, say what you like about British engineering in the post-war heyday of the motorcycle, but our manufacturers *did* seem to know all about a good riding position. Perhaps it was the work they put into preparing those successful entries for the International Six Days Trials? The Japanese are to blame for the change. Catering for a largely uninformed market (an American one, at that), and turning out bikes with

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engines of ever-increasing power, and overall size, probably it seemed that the best thing to do was to aim for a sort of armchair look. Honda show a pointed case history: C72 – narrow bars, tank, good position; 750 four – high, wide bars (admittedly narrowed a trifle after the first year), bulbous tank, great weight, inferior position; now a return to better things with the slim, relatively light 400 four.

BMW's never made this mistake. To ride a 1955 R60 is to be riding a 1975 R75/6 – at least in this important matter of riding position. A BMW 5-gallon tank achieves its capacity through depth, not width; the footrests (staggered as always, the left a little ahead of the right) are still behind the nose of the seat; the bars are a mere 27 in. and lowish. And despite the massive look of the casing above the engine (containing a lot of air, one starter motor and a filter element for the carburetors), the BMW is not terribly heavy, as has been pointed out in the preamble to these test reports. It is probably, in 900 form, the least heavy of the so-called superbikes. Much light-alloy (including the wheel rims, with their short straight spokes) and some plastic, for the beautifully finished mudguards, must take credit here, and a frame that is big enough but not enormous, and free of the tangle of struts and bridging works that seem to shore up the frames (and the designers' minds) for some rival makes.

I set the steering damper to position 1 (this can be done on the move with the knob at the steering head altering the axis of the hydraulic unit under the head), the rear suspension to position 2 – by hand, let it be noted, with a plastic-covered strut: no ill-fitting C spanner here – turned the fuel tap to Auf/on (BMW fuel taps these days are labelled so dazzlingly clearly in German and English that I no longer have any excuse for saying "Ah yes,

zu, that's 'on', of course" and then wondering why the damn thing has stopped in the middle of the first busy roundabout) – and set off for Cornwall.

From London, that is. I went west on the motorway, and there's not much to say about this except that I covered 100 miles in 1½ hours and found it pretty boring. At around Exeter I came off the motorway and for 120 miles took to some A roads, finishing with a variety of minor roads, all in a reasonably pressing-on way. Fuel consumption worked out at 47.48 mpg.

A week or two later, returning to London, I used the A30 almost all the way and was in no particular hurry and noted the consumption as well over 50, with one tankful sufficing for the journey of about 270 miles, without need for turning to "Reserve."

Top speed was a mile or two over 100 m.p.h. when I was crouching just a little, and was attained with no particular effort; in better circumstances there would be a little more to come. All done in a very mild, reasonable way, with no exhaust blast (73db, I've been told, is the maximum din emitted by a BMW, and I believe it – for comparison the Honda four figure is about 83). In Devonshire lanes, using the brakes a lot, I thought they were a bit mild too. The front disc does not have the power of larger ones fitted to other makes and I can see the point of the double-disc set-up on the much faster 900S (and the availability of an extra disc for 750 owners who like to travel fast). The handling, again, shows some limitations when you are pressing on. It's fine at a more sedate pace, or even when keeping things going at 80 or thereabouts on the straight bits and whistling through bends at a fair lick but without that little extra urgency that pushes the overall rate up from (in Denis

Jenkinson's terminology) about six-tenths to let's say eight-tenths. At eight-tenths, through the curves, using a single disc, you can become aware of too little braking power and a lack of precision in the handling, a tendency to wallow through soft springing (rear, mainly), and slow responses.

But that's not fair criticism, the BMW (GB) people might say: if you want to go motorcycling that way, the 900S is the one for you. And of course they would be right – to an extent.

In 600 miles the 750 used a half-pint of oil (and what a fiddle that is, getting oil from a pint tin into the tiny, rather masked, orifice on the crankcase wall), gave no trouble at all, starting easily, cold or hot, giving plentiful illumination from its Q1 headlight when the need arose, and generally promoting a sense of utter dependability.

I must not forget to note that my return trip from Cornwall meant a lot of gear-changing, which emphasised the fact that the BMW clutch is distinctly heavy (BMW's fault) and that I am still unable to be sure of a clonk-free gear change around second and third (probably my fault). Reverting to the brakes for a moment, the front brake lever (like the clutch, beautifully shaped to fit the hand and matt-black finished) was pretty heavy in operation too. After the first 100 miles or so of riding the 750, I noticed that the front brake would give an audible, continuous *tizz* when applied (that is not a very good way to describe the noise – what can one say? Something like a very low-scale version of wind whistling along telegraph wires might be better). The brake worked as well as ever, but with this noise added. Mysterious.

