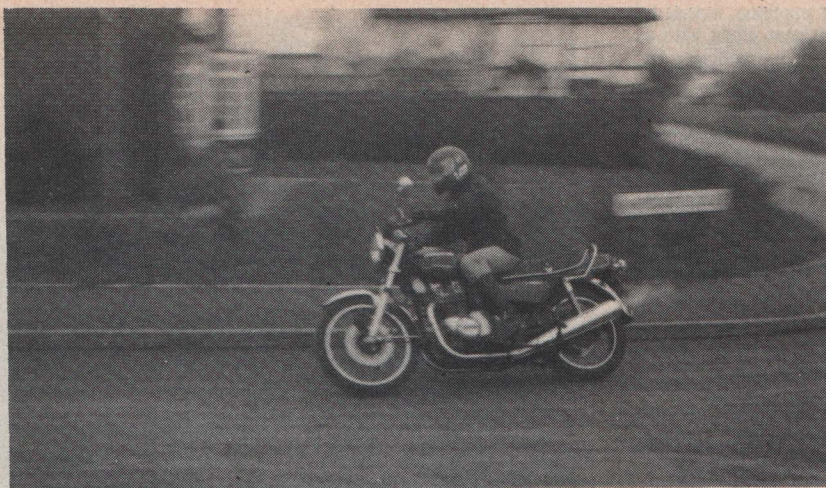


"Oh, What Transport of Delight"

-Sir H. W. Baker



KAWASAKI Z750

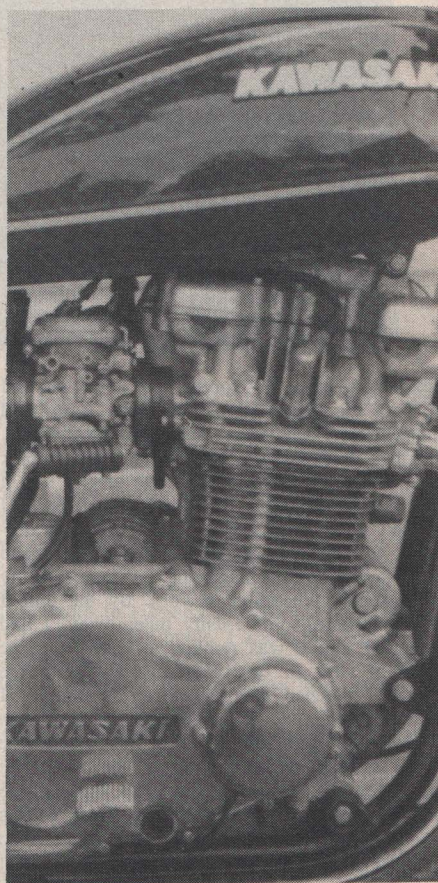
I MUST confess I had given up motorcycling about a year ago, having commuted 40 miles a day in all weathers. I don't mind getting cold and wet in the interests of pleasure but when it comes to getting wet every day for a week it's not for me. Mind you I didn't own a despatch rider's coat and waders! So I bought one of England's low volume production sports cars which had many of the attributes of a motorcycle, like 50 m.p.g. and superb roadholding, all attained whilst being kept dry. I was a traitor to the cause.

However, I was putting up with entering a bend at 80 m.p.h. and coming out at 70 m.p.h. There was also a distinct lack of steam when quick overtaking was called for. Again I was dissatisfied, but there was nothing on the motorcycle market that particularly took my interest. My last machine had been a 10,000 r.p.m. six-speed CB400F Honda, which is an excellent middle-weight motorcycle; however I disliked reading telephone numbers on the right-hand dial and suffer from cramp when I move my left ankle too often!

Then I discovered wall-to-wall carpeting in a motorcycle showroom. This confused me and coupled with the highly polished delectable machines on view, with tastefully poised spot lighting, I was a sitting duck for any salesman. Most of the machinery on view though was in the £1,500-£2,000+ price bracket so the visit was purely academic, until I saw the price tag affixed to a strange breed of Kawasaki 750 which looked like a four-stroke twin. It must be a trick of the lighting I thought, but on further investigation I found out that this was a new model from the makers of those incredibly fast, and even more incredibly, thirsty two-stroke threes. Could it be that they had made a sensible motorcycle at last. I was even more pleased when I was told that the Z750 produced peak torque at 3,000 r.p.m. and had only a five-speed gearbox. No more telephone figures and cramp in the ankle. I went home with thoughts of the wind once more whistling around my lithe frame and the sound of motorcycle boots scraping the tarmac. It wasn't only Mary that was contrary! But I was not to be swayed by such romantic illusions. I still didn't want to get wet so I devised a plan whereby I could run a four-wheeled rust heap, which was waterproof, and buy my dream machine as well.

