

EMPIRE OF

Initially announced at last year's Colonge show, BMW's K1 is now officially launched. BMW are not noted for pushing the outer limits of radical motorcycle design, but they are one of the few European manufacturers who virtually ignore the belligerence of the Japanese and consistently get away with it. The K1 is therefore an uncharacteristic and significant move for BMW. It is not only a probing finger into the hotly contested 'Super Sports' market, but also a clear confirmation of their commitment to the future of the K series.

The factory proudly announced the K1 to be the top of the range, and to signify the 100,000th K to be manufactured. There are no plans to cease production of the R series twins either.

More characteristically though, BMW made it quite clear that the K1, as far as they're concerned, is not intended as direct competition for the Japanese monster power bikes. Quite where all this leaves the K1 positioned in the market is unclear, although I suspect it's with all the other BMWs. Possibly a fairly safe place to be.

BMW very kindly decided to launch the K1 in Italy, and suitably stuffed with quantities of pasta, various members of the world's press were squeezed into their leathers and allocated a K1 each for three hours' riding in the hills around Rome.

As we wobbled in convoy down the steep hotel slip road, the first impression I got of the K1 was the unfamiliar feeling of having to reach backwards for rearset footpegs



'An exceptional and fascinating motorcycle to behold'

on a BMW. The second was the vicious power of the twin four-pot Brembo calipers on fully floating discs; something one is accustomed to on Japanese bikes but definitely a first for BMW. Their ABS anti-lock braking system is available as an extra on the K1 and it will be interesting to see how it performs on this kind of set-up compared to the less dramatic K100 system. According to BMW 60% of their new K series customers now order ABS.

The K1's motor is basically a K100 liquid cooled flat-four, fitted with a sixteen valve head — instead of the K100's eight — and a central digital engine management system, with a defect recall memory, that controls both fuel injection and ignition. Producing a claimed 100bhp at 8,000rpm, instead of the eight-valve's 90bhp, the K1 is sticking to a voluntary 100bhp maximum power output for motorcycles produced in West Germany (I don't think

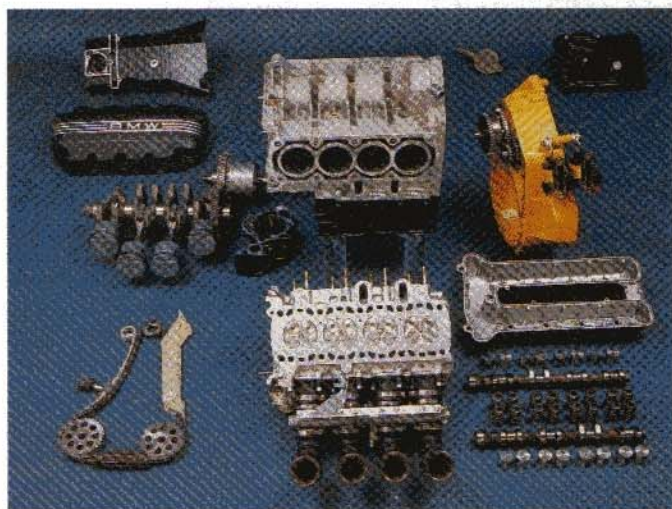
the ones produced in the East have much to worry about). As BMW are one of the few bike manufacturers whose power and performance claims are quite realistic this, plus the claimed 142mph top speed, may well be true.

Riding the bike briefly on public roads it is hard to say how much power is there, and without comparing it to a K100, even harder to say how much more it has over the eight valve. However I am in agreement



• Extract from BMW K1 press information pack.

WEIRDNESS



K1's motor, showing new 16 valve head. Established K motors have proved good for mega-mileage.



