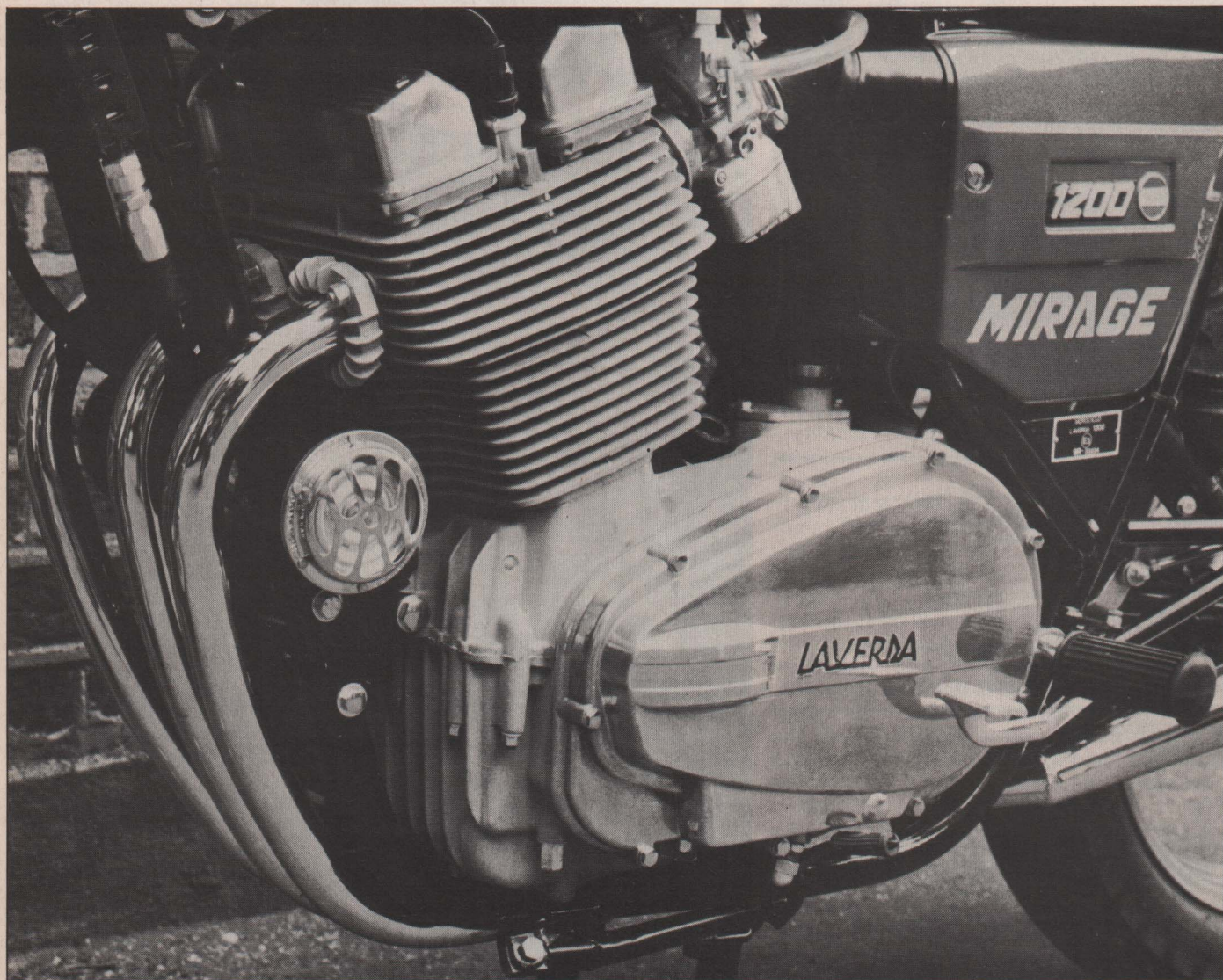




Laverda Mirage 1200

BETTER THAN BIGGEST



Six months ago we previewed a 1200cc derivation of Laverda's already indomitable 1-litre triple. We were impressed with what we rode. If you thought we were impressed with what we rode then, imagine our reaction when we heard about a hotter version of the same bike? *Dave Minton* flew to Italy and came back breathless.

