

You might've expected that BMW's approach to touring bikes would've gone down a bomb in the States. Their biggest flat twins have got it all; big engines with big powerful cylinders, smooth and luxurious suspension and the clincher of the lot, shaft drive, which BMW virtually made their own until only recently.

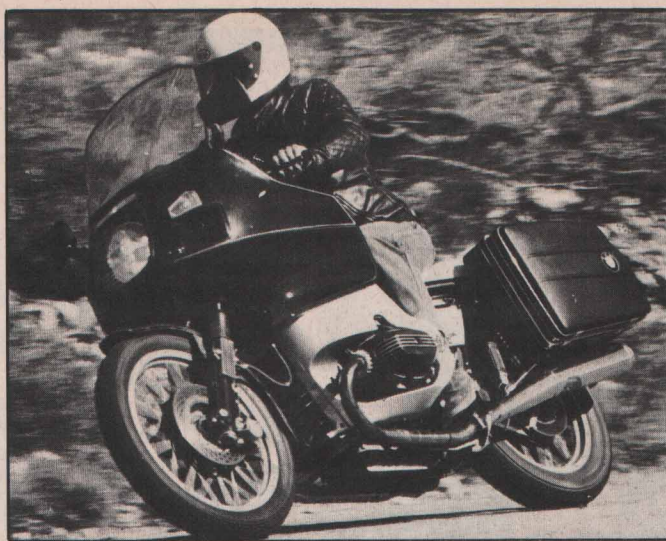
But BMW have taken quite a knock to their pride in the last year and it was flagging sales in America that did it. Part of the reason was that the West German factory regarded the other side of the Atlantic as merely an extension of their European operation. But it's nothing like that at all. No way.

When it comes to touring Americans have developed their own unique method. They simply take the heaviest, biggest capacity bike they can lay their hands on, mount a Vetter-type fairing, pannier boxes, crash bars, footboards and then add creature comforts like a CB radio or tape deck. Suspension systems that can handle extra weight without wilting are desirable as are arm-chair-style seats. The final move is to a trailer; the result you've guessed is a two-wheel Winnebago camper.

The divergence between that picture and BMW's ideal, which means European, touring bike seems almost too wide to bridge. When the R100RS was introduced in 1976, though it brought praise for its aerodynamic fairing from over here, the Americans cried out for a 'real' fairing.

With the new R100RT, BMW have done just that. And appropriately, we rode it for the first time through the balmy heat of California and Arizona.

From our point of view, the RT couldn't be better equipped. Like the RS, it has a 980cc pushrod flat-twin power plant developing 70bhp through a five speed gearbox and shaft final drive. Enhancing its long-range cruising ability is a tall, stylish fairing based on the RS's low sports unit but with an adjustable screen allowing the use of higher handlebars and offering lockable stowage space either side of the generous 5¼-gallon fuel tank.



BMW R100RT BIG BUCK BEE-EMS

With the introduction of BMW's top-end 1979 range, which includes the American-inspired R100RT tourer, there are no surprises... except that presto! the clunk's a thing of the past. *John Nutting* reports from the deserts of Arizona after riding the new models.



It works remarkably well. You can glide along comfortably at any speed up to 100 mph and not really know it. To those BMW fans who will say that you can do that on a naked Bee-Emm, I'll suggest that wind pressure will take its toll, and that's absent on the RT. Top speed is further cut from the RS's 125mph by 10mph but no worry, at the American's 55mph Federal speed limit it's all rather academic.

Trouble is that the Americans I talked to weren't at all impressed by the fairing, mainly because it was mounted too far forward and its adjustability (by pivoting it at its base) was in the wrong direction. It was also optically poor as well as having awkward to use ratchet-style adjusters at either end of the screen frame.

Despite riding through some of the most pleasurable motorcycling country in the world from Los Angeles to Tuscon, neither was the RT particularly impressive in overall comfort. It would appear that BMW have only gone part of the way towards offering a really luxurious tourer.

The seat remains the spartan slab as on last year's models thanks to the first-aid kit mounted in the padding and the suspension, while being fine a couple of years back, has been eclipsed by better achievements from Japan. The extra weight of the fairing compromises the handling of the RT compared to the naked models markedly. The front forks have long travel that is used up under braking and the higher centre of gravity means extra work for the ride on mountain roads.

Let it be said though that at 528lbs dry the RT is still much lighter than many unfaired bikes. This is a boon in European terms but a drawback in the States because the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating is low at 878lb lading. This gives space for barely 60lb of luggage with 300lb of rider and passenger aboard which is a pittance for a Yank.

As ever, the light weight pays off in the more twisty and demanding mountain roads. Along with the low

