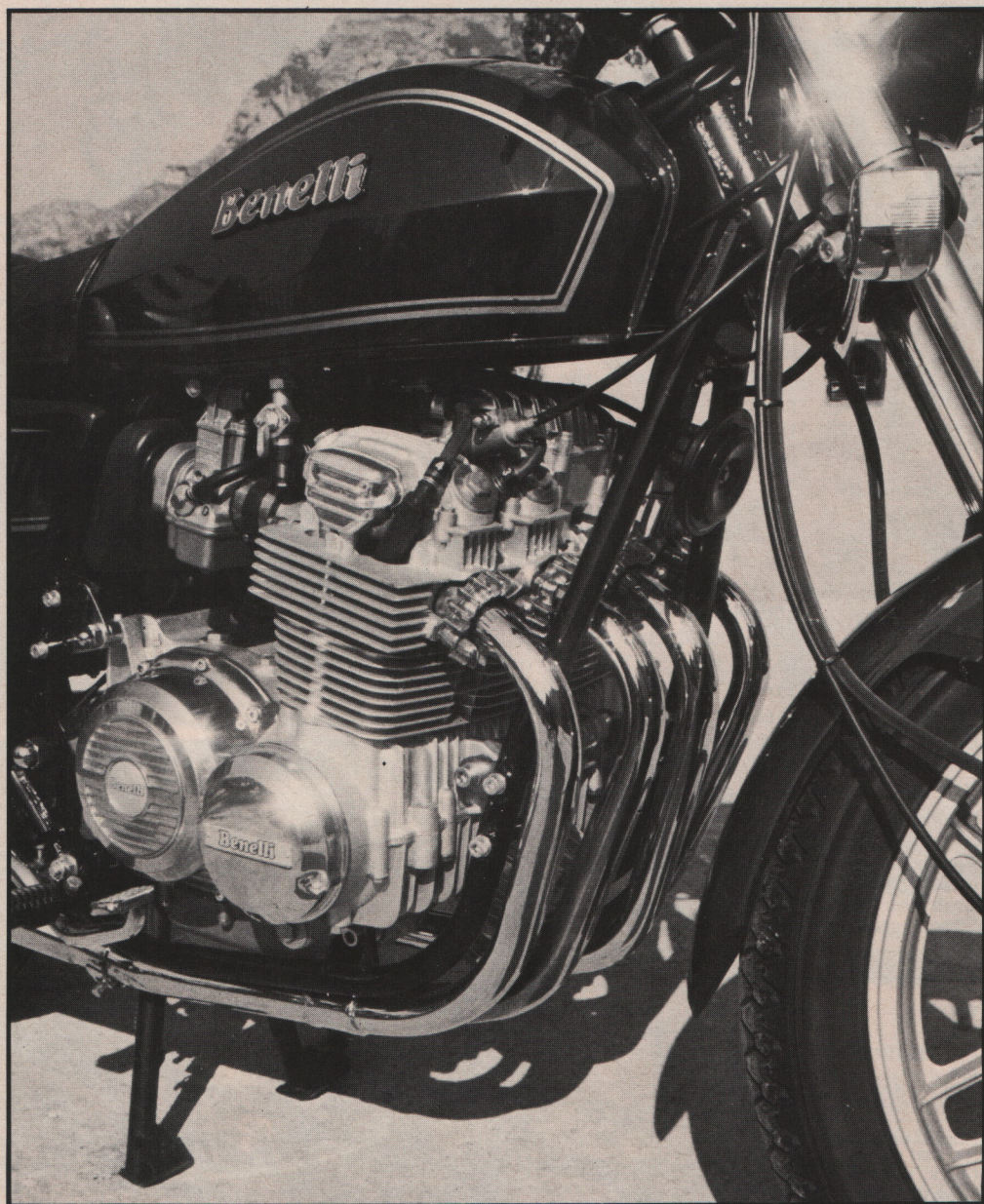


SPAGHETTI

BENELLI 654

EASTERN



The 654 is basically a more powerful, relaxed version of the 504 Sport (tested in the Sept '79 issue of *Which Bike?*). The footrests are mounted forward and the 'bars have a slight rise. The seat is stepped, wide and filled with a hard compound but the riding position is

Benelli launched their 1980 range to coincide with the appointment of new UK importers, TKM, who used to handle BMW so they know a thing or two about bikes. Newest addition to the range is the 654 and it doesn't carry a 'sport' tag, so it's as close as you'll get to a Benelli tourer.

