

BARGAIN BANTAM

ABOUT six years ago, when BSA stopped producing the Bantam, it sold for around £200, and offered simple, commuter class motorcycling reliability. MZ, with their TS125 Alpine, have filled the gap that has remained since, and it is interesting to note that, despite the passing of six highly inflationary years, the little East German two stroke is selling now for under £230. The Alpine offers almost everything the Bantam did — and in some respects a lot more — like flashing indicators, alloy wheels and levers, enclosed chain and a very neat and tidy — if cosmetically unappealing — finish.

The bright lime-green paintwork highlights the slab-sided appearance, and when riding I was frequently reminded of school-boy gobstoppers by the bulbous headlamp shell. The frame is constructed in the best traditions of economical mass-production. The main frame loop being a pressed steel unit, and rear sub-frame a cast aluminium chunk that forms most of the rear mudguard — eminently practical and easy to clean, and giving superb handling limited only by the Pneuamant tyres. These are 18 inch versions of the plastic boots fitted to the TS 250, and

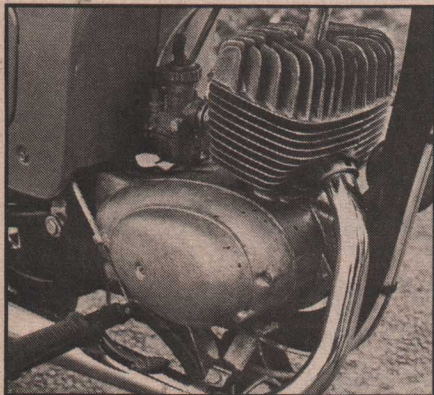
MZ TS125 ALPINE



By Bob Goddard

to overtake a lorry, third would jump out just at the wrong moment. Obviously the Alpine was not designed to be raced, so it is probably more a fault of an impatient journalist than that of the designers. I have a sneaking suspicion that the peculiar traits shown up in both the TS 125 and TS 250 gearboxes are at least partially due to clutch bothers. The 250's engine-speed clutch is spinning so fast the driven plates don't get time to slow down enough for the gear to engage immediately and the resulting clunk as the dogs mesh is inevitable until the rider has trained himself to shift at the right moment.

The 125 has its clutch mounted on the gearshaft, driven by duplex chain from the crank, so it doesn't suffer from this problem, but it did drag quite a bit when cold, and it is likely there was just enough friction when disengaged to prevent the gears clicking