Soon after my visit to Hexagon of Highgate, in case you hadn't guessed, the first road tests appeared in the weekly comics. I was impressed not only by the superbly soft flexible power of the engine but also by the fact that it didn't frighten the testers at high speed, unlike the larger 900 model. The conclusions seemed to be that it was

It is the engine that is the heart of any motorcycle, and on the Z750 it is golden. It provides smooth power from tickover to a red-lined 7,800 r.p.m.



an extremely sensible motorcycle but not cast in the utilitarian MZ mould. It had the right amount of power for today's road conditions and placed at the right end of the rev range.

My next visit was to SGT of Taplow who most kindly arranged for me to have a ride on the beast. It wasn't just a tour round the block either. I was out for about half an hour, encompassing every road condition except very high speed, so I could make a fairly adequate appraisal of the machine from first-hand knowledge. The atmosphere there is totally different to any other showroom I have encountered. Things are never rushed and you are never bludgeoned into making a decision. It is in fact the ultimate in soft selling techniques and is a refreshing change from the more normal attitude of "I'm sorry sir we can't let you ride the machine because of insurance difficulties". More truthfully this type of dealer does not want to lose the revenue from putting a machine out of stock onto the road because of the huge depreciation involved. What they do not realize is that they are losing customers like me who refuse to hand over £1,000 without first finding out what I'm buying. And in the long term it is people like SGT that will make more money through better customer relations. Long may they thrive.

I shall now come down off my soap-box and tell you that I did indeed buy the machine in the April of 1976. At £949 it is the only 750 apart from the Meriden range that is under £1,000. Despite its poor man's superbike price it still has the best finish of any of the Japanese big four and I have owned at least one example from each manufacturer. The paintwork, whilst not being in the Rolls-Royce class, maintains its sheen without having to be polished every other day and as the engine is unlacquered it does not begin to look tatty after a few months' ownership. All the switchgear is of usual Japanese high quality being also easy and logical to operate. The clutch and throttle are also light and smooth to operate which helps a great deal towards the end of a long ride. The gear change alternates between a certain degree of notchiness and knife through butter smoothness. After almost 5,000 miles I still cannot identify the right conditions for a smooth change, but I shall persevere as many BMW rider's do.

