

Latin Class

Long Pants for Laverda's Montquick Breathless gasps from Tony Middlehurst

"La-vair-dah, hein?"

Imagine Kaiser Bill with a full set of Damen leathers and Porsche helmet, and that was the chap haltingly enunciating the Breganze mantra at Keele services as I squirted another three quids' worth of juice into the Monty's tank. He twirled his handlebar moustache for extra effect as I unloaded the full weight of my linguistic expertise on him.

"Er, ja, that's right, ahem", I stammered incoherently. Why was he looking at it like that? Don't they have Montjuics in the fatherland or something?

"Ah, ve do not haff zese in der Vaterland", he bellowed psychically.

"Sehr schon, ja?" I nodded quickly, losing no time in swinging my leg across the saddle as he turned away to fetch all his similarly beleathered *kamaraden* over for further interrogation. I mean, I've nothing against foreigners as such, but why are Germans such prannies? And why are they all seven feet tall? Eh?

The 500 twin was hot, but as usual it needed choke before the grind of the starter motor gave way to the flat budda-budda of the stub-arse meggas, unchanged this year in the true glorious spirit of noble self-righteousness. Six square heads whirled round in the direction of the unearthly din; *Vas? Vas? Vas ist das?* they shouted to each other, arms waving excitedly as the sinister figure of the ace *SuperBike* test pilot roared off from the pumps, clutch slipping slightly as the high first cog fought for engagement. . . .

Or something like that. Actually, they were probably thinking "*vot ein Gepratten*" as I mucked up the change to second with my inferior non-Aryan left boot. But I didn't care. My heart was light as I thought of the pleasures to come, once the long motorway journey was completed and the Montjuic was properly established in its rightful stomping ground: the

Isle of Man. A foretaste of the Montjuic's attractive repertoire on the lanes of Herefordshire was a good appetite-whetter for the main course on the UK biker's equivalent of Fantasy Island, and so it was relatively easy to shrug off the transient trauma of a 250 mile motorway dash on a machine so obviously unsuited to the task as the Montjuic.

Just the same, the amplified hammering of twin pistons over three hours is best tolerated with the aid of twin wads of cotton wool in the appropriate orifices. The price of omission is partial deafness over the next fortnight. But what finer way to go deaf? The shock and fear which invests a first-time Montjuic rider soon gives way to a wonderfully anti-social penchant for throttle-twisting as the full range of noise is revealed and unleashed upon the bleeding ears of the innocent bystander. Sound and fury would be an apposite legend on any Montjuic's heraldic crest.

In fact, that nearly became its epitaph earlier this year when rumours concerning Laverda's avowed intent to discontinue the Monty reached a new peak. Happily, Slater Brothers have now officially scotched these vile suggestions (for this year at least). It would indeed be a shame if such an effective tool were to be killed off simply because of a loss of bottle at board level. After all, when you look at the specification, isn't this the bike we've all been screaming out for since the domination of thirsty fours?

Honesty time. When I first rode a Montjuic, I was not terribly impressed. Last year, it was, and the circumstances surrounding my tenure of the Laverda were far from propitious. Not to put too fine a point on it, the 1980 test machine was ruthlessly hogged by a certain person on the staff not unadjacent to the Editor's Office. So it was a somewhat disgruntled TM who saddled up for the first time on what was also the last opportunity to do so, viz, the dreaded ROTB

journey (Return Of Test Bike) so feared by quavering bike hacks because usually it's a one-way trip backed up by a miserable journey on (whisper it) public transport.

This particular Monty was going back to Kel Prince's place in Leicester. After everybody had told me how wonderful it was I felt sorely let down on the all-too-brief trip, mainly because I hadn't realised that here was one four-stroke which demanded to be ridden like a two-stroke. I'd been changing up through the six-speed box at around six thousand revs more often than not, and certainly never more than six-five. After all, it was privately owned, and the redline was at eight. I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. All I knew was, my ears and bum were telling me I'd done the journey in x hours, yet my watch was insisting that I'd actually done it in x times two.

