

Barron 125

A more than conventional-looking machine intended to take over where the Bantam left off. It is unusual because it was produced — of Italian, Polish and British components — simply to fill this gap left when the Japanese took control and British industry foundered.

It was dreamed up by Barron Eurotrade primarily because their Fantic machines are priced at the top end of the market and volume sales are obviously limited. They wanted an economy model too, and took the idea from the ill-fated WSK, another Polish machine imported briefly to this country.

The Polish manufacturers agreed to build the rolling chassis but would not export their engines, because of the poor reputation they had. This was no problem for Barron because Minarelli can supply their lightweight two-strokes in a wide variety of specifications, including the domestic one used here.

So the frame, including the wheels, brakes, Stormil tyres, and the lighting equipment is shipped over from Poland and the 125 is assembled here with the Italian engine and a few assorted British parts.

There were some doubts expressed about the tyres but so far they've behaved well enough for the performance of the machine — an unambitious 60 to 65 mph flat out. But the front forks were not up to the job, so these have been abandoned and Barron now fit Metal Profile forks to all their machines.

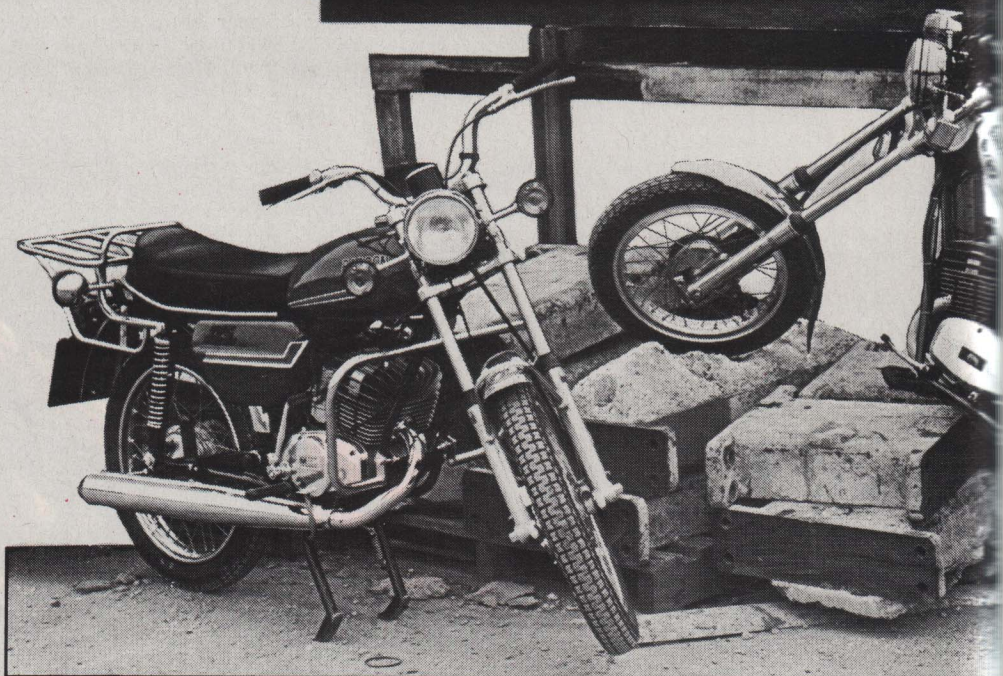
This machine is in fact the first of the mark 2 version — to be called "Roadster" to distinguish it from the earlier type. The Polish chassis is typically heavy duty — even the paint is heavy duty — but it is certainly robust and well finished — and on this version the finish has been improved with better quality chrome-work.

The machine has a rather agricultural feel and fits in with the pattern already set by the Jawa CZ range. Its performance is intentionally stodgy, its character functional and spartan. Crash bars and a rear carrier, designed by Barron, are available as extras. But the price is only in the economy class when it is compared to machines like the other Fantics.

At £399, including VAT, but excluding delivery and the cost of the carrier or crash bars, the 125 costs roughly the same as an average Japanese 125. In fact some of the more basic commuter bikes undercut it quite easily. In Eastern European terms, a similar amount of money would buy a 350 Jawa.