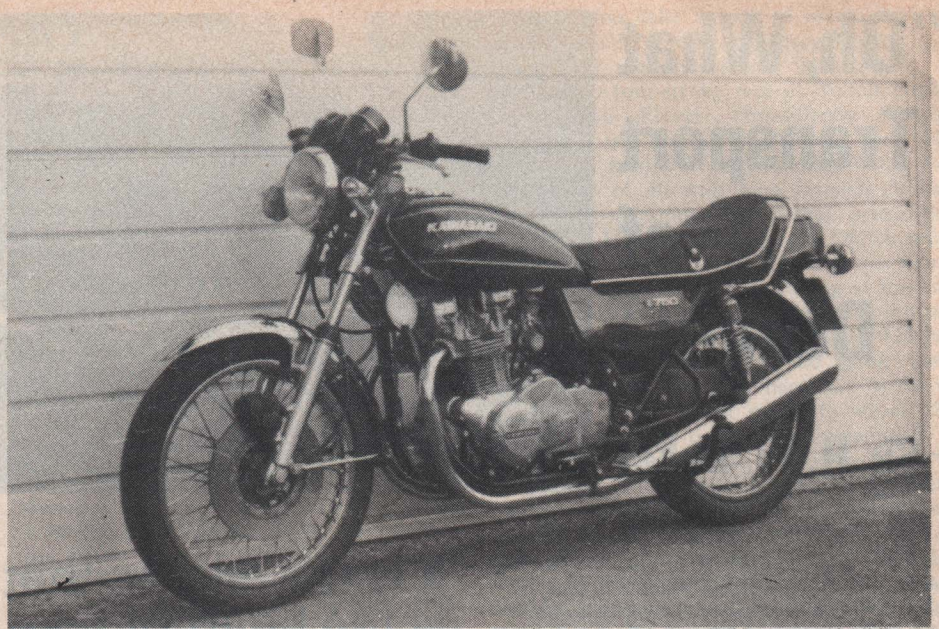
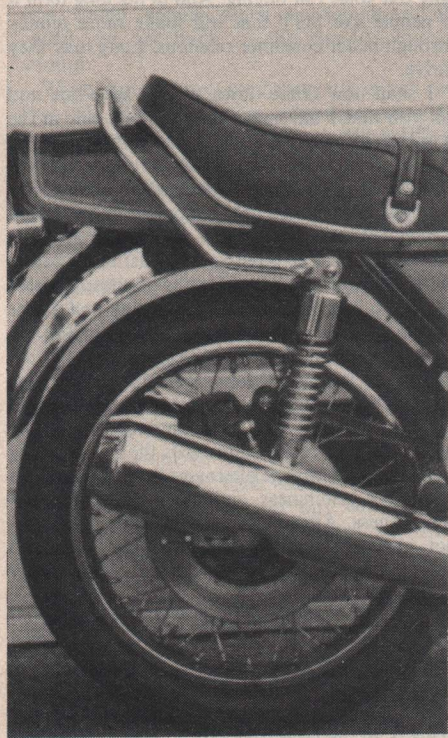
It is, however, the engine that is the heart of any motorcycle and on the Z750 it is seemingly golden. It will pull smoothly from tickover to 700-800 r.p.m. where the red line begins, although for acceleration through the gears 5,000 r.p.m. delivers all the power necessary to stay ahead. Its

character is that of a top gear machine, indeed it is possible to pull away in top gear albeit with a lot of clutch slipping. This is not a practice to be recommended however in deference to a certain amount of mechanical sympathy. The ability of the machine to function usefully at low revs does make for extremely easy riding through built-up areas and when on the open road the absence of any need to change down for acceleration makes instant overtaking the order of the day. The inherent safety of a motorcycle being able to accelerate out of potentially dangerous situations is very rarely mentioned when accident statistics are being discussed.

I was somewhat sceptical when contra-rotating balance shafts were introduced for modern parallel twins. I saw little reason for the extra weight and complication coupled with a certain amount of power loss in the system. Rubber mounting is cheaper and easier. To some extent I still subscribe to this view but having sampled the effects of the shafts in the Z750 I am not totally against this method of damping vibration. What vibration there is is more like that of the Morini V-twin. The engine can be felt working and the mirrors become blurred over 4,000 r.p.m. but it does not intrude into the rider's comfort, even after twelve hours of virtual non-stop travel, of which more later.

However, it is a different story for the pillion passenger as anybody that travels on the back will tell you. The vibration, both through the footrests and the seat, is quite uncomfortable, making anything more than a 50-mile journey unfeasible. Another manifestation of the vibration made itself known whilst travelling along a motorway. I happened to glance down to see one of the flashing indicators working itself loose. Having said all that though it is still nothing like the agonizing vibro-massage experienced whilst riding an Edward Turner twin.

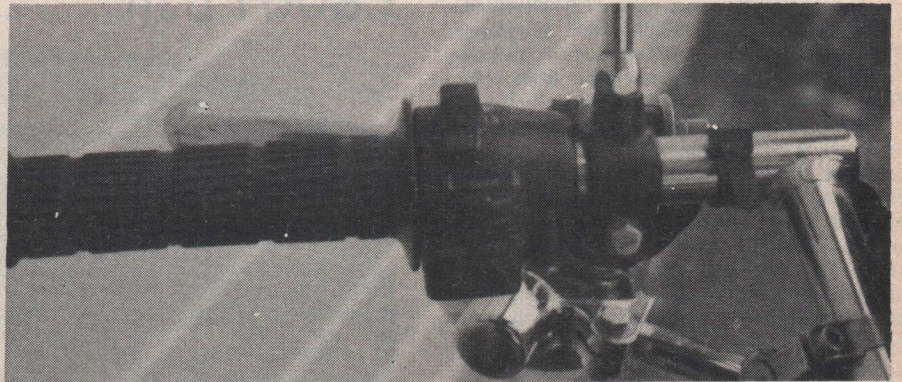
The only things to complain about when I picked the machine up from SGT were that one of the indicator bulbs blew after about 100 miles and the tickover was too slow making the machine cut out when asked to tickover in traffic. Both these faults were promptly dealt with at the 500-mile service.



