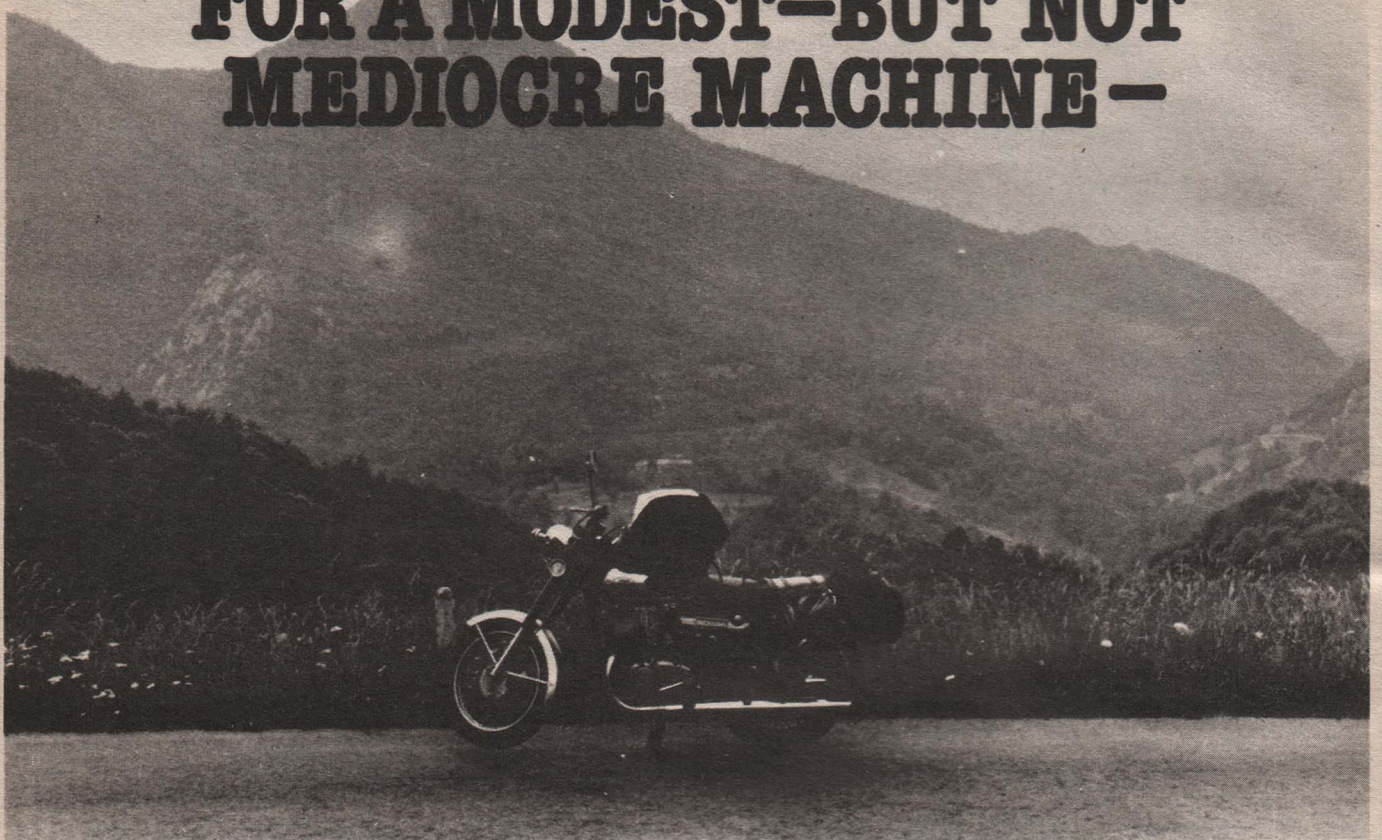


JAWA 350

A MODEST PRICE FOR A MODEST—BUT NOT MEDIocre MACHINE—



Ask any enthusiast what he thinks of the Jawa and like as not he will reply that it is cheap, reliable and not very exciting. Strictly speaking, while this is true enough, such an assessment will make no allowances for the gradual increase in quality of these Czechoslovakian made motorcycles nor for the fact that many people are becoming more aware that Jawa/C2 pricing makes more sense than buying a superclass mount at an equally super price.