It is hard to find a specific fault with this sort of machine — it is purely a workhorse and the finer points, like the suspension is too harsh and the brakes not particularly powerful are really minor considerations. The point is that it copes and had it been £100 cheaper it would deserve nothing but praise for beating the Communist countries at their own game.

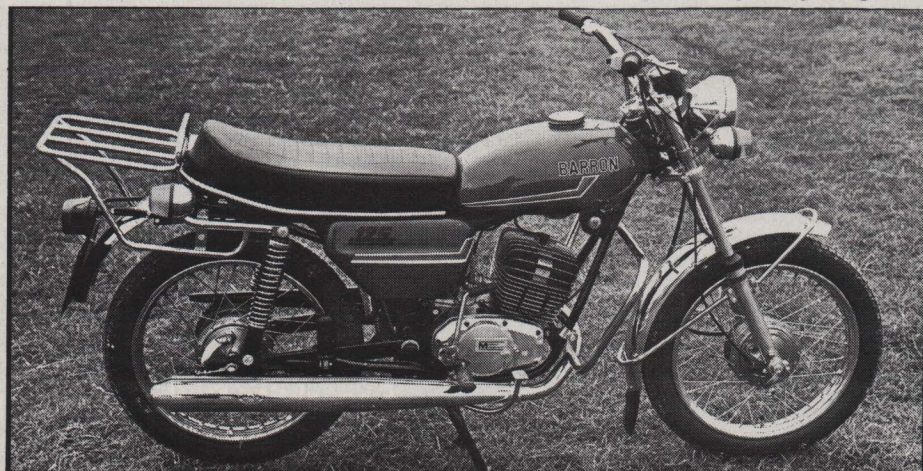
There are a few irritating detail points which you could expect and overlook on a raw economy model but which, on this machine might well encourage people to spend just a few more pounds and not have to suffer them. For example the Minarelli



Lightweights with a

To many people a lightweight is either a necessary tool to do a straightforward job or a necessary evil imposed upon them by legal, financial or parental dictates.

Anything with a small engine may offer various economies but you can't escape the fact that it usually has pretty severe limitations as well. Many of these come from the basic design aping the shape of bigger bikes — we took a quick look at four which, in their own ways, are pretty original.



Jawa 350 outfit

The idea of coupling a 350cc two stroke twin to a chair is not a particularly exciting prospect even to die-hard chair enthusiasts. You would be wrong, however, to imagine that the Jawa is anything but exciting. Thanks to, or because of, the ultra light-weight chair every bend becomes an adventure, spiced with the very real danger of running off the road or tipping the lot into a ditch.

Experienced sidecar buffs are a breed alone and I shouldn't think for a minute that any one of them would consider the Jawa 350 as their type of transport. This bike then, must be aimed at the man looking for cheap transport for three bodies, plus some week end shopping trips. Here the sidecar outfit scores heavily and none more so than the Jawa. With a basic purchase price of £649 and Jawa-CZ's special insurance scheme which brings full comp cover down to around £12 for an experienced licence holder, the 350 looks a good bet. With this in mind I felt quite confident when I arrived at the importers to pick up the machine. Such rash confidence soon disappeared when a mechanic rode the bike out of the workshop with only two of its wheels firmly in contact with Terra Firma. Coming to a halt in front of me the sidecar wheel gently floated down to earth with an incredible lack of urgency, appearing to defy the force of gravity. "I should watch out for that, mate" was his only word of advice and he joined the gathering crowd of onlookers. It would appear, judging from the expectant faces of the audience, that a departing Jawa sidecar was not an event to be missed.