Rick Kemp rode the bike in Italy.

comfortable. Stylistically the 654 is like the 504 but without the handlebar fairing and a deeper seat with grab rail. The rear light is integral with the mudguard and the indicators are rectangular. The instrument console is larger, incorporating a volt-meter as well as the usual

SPAGHETTI BENELLI 654 EASTERN

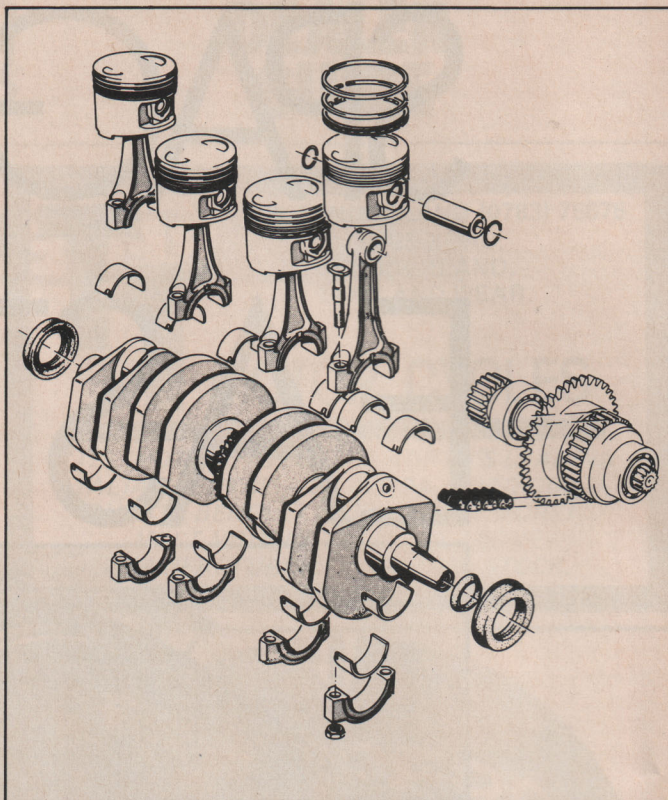
array of warning lights. Linked Moto-Guzzi front and rear brakes is now a feature of all the four strokes from the 354 Sport to the 900 Six. Another feature is the side-stand ignition cut out: the bike won't start unless the stand is retracted.

The 654 actually displaces only 603.9cc, each of the four pistons having a bore and stroke of 60x58.4mm. Outwardly, the engine is identical to the 350 and 500 fours with a single overhead camshaft chain driven from the centre of the crankshaft. Primary drive is by a Hy-vo type chain that drives a counter shaft which is geared to the clutch and starter motor. The valves are operated by screw adjustable rockers in the conventional way.