Even after ten years of road testing, I had not ridden a Jawa before and when I collected the latest 350 — 634/6 — from the company's Goswell Road, London headquarters I was in for an agreeable surprise.

I had made the mistake of equating low price with crudeness and, although the machine is still not perfect and does have one or two areas that could be improved, it is pleasant to ride and, provided one does not expect *too* much in the way of performance, is well capable of quite sustained high speed mileages, as a colleague's 22½ hour dash from the south of France to London recently proved.

A major facelift on the 634 series Jawas has eliminated most of the Eastern European character from its lines and now it can hold its head with the best of them. A black frame topped off by, perhaps, a trifle too garish a red

tank, side panels and front forks gives the 'bike eye-catching looks and the removable chrome tank panels must surely be a good idea. Chrome mudguards, a neat, smooth looking, reasonably oil tight engine and long fat silencers complete the package.

The engine seems unusually large for a 350 and the unit is quite wide. It has separate cylinder barrels in cast iron and separate alloy cylinder heads. Oil is supplied to the cylinder walls by the positive oiling system which is located on the left hand crankshaft end with a tube running to the top of the carburettor to create a petroil mixture and a separate feed from inside to the big ends. The system works well enough and is economical, using about a pint to every 300 miles but it smoked unduly at speeds in excess of 65 mph and did little to endear the rider to those he overtook. Jawa say that this is not typical. In fact it served as a useful incentive not to demand too much of the bike for 65 mph was just about the speed that the bike would run at all day with reasonable economy, averaging 65 mpg when we did just that on a trip to the coast.

Although the bike would manage 80 mph, given time, anything above 70 mph blurred the speedometer and the senses and was not really much fun. To be honest the Jawa is not intended for that kind of treatment.

