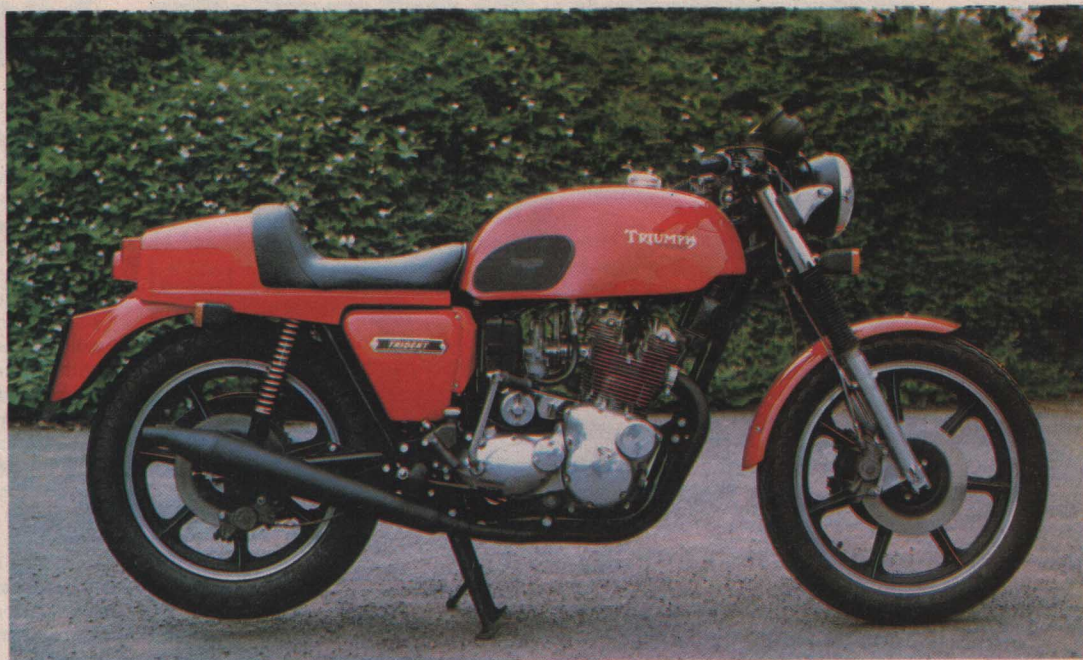


Treat yourself . . . buy a British 3!

A Legend lives on. For well-heeled patriots it means the market has grown 100 per cent from Hesketh-only days



IT'S CLEAR that the British triple was a nuisance. Edward Turner called the three-pot "potty" and the development department at BSA-Triumph was blamed, a lot of the time, for the company's misfortune.

BSA-Triumph took the credit when the bike won, in a conglomerate sort of way, and then NVT cast a greedy eye over the three: they sold out in order to strip whatever they could, cash-wise, from the machine. Meriden steadfastly ignored it, and remarks like, "It takes too many man hours to build one motor," "Do you know how many machining operations there are for one set of cases?" and "Every one was subsidised, sold at a loss," were heard often, somewhere near Coventry, as the machine was slowly pressed into obscurity.

On the streets, people circulated awful rumours about valve guide troubles, broken crankshafts and overheated centre cylinders — little lies which increased the pressure.

In an eight-year production life, very few detail improvements were made to a motor which, in a remarkably short life, was clever enough to win at Daytona, the Bol d'Or, countless international events and, six times in succession, in the Isle of Man TT. Imagine what this motor could be like after 20 years of production and development: imagine what the whole machine might have been like if its life span had been anything like that of BMW or Moto Guzzi — after all, that's the class of machine it is. To help imagine what might have been, just a few years later, read on.

In a quiet corner of Warwickshire, off the A46 in Kenilworth, works Les Williams. His reputation, as you may know, rests on one machine in particular, five-times TT winner, Slippery Sam.

And of course it was, at times, against all odds: one year the machine was a collection of parts in boxes, and another year it had to be ridden to the Island in order to compete.

Chagrin is the word that most aptly describes the feelings of those people who worked on the triples and were "set free" by the closure of NVT. From it comes the goad that has set off a couple of experiments with the triples, to make them viable and up to date.