New rorty stainless pipe has expansion box behind gearbox for silencing.

with BMW that it produces enough. Below 4,000rpm it's a bit flaccid, but between 4,000 and the 9,000rpm redline power is smooth and progressive. A tingly vibration can be felt between 3,000 and 5,000rpm, although this was not obtrusive. What was obtrusive, and I wasn't the only one to find it, was an annoying false neutral between fourth and fifth

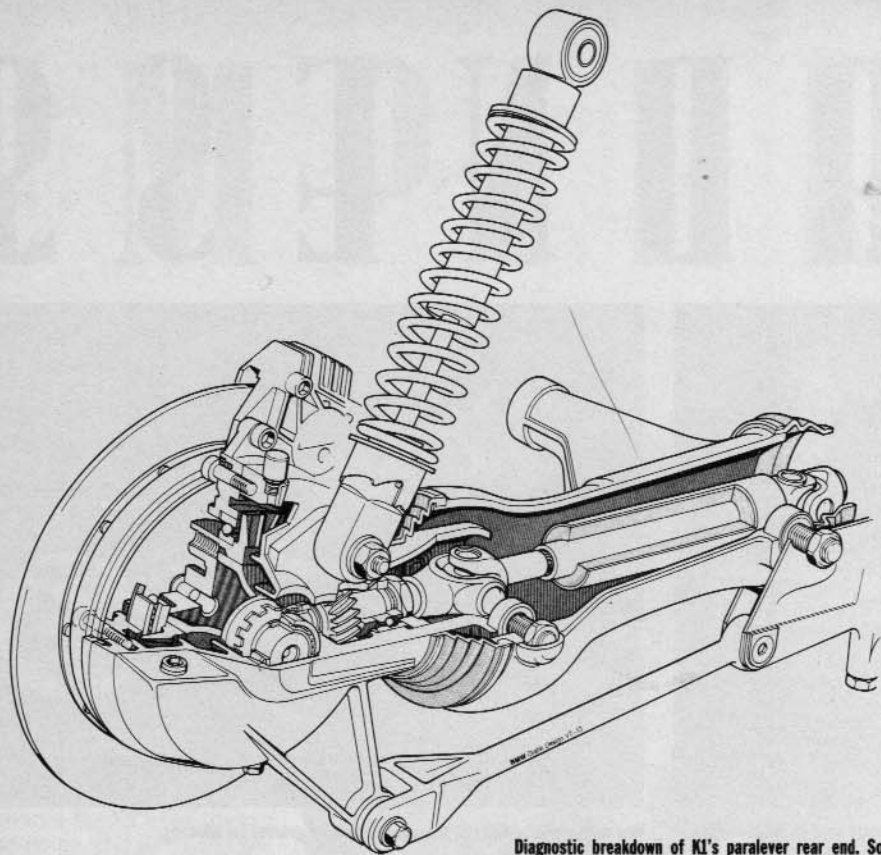
gears. I found it at least five times and was able to coast along without any number showing on the digital gear indicator and without any signs of the box changing up or down un-aided. If you remember it's there then it doesn't really matter, but on a high-tech £7,500 bike should the gremlin be there in the first place?

Perhaps the most significant step forward the K1 has made for BMW is in suspension and handling. New, braced, 41.7mm Marzocchi forks, developed especially for the K1, and BMW's Paralever rear suspension attached to a beefed-up K100 frame, are by far the best K series set-up yet. The appalling state of some of Italy's mountain roads would give some trail

bikes a hard time, and put some sports bikes into terminal tank slappers. The K1 coped remarkably well, only showing a slight bar twitching tendency accelerating over bumps. A small steering damper is fitted.

The Paralever rear end, as fitted to BMW's R80 and R100 trail twins, is a distinct improvement on the standard K100 set-up and prevents the lifting rear





Diagnostic breakdown of K1's paralever rear end. Somehow this lot, unlike the K100's system, prevents the back end rising under acceleration.

end effect of the shaft final drive under hard acceleration. The ride is still smooth and soft, not unlike the bigger Japanese sports bikes. Steering is light and assisted by unusually wide, 30in handlebars.

Much emphasis by BMW has been put on the wind tunnel developed aerodynamics which are perhaps not entirely apparent when first riding a bike that has them. But after a while it

did occur to me that there was actually very little turbulence bashing my head about, and at high speed the bike appeared to be stable and smooth. I don't know about crosswinds because there weren't any. Good aerodynamics also means good fuel consumption. BMW's figures for the K1's drag coefficient are 0.38 with the rider upright and 0.34 prone. If you understand that then you know more about

such things than I do.

I'm not too sure about the paint scheme though. It seems to me that the bulboid shape of the bodywork is sufficiently confusing without having contrasty colours add yet more shapes and patterns. The yellow gearbox, shaft and hub is positively Massey Ferguson.