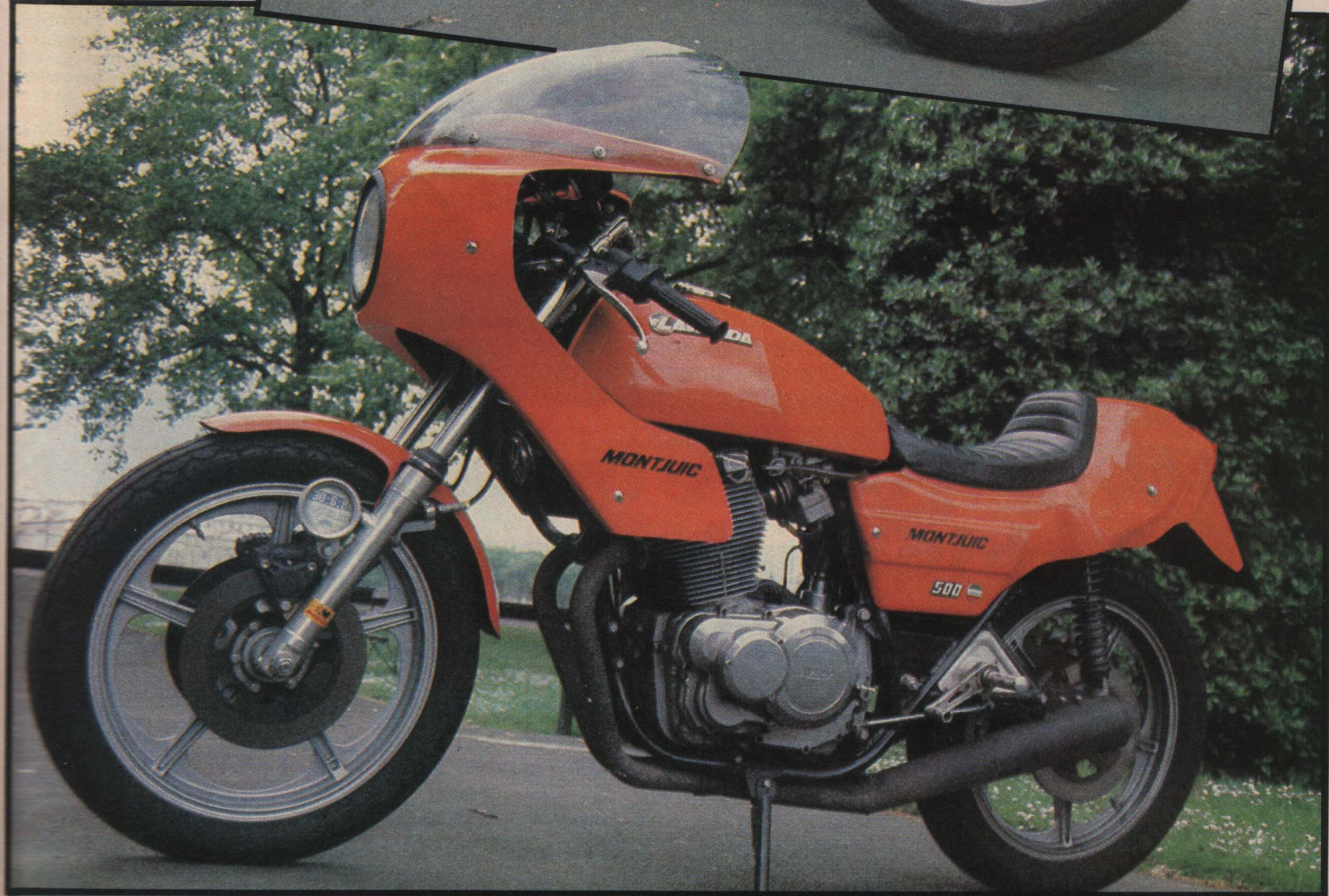
This year, I knew better. Moreover, prevailing winds this year blew good fortune my way in that the only staffer exercising monopoly control over the junior Laverda turned out to be me. This time I knew that not only was the 8000rpm redline incorrect for the spunky little twin-cam eight-valve motor, it was actually more useful to imagine it as a magnetised area for the tacho needle as the mini-turbo effect of the valve timing came into full force over 6000rpm. The pilot senses this power step in two ways: one audible, caused by the fusion of the twins pulsing into a single note of screaming abandon; and one tactile, caused by the perceptible lightening of the Marzocchi-suspended front end and the aggressive squat of Phantom-shod rear. Other road users sense the step by the visible transposition of the Monty from rear view mirror to rapidly disappearing yellow dot on the far horizon, rider tucked-in and crouching in best Willie Carson style.