No one has been more successful than Les Williams: having helped to create the "legend"

that Triumph were to use as part of their sales image, he has built his own with thoroughness, style and a bit of magic. There is a great resemblance to Slippery Sam but somehow the broad-chested power of Sam has been replaced by leaner looks, clean and uncluttered, far removed from the bits-and-pieces design that some of the early triples had. The cleanness and tidiness is reflected in its handling too: sweetness itself, no question of power on or power off, just lean over, steady as a rock, and round you go. It is a long-distance machine. The seat is comfortable, and the new exhaust system crackles rather than thunders, seems quieter than on the original. There are many small detail improvements, in the front brake, footrest position, handlebars and rear mudguard.

Frame and steering geometry of this machine

are precisely the same as for the T160 Tridents that ceased production in 1975. Slippery Sam was the progenitor of these frames and it has always been a source of irritation to critics that such a simple frame could be so good. And look again: how much of it is really different from those last production machines? The differences are in detail and in style, a style that is as happy in 1983 as the Rocket 3 was happy in 1970.

Les Williams will not be drawn about the future of his "Legend". It is almost as if he is discreetly waving two fingers at the establishment who shut down the shop, and as though he is showing us just one of the things Britain could have had, something that people wouldn't have bought just out of blind loyalty but because it really does light the fires inside.

HUGH MORRISON-LYONS

The "other" Laverda

Two weeks with the likeable 500 Roadster twin

I FIRST came across the 500 Laverdas in 1978 (writes Rosemary Swindells) when I read a report on the Montjuic. Its low weight — under 400lb — and low seat height — 28in — appealed to me, most motorcycles being too large for my 5ft 3in stature. However, the fly in the ointment came when I read further and found it was really only a half-tamed production racer, with a price tag of over £2,000. That was it . . . low weight, and seat, ok, but I could neither afford that sort of money nor really picture myself "touring" on a racing machine. But I have to confess, that on the few occasions I have seen (or, rather, heard) a Montjuic, I wish one could be mine.

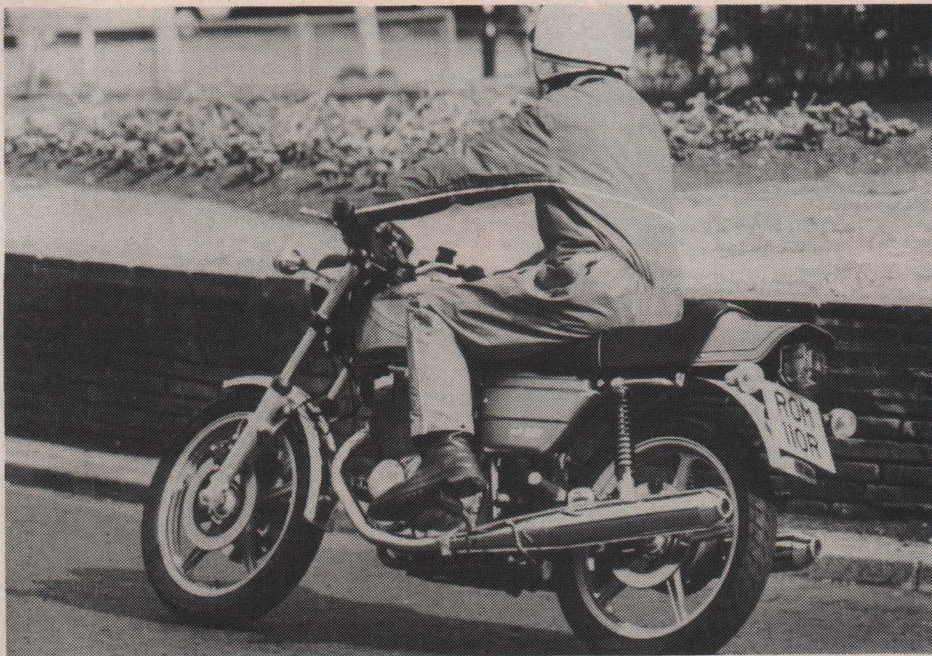
I have never really liked the idea of buying a motorcycle as though it were just another consumable item, using it for two years and then trading it for the newer model. I rather like to think of a motorcycle as an extension of oneself — the "love me, love my bike" syndrome. So it was probably inevitable that I should turn to the Italian machines whose individuality and class are second to none, in my opinion. By the time I was seriously looking for a mid-range touring bike, the Alpino (the touring version of the

