

# The East

Chris Dell

MZ motorcycles have been around for many years. Although they have changed steadily during that time they still remain loyal to their original Eastern European design concept. They're relatively cheap, rather ugly and generally robust.

Comparing them to Japanese machines is virtually impossible. What Japanese bikes are similar enough to justify comparison? But MZs have attracted a fairly loyal following who recognise their faults but enjoy their virtues.

Four capacities have been offered. The 125, 150 and 250 have recently been joined by a 300cc version. Each of these models has its own good points: the 125 suits learners, the 150 offers all the performance that is actually needed in a round-town machine, the 250 is better for those who want to travel longer distances at higher speeds. The 300 is a bit of an oddball. Certainly it offers more power but it is much more expensive than the extremely similar 250. However, a steady demand exists for it so some riders must feel that the extra cost is worthwhile.

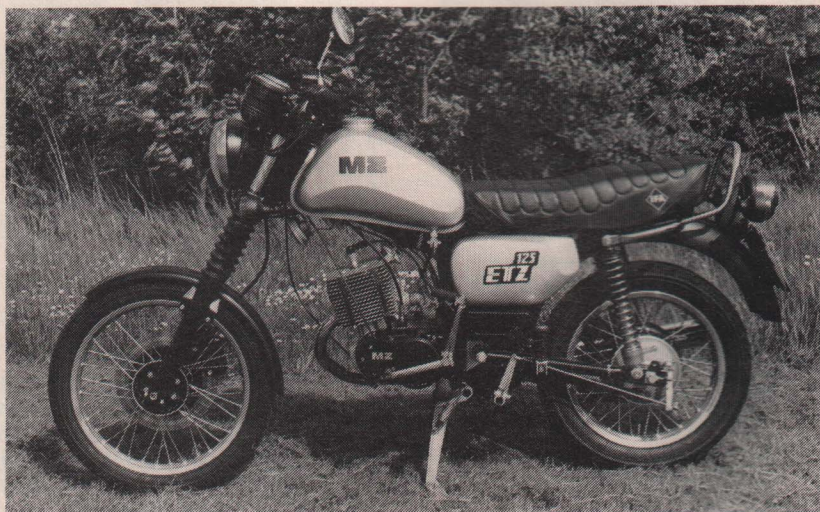
MZ styling has certainly changed over the years. Some of the early models were decidedly peculiar and the current range can hardly be described as run of the mill. The ETZ125 and ETZ150 have a slightly chopperesque look about them — very different to what had gone before.

The TS range (125, 150 and 250) share similar styling. None of them could be termed really ugly, provided you don't object to the oversize looking (but useful) petrol tank. Some riders might even find their functional looks appealing for what is supposed to be a functional motorcycle.

The really ugly MZs included models such as the Trophy ES250/2. You'd have to go back about 15 years in a time-warp to buy a new one and you aren't likely to find any secondhand specimens for sale. The sheer awfulness of the styling had to be seen to be believed. It had leading link forks, a giant front mud-guard mounted on the bottom yoke and the headlamp sort of integrated into the petrol tank. However, there was still a good bike hiding beneath that ugly disguise.

The first of the ETZ series was the 250 back in 1981. This was sold alongside the TS250/1 Supa 5 for several years, finally taking over from it. As ever (even with MZs) a new, higher specification model saw a hefty price increase. The change from Supa 5 to ETZ was no exception, with the comparative 1981 prices

MZ ETZ 125 -  
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being roughly £600 and £700. Unfortunate, since at that time Suzuki chopped the X7's price from nearly £850 to under £700 — rather denting the MZ 'bargain basement' concept. Faced with a straight choice of an 'old fashioned' single or a modern twin it should come as no surprise that the X7 tempted many purchasers.

The ETZ is readily distinguished by its disc front brake. Its predecessor, the Supa 5, was also easy to recognise. It adopted the world's strangest looking cylinder head. The finning makes it look like an extension of the barrel — the fins all look the same. This peculiar feature is used on all the ETZ range too. The Supa 5 was so-called due to it having five gears in place of the earlier model's four.

The Supa 5 arrived in the winter of 1976/1977 and was good value at £410 when a Kawasaki KH250 was £640. Many changes were made to the engine at this time but none made as much difference as the new gearbox. The four speed box had a slow and clunky action and the five speed version offered a useful improvement.