The Montjuic rewards spirited riding just as surely as it discourages inner city poodling. Its inability to idle under any circumstances is a warty counterpoint of its absolute willingness to rev out to five figures if need be. The 1981 Isle of Man Formula Two bikes were, as a matter of course, taken to 10200rpm in the gears and 9200 in top (equivalent to 138mph using the smaller, 38 tooth rear sprocket). Its pixie frame and compact dimensions allow for optimum manoeuvrability on the open road with no apparent trade-off in stability on the straight. Much of this may be attributed to the rider's relatively low seating position in relation to the steering head, unusual for a machine with clip-on handlebars. You do sit in the Montjuic rather than on it; club racers may jib at the slight unnaturalness of adopting a true racing crouch on it, but road riders are grateful for the ease of control it permits in less radical situations. Quite long journeys may be undertaken with a surprisingly high degree of lumbar comfort.

As already mentioned, only the ears really suffer, and that problem is easily remedied. Despite the thinnish padding of the seat, the only real discomfort in this area arises from condensation due to the plastic material used. It is possible to induce personal bruising should you decide to really gun it along a particularly bumpy byway. Many of the minor roads inside and outside the TT course fall into this category; indeed, some parts of the course itself still qualify for this description, lifting still further one's admiration for the steely disposition (mental and physical) of the F2 Laverda men.

The relatively simple - I nearly said humble - Marzocchi suspension is hard pressed to cope with a rapid series of undulations, causing the rear wheel to spend some time off the road surface. Obviously this is less than ideal in that if the tyre is not making contact with the ground, then nor is any proportion of the engine's 50bhp power output. Plus of course the minor problem of not having any control of the back half of the bike, a consideration which definitely encourages a modicum of tapping-off when things start getting out of hand. But as you're probably going 20mph faster than you thought anyway it's nice to have a built-in "cool it" signal to remind you (if you needed it) that you're taking liberties with your licence. Be grateful instead that on less agricultural roads the cycle parts of the Montjuic are more than up to the job of handling the engine's 115mph potential.

LAVERDA



And the brakes, three Brembo discs, haul you down from speed with all the power and security that pundits have come to associate with the name. The front brake lever has a satisfyingly beefy feel to it, enticing the rider into grabbing a hearty handful even when he doesn't really need it; there aren't many occasions where the sheer poise of the Montjuic won't get you out of trouble without having to resort to heavy braking. Strange that the bikes which really *need* good brakes are usually the ones without them, and vice versa. . . .

Anyway. The Monty has excellent brakes. Overbraked for a 500 perhaps? Not really, in that the fine weight distribution of the bike with a rider aboard rules out any likelihood of the unexpected wheel-locking which is the bane of many other machines encumbered with more sophisticated systems. The rear brake is controlled via a tubular billet on the attractive alloy rearset assembly, matched on the nearside by a gearlever which on our well-prepared Slater Bros tester gave a touch of trouble. Occasionally, and absolutely unpredictably, the lever would refuse to return to its standby position in readiness for the next change, necessitating somewhat convoluted terpsichorial arrangements in advance of the operation itself.

The problem was traced to a combination of related circumstances, not the least significant of which was a reversed nut and bolt on the linkage rose joint. This had the effect of diminishing frame clearance, a situation which became critical at odd moments when the built-in slop at the lever-footrest pivot point went outside acceptable tolerances. Obviously a fault peculiar to that particular machine, and in no way inherent to the model.

Of gears, there are six: first is high enough to merit care on take-off lest the peaky engine should stall, while fifth and sixth are so close in ratio as to make any difference in engine note almost imperceptible. The ratios are right though since it's possible to run 9000rpm plus in top, where most power is produced. And thanks to the new fairing on the '81 Montjuic, maintaining these speeds is as practical as conditions allow.