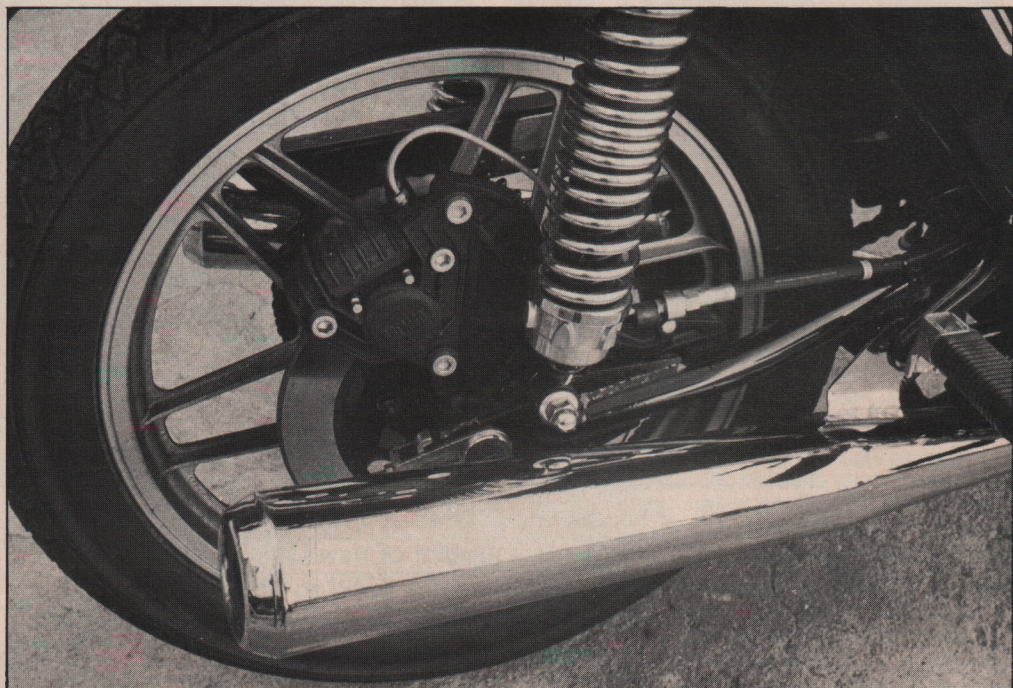
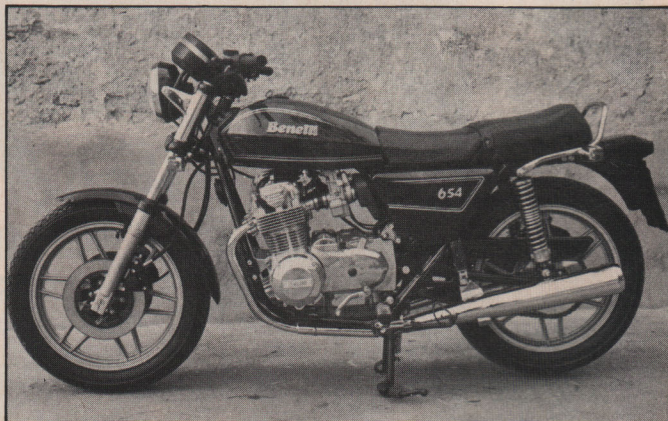
Ignition is by coil and twin contact breakers mounted on the right side of the crankshaft. The mixture is fed in via four Dellorto carburetors.

The engine produces a claimed power output of 60 bhp at 8,700 rpm and maximum revs are at 9,500 which would suggest that all the power is at the top end, but this is not so. The motor will pull cleanly from low revs and it doesn't lack torque in this area either; even in top (fifth) it will pull reasonably from 4,000 rpm onwards so it's not just an overdrive. Top speed is claimed at 119mph but this is probably optimistic in the usual Italian fashion and as the engine on the launch bike was new we couldn't put it to the test. The Veglia instrumentation seems to have improved with the needles on both clocks remaining steady.

To fire up the 654 the clutch needs to be disengaged and the side stand up (a warning light for the side stand would be helpful in preserving battery life as the motor will turn over but it won't fire). The Dellortos have a progressive choke mounted on the left side, much better than the snap ones associated with Moto Guzzi twins. Once the choke is off the motor settles down to a smooth purr and will tickover at 1000rpm happily. Mechanical noise is higher than we're used to on Japanese bikes with their silent cam chains and bucket



This bunch of bits is the Benelli's crank assembly. It follows common practice with plain bearings and Hy-vo chain drive to the jackshaft.



Benelli have adopted the Moto Guzzi's "integral" braking system where the rear disc is connected to the left front disc and operated by the foot pedal.