The drum brake was just about good enough, the later disc was considerably better. Whether this is actually an improvement largely depends on how you ride. Some motorcyclists prefer drums and the MZ's are adequate for steady riding. Note though that front drums can

become oval.

Wheel sizes have steadily evolved. The TS250 had 16 inchers front and rear. For the TS250/1 there was a change to an 18 inch front. And for the ETZ250, MZ finally moved to a pair of 18 inch wheels — which gives considerably more choice when it comes to buying tyres.

THERE have been various mechanical changes over the years. Early motors had the main bearings lubricated by the gearbox oil whereas in 1976 the design was changed so that the bearings were lubricated by petrol. There are a few unusual design features too in the engine. For example, on many models the clearance between the head and piston has to be adjusted, by means of aluminium shims, from 1.2 to 1.6 mm.

Performance of the 250s hasn't varied much for many years. Typically, top speed is 75 to 85mph and fuel economy is around 60mpg, depending (of course) on how you ride. Actual power output of the 250 is about 17bhp at the rear wheel, only fractionally down on many 1970s Japanese 250s.

The smaller versions are obviously considerably slower. A 125 should manage 60mph under neutral conditions while a 150 can top 65. Although this five mph gap sounds small, 'on-the-road' performance differs considerably. The 150 has about 20% more power than the 125 and this gives the bike a much more relaxed feel and is especially useful when climbing hills or overtaking.

Fuel economy is better than on the 250, with up to 70mph during normal use though taking it really steady can give over 90.

Large price jumps also occurred when the TS125 and

TS150 were replaced by the ETZ125 and ETZ150 models. In 1986 a new 150 Eagle was an absolute bargain at just over £400 but its replacement — the ETZ150 Luxus — came in that year at a relatively hefty £588. 1987 saw even worse news as its price tag flew up to over £700.

In many ways the 150 motor has the nicest feel. It is smoother than the 250 but has usefully better performance than the 125. Naturally the 125 has sold far better due to the demand from learners, but real bargains are to be found by going for a second-hand 150. It is still possible to get a nice one for £100!

Clutch drag can be a problem, especially on the 125 and 150; it is best to allow several seconds running with the clutch lifted after starting from cold before you try to engage first gear.

Comfort is good on all the MZs. They have excellent suspension and well padded seats. Even with a passenger the suspension can cope well and the seat is plenty big enough. If you want to go two-up touring on a two-stroke single I don't think you'll find anything more comfortable.

RELIABILITY has been only mediocre. On a day-to-day basis the bikes are fine but long term there have been two common problems. Main bearings and gearchange return springs have been the flies in the ointment. Mileages between failures vary a great deal and the reasons aren't all that clear. Using only top quality oils should help with the main bearings but trying to prolong the gearchange spring's life appears to be far less simple. Changing gear less often is one answer but obviously there are practical drawbacks with this scheme!

The electrics were originally six

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volt but the ETZs saw a change to 12 volt. This is an improvement but even the earlier models have good headlights, good enough to make you wonder why most six volt Japanese machines have such abysmal lights.

MZs have many useful features and a few strange points. Surely nobody could argue against the excellent chain enclosure. The rubber gaiter design provides protection without looking unsightly and is one feature that the Japanese should copy.

East German design theory on silencers appears to state that big is beautiful. MZ have taken this idea to heart and the result is a quiet exhaust note, coupled to a rather obtrusive silencer. Carelessness when manoeuvring the bike backwards can all too easily result in the end of the silencer burying itself in a gatepost or similar.

Alloy rims can be a mixed blessing. Poor quality examples tend to corrode and distort rather easily but MZ's are good enough to avoid these pitfalls and are obviously lighter and longer lasting than most chrome rims.

Although the rims are fine the Pneumant tyres have attracted much criticism due to their poor wet grip. This is exacerbated by the grabby nature of the rear

brake (which has the world's longest pedal) making rear wheel lock-up too common in the wet. Obviously the extent of this problem partly depends on how careful you are — and partly on how often other road users force you to brake suddenly.

The 250 uses an engine-speed

clutch. This means that the clutch is mounted on the end of the crankshaft and so rotates at engine speed. Most bikes have the clutch on the end of the gearbox input shaft. An engine-speed clutch normally causes a poor gearchange, but it often gives a lighter action than a 'conventional' clutch.