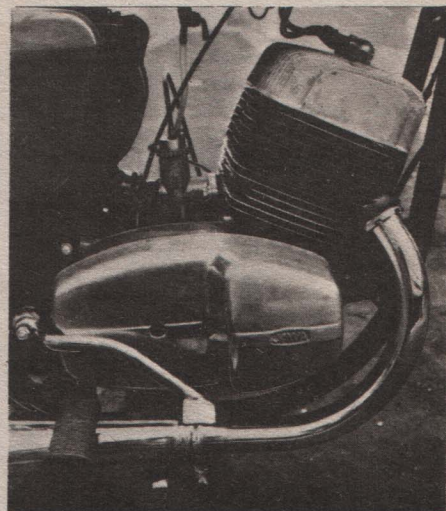
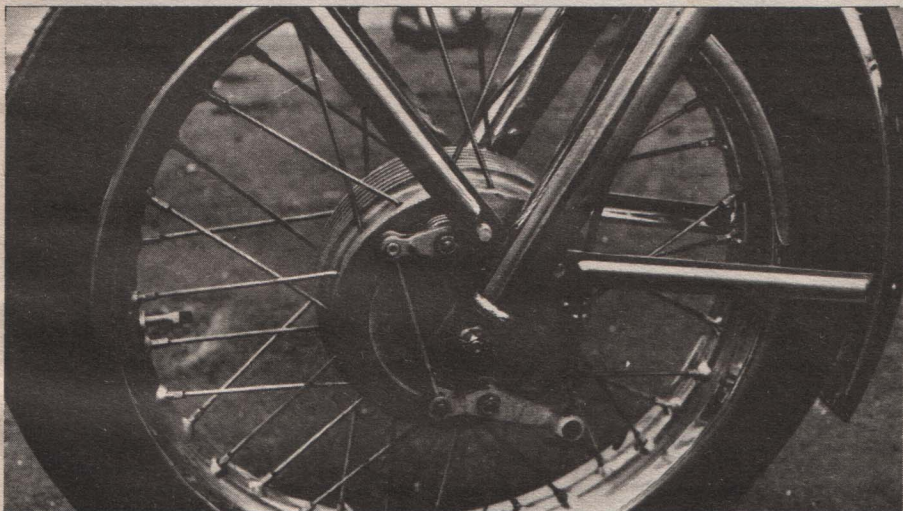
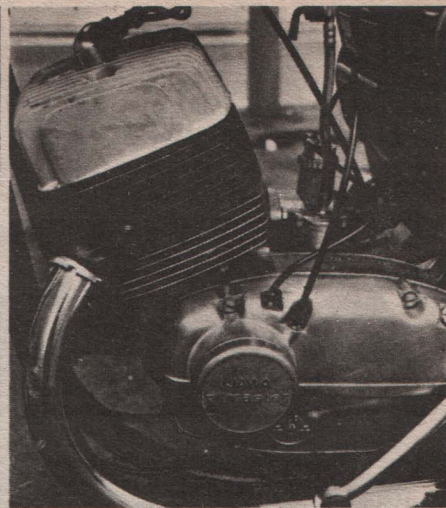
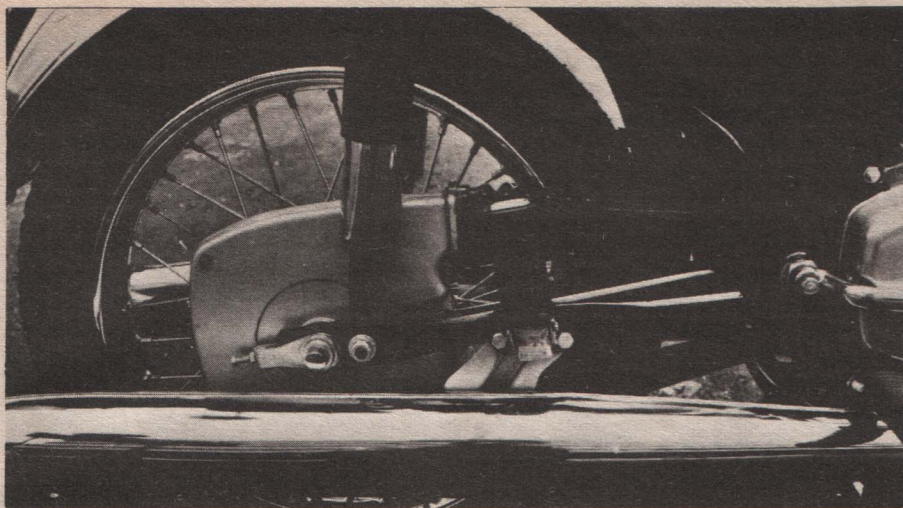
Below 70 mph the machine was all but vibration free, the twin cylinder

2-stroke engine not only being as smooth as most other comparable machines but, due to its modest performance and low revs, it had far less induction roar and was undoubtedly one of the quietest twins that we have yet tried. Added to this was an exhaust note that was almost inaudible at town speeds.

The Jawa's modest performance was reflected in its getaway. The motor, which always started second kick, after moderate flooding from cold and immediately settled to a slow reliable tickover, needed a large handful of throttle and a second's delay while this was communicated to the engine before any kind of acceptable getaway was possible. It was irritating at first but I soon became used to the machine's characteristics and learned to live with them. It was no use trying to get involved with Yamaha RD250s consoling myself with the fact that they were using much more fuel than we were!

If we were to compile a list of the machine's faults the gearchange would be near the top for it was what is commonly known as 'clunky'. Engagement of bottom gear was always accompanied by a loud crunch and all the other gearchanges needed time. Hurry them and they objected and soon we learned that there was only one way: nice 'n easy.