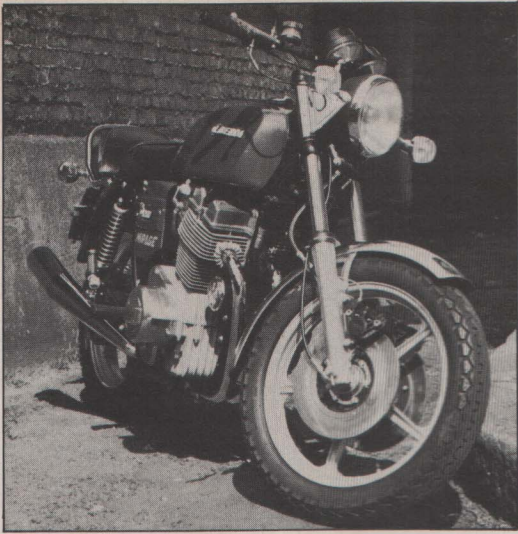
Massimo Laverda, head of the Laverda industrial group, arrived back from an overseas conference straight into the press-cum-trade meeting. Without exception everyone present had demanded, and got, a name for the new model, the choice having been made a few minutes ahead of his arrival. Massimo sat down. The discussion about the new machine continued. Massimo stood up. "What is this 'Mirage' motorcycle you are all talking about?"

Perhaps it would have been diplomatic to have informed the boss.

But that's the nice thing about being small, as Laverda are to, say, Suzuki or Yamaha, and that's the nice thing about living in Britain — at least until the EEC bureaucrats finally screw

us down. Slater Bros., UK Laverda concessionaires, wanted to give the standard 1200 a bit of a fillip so, with the factory's full co-operation a specification was drawn up in a few days especially for the only market able to take it. The standard 1200 will still be around for those wanting sane and sensible riding and so is the legendary Jota — and both continue unchanged in all but minor details. But the Mirage is something else. . . owing less to the smooth and creamy ways of most modern motorcycles and a hell of a lot to the good old Anglo-Italian blend of guts and glory.

Take the capacity and torque of the standard 1200 (how eminently sensible), and leave the riding position unchanged (sounds comfort-