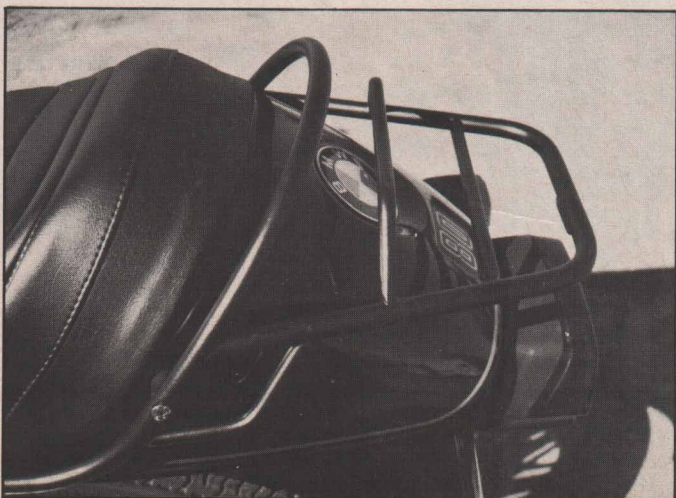
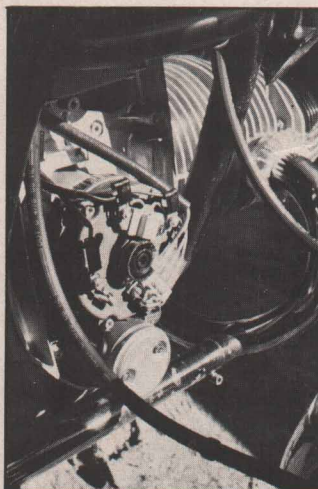
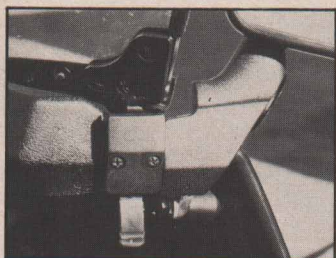


Above: Hot to trot to the ends of the earth, BMW's R100RT tourer. It comes fully equipped (except for the optional Krauser panniers).

Right Contact breaker is now fully sealed.

Below left: Ratchet mechanism to adjust screen height is poor.

Bottom: Rack is stock fitting.



centre of gravity the bike is easy to flick through S-bends and much more controllable on damp or gravelly surfaces than many smaller capacity machines.

The signs are that BMW are in the throes of cutbacks after upheavals at top board level. All the models above the R65 are offered in the appearance first seen with the R90S with a large tank and S type seat. Dual disc front brakes are stock along with ungaitered fork legs. Only two versions of the 980cc engine are offered, the 70 bhp model on the R100S, R100RS (which also has an oil cooler) and R100RT, the 65bhp model (formerly on the R100S) being found in the new R100T, an unfaired tourer replacing the R100/7 which has Krauser panniers, a clock and voltmeter in the specification.

Those who are now thinking that BMW have copped out will however be encouraged by the news that there are new significant changes in the range.

For those 7,000 owners who have already mastered the technique of the BMW gearchange there is bad news; BMW have virtually cured it. As on the lightweight R45/65 series the drive shaft now has a spring-loaded shock absorber that takes much of the lurch out of the transmission. The change from bottom to second still has to be assisted by the light clutch to prevent jerking up the front wheel but from that point on the change is almost as good as on the R65.

Another common modification is to the ignition. The contact breakers are now mounted in a small sealed unit on the front of the crankcases and driven by a keyway from the camshaft. This overcomes the moisture afflictions and cam run-out troubles. It also means that the crankcase cover is longer by about 2 inches. Switches too are changed to the R65 type with a side-to-side trafficator thumb button. Lights, super-powerful quartz-halogen units up front, are on permanently. Also new are improved seat hinges, a rear carrier and the option of Krauser carriers on all models except the RT which has them as standard.

After jetting half-way around the world to try the new R80/7, R100T, R100RS, R100S and R100RT I can't

help thinking that BMW are just marking time until something new arrives. Certainly their 980cc models are crude and mechanically rough compared to recent developments. And it equally rings true that the factory have water-cooled multi-cylinder bikes on the way. It'll be a sad day when that happens for Bee-Emm fans, but I guess that's just progress.

BMW R100RT

Price:	£3,099
Engine:	Ohv flat twin
Capacity:	980cc
Bore and Stroke:	94x70.6mm
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp Ratio:	9.5 to 1
Carburetion:	Two 40mm CV Bings
Ignition:	Coils and contact breakers
Max Power:	70bhp at 7250rpm
Max Torque:	55.7lb-ft at 5,500rpm
Clutch:	Dry single plate
Primary Drive:	Helical gear
Gearbox:	Five-speed
Final Drive:	Shaft and bevel gears
Mph/1,000rpm:	16.8 in top gear
Electrics:	12v 28ah battery 280w alternator 60/55w QH headlamp
Fuel Capacity:	5¼ gallons
Frame:	Duplex loop cradle
Suspension:	Leading-axle telescopic fork (f) Swing arm, 3-pos manual preload
Tyres:	Metzeler or Continental 3.25x19 (f) 4.00x18 (r)
Brakes:	Dual 10.2in discs (f) Single 10.2in discs (r)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	58in
Seat Height:	32in
Handlebar Width:	29in
Grnd Clrnce:	6½in
Trail/castor:	3.8in/na
Weight:	518lb dry

EQUIPMENT

Electric Start:	Yes
Mirrors:	Yes
Headlamp flasher:	Yes
Lockable steering:	Yes
Lockable tank:	Yes
Lockable seat:	Yes
Prop stand:	Yes
Tripmeter:	Yes
Fuel gauge:	No
Others:	Fairing, clock, volt meter, steering damper, tyre pump, first aid kit, Optional pannier cases, oil cooler, additional lamps, Kick starter.

PERFORMANCE (claimed)

Top Speed:	118mph
St. ¼-mile:	13.5secs
0-60mph:	4.7secs

Fuel Consumption:	49mpg
Range:	257 miles
Importer:	BMW Concessionaires GB Ltd, 361 Chiswick High Rd, London W4