Incidentally there's a well known Jawa feature here — the kick starter-cum-gearchange lever. To start, the lever



is pressed in and lifted to a one o'clock position for kickstarting. When the motor fires it springs back into the conventional horizontal gearlever position. Once or twice the flying kickstarter knocked the Jawa into gear when it was on the centre stand, which was awkward. The neutral indicator light often claimed the 'bike was in neutral when it wasn't.

Yet, to finish the gearbox appraisal on a high note, the clutch was light and beautifully progressive. The old model 350 'slickshift' arrangement has been dropped on the 634 range.

Comfort and handling go together and there is no point in having a machine that handles well if you are too uncomfortable to get the best out of it.

The Jawa makes no pretensions to being a lightweight but the only drawback to this was it needed unreasonable effort to heave onto the centre stand and the assistance of a prop stand would have been appreciated.

In its favour the weight made the machine sit solidly on the road, too, and it took real physical effort to deflect it from a straight line. It cornered well, holding whichever line chosen and the hard rear suspension, (surely a by-product of Jawa's successful cross country machine?), prevented any trace of wallowing or pitching.

It also rattled kidneys once or twice over pot-holes in this deteriorating road system of ours.

The dualseat felt, initially, quite hard

but the only way to find out really is to ride on the thing and to this end it passed the bottom test well, and there was ample room for two. The only criticism was that it was high. Indeed, the Jawa is quite a 'tall' bike and smaller riders would find it hard to put both feet firmly on the ground.

The handlebars looked as though they had come straight off the ISDT machine. They were high and wide but comfortable with it and the machine was not really fast enough to suffer from such wide 'bars. I liked them.

The unkind could say that the Jawa has more British equipment on it than the recently launched "British" moped. Lucas were brought into the picture with chrome headlamp, rear light unit, trafficators and switchgear as the first 634s — the /4 model — were being introduced to this country back in February 1974. A party of Czech technicians travelled over for talks at Birmingham that culminated in the finalisation of the deal — an improvement as far as the switchgear is concerned over the Czech Pal concern's equivalent — for the then planned 634/6. What does seem a shame is that while enhancing the system superficially the crankshaft mounted dynamo couldn't have been upgraded to become 12 volt.

Main beam lighting has been improved by the Lucas headlamp and the switchgear, fitted to the left hand bar, is easy to use and far more positive

than the Pal equipment. The circuitry is such, though, that both the horn, headlamp flasher and rear brake stop light can be operated without the Jawa 'toggle' type key activating the ignition side.

Three warning lights are visible in the centre console, green for neutral, red for generator and blue for main beam but the colour used was a bit pale so they all finished up glowing white. The horn was above average. A flashing indicator warning light appeared to be allocated but it was missing its top and did not work, which could merely have been the bulb expired.

Jawa have been making go-anywhere motorcycles for a number of years and it turns out that this year is their fiftieth anniversary. The experience shows in a number of good ideas, the best being a flexible totally enclosed rear chain that is popular in Eastern Europe but appears to have travelled no further. It worked well, kept chain oil off the rear of the machine and reduced the periods between adjustments.

The test model had a smear of oil around the joint at the back but really did its job well. Complimenting this, the rear wheel could be removed without disturbing the rear chain or case, a genuine quickly detachable affair. A pump is provided to assist in the event of a puncture. Such a luxury is rare these days and even expensive superbikes get punctures.

Continuing in the same vein a really comprehensive, if a little crude, toolkit is provided in the right hand side panel compartment. To reach this the dual seat has to be unlocked and the panel top unscrewed. How convenient also to be able to visibly check the battery fluid level at the same time.

In years gone by suspension units on motorcycles were covered to prevent road muck doing its worst. Then the racers started exposing their springs and fashion dictated that 'with it' road 'bikes followed suit.

In this respect, the Jawa can be considered 'old fashioned' for it retains dust covers on its front and rear suspension units and its a fair bet that they do not wear out so quickly. It really is a 'bike intended to lead a hard life and to do this it has been solidly constructed. The frame, of the twin down tube cradle type, is strong enough to carry a much bigger engine.