The British firm Screen & Plastics made it for Slaters, and mounted it to the Monty's single downtube frame by way of an extremely robust-looking subframe, whose tubing rivals the Laverda's own in terms of diameter and finish. Flex is non-existent, and the screen is actually

usable. It's a nice job, alright. The portion of glass behind the fuel tank is new too. The old sandwich-hole in the tailpiece has disappeared in favour of a swoopy new one-piece seat/tail unit which lends an air of integrity to the styling, absent from last year's model. One of the retaining bolts on the offside cover didn't want to return to its appointed hole when we reassembled the bodywork after examination, but aside from that the new-look clothing went down well with all who beheld it.

Some Montjuic owners I've met have voiced the almost traditional complaints about Italian electrics, but in all fairness it now appears that this particular ghost has been laid. Electronic ignition by Bosch, essential on such a sprightly engine, Nippon Denso clocks and Suzuki switchgear show that the Italians aren't too proud to admit that indigenous parts aren't always best. In fact, the only failure we had with our Montjuic was caused by the fracturing of a tacky Continental-type bullet fuse, resulting in the dousing of all illumination. Hardly surprising that it should happen, though, as the fuses are mounted under the seat and atop a flimsy plastic sheet which receives a right hammering from the back wheel. Some improvement needed here, perhaps.

We had no problems with the indicators or mirrors, principally because there aren't any. If it were mine I think a bar-end mirror would be my second investment (after the cotton wool). It might not be in keeping with the image, but rather that as a second purchase than the services of a brief, eh?

Tyres, the inestimable Phantoms, performed faultlessly; what's more, they're well suited to a light, *relatively* low-powered bike such as the Montjuic from the point of view of wear. The ones on our 3000-mile test machine had lots of tread left when we returned it to Slaters. And aren't those Laverda wheels something to behold? Very easy to clean to boot. Oh yes, the front mudguard is now metal instead of brittle glassfibre, a worthwhile change.

Interested in buying one yet? The latest round of medieval legislation from our wonderful government has pushed the Montjuic's price up to a stinging £2579, for which amount you can get any one of a million big fours with much more performance and equipment. But such comparisons are odious. A Montjuic is Totally Different. It's not perfect; the throttle could do with being a bit quicker, and something should be done about the mounting of the fuse box.

On the other hand, even with twin 32mm Dell'Orto carbs it's easy to turn in 50 miles for every gallon of four-star. The Montjuic is featherlight, with exhilarating power delivery and punchy, aggressive response to all rider inputs which make it into a deadly weapon in the right hands. On a Montjuic you can embarrass any competition on all B- and most A-roads, and yet your bank balance won't be that embarrassed when the time for forking out the insurance premium comes round.

The Montjuic rider rides alone, though. Leave the Gold Wing and the girlfriend behind for once, jump on the Lav and make some noise. You'll feel much better for it. I know I did.

Laverda Montjuic £2579 inc "car tax" (hah)

PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed - 116mph
Standing Quarter Mile - 14sec
Fuel Consumption - Hard Riding - 39mpg
Cruising - 57mpg
Best Full-Tank Range - 175miles

ENGINE

Type - air cooled DOHC eight-valve parallel vertical twin with balance shaft
Displacement - 496.7cc
Power - 50bhp at 9200rpm
Bore & Stroke - 72x61mm
Compression Ratio - 10:1
Induction - 2x32mm Dell'Ortos with accelerator pumps
Exhaust - two into two with balance pipe
Oil System - wet sump
Ignition - Bosch electronic

TRANSMISSION

Clutch - wet multiple
Primary Drive - gear
Final Drive - chain

CHASSIS

Frame - single downtube duplex cradle
Front Suspension - Marzocchi hydraulically damped telescopic forks
Rear Suspension - swing-arm with five-position preload
Marzocchi shocks
Wheelbase - 55.1in
Ground Clearance - lots
Trail? - no, much better on the road
Weight (wet) - 370lb
Fuel Capacity - 3.08gall
Tyres - front: Pirelli Phantoms, 100/90V18; rear: 110/90V18
Brakes - triple Brembo discs

INSTRUMENTS

150mph speedo, 11000rpm tachometer with spurious 8000rpm redline

Test bike supplied by: Slater Bros, Collington, Nr Bromyard, Herefordshire