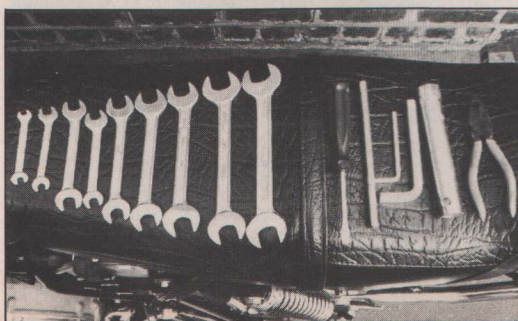
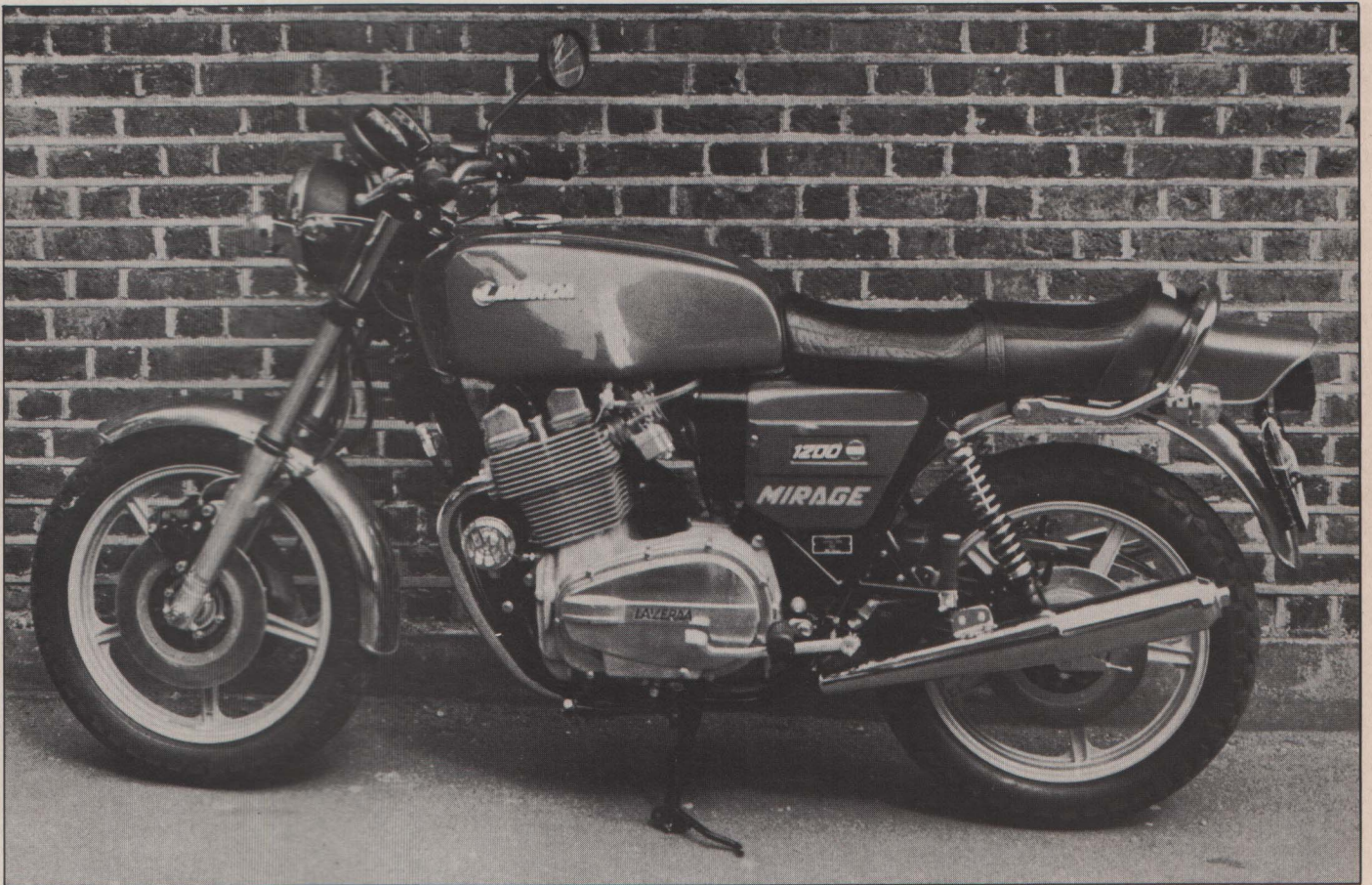


able); then enliven it with a special cam (now you're talking my kind of language); and finally give it a chance to clear its lungs with a Jota exhaust system and modified air cleaner.

No, we ain't kidding at all, and the result is a packet of muscle that goes about its business of covering ground fast, simply and safely as precious little else does. Into the bargain it makes *such* a lovely noise about it - deeper than a Jota, quieter too, but still with the scalp-crawling throb around mid-range.

An apparently minor change, but actually one giving cause for a major handling/stability improvement, is the adoption of flatter, narrower handlebars, as compared to the standard 1200. The slight front-end quiver that accompanied a few high speed manoeuvres has been completely eradicated by this simple modification, and the Mirage feels so much more at peace with itself because of it.

Apart from the name on the side and narrower 'bars external appearance is little changed for the hot one.