The whole machine disdains the use of weight saving plastic and uses little alloy. As a result our fifty year old lady has become a trifle portly, turning the scales at a hefty 368 lbs.

That would have been considered heavy for a 650 ten years ago and, although it aids the handling it throws an undue strain on the brakes — the not overlarge twin leading shoe front brake and single leading shoe rear are only just capable of handling it. The front brake will lock the Barum tyre but this could be due more to lack of adhesion in the Barum than an excess of power in the brake. The Jawa is one of the few modern medium weight 'bikes to persist with the drum brake and is none the worse for it.

It is possible to pay between £550 and £600 for a good 350 class twin cylinder 2-stroke so the Jawa 350/634, selling at £398 is clearly pretty competitive. To present the full picture we are bound to say that a 200cc Japanese machine has much the same performance as a Jawa 350 and rather more refinements but even that costs more and there are still those who consider that there is no substitute for cc's and who regard a flexible 350, however average the performance, as a better buy than a highly tuned 200.

Judged as a 350 the Jawa is not a quick machine. Its top speed of 80 mph being no more than others can do with smaller engines but it did have stamina, would happily cruise at 65 mph and continue to return a reasonable 65 mpg.

Strangely, town use at slower speeds saw exactly the same figure averaged throughout the test. It handles very well in a solid kind of way, stops with reasonable confidence and is really very comfortable indeed, the firm seat being no worse after a long ride.

Its lights are good, engine smooth and quiet and looks not at all bad. It is not perfect. An overly high top gear finds the machine running out of breath at anything below 40 mph in top and although it is good when things are in

its favour it soon runs out of puff up hills or into a headwind.

The engine objects to an overdose of slogging and tends to gas up if too high a gear is held for long, needing an excess of revs to clear the tubes. It has one or two minor niggles, no mirror being fitted as standard (we once again resorted to our 'road test' Stadium), neither is a side stand.

The centre stand is hard to use and almost impossible for lady riders. The battery disgraced itself by spilling onto the left hand silencer and ruining it despite an overspill tube and the gear-change pedal shaft leaked a little oil.

On the credit side the test 634/6 was absolutely reliable, started easily, looked good, sounded better and did not have the slightest suggestion of the crudeness we expected. It is a machine of modest performance, modest price and, for that price represents very good value indeed.

Robbie Millar



... and not content with a straightforward road test, we take a standard 634/6 to the French Riviera. Monte Carlo or bust? Yes we did and no it didn't!

The Campbells Main Course Soup bubbled warmly in the billycan. The mild hiss of the Camping Gaz stove subsided and in the silence that ensued the pinging of the Jawa 634/6's contracting cylinder fins could clearly be heard.

It was around three in the morning somewhere along the main N44 national route in France between St Quentin and Reims enroute for the Riviera, a round trip of 1737 miles — on the same machine that had previously taken me to Prague — proving the reliability of the marque.

In between the two ventures, LNV 853P has been serviced once by the man who supplied and prepared the 'bike for the ride to Czechoslovakia and back, Mick Berrill, Jawa/CZ stalwart whose Northampton shop also resounds to the crackle of the same factory's

scramblers.

The 634/6 is the latest in the 634 series of Jawa 350cc roadsters and carries worthwhile refinements. The main point is the Oilmaster separate oiling system, obviating the need to mix oil with fuel at every filling station. Basically, it's the same as many well proven systems and the cable linkage through the pump is foolproof.

Although the 'bike is fitted with a steering lock, the 'toggle' key is common to all Jawa/CZ models and if the bike is to be left for any length of time, experience suggests it's a wise precaution to unlock the seat, disconnect the readily accessible fuse (fitted with a spare) and relock the seat.

Starting is always a first or second kick affair with the gearlever doubling up as a kickstart, as described elsewhere. The procedure is to tickle the carb until the first smear of fuel appears around the top of the 'antique' separate float bowl of the Jikov carb, push the key home and kick. The engine settles down straightaway to a regular tickover — just like that — no choke necessary and none fitted.