BENELLI 654

Price inc. VAT:	£2099
Warranty:	Six months/ unlimited mileage
Engine:	Ohc inline four
Capacity:	603.9cc (60x58.4mm)
Lubrication:	Wet sump
Comp ratio:	n/a
Carburetion:	Four Dellorto PHB
Ignition:	Coils and twin contact breakers.
Max Power:	60 bhp at 8,700 rpm
Max torque:	n/a
Primary drive:	Gear
Clutch:	Wet multi plate
Gearbox:	Five speed
Final drive:	Roller chain
Mph/1,000 rpm	n/a
Electrics:	12v 15ah battery, Alternator, 40/45w head- light
Fuel capacity:	3.3 gals.
Frame:	Duplex cradle
Suspension:	Telescopic tank (f) Swing arm with 5 pos. spring preload adj.
Tyres:	Pirelli 325S 18 (f) 350S 18(r)
Brakes:	Brembo 10 1/4in dual disc (f) single disc (r) interconnected.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase:	55in
Seat height:	n/a
Grnd clmce:	n/a
H'bar width:	n/a
Rake/trail:	n/a
Weight:	399 lbs dry

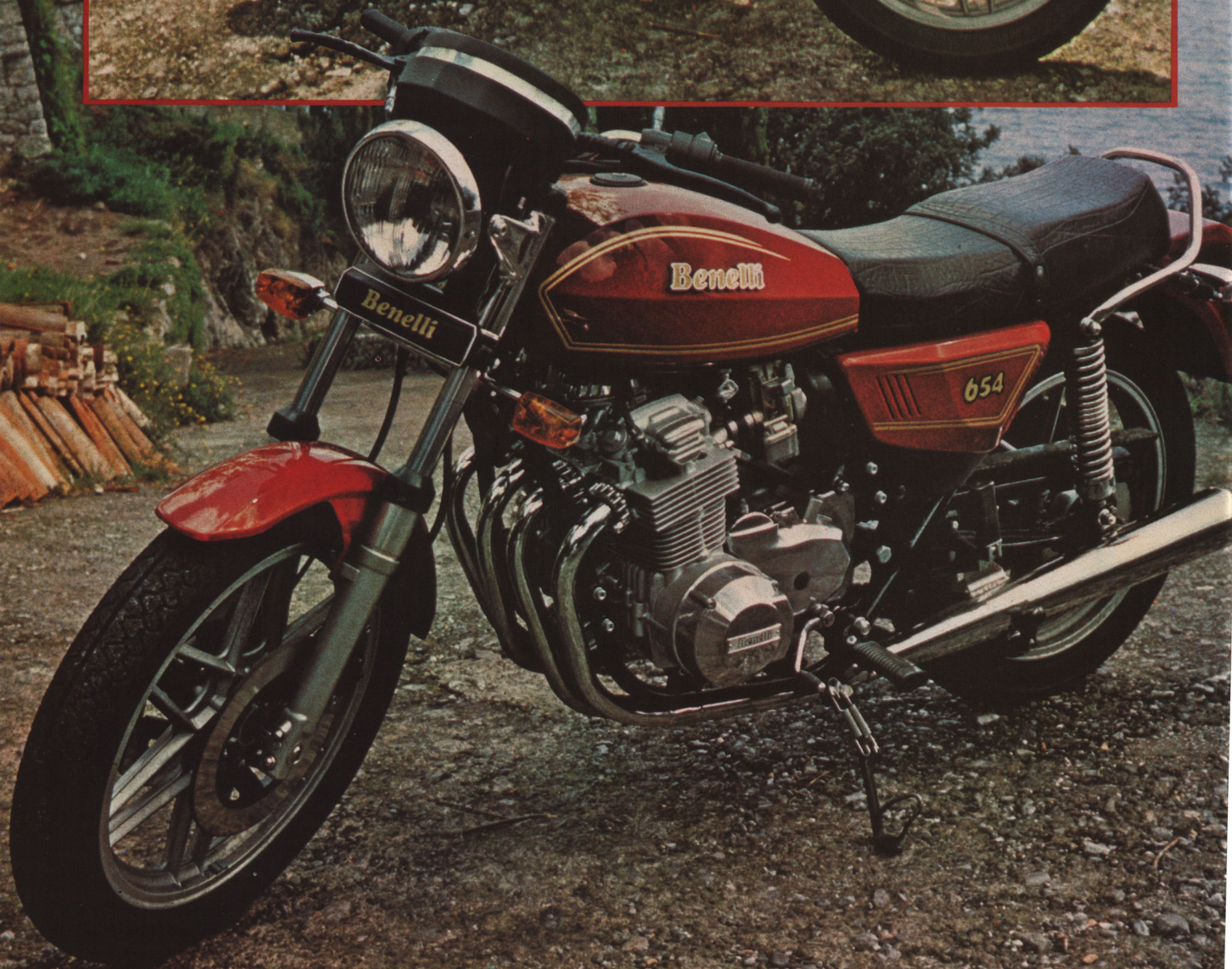
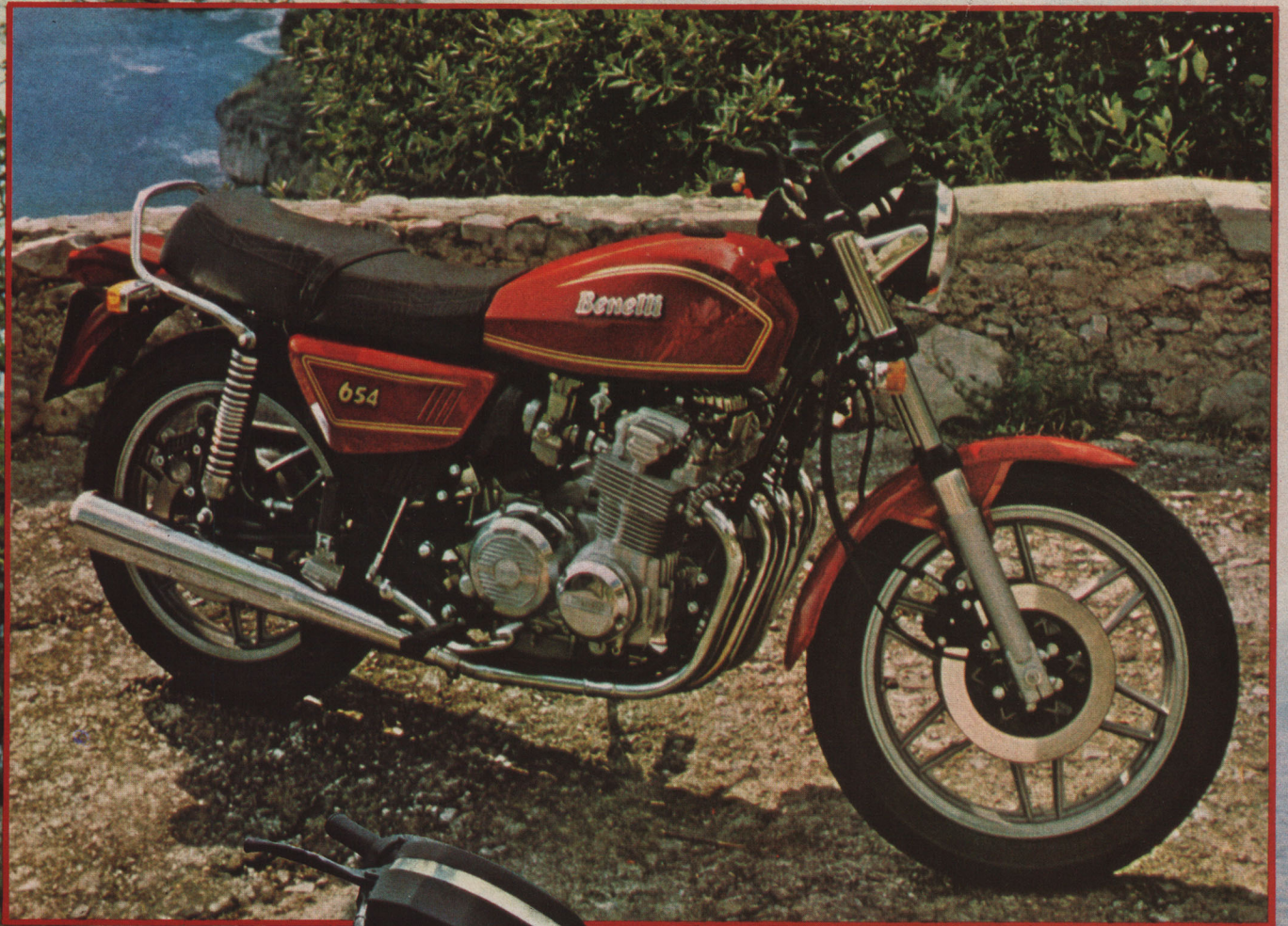
EQUIPMENT