The rev counter also reads consistently fast which I didn't discover until I saw in one road test that the m.p.h. per 1,000 r.p.m. should be 15.7 and according to my tachometer it is more like 14. This led to a very gentle running-in period which will probably pay dividends later on in the engine's life.

For the first 4,000 miles I kept the machine in absolutely standard condition, including the Japanese Bridgestone tyres. Contrary to popular belief a modern Japanese tyre bears little resemblance to its predecessors of a few years

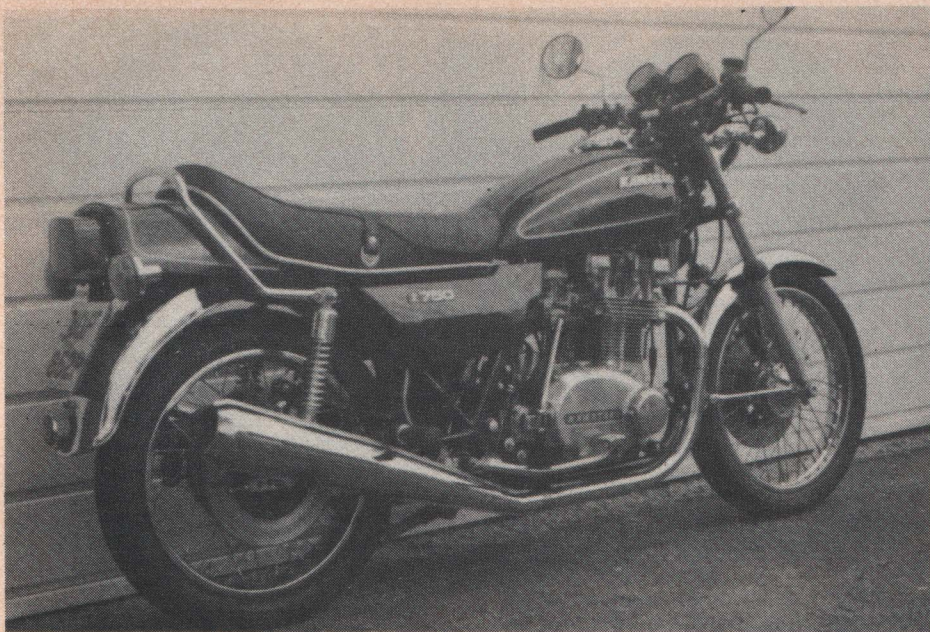
The handling is taste but I have is not in the racing class of the Morini traits either, which of security to enjoy



ago. I must admit that I'm no hero in the wet and at first the prospect of Japanese tyres and stainless steel disc brakes both ends terrified me. But then the fateful day came when I had to pick the machine up after its 500-mile service and it started raining just as I drew up outside SGT. I dressed up in the complete, supposedly waterproof, gear and was grateful of the fact that I had overtrousers on thus disguising the shaking of my two patellas (kneecaps to you). By the time I reached home, some twenty miles away, I had forgotten that it was raining, at least from the point of view of the tyres anyway. With the brakes I reached a compromise situation: if I didn't ask them to do an emergency stop then they wouldn't grab, but if I broke this private little social contract things got nasty. The braking in the dry though is absolutely faultless, especially to one who has owned a Velocette Viper with a single-leading-shoe front brake which refused to render even a 30-0 stop. It was more of a kind of

grind to a gradual halt after much heaving and sweating. (I have since discovered that this was probably due to the fact that the drum had worn oval at some time and had been machined out again without any attention being paid to the brake cam. Consequently I could never achieve maximum braking power.) Almost complete safety was attained however by the incredible noise that was emitted from the gorgeous fishtail silencer. People could hear you from miles off. In contrast to that infamous Velocette the disc on the Z750 has a superb amount of non-fade power delivered with excellent feel. Tunes can be played on the front tyre with great finesse. The rear disc is totally unnecessary but it helps somebody with puny leg muscles like me in that all you need to do is touch the pedal in order to help stable braking at the sharp end.