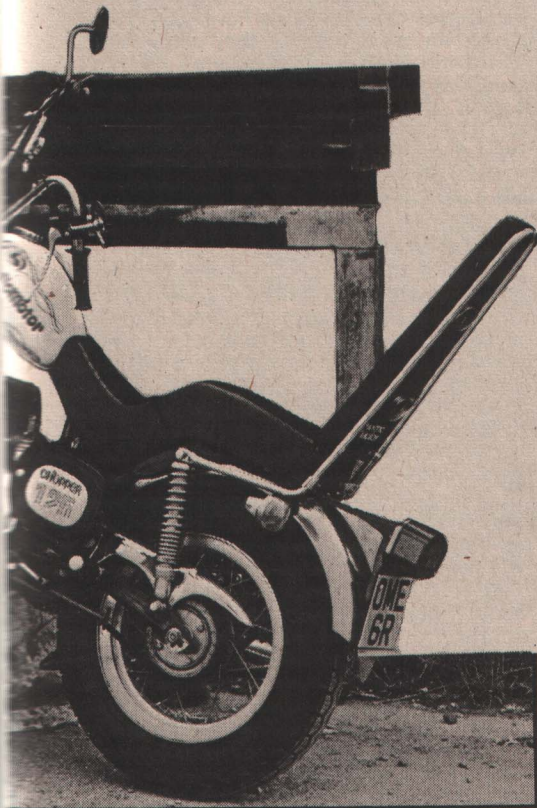
I am happy to report that I had travelled all of four hundred yards before the sidecar

wheel lifted for the first, but not the last, time. The ultra light chair, however, also has its plus points in that the straight (or almost straight) line performance is quite respectable, considering the engine's lack of cubic inches.

The ease with which the sidecar wheel lifts has its plus points as well. Simply leaning over the chair is enough to bring it back down to earth. With this in mind left hand bends are approached at near zero speed and a weather eye cocked in the direction of the chair. Once this starts to lift you know that maximum speed has been attained and you simply maintain that speed but lean over the coffin, I mean sidecar, as you progress around the bend. If the bend should tighten up half way around you will be forced into making a snap decision. Plan one is to let the outfit run wide and pray that nothing is coming the other way and plan two is to let the bike turn over and abandon ship.

The straight line drag strip approach also has its dangers. Winding the throttle open and taking it up through the gears could be indulged in, but things got quite exciting when the throttle twistgrip came away in your hand just as you were heaving on the bars. This happened to me on two occasions and each time the carb shut off and I cruised to a standstill.

Adding some ballast to the chair, in the shape of a 15-stone Ad manager, changed the whole riding technique. Gone was the danger of the chair lifting, to be replaced by a right turn tendency as the throttle was closed. Braking in this loaded condition was just about



difference

engine needs two-stroke oil adding to the fuel, not a major fault but an unnecessary, messy palaver compared to the simplicity of a separate system. The electrics and controls are not as slick or easy to use or as well weather-proofed as the standardised Japanese equipment; the ignition key fell out of the Barron during the first couple of days it was ridden but the lock was easy to work with almost any substitute and we finished the test using a locker cupboard key.

On the bright side the Minarelli engine is as robust as the rest of the bike and if our experience of the revvy enduro engines is anything to go by, this detuned version should prove reliable. Fuel consumption is what you would expect from the performance — good. It delivers 70 to 80 mpg driven to the limits of the motor and should be good for over 90 if it was pottered about gently.

Barron's initiative in attempting to produce their own ride-to-work, genuine economy model is admirable but I can't help feeling that somewhere along the line they've got their sums wrong.

John Robinson



adequate but I wouldn't want to. have to stop in a hurry. Since the Ad manager's comments on the quality of the ride are just a little biased, he has to sell the ads, I decided to get a second opinion.

The main complaint from the passenger was the deafening noise from the engine as it was buzzed up in the lower gears. Once into top, however, the wind noise helped drown out the engine. At the start of the test I was a little worried that it would come to a premature end on a lonely left hand bend. Fact, however, is stranger than fiction and the outfit came to an untimely end in a wide open car park. I wanted a second opinion on the wheel lifting antics of the sidecar and John Robinson's aid was

enlisted.

Riding the machine around the car park, to get the feel of it before venturing onto the open road, John disappeared around the back of a building for about five minutes. Coming back much slower than he took off, John attempted a right turn just in front of me. Having had the bars on full lock John was balancing the crabbing effect with delicate throttle control. The throttle, however, had other ideas, because it pulled right off the bar and jammed wide open.