Self starter, mirrors, fuel cap lock, steering lock, seat lock, tripmeter, speedo, rev counter, voltmeter.

PERFORMANCE (claimed)

Top speed:	119mph (claimed)
St 1/4 mile:	n/a
0-to-60 mph:	n/a
Ave fuel cons:	47mpg
Importer:	Benelli

Concessionaires
Ltd, 361/365,
Chiswick High
Rd., London
W4.



and shim followers. The noise soon fades from the rider's ear as wind noise takes over.

Suspension is typically Italian, which means good but with the rear sprung harder than the front. Having the integral braking system means that under normal stopping the front doesn't dive too much as the whole bike tends to go down compressing the springs front and back. This also makes for more controlled stopping. The frame is a full double cradle and feels very rigid. The swing arm looks a bit light, though it didn't seem to have any adverse effect on the handling. The 654 handles much the same as the 504 Sport, which isn't bad by any standards. The only difference is in a lower footrest height which restricts the

angle of lean on the 654. The centre stand extension too can ground easily on left handers. The Pirelli tyres fitted to the 18-inch cast wheels were excellent in the dry but didn't grip too well on the wet Italian roads on which the bike was ridden. But to be fair you wouldn't find road surfaces that bad in this country. (Wanna bet? - Ed.)

So good handling and the best brakes you can get plus the smoothness and zip of a multi cylinder engine are basically what the 654 has going for it. The engine is an Italian version of a 500 Honda four only most of the Japanese have gone to two camshafts so the Benelli seems dated by comparison though it's only 4 bhp down on the Z650 Kawasaki and three on the CB650 Honda,