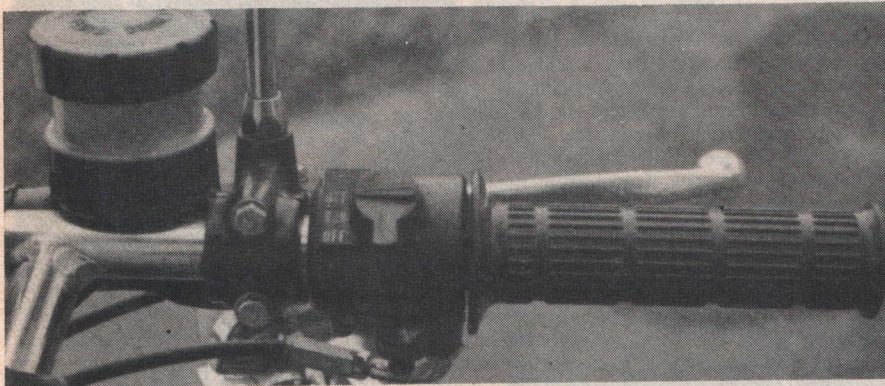
The handling is perhaps an acquired taste but I have grown to like it. It is not in the racing thoroughbred class of the Morini but has no nasty



perhaps an acquired grown to like it. It thoroughbred but has no nasty adds to the feeling a ride to the full

get to circa 110 m.p.h. (its approximate top speed) and start wishing for a bigger motor.

The first decent excursion I had after the running-in period had been completed was to Silverstone to see the Motorcycle Grand Prix there in August. I had to get back in a hurry as I was leaving for Scotland the next day and I had neither packed nor given the bike its final checkover. That day, according to the motorcycle press, was famous for the bad standard of riding among the spectators returning from the event. From my personal experience I can endorse this



traits either, which adds to the feeling of security necessary to enjoy a ride to the full. Partly due to the machine's weight and perhaps also the steering geometry the steering is slow and the bike has a tendency to understeer. There are two ways to overcome this barrier to fast cornering; the first is to adopt the Paul Smart, Barry Ditchburn mode of travel, *i.e.*, crawl all over it in an effort to force it down into the corner. To the more stylish rider the same results can be achieved by the simple expedient of turning the handlebars the opposite way to the way you want to turn. The bike will then lay down into corners admirably well and pick itself up in the same manner. The most annoying habit it has arises when braking in mid-corner is called for; it tends to drift outwards and upwards as the brakes are applied. The same effect results whether the rear or front brake is used. The biggest plus mark though must go to the straight line stability. It seems the faster you go the more stable the machine becomes so that you

view for the time spent travelling round the narrow lanes where there was a distinct lack of courtesy to car drivers and motorcyclists alike, and I was also witness to the aftermath of one accident where a car had swerved off the road presumably to avoid a motorcyclist. However once past Buckingham and heading south I saw no repeat of the discourteous attitudes. I found myself travelling behind an R90 BMW and we settled down to a steady cruising pace for which our machines were made. I know the road from Buckingham to Aylesbury very well having attended meetings at Silverstone from an early age and it is truly superb for fast, safe motorcycling. Unfortunately the Buckinghamshire police do not think so, so a wary eye has to be kept. The ride home was very enjoyable, first in the company of the BMW and later on with a 500 Suzuki behind me. He gave me a cheerful wave when I turned off towards Amersham. On arriving home the conclusion I came to was that the

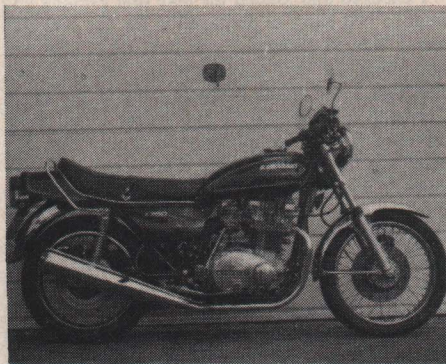
standard handlebars would have to be ditched as they hampered my comfort at speeds over 60 m.p.h. But the journey to Scotland was tomorrow so that would have to wait.