Two more very worthwhile improvements the K1 has over the K100 are a central steering

lock (unlike other BMWs which have a lock so stupid it defies description), and that the blue smoke emissions familiar to post-side-stand-use K owners are a thing of the past. This is due to the addition of oil drain holes in the vicinity of the piston rings. All future K series models will have these drain holes.

Unworthy items on the K1 are the tacky and fiddly mini panniers in the rear body panels. The idea of having some stowage space, albeit small, is a good one, but the lids are not hinged and if not correctly refitted will fall off. The six litre capacity compartments could also do with a soft lining to isolate vibration. This sort of poor design would not appear on a BMW car so why should it on a bike? An additional stowage compartment is included in the front fairing for holding tools. A semi-rigid, 42 litre pannier set is available as an extra although conventional Krauser style panniers, it is said, would not suit the K1's aerodynamics.

The K1 is certainly not a tarted up K100, and is without doubt a thoroughly developed concept on the whole. Whether its radical appearance will attract those previously uninitiated to the BMW marque is hard to say. It is perhaps more likely, taking into account its price, to attract those who already have a K series and lust for something a little more daring.

Peter Comely

T E S T S P E C I F I C A T I O N

BMW K1

Price.....£8,000 with ABS, £7,500 without (approx)
 Warranty.....12 months/unlimited mileage
 Importer.....BMW GB Ltd, Ellesfield Avenue, Bracknell, Berks RG12 4 TA. (0344 426565)

Engine

Type.....flat four, DOHC, sixteen valve, liquid cooled
 Bore x stroke.....67 x 70mm
 Displacement.....987cc
 Compression.....11.0
 Fuel system.....Motronic fuel injection
 Ignition.....Motronic digital

Transmission

Primary drive.....gear
 Final drive.....shaft
 Gear ratios.....1st 1.64; 2nd 1.08; 3rd 0.84; 4th 0.68; 5th 0.59

Electrics

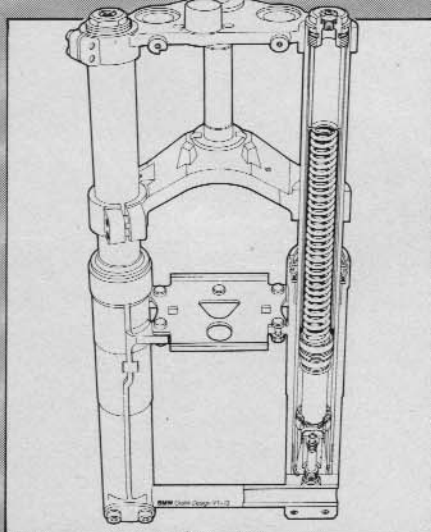
Alternator.....460W
 Battery.....12V/25Ah
 Headlight.....55/60W Halogen

Chassis

Front tyre.....120/70 VR17
 Rear tyre.....160/60 VR18
 Front brake.....305mm twin discs with four piston Brembo calipers

Performance

Maximum.....142mph (claimed)
 SS 1/4 mile.....n/a (0-62mph 3.9sec)
 Fuel consumption.....56mpg (claimed)



All-new stout and goodly Marzocchi front end was specifically developed for the K1.

Rear brake.....285mm single disc with two piston caliper
 Front suspension.....41.7mm Marzocchi tele fork, 135mm travel
 Rear suspension.....BMW Paralever, single shock, 140mm travel, adjustable preload
 Castor.....90mm

Dimensions

Wheelbase.....1565mm (61.6in)
 Overall length.....2230mm (87.8in)
 Overall width.....760mm (29.9in)
 Seat height.....780mm (30.7in)
 Dry weight.....259kg (571.1lb)
 Fuel capacity.....22 litres (4.84gal)

Tester's verdict

Good points.....it grows on you, best BMW suspension yet
 Bad points.....clumsy colour scheme
 Performance.....sufficient
 Economy.....don't know yet
 Handling.....good
 Comfort.....not bad, felt a bit wide
 Braking.....very good
 Value.....it's a BMW so it's expensive

Quick comparison

bike	top spd	av mpg	ss 1/4	price	issue
K1	142 (est)	—	—	7500	hibble
ZX10	163	40	11.5/120	5199	Jul 89
CBR1000	161	34	11.1/126	5299	Jun 89
GSX1100FJ	152	40	11.4/122	5199	Jan 88
906 Paso	137	39	12.5/105	6495	Mar 89