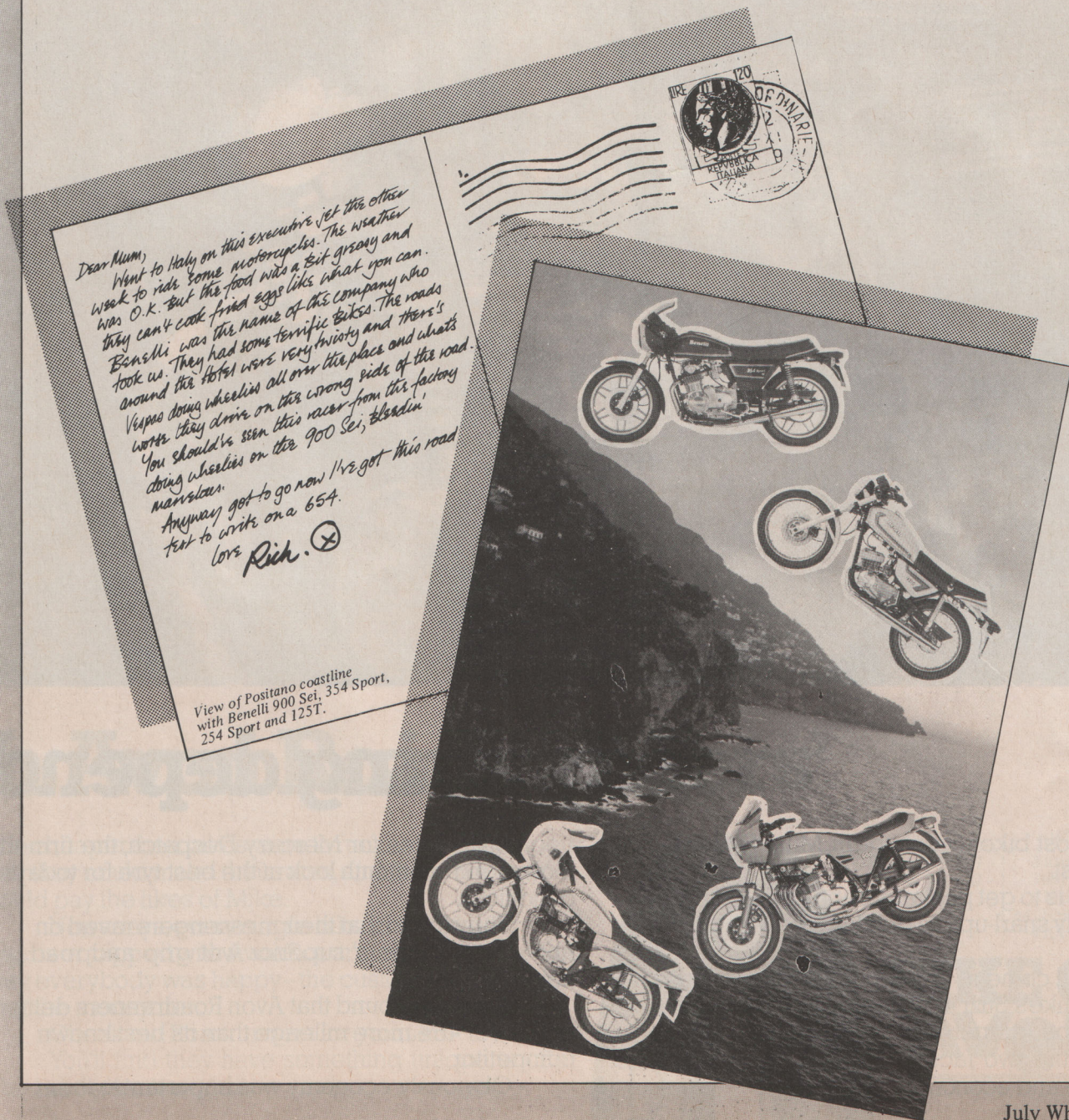
which, incidentally is the only other multi around with a single overhead camshaft and that was based on the CB500 too. If we are to believe the weight quoted by the manufacturers, 399 lbs dry, then the Benelli's slight power disadvantage is purely academic.

The Benelli 654 is small for a 650 class machine. But unlike the sports models making up the rest of the range it's not back breaking to ride for long distances. It is obviously an able tourer, but its physical size doesn't encourage the use of fairing, panniers and the extra weight of these items could well slow the bike down more than they would its competitors.

The test bike was well finished and details like the proper grab rail and flush fitting,

lockable fuel cap shows some thought. If the chrome holds out then so much the better but the Italians seem to have problems in this area. The instruments are easy to read but the warning lights are rather too dim to be noticed easily in daylight. Unfortunately the Mickey Mouse switchgear is still there and we wish the Italians would relent and buy in Japanese switches if only for their export machines. It works alright but it's a pain to use.

The only thing that lets the 654 down is the boring colour scheme, a sort of brick red with gold striping. If they had used the gold wheels found elsewhere in the range then the £2099 price tag wouldn't seem so high.



View of Positano coastline with Benelli 900 Sei, 354 Sport, 254 Sport and 125T.