A few years back BMWs had side-stands which kept down till you pushed them out of



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action with your foot. Now and again you would forget, ride off and jangle the stand on the first mild left-hander. No doubt one or two people even fell off and maybe, who knows, knocked themselves about in doing so. At any rate BMW modified the strut so that when you straightened up the bike, preparatory to moving off, the stand zipped back, out of the way. This is fine and perhaps even an improvement, though the folding-back can, in my experience, happen so quickly that you are left unprepared for the bike's weight. Still, BMW are humane people and no doubt calculate that even the most bike-proud owner would rather have a dented tank than damage his head. The latest variation, as shown by the 750 I rode, was to have a spring-back stand fouled up through dirt or maladjustment so that it could only be *pushed* back with considerable effort.

Whatever reservations I may have about BMW bikes, and heaven knows they are very few, and are best described as an almost inexplicable, probably perverse, irritation with their sheer good quality and good manners . . . their urbanity and unflappability . . . it has to be said that they are among the best motorbikes in the world. And if I could only force myself to say it plainly, I'd say that on any intelligent, reasoned assessment they are *the* best. But how do you fill those long winter evenings with no tinkering to do, with no chains to adjust!

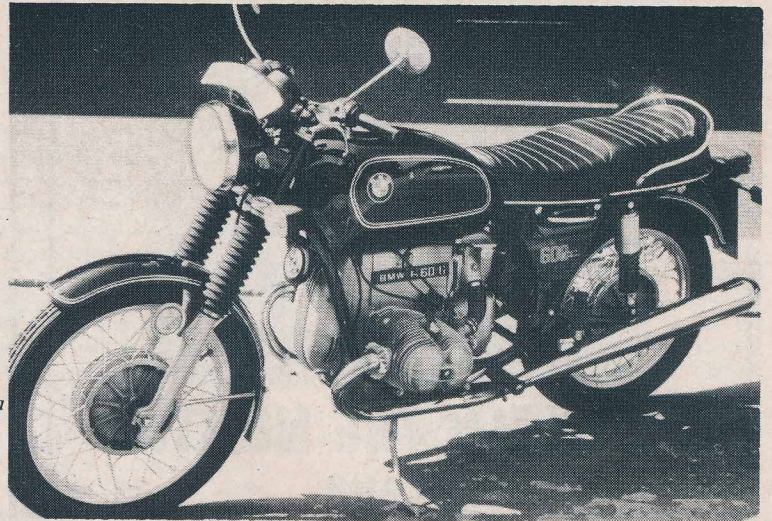
THE "SMALL" ONE: 600 R60/6

IT WOULD be tiresome for me (and readers) to spend much time writing about the 600. It has the same engine as the others in the range, only rather smaller, with a 73.5 m.m. bore for the common 70.6 m.m. stroke, giving 599 c.c. It has slide carburettors like the 900S, where the others

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Drum front brake and (unusually) the small fuel tank on a 600 BMW.



have a CV type, but these are German Bing instead of Italian Dellorto and considerably smaller at 1.26mm. The power output is 40 b.h.p. (This is a claimed figure but BMW over the years have shown themselves to be commendably accurate, sometimes even modest, in their published claims on power and speed, etc.) The result, with this comparatively small engine propelling a machine of the same weight as the other, more powerful, BMWs is quite moderate performance and a feeling, for the rider, of some sort of "over-engineering", with the less captivating aspects of a BMW – the heavy controls, the sometimes noisy gear-change – made more obvious through the dearth of inspiring performance.

The R60 I had was fitted with the 3½-gallon

tank which gives an altogether lighter look to the familiar BMW line; it is fair to say, I think, that the "small" tank is more attractive than the 5-gallon unit and suits *any* BMW better (apart perhaps from the 900S) though undeniably it is less practical.

The R60 is the only BMW now sold with a drum front brake, with a single – or double – disc available as an optional extra. I found the drum brake quite adequate for the 600, though it must be admitted that there was little opportunity for hard riding during the time we had the machine.

It comes to this: if you want a BMW then an R60 is as good, indeed is the same, as other BMWs – except that it won't give you the speed of the others. And speed is still, for a lot of us, the name of the game.

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