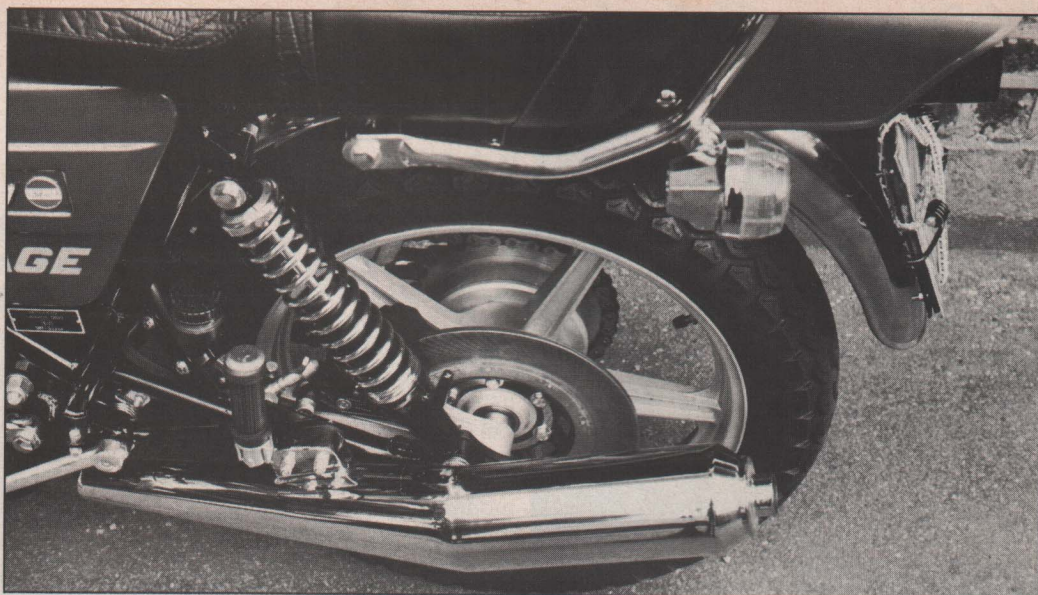


The same might be said about the GS1000 Suzuki, for instance, as indeed it was by some journalists on the same trip who have largely grown up in a world dominated by Japanese motorcycling philosophy. Objectively there is no argument that the GS1000 is the "superior" machine, inasmuch as it is quieter, smoother and more immediately comfortable. Damn quick as well, and fast around the bends. Objectivity is not an especially valuable asset when comparing such animals, however. Motorcycles of this type are brought purely on their emotive tug. If they pluck the right heartstrings then the brain finds good reason for following suit. Subjectively, therefore, many of us, more probably either the older rider more familiar with "strong" motorcycling or younger ones bored by "Gillette engineering" as Laverda themselves refer to Japanese motorcycle design and production, the Mirage, with its denial of sophistry but an abundance of lusty ideals is the one that sets the blood racing.

Rubber kick-down on prop stand saves all that grovelling associated with some Italian bikes. Tool kit will handle most minor jobs.

Starting it was a cinch, although the old

Jota type silencers contribute a large part of the extra muscle on this bike. The twin Brembo units are as impressive as ever. Under the near-side panel, a relatively small battery and ample space for tool roll.



Honda-style air lever mounted under the tank nose reeked of rare thoughtlessness, and hauling off into the Dolomites — where we all went bananas on the new models, went as smoothly as any machine could have provided, but thanks to the new handlebar bend the riding stance was tighter and the bike that much more snug in its relationship with its rider. In short, it was all familiar Laverda, even down to the real beefcake clutch operation and a gearchange that, whilst not as short and silky as some, was as fast and positive as any.

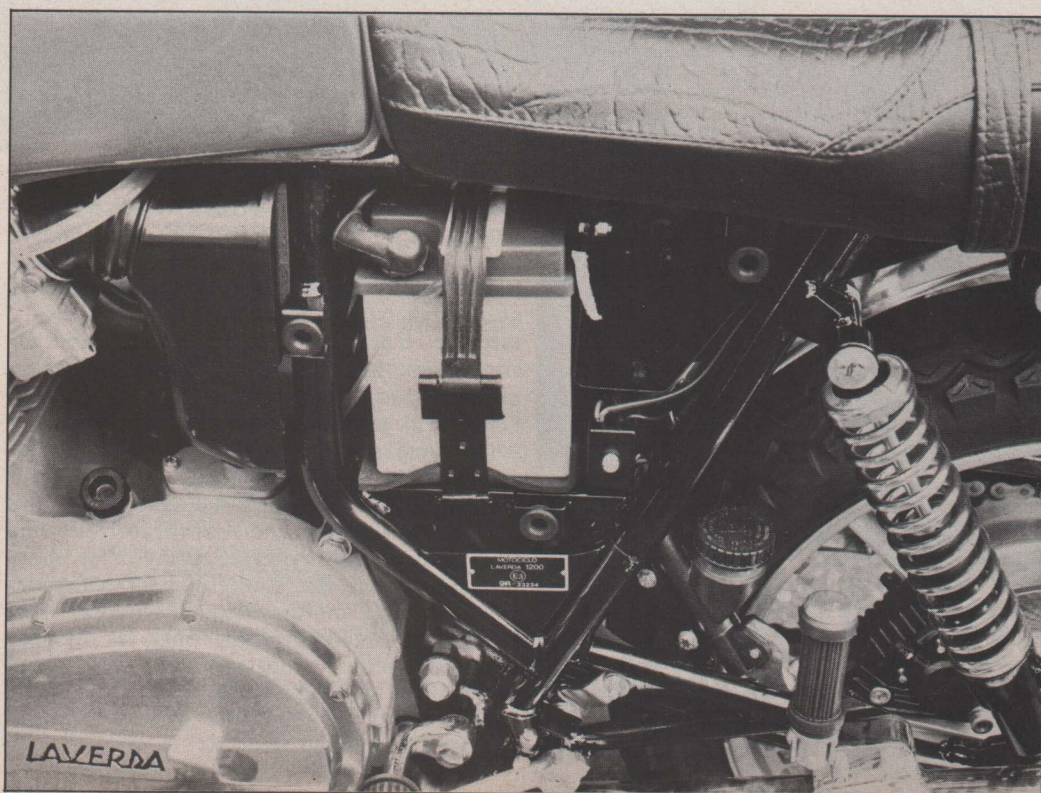
Over the sometimes patchy, or even broken roads the softer suspension (introduced on the 1200 last year) was very advantageous in that the bike was not as prone to being knocked off a line as it might have been on the old racing-firm system. The wheels simply dropped or lifted during cornering and the bike remained stable.