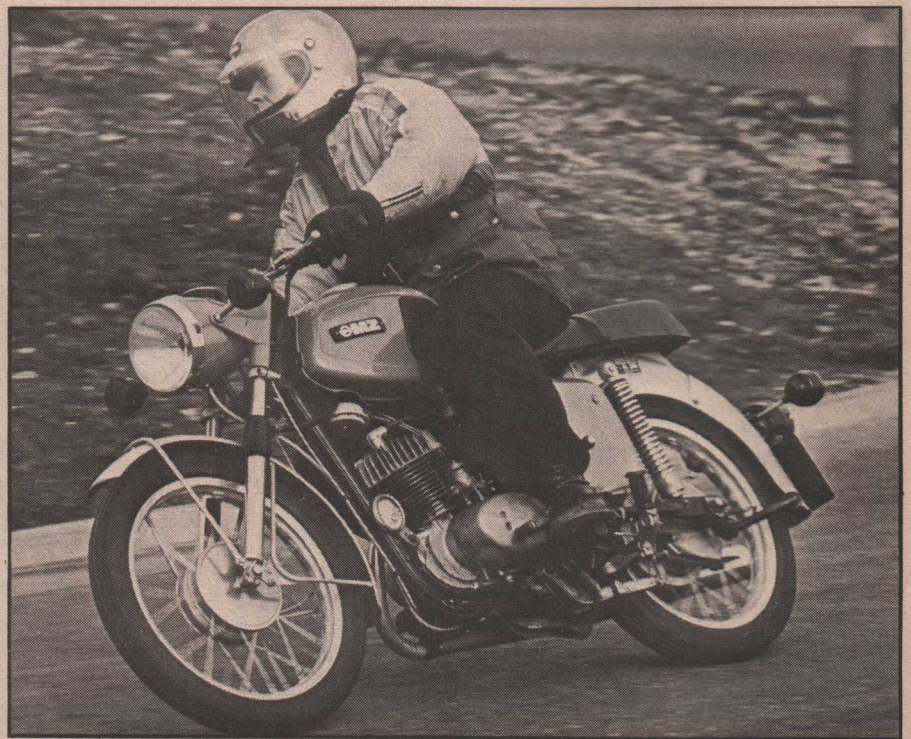


Looking very similar to the Bantam motor the TS125's engine gives sturdy commuter performance.

seemed to offer quite a bit more grip, but adhesion was still poor, particularly in the wet which is a shame, because despite the Alpine's non-sporting performance, the fine handling and short-flat bars egged me on to lay the bike over in bends, and it would have been great fun if I had the confidence that the tyres were not going to come unstuck.

The suspension, benefitting undoubtedly from MZ's successful involvement in ISDTs, was fabulous. The long-travel and progressively damped movement at both ends soaked up the bumps and kept the machine fully stable at all times, giving a luxury smooth ride that you just don't expect for £230.

Having gone most of the way to making the bike a smoothie like its bigger brother, I cannot understand why the factory have not seen fit to rubber-mount the engine like the 250. Vibration buzzes the rider's hands, feet and bum to numbness if the machine is held at top speed for long. The motor's 11 bhp



produced 66 mph at the test track, but vibration kept cruising speed down to 55. Although not possessing the zip of the Japanese two-stroke 125s, the Alpine does produce its poke higher up the rev-band than other MZs I have ridden, and it had enough go to easily deal with town traffic, and not get blown into the gutter by artics on the highway.

The four-speed gearbox is a big improvement over the 250's crunchy cogs, selecting the well-spaced gears relatively quickly and silently, but instead it had another annoying trait — jumping out of gear. If the bike is ridden sedately, and gears changed before the revs have peaked, this phenomena seemed to disappear, but you could bet your life that if you had to rev through the gears

fully home, hence the jumping.

Most clutches benefit from carefully checking to see that the plates are lifting off evenly, and I imagine that this one would too, but unfortunately I did not have time to get in there and fiddle. As well as gear-changing, the whole ride became more pleasant if you take a leisurely attitude towards the machine instead of aggressively trying to extract maximum mph. In top gear it would accelerate from around 30 mph without too much thumb-twiddling, up to its cruising speed, and would hold it there unless hills got too steep or winds too strong.

The single leading shoe drum brakes front and rear were well up to coping with the Alpine's performance, and the bike stopped

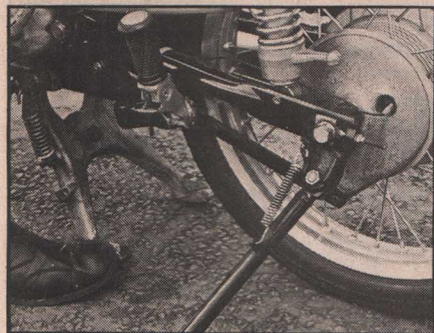
BEATER

sharp and sweet, but the front tyre squealed easily when the front brake was used alone, which acted as a reminder not to put too much faith in the tyres.

Night-time riding was no problem because the Alpine is fitted with the same lights as the 250, which were quite adequate for the bigger model, but in the last few miles of the 800 mile test, the rear lamp filament blew. This was evidently due to vibration which also played havoc with the rear-view mirror.

The left hand winker blinked faster than it should have done, but otherwise there were no problems with the sparse and simple switchgear, once you had mastered flicking the indicator switch on the right-hand bar up for right and down for left without having to think about it. The cold start lever on the handlebar was not a choke at all, but a device for opening an extra valve in the carburettor to enrichen the charge. With it opened a couple of prods on the kick starter woke the engine up, and the lever could be closed immediately.

