

# My super-buy MZ Supa 5

**"A year-old model,  
10,000 miles up, for  
£250 seemed a  
bargain. Even at  
£350 I'm pleased  
with it . . ."**

*The Supa 5 came complete with top box and fairing and (it soon transpired) worn engine gearbox bearings*



IT SEEMED like a good idea at the time. The plan was to buy a near-new secondhand Supa 5 and save a few hundred. Events did not work out quite the way I intended.

I easily sold the MCS-publicized MZ 150 for £120. In depreciation terms, 20,000 miles and two years' use had only cost £140. Very sad to see it go. Scanning the small ad. columns in the weeklies, I was attracted by a one-year-old 250 with 10,000 miles up, Michelin tyres, top box and fairing. This would have cost £650 new. I reckoned that a well-built 1978 MZ 250 would be sound and nicely run in at only 10,000. A sectionalized 250 motor at the BMF Rally in May convinced me that the Supa 5 motor was bullet proof and built to last. With main bearings as big as the 750 Bonneville's surely, I thought, that is the end of the main-bearing bogy. I liked the over-engineering and simplicity of design.

Travelling by rail to the private seller in London, I gave the MZ a thorough once-over. All checked out well, with good looks and quiet motor. A bargain. I chuckled as I handed over £250 in fivers. Delighted and pleased with the power and feel of the MZ, I rode off into the London traffic. On the A1 I settled down to a steady 70 mph at 5,000 revs, everything running well. Then, without warning, a screech of tortured metal and loss of transmission brought the MZ to a halt.

Broken chain perhaps wrapped around the sprocket? Nothing so simple. Something drastic had happened inside, causing total gearbox failure with no drive in any gear. Hundred miles from home, utter despair settled over me. My "bargain" had suddenly turned into a nightmare liability. Not being in the AA or RAC, I had no one to turn to. (Since joined National Breakdown for £8.50 year. Worth it for the peace of mind alone.) Eventually, as the motor ran OK, I managed to obtain some drive in fifth and noisily limped home at 20 mph, arriving back in Yorkshire at 2 am. My wife greeted me by saying I was mad anyway to go half-way across the country just after a bike. Being £250 poorer with a useless bike and feeling wet and miserable, I was inclined to agree.

Now you can usually manage to extract some compensation from a dealer after hard luck of this sort but buying privately is a different matter. "Hard cheese" said the previous owner when I rang and complained. Next day I dropped the motor out of the frame (half an hour), strapped it on to the back of the MZ 150 "trail" and took it to the MZ main agents in

York. A week later I got the autopsy. A gearbox bearing had collapsed and wrecked the box, the casing was also damaged beyond repair. The main bearings were worn and the little end had collapsed. Total bill came to £100.

I suppose it was foolish to ride the bike back for 100 miles with a smashed gearbox. Now everyone knows that MZ bearings are dodgy. But I was quite shaken by this sudden failure at low mileage. The previous owner seemed a most careful and considerate rider and I doubt if he had neglected the bike. From this experience, therefore (and confirmed by several MZ dealers), it is clear that early replacement of bearings (and tyres) is recommended. Though David Baynam's magnificent 48,000 mile Supa 5 trip in the Americas would seem to disprove this theory. Of course, the importers deny that even the East German tyres need replacing. I have now changed to Duckhams two-stroke oil. Nothing against Filtrate but apart from Baynam's proven performance many riders are saying nice things about Duckhams. Filtrate is also hard to obtain. It is some comfort to know that I have a virtually new motor, and after six months use, no trouble of any kind has occurred.

## **Big-hearted motor is happier on the open road**

Apart, that is, from two bulbs failing, caused by the unpleasant vibration at low revs. The rubber mounts hide most, but under 2,000 rpm the shakes are too much to cover up. Together with banging and popping in the silencer, low-speed town work and pottering about is unpleasant. MCS reader Mr Joyce hit upon one good idea. Do without the tickover and turn down the throttle stop screw. The big-hearted motor is happier out on the open road keeping the revs over 4,000. No red line! Up to 75mph-cruising is quite possible. Many owners claim 90 mph maximum, in good conditions, more than the speedo limit of 85!

Performance reminds me of the British 500 banners of the 50s. With 21 bhp, light (300 lb) weight, and maximum torque at 5,000 revs, the similarities are apparent. Though nothing, but nothing, can equal the relaxed feel of a big four-stroke, so ably described in the 4,000 miles across Canada by MAC Velo (August MCS). Unlike big singles, the faster the MZ goes the smoother it gets, even at 75 mph and 6,000 revs.

Petrol vanishes rapidly at high speed and 50 is best at a steady 70. Average: 60 to 70 mpg. Carburation at lower speeds is lumpy, and some owners have changed to an Amal with beneficial results. Through the gears it moves swiftly along thanks to a lively motor and quick-change box. A vast improvement on the 150 box. The lights are less than bright, and compared with the 150 the brakes too are not as good. Of immense value is the four-gallon tank giving 240-mile range. With no petrol anywhere in the north on Sundays, I can still enjoy a full day out in the Dales or Derbyshire without a refill. Starting is always a first-kick affair but it smokes furiously for the first mile, probably because I always put a bit extra oil in the tank. Handling is satisfactory. The all-welded frame and central bone back give stability at all speeds. Suspension is spot on and comfort for two, even on a 300-mile trip, is good.

The large Craven top box is a boon. On business trips I can lock away all the outer gear, helmets and boots. No more furtive searching for somewhere to hide scruffy riding gear. Most civilised! Snags are that the box does rattle a bit, and with the fairing all sorts of squeaks and other noises are heard. For me a fairing or screen is a must. Being battered for hour-after-hour at 70 mph on a winter day is no fun. The large expanse of white at front and rear should make the bike more noticeable to myopic drivers. On the other hand, both extras make it a bad risk for irresistible explorations down green lanes. Regrettably, this MZ is intended for touring and business trips only. The 150 was far more suitable for a dual role with an engine smooth and flexible from zero to 70 mph. Spares when needed were actually available. Top marks there. Had this been a Jap bike the bill would have been £300 not £100, and despite all the ballyhoo spares for all those models are just not there. Hondas change models faster than I change socks. A two-model range with electrics and most cycle parts identical would be a Honda dealer's dream. The vast complexity of the Honda range must be a mechanic's nightmare.

Despite the doubts on tyres and bearings, I reckon the Supa 5 is a good buy. The 150 is the best-value MZ of all. Such a pleasant machine for a bargain price.

So was it a good idea to buy a second hand MZ 250? On balance, yes. For £250 I gambled and lost. For £350 I have a smart 1978 250 in first class condition. Not exactly how I planned it: but the best-laid plans go wrong. . . . It should last a very long time, and the Baynam marathon trip fills me with confidence. I detect no weaknesses now. Gear primary drive is a comfort. A few more head gaskets should ease the low-speed unpleasantness. Where the 250 scores over the 150 is in stamina. Many a Jap 250 and larger bikes have seen a clean pair of MZ dampers. The way it climbs up the M62 out of Lancashire on to the Pennines never dropping below 70! All fuss free without nerve tingling revs. Easy maintenance. No oil changes every 1,000 miles.

No cam shafts running in soft alloy heads! Just a plain bike with a bit of character. Not perfect, but no frills either. I do like the 250. Many scorn the MZ as suitable for commuters and learners, preferring heavy, expensive four-cylinder superbikes.

How many five-year-old fours do you see still running? I look forward to reporting again at 20,000 miles. This will not take long doing 1,000 miles a month. If you should see me on the open road, give me a wave. BRIAN THOMPSON