Initially the impression created was that of a rather more gutsy standard 1200 but as the day progressed it became apparent that, locked inside that double knocker triple was a sabre toothed tiger.

I was chasing the new Alpino S (the old "a"

had been dropped in favour of an "o" on the end for grammatical reasons) down a mountain road, closely followed by a Jota rider. Believe me, there is nothing faster than the new Alpino S on mountain roads, but I was trying to stay with it anyway, and this meant giving the Mirage the whip, so much in fact, it proved safer to hold the revs down and the gears up, because anything more than 4000 rpm induced acceleration so damn fast it wasn't healthy any more, not on those roads. Hauling out of a sharp downhill hairpin in third gear at around 2500/3000 rpm I cracked the throttles carelessly and was almost unseated by a spinning rear wheel! The same thing happened again a few miles along the road. Power of this type is nothing like a 1200's, which, while torquey is gentle with its delivery, nor that of a Jota which, while wild above 4000 rpm, needs a space to gather itself under that engine speed.

In short the Mirage is a true Italian grand turismo, being as fast as your right fist dare let it be, yet without the intensity of its more sporting brother, the Jota. Exactly what its power development is has not yet been evaluated, but if the torque curve isn't nearly flat



from 4000 rpm on I'll be surprised, because at 2500 rpm there's enough of it to make you feel all silly, especially with that gargling engine note to play with as well.

Time was when a big Laverda required something of a technique to ride it fast. Once achieved it was as fast as anything else made around corners, but it tended to resist line changes, so raggedness caused by over-eagerness on the rider's part could result. No more does this occur because of the change in

quite possibly more. This is still lower than the standard Jota and not a lot more than the 3CL — so who's going to buy the Mirage?

Well whilst the name Laverda has always been synonymous with ultra high-speed performance, the marque's reputation has by now extended far enough to reach such well-heeled folk that have the money to trade off on the adrenalin churning image without risking their virtue in the somewhat ferocious grip of the Jota. Until the Mirage came along they



steering geometry, which has lightened steering at low and medium speeds, and improved high speed direction changes without upsetting stability. In consequence the Mirage is now up there in that exclusive echelon of near miraculous roadholders right alongside Ducati. Heavy, yes, ponderous, no. Nothing scrapes during cornering either, unless you're bold enough to touch down the generator cover. . .

Exactly what the top speed is of the Mirage is not yet known, but its cruising speed appeared to be whatever I cared to make it up to 120 mph, and top speed should be at least 135 mph,

had to choose between a 500 or 750cc Breganze twin (not quite the done thing, perhaps?) a 3CL (to close to the Jota for comfort?) or the 1200 itself (a machine which seems to have suffered from the slightly stodgy implications of the "big tourer" tag that's been applied to it).

Now there's a bike which exudes Laverda's sporting ancestry but betrays none of the harshness that so easily becomes that lady's unwelcome bedfellow.

For some men the Mirage will become the perfect mistress!