Twice, in the heat of the French Riviera, the 'bike failed to pick up straight away, requiring several kicks, but this is the exception.

Considering the heat and that the 'bike was run hard — often at an indicated 75 mph (which implies that there was more performance to come from the tighter road-test version supplied by Skoda), it speaks volumes for the Jawa that not so much as a sparking plug required changing throughout nearly 1750 miles. What did happen at this speed was that the fuel consumption rocketted to around 48 mpg and the Duckhams oil consumption dropped to 180–200 miles to the pint.

The engine is characteristically 'soft'. It knocks out a lowly 28 bph at 5,250 rpm and with a machine weighing around 367 lbs such a power/weight ratio can hardly be called favourable. Yet the engine is a willing, hard working unit that has a heartening capability for plodding on all day through thick and thin. Crossing the Alps through the Mont Cenis pass 2083 feet above sea level more than proved the point.

Laden with tanktop bag, Swagman pannier bags and a tent on the Tower carrier the 'bike took all the climbing in its stride and on the way down again towards Rivoli the twin leading shoe front brake proved its worth despite being a meagre 6½ inches in diameter. Perhaps some of the secret lies in setting this unit up correctly by taking up the adjustment on the primary brake arm wing nut first. Once this starts rubbing on the drum, slacken off a couple of turns and then adjust the secondary arm on the link-up adjuster until that too binds. Slacken off by the same number of turns and the brake becomes impressive.

The sixteen inch wheels fitted to the earlier model 360 Jawa have been superseded by eighteen inch rimmed units —



still quickly detachable and interchangeable (in theory, although the front wheel is fitted with a ribbed pattern 325.18 Barum).

The general handling is good, but the lengthy and somewhat spongy travel of the front forks can be disconcerting on long fast bends. The rear end is completely the opposite, the units being non-adjustable but on a hard pre-load.

The frame of the 634 series owes a lot to the ISDT models and this can be no more apparent than in the way the downtubes are secured to the headstock — typically 6-Day stuff with the tubes running up either side of the stock.

Such a feature is typical of Jawa thoroughness. Like the duplex primary chain which deals with all those rampaging horses when probably a single chain would suffice. The gearchange is clunky and best used with slow deliberation. Top gear is really too high, but on long runs allows the engine to build up to a comfortable — and respectable — all day cruising speed, probably

around 4500 rpm, without causing undue vibration.

In truth, the seat is probably not only too high, but too hard also. The journey to Monte Carlo using national routes took 23½ hours for 793 miles (including the soup stop and about two hours kip when I inadvertently fell asleep in a layby).

The return journey, using a combination of Autoroute and national routes taking in the Nice-Cannes-Aix-en-Provence-Avignon "loop" took slightly less time for more miles — 22 hours and 944 miles, but this time solid riding without any rest apart from coffee breaks. That seat therefore became a sore point!

Bear in mind with this that the 'bike never gave a hint of trouble throughout including travelling through evening thunderstorms during the return journey.

Reliability has always been the keyword. The bottom half of the engine, fed positively by Oilmaster lubrication, is also fitted with an external grease nipple for supplying lubricant to the

centre main bearing every 5,000 miles!

Can it be too that the Jawa is catching on in a really big way? Just outside Menton, I met Dutchman Gerard Nieuwenburg from Den Haag with a petrol mixing 634/5 that had covered 12,000 troublefree miles and further on towards Imperia on the Italian Riviera two Italian registered 'bikes, another /5 and a Californian with a 360 bottom half with Oilmaster but with the new square barrels and heads.

What could be more logical is that the 634 frame would lend itself to a 500 motor. The brakes would have to be enlarged to counter the extra pace — and, influenced as they are by market trends, is it possible that the Czechs will revert again to four-strokes?

Conjecture apart, the 634 series 350cc Jawa represents real value for money for the thrifty and holds no wheelying surprises for the many who're making a return to motorcycling after a lapse of some years.

Jerry Clayton