The sight of a Robinson, wheel spinning across the car park with all three wheels pointing in different directions, was quite spectacular and I remember thinking at the time that the engine really must be quite,

powerful for a three fifty. Then the Robinson road show came to an abrupt halt, brought about by a brick wall that just happened to be in the way!

That was the end of the test, Robinson was rushed to hospital for repair and the Jawa was rushed back to the importer for treatment. To sum up it would appear that sidecars are dangerous in less than expert hands but they obviously have something going for them because they are getting more and more popular, "there's nowt as queer as folk" you know!

Dave Walker

Fantic 125 chopper



A genuinely silly piece of extravaganza which, when you see it and its price, inspires just one thought. Oddly enough, it

nearly pays off — if you are four foot eight it would probably be quite comfortable.

It doesn't exactly project the image of chopper riders as depicted by the movie makers though — people usually laugh when they see it.

But does it have any intrinsic value? The Minarelli motor is a detuned and muffled version of the peaky 125 but would push the huge machine and its 5.60 inch rear tyre along at maybe 70 mph but using it like this gives under 60 mpg. This, combined with a fuel tank which only takes slightly more than one gallon means that it is not exactly a machine on which to enjoy the freedom of the open road. It also runs on a petrol/oil mixture which means you need to carry your own oil and some measuring device because to avoid running dry you're forever stopping and finding it takes eight tenths of a gallon to fill up. So in addition to the oil and a small burette, a pocket calculator

wouldn't be entirely wasted if you're keen to preserve an accurate oil to fuel ratio.

The seat in itself and the seating arrangement is quite comfortable; it weren't so close to the handlebars and footrest it could make a good riding position. But the only way a normal sized adult can get on the bike is to use the pillion part of the seat and then there's nothing to lean back against so you have to hang on to the handlebars.

Despite the unlikely layout and the odd combination of tyre sizes, it doesn't handle badly and while it isn't exactly as agile as most lightweights, the response and roadholding are quite good. The only fault was bad juddering when the front brake was used hard and this seemed to come from a sticky action of the front forks rather than a fault in the brake itself.

Even Barron Eurotrade, who import the chopper, see it mainly as a promotional exercise — a gimmick machine to use at shows and in advertisements. Yet perhaps the most amazing thing about it is that, at £599, they've sold about a hundred models so far.

John Robinson

KM90 Kawasaki

Created in the image of the standard Japanese trail bike, the 90 looks like a toy, an expensive luxury for rich people's kids to annoy poor people's kids with.

It's scaled down, sure, but it has everything a full-sized machine has from its brake wear indicators to its separate lube system and its £335 price. And as we rode it, around town, around the garden, along the beach it slowly became obvious that the little Kawasaki was quite a handy machine.

Taken in context, it is as good a ride-to-work bike as any 90 and as good as most 125s and as a means of instant transport its lack of physical size gave it a surprising number of advantages. It really is a machine for all the family as anyone over the age of seven can handle it. The kids can play on it, grannie can belt down to the Derby and Joan club on it, editors can go fishing on it; in short it generates a lot of usefulness.

And all the time you've still got the basic, reliable, commuter workhorse.

It cruises at 50 mph and might achieve 60 mph if encouraged and between being belted flat out to the office and played with by all and sundry, usually in bottom gear, it still gave 83 mpg. It handles quite well — it

would be hard to make such a small bike which didn't — the brakes are OK and the lighting, indicators and so on are standard Japanese issue.

Probably anyone looking for a simple commuter wouldn't even consider such a machine and in many ways it would be their loss. It doesn't lose out to conventional machines, except that it won't carry a passenger and, depending on what you expect out of a 90cc machine it offers a fair range of uses.

The single-cylinder disc-valve engine drives through five gears and, like Kawasaki's bigger trail bikes, has a fair spread of power. It pulls steadily from tickover and using the gears makes it quite nippy in traffic while manoeuvrability is in the roller skate class.

It certainly is a lot more than a toy but then it's not cheap either. The recommended price is marginally less than Kawasaki's own KH100 commuter bike but slightly more than the 70s, 80s, 90s and 100s offered by Suzuki, Honda and so on.

John Robinson



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