I checked and loaded the bike that evening and went to bed early in preparation for the 600-mile ride I was to undertake the next day. This was something of an adventure for me because, although I had made frequent trips to the tip of Cornwall (almost exactly 300 miles), I had never travelled further by motorcycle in one day. My plan was for speed rather than scenery so my journey started by going up the M1 and M6 to Carlisle and then on up to Glasgow, past Inverness and a further 100 miles to Lairg, a small town in the Highlands of Scotland.

I set off at 5.45 on Monday morning and although it was summer it was still cold at that time of the morning so full regalia was called for. I felt very happy with the bike, it had behaved very well the day before and had been returning 55-60 m.p.g., so not too many fuel stops would be called for. My only worry was the nature of the riding position. At high speed it gave me stabbing pains in the shoulders and, sure enough, just after Luton the pains started. But then about 10 miles further on I hit some early morning fog so I had to slow down from my 70-75 m.p.h. cruising speed to 45-50. I no longer had to hold on to the handlebars so fiercely so my shoulders soon stopped aching as I wondered whether the fog would ever clear. It lasted for about half an hour before it cleared by which time my gloves were soaked from the moisture and so was my face because I travelled with the visor up in order to see where I was going. My gloves didn't dry out until Kendal in the Lake District by which time the weather was fine and not too hot. In fact I was faced with ideal conditions to finish the ride in. At least I thought I must be on the last stretch as I'd nearly reached Scotland. At that time I had little conception of just how far it was to Lairg once the Scottish border had been crossed. Perhaps if I had, I would have been more demoralized. The journey so far had been boringly simple except for one slight mishap at a filling station. My stops previous to this had been for fuel alone consequently I had filled the meagre 3.3 gallon tank up to the brim in order to get a reasonable touring range. This time I repeated the procedure but Mother Nature had started whispering in my ear about 50 miles previously that I ought to stop to attend to the functions of my body. By this time it was not just a whisper, it was a loud shriek with plenty of expletive deletives. So I parked the bike after the tank had been replenished, and went into the nearest loo. I came out with a relieved smile on my face and an equally relieved bowel. I looked across to the bike and saw a pool of liquid underneath. Dispelling the strange thoughts I was having about bikes being human I went to investigate. At first sight it looked as if the gearbox was leaking but on further investigation it looked

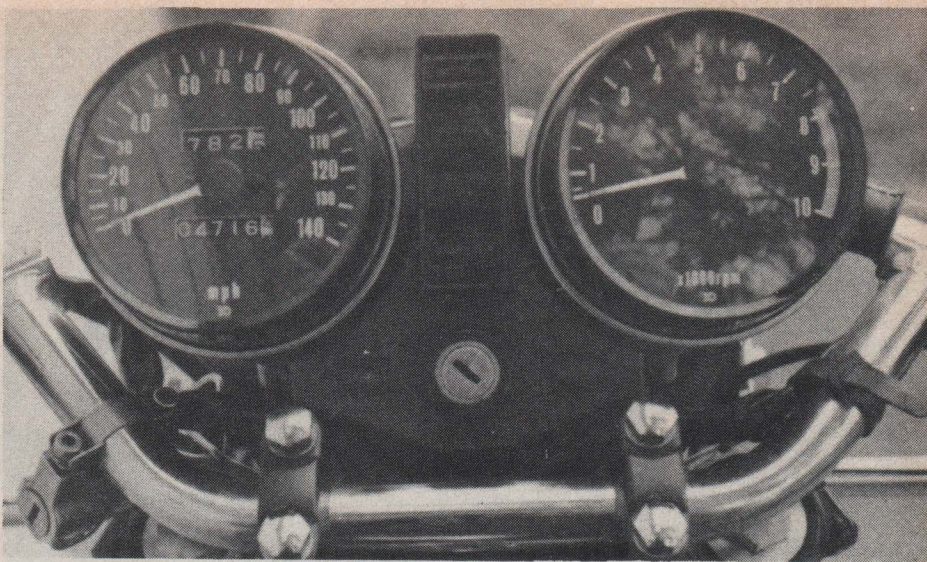


"This marvellously economical bike"