Montjuic) had already ceased to be imported. However, even in 1978 at a price of £1,700 the Alpino was a good £600-£700 above what Japanese 500 cc machines were selling for, so it was really cost-prohibitive.

However, this year, as Italian-bike fanciers will know, Laverda have decided to reintroduce their 500 cc touring machine under the guise of "Roadster" and "Sportster" models. The Roadster is based on the old Alpino and, because the basic tooling is unchanged for the current models, the price has hardly risen since 1978. The Roadster costs around £1,899 and the Sportster (with a slightly higher compression ratio, 9:1 as opposed to 8.6:1, clip-ons and a handlebar fairing) around £1,949.

As I am small, size and weight of a bike are very important to me. It was because of its relatively small dimensions and good mid-range engine power that I felt the 500 Roadster would be a good machine for the female touring rider wanting a viable alternative to a Japanese bike. It will cruise happily at around 80 mph, but will easily accelerate to over 100 mph.

A letter to Keith Davies culminated in my



Very little changed, in looks or price, since 1978 when the name was Alpino.

LAVERDA 500 . . .

arriving on a cold, wet, miserable early summer's day at Three Cross Motorcycles in Dorset to see what I'd let myself in for. Although the bike has the appearance of being small and slim seat height at 31.5in was quite lofty and, even on the softest rear shock pre-load setting, I could only just touch the ground. However, as the bike is narrow and not excessively heavy, this didn't cause too many problems. I feel that perhaps shorter rear suspension units would be a good modification as, having made a small bike, it is a shame to have made it so high. My husband and a couple of taller female friends said the bike was physically too short for them, anyway, so a reduction in seat height could only enhance the Roadster. Unfamiliarity with some of the controls was inevitable, the choke being difficult to locate, being situated high and underneath the tank, but once moving, I soon felt at home on the bike. The brakes were a surprise, to say the least, the front double-disc Brembos nearly having me fly over the handlebars on the first few occasions — and that in the wet. I had ample opportunity to see if I liked the Roadster as I had the 250-mile journey home from Dorset as my first ride. I found the bike surprisingly smooth; the only other vertical twins I've known have been 360° twins that have vibrated terribly. I didn't experience any tingling or dead fingers and toes — in fact, on the M1 the 500 felt more like a four-cylinder.

The engine, as most will know, is a 497 cc dohc twin with four valves per cylinder. The casings are of polished alloy, the barrel is roughcast. The crank is a pressed-up 180° shaft which runs in ball and roller main bearings and has needle roller big-ends. A rotating counterweight on the lefthand side effectively smoothes out vibrations. Mixture is fed through two carbs — 32mm Dellortos. However, I was disappointed that the Lanfranconi silencers actually did *silence!* Rev her over 6,000 rpm and you may just catch a note of a strangled roar.

Apart from the switchgear, all the electrics, even down to the spark plugs, are Bosch. It was all well set out with proper connections, and not the usual "bodge it on somewhere spaghetti"

I've seen on some Italian bikes. The headlight is a 6in halogen unit which, although giving out an adequate beam on main, is rather dim and "scatters" on dip. Because of the awkward switchgear, I tended to leave the beam on main where possible, and although this was rather discourteous to other traffic, no one flashed me with their annoyance, so I can only assume the beam is not excessively bright.

Switchgear and instruments are Japanese, so are of better quality than the old Italian components. Nevertheless I did find that at over 70 mph the speedo did take on rather "Veglia" tendencies. Although everything works and is well made, the layout of the headlight switch on/off and main/dip switches is bad. Switches are identical and are mounted next to each other on the lefthand side. It is all too easy, when switching to dip, to switch the lights off instead! I did this several times, and when riding narrow country lanes this certainly gets exciting.