The 79 mpg fuel consumption average was the result of quite hard usage, and would no doubt be improved by someone who is not perpetually late setting off for work like me. The 33:1 mix-in-the-tank lub-



Hefty cast aluminium centre stand looks robust, and side stand keeps well out of the way. Note stop switch in hub.

rication is aided by a measuring cup in the filler cap, and the oil seemed to do its job efficiently enough with no tightening from the motor.

There is no spare space on the 125 for carrying a bottle of oil for emergencies, but the right-hand sidecover removed to give access to the well-equipped tool kit, and the left cover hid the battery and electrical gadgetry. Ideas that I liked were the stop lamp switch hidden away inside the rear brake plate, and front brake leverage hidden inside its drum.

Overall finish on the Alpine was to a high standard, and there was nothing to suggest the machine had been built down to a price, instead of up to the factory's usual quality. It is a well designed motorcycle on the whole and despite a couple of little niggles like vibration and the gearshift, I suspect it will prove very popular with commuters looking for a budget alternative to a car or public transport — at £227 they are getting a bargain.

PERFORMANCE AND SPECIFICATION

TEST CONDITIONS

Dry, 5 mph tailwind, ambient temperature 56 degrees Fahrenheit

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Maximum speed | 66mph |
| braking from 30 mph | n.a. |
| Standing start $\frac{1}{4}$ mile | 21.3 secs |
| Fuel consumption: | |
| hard riding | 71mpg |
| average | 79mpg |
| Speeds in gears: | min. max. |
| 1 | 4 21 |
| 2 | 8 36 |
| 3 | 12 52 |
| 4 | 15 66 |

ENGINE

type Piston ported two-stroke single, displacement 123 cc, bore x stroke 52 x 58mm, compression ratio 10:1, claimed output 11 bhp at 6,200 rpm, lubrication 33:1 petrol mix, ignition coil and c.b., carburettor 22mm B.V.F., charging 6v 60/90 watt dynamo.

TRANSMISSION

clutch wet multiplate, primary reduction 2.31:1 duplex chain, final reduction 3.2:1 chain, gear ratios: 1 3.05:1, 2 1.805:1, 3 1.285:1, 4 1:1,

CHASSIS

Front tyre 2.75 x 18 Pnuemant, rear tyre 3.00 x 18 Pnuemant, front brake 160mm s/s, rear brake 150mm s/s, front suspension 185mm movement, telescopic forks, rear suspension 105mm movement, swinging arm adjustable shocks, wheelbase 51.4 ins (1,305mm), trail n.a., overall length 80.5 ins (2,045mm), overall width 28.8 ins (730mm), ground clearance 5.4ins (140mm), dry weight 227lbs (103 kg), fuel tank 2.75 gallons (12.5 litres), warranty Six months parts and labour, Concessionaire: Wilf Green Ltd, MZ House, 330 Queens Rd., Sheffield 2.

HOW IT COMPARES

| MODEL | price inc vat | max speed | ss $\frac{1}{4}$ ml | dry wt lbs | fuel tank |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------|------------|-----------|
| MZ TS125 Alpine | £227.88 | 66mph | 21.3s | 227 | 79 |
| CZ 175 Mk V | £269 | 73mph | 20.5s | 247 | 56 |
| Gitane Champion 50cc | £289 | 50mph | n.a. | n.a. | 90 |
| Kawasaki KH100 | £289 | 63mph | n.a. | 196 | 90 |
| Suzuki B120 | £250 | 63mph | n.a. | 187 | 84 |
| MZ TS150 | £234 | 65mph | n.a. | 240 | 68 |

PARTS PRICES inc vat

| | £ |
|------------------------------|--------|
| front mudguard | 10.50 |
| handlebar | 4.85 |
| speedo cable | 1.70 |
| exhaust | 20.25 |
| set of pistons/rings | 5.50 |
| contact breaker points | .80 |
| list price | 227.88 |