more like the cuplit was the petrol tap, but I was wrong yet again. Due to the heat of the engine the fuel in the tank had expanded and was rapidly overflowing all over my beautifully polished machine. There was nothing to do but get on and ride it, which I did. Then I re-discovered the aches and pains which had been temporarily dispelled by the moment of high drama that I'd just experienced. The stabbing pains in the shoulders had subsided to a dull ache and the full brunt of the agony was coming from that area known as the bottom (quite why it's called that I've never been sure. I mean your feet are at the bottom of your body aren't they?). Any analysis of the comfort of a particular motorcycle must be of necessity subjective, and I am not sure whether it is the seat of the motorcycle that lacks padding or the seat of the person sitting on it that does. Whatever it is it hurt. However I gritted my teeth and screwed the throttle open a bit more in defiance of the wind that was desperately trying to throw me off my motorcycle. After all I knew I was nearly there by now. I had just passed Glasgow so it couldn't be much further could it?

As time went on and I stopped for yet more fuel I was beginning to wonder, perhaps I was a masochist after all. But as the roads became twistier and more narrow I forgot about everything except the road and the traffic situation. In my haste to get the journey over with I was travelling faster and faster which required



more and more concentration. There was a BMW advertisement some months ago which said that there is nothing as relaxing as total 100% concentration and I agree. The only thing that was disturbing this growing state of euphoria was an annoying graunching sound coming as the engine revs passed an indicated 4,000 r.p.m. in top gear. The way to cure this of course was to keep above 4,000 r.p.m. whenever possible, because I was not going to stop when I was enjoying myself so much. In retrospect this was a very stupid decision as there could have been something seriously wrong. The last 11 miles were over moorland on well surfaced single track road. You could see the corners well before you needed to and, more important, you could see right round them. It was time for delusions of grandeur. Was this how Mike Hailwood felt as he went round the Island. Absolute confidence, in both rider and machine. I didn't want to stop at all. I could have gone to John O'Groats and then turned round and back to Land's End. I rounded a left-hand corner which for once I could not see round. The euphoria vanished, replaced by a sick numbness in the stomach. I was well banked over and I was coming up to a greasy cattle grid. There was no way I was not going to fall off. All this way just to fall

off into some Scottish heather three miles before journey's end. I felt really sick, but the cattle grid came and went and I was still travelling on the motorcycle pointing in the right direction albeit on the wrong side of the road at reduced pace. In fact nothing had happened. I cruised into the hotel car park and got off the bike. I looked at my watch, it said ten to six. I had taken just over 12 hours to cover 600 miles. I was happy and I slept well that night.

I woke up in the morning and felt terrible. I ached all over. My shoulders were knotted up so that every time I moved my arms I got a strange clicking sensation and my left buttock was completely numb! That is enough to strike fear into the bravest young man's heart. In fact it took about two months to clear up. On investigation of the motorcycle I found the cause for the strange clunking noise I mentioned previously. The chain looked as if Uri Geller had had his hands on it. It was so absolutely clobbered that it had been thrashing from side to side at certain speeds and was hitting the chain guard. This had in turn scored the rivets on the chain. The only other thing that was slightly wrong was a slight weep of oil from the rev counter drive at the side of the crankcase. The engine had been marvellously economical, returning an average of 57 m.p.g. attained at a cruising speed of 70-75 m.p.h. The best fuel consumption I have obtained is 74 m.p.g. on a journey back from Cornwall with my brother who was running in his new Honda 550F. Most of the time was spent between 45 m.p.h. and 60 m.p.h. with short bursts up to 70 m.p.h. And the worst consumption came whilst travelling down to Cornwall (300 miles in 5 hours) which was between 50 and 53 m.p.g.

Recent improvements have been to fit ace handlebars from a GT185 Suzuki, which makes the riding position supremely comfortable, and the fitting of Avon Roadrunner tyres which have helped the steering of the machine considerably, allied to superb grip, wet or dry. It has now covered almost 5,000 miles and is well overdue for a service but still starts promptly and runs cleanly, also still returning meagre fuel consumption. Until that situation changes I am not going to do anything except regular oil changes and there is every reason to look forward to many more enjoyable rides ahead complete with its new Renold Grand Prix chain and this time I have promised to lubricate and adjust it regularly. Only when talking about chains do I wish for a BMW or Guzzi or even an MZ perhaps!