I was expecting the usual heavy Laverda clutch, but found the controls surprisingly light and smooth. The single-cable throttle being much lighter and responsive than the double cable I'm used to. Although a pretty basic twin; the 500 is quite fast. I managed an indicated 110 mph on a couple of occasions. However, the handlebars on the Roadster are rather too high for prolonged fast riding and after 200 miles of near non-stop riding chronic neck-ache set in . . . not to worry, it took my mind off the hard seat. Keep to A roads, where the Laverda is happier anyway, and the riding position is very comfortable.

The 500 returned a pretty regular 50 mpg over the 1,000 miles I rode it, giving a range from full tank to reserve of around 130 miles, with around 30 miles on reserve. Back on my home ground in Derbyshire, I discovered the immaculate handling of the Laverda. The bike felt taut around even the tightest of corners and would accelerate quickly out of a bend with no wobble or weave. On wet or dry roads the handling inspired confidence. The Marzocchi suspension front and rear damping down bumps very effectively. Light-weight and slimness made it very flickable around a series of twists and turns. You might be overtaken on the straight, but you'll soon make up ground in the bends.

Ground clearance is more akin to that of a trail bike — you'll be sliding down the road yourself before there's any chance of scraping the footrests. The quick throttle response and acceleration makes overtaking "Sunday Crawlers" easy and I was soon riding a good deal faster than I usually do. I even began looking for the most twisty routes possible, because they were just so enjoyable.

There must be something about the Italians that makes it impossible for them to produce a decent sidestand! I have to confess this is where the Japanese score 100 per cent. To say the sidestand on the 500 is useless would be to put it mildly. The stand itself is a rather wobbly affair with a spring so strong that at the slightest touch it flips up, leaving your pride and joy horizontal. Thankfully, the bike is easy to put on its main stand, a feat I have never managed successfully with my own Japanese bike. However, I found it a nuisance having to use the main stand *every* time. The bike comes as standard with Pirelli Mandrake tyres, though when I collected the bike, with only 2,000 miles on the clock, the rear tyre had already been changed for a Michelin M38. A toolkit, handbook — which is more like a maintenance manual — steering lock and indicators are all standard.

The Roadster is only available in the UK in silver, the Sportster in red. I was impressed by the paintwork — better than I have come to expect to see on Italian; but the chrome could still be improved. After 3,000 miles the joints around the exhaust header balance pipes were rusting and the rear mudguard showed signs of rust. Other faults that appeared after 3,000 miles were that front fork seals and one rear suspension unit were leaking oil, and there was also a slight weep from the cylinder head.

I was truly sorry when my two weeks of Laverda "ownership" came to an end; as I left Three Cross I felt as if I'd deserted a friend. I can say that the Laverda Roadster is the nearest I have ever come to my "ultimate" bike.

For readers who may not be interested in my impressions of the bike, I append the *facts!*

Engine: 180° parallel twin, with 20° forward-slanting cylinders, 8 valve, dohc.

Bore and stroke: 72mm x 61mm.

Capacity: 497 cc.

Compression ratio: 8.6:1.

Carburation: 2 x 32 mm Dellorto.

Ignition: Bosch CDI

Gearbox: 6 speed.

Final drive: Chain.

Electrics: 12V 15ah battery, 150W alternator, Bosch H4 55/60W headlight.

Tyres: Pirelli Mandrake.

Brakes: Brembo double piston. Front: double disc 10in diameter. Rear: single disc 10in diameter.

Suspension: Front: Marzocchi telescopic fork, coil sprung. Rear: Marzocchi coil spring shocks, 5 pre-load settings.

Wheelbase: 57in.

Overall height: 45in.

Overall width: 28in.

Seat height: 31.5in.

Kerb weight (incl. one-gallon fuel): 415lb.

Fuel capacity: 3.2 gal.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed: 110 mph (indicated).

Fuel consumption: 50 mpg (overall).

Price: £1,899.

Guarantee: 12 months, 12,000 miles.

Importers: Three Cross Motorcycles, Woolsbridge Industrial Estate, Three Legged Cross, Wimborne, Dorset.