Single cylinder engines always tend to vibrate, especially at high revs. Many Japanese bikes cancel out the vibration by using balance shafts. This works fine but is much more expensive than MZ's very simple rubber mounting system.

SOMETIMES MZs are thought of as machines for eccentrics. Whether this is true or not I wouldn't dare to say. The fact that MZ racing is now very popular must be some sort of comment on the bikes, or on their owners.

Of course, MZ have a fine

racing pedigree. Back in 1960, they ran the most successful two strokes in road racing and proved that two strokes could compete effectively against four strokes. This dominance rather came to an end once the East German Ernst Degner defected to the west just before the end of the 1961 season. That defection cost MZ — and Ernst — the 125cc World Championship since he was then unable to ride in the final round, despite EMC providing a bike for him. MZ, however, continued to participate in motorcycle sport and enjoyed considerable success in the International Six Days Trial (as the ISDE was then known).

The history of Motorradwerk Zschopau goes back to just after World War One, even though bikes weren't sold under the MZ name until the late 1950s. Originally the factory produced DKW motorcycles but DKW production was switched to West Germany after World War Two. One DKW design was 'liberated' after the war and led to broadly similar bikes from several companies, including the MZ125 and the BSA Bantam.

Taking a look at the 1974 MZ TS125/150/250 Owners Manual (or, as MZ call it 'operating instructions for the MZ motorcycles') produces evidence that the makers, at least, are certainly eccentric. What other manufacturer would list under the heading 'special equipment' "Hand gearshift control. With this attachment, a person having an artificial leg (prosthesis) can handle an MZ motorcycle"?

It also contains useful tips such as "The damage caused by seizing is rather serious. If the engine jams and you fail to disengage the clutch in time, cylinder and piston must be removed and the latter refinished by means of a smooth-cut file..." The starting procedure is also described "... vigorously actuate the kickstart until the engine runs." Who could argue with that?

Taken all round, the MZ range offers real value-for-money motorcycling. They are not machines that will appeal to the fashion conscious teenager but older riders wanting an inexpensive yet competent machine are likely to prefer a MZ to most of the similarly priced alternatives.

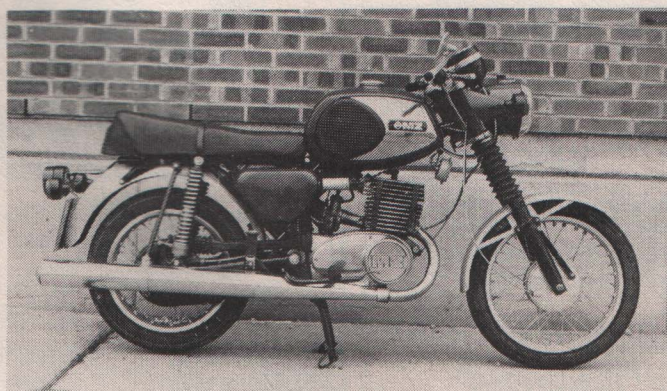
Whether you want a machine for riding to work, or for long distance touring, an MZ model exists that is suitable — provided you aren't in too much of a hurry. Quite a few riders use MZs as second bikes, bringing them out when the weather is bad or when their 'number one' machine is off the road. This approach makes sense; an MZ is very cheap to buy and won't go down in value if you look after it. And if it saves your 'best' bike becoming tatty due to everyday use in winter, an MZ can more than pay for itself by helping your 'nice' bike maintain its value.

There is an active club for MZ owners too, with branches in various parts of the country.

## PRICE GUIDE

TS models				
year	125 Alpine	125 Luxus	150	250
1980	—	£125	£120	£170
1981	£140	£150	£140	£200
1982	£160	£175	£160	£240
1983	£180	£200	£180	£280
1984	£210	£230	£200	£325
1985	£240	£270	£240	£375
1986	£290	£320	£280	—
ETZ models				
year	125 Standard	125 Luxus	150	250
1981	—	—	—	£210
1982	—	—	—	£250
1983	—	—	—	£300
1984	—	—	—	£360
1985	—	—	—	£420
1986	£375	£420	£380	£490
1987	£425	£480	£440	£560

● Prices are for dealer sales, privately bikes sell for about 20% less.



MZ TS250 - Functional yes, styling, no!