

The 1977 Sanglas 500:

THUMPER REINCARNATE

The call to bring back the thumper has been gathering in volume as more riders yearn for the days of simple, big single-cylinder street bikes.

JIM GREENING sampled the latest 500 cm³ single from the Spanish Sanglas company and found that in this case, nostalgia might be better left for campfire tales . . .

BRING BACK the thumper." That's what old-timers — not to mention a good few youthful traditionalists — will tell you when in the throes of nostalgia.

Ah yes, The Thumper. The 500 cm³ single-cylinder ohv push-rod motorcycle. A *character* bike, don't y'know. Not a 1000 km tourer, a frantic-revving-gas-guzzler, or a 12 sec/400m standing-start blaster. No, just a basic bike with predictable manners, super-handling, and a top gear that engages at 45 km/h and stays in all day.

Incidentally, Yamaha's XT500 does not enter the European basic bike reckoning because of its trail-bike

design. In any case, the Yam four-stroke single is a low volume seller in Europe, though appreciated by the Germans as a two-up round-city plonker. More significantly perhaps, it proves what sophisticated engineering can do for the big single. Get shot of the rattles, for instance.

Old timers are inclined to think of Matchless/AJS updates when allowing nostalgia free flow. The trouble is that nostalgia dulls the dividing line between fact and fancy. Obviously it is easier — and far more comforting — to remember the good points than the bad.

As a timely reminder that mere mortals cannot turn back the clock, the

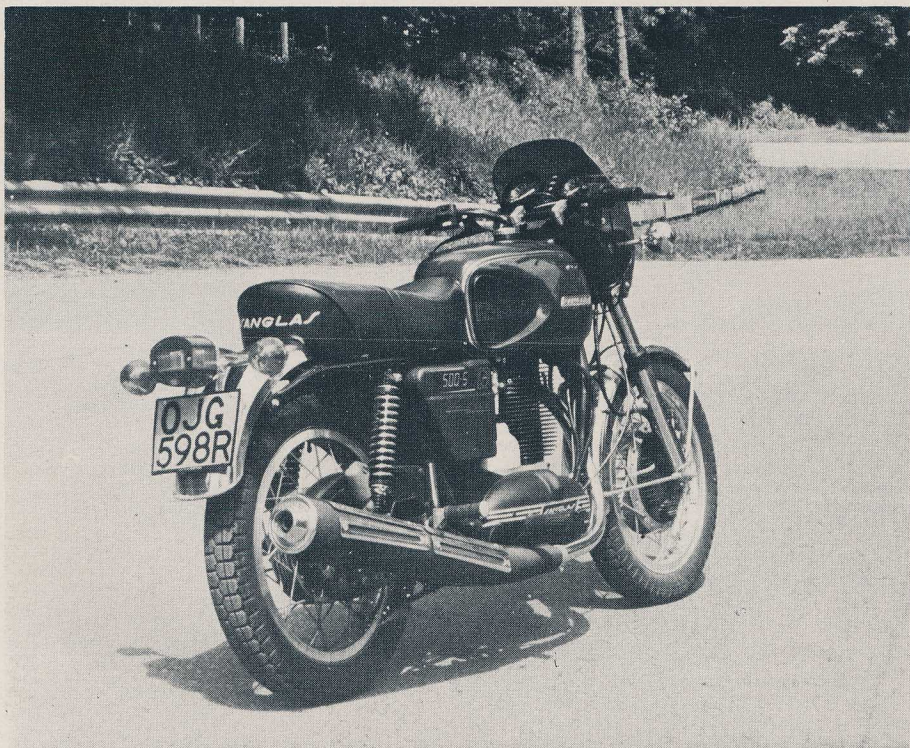
Spanish Sanglas company has come up with a 500 that should provoke a heartfelt "thank heaven", whenever someone drops the cliché "They don't make 'em like they used to".

Sanglas, bucking the Spanish lightweight trend, is a long-time producer of 500 cm³ thumpers for the domestic market and is the major supplier of police motorcycles. The new bike is a comprehensively equipped civilian version of the law bike, but it's basic bike to the core. We can only imagine that the heavily protected Spanish industry is the sole reason for local bikers even thinking of parting with their money. Because when a few models were released to other European countries for export-evaluation purposes, the recipients rapidly discovered lots of old-fashioned vices with hardly a compensatory modern virtue tossed in.

Not that the 500S is all bad. The enclosed disc front brake is very good, and of considerable interest to fast-riding (rain and shine) European bikers who have suffered the horrible experience of waiting for discs to be purged of water before the pads bite. Eurobikers are most critical of this aspect of stainless steel discs and are barely mollified by the marketing men's explanation that the majority of customers prefer the clean stainless look to rusty cast iron.

The Sanglas attempts to combine the aesthetic with the efficient — albeit in a high-cost manner — places the disc in an open drum with the ends blanked-off with circular castings. As the hydraulic actuators are cast integrally, the whole assembly presents a very neat appearance reminiscent of a drum brake. The only mystery is how the thing comes to pieces. If it's as specified with double discs inside, then there will be a few problems extracting the discs from between the calipers. Actually the comparatively slim hub led me to believe there was only one centrally sited disc with single pads pushing on either side.

Provision is apparently made for an extra cylinder/piston assembly at the bottom, conjuring up visions of a cast wheel with a heavily ventilated disc and four pads operating in opposing pairs. It would stop a train. Anyway, it's unfortunate that the breakdown of Anglo-Spanish technical communi-



Big black silencer keeps exhaust noise down but tall, heavily finned engine clatters and vibrates alarmingly. Worse, it only produces 26 kW. Hydrobag fitted to bottom of gas shocks isn't protected well enough.

cations prevents a more detailed — and accurate — description, but I liked the brake which worked beautifully in the wet and showed no tendency to fade in the dry through overheating.

Another Sanglas plus is the frame. A magnificent structure of heavy gauge tube, the twin loops form a wide cradle for the engine and gearbox. Rigid it certainly is, and designed with something like indestructability in mind. There are even sidcar hook-up points built in — and there's a feature worthy of a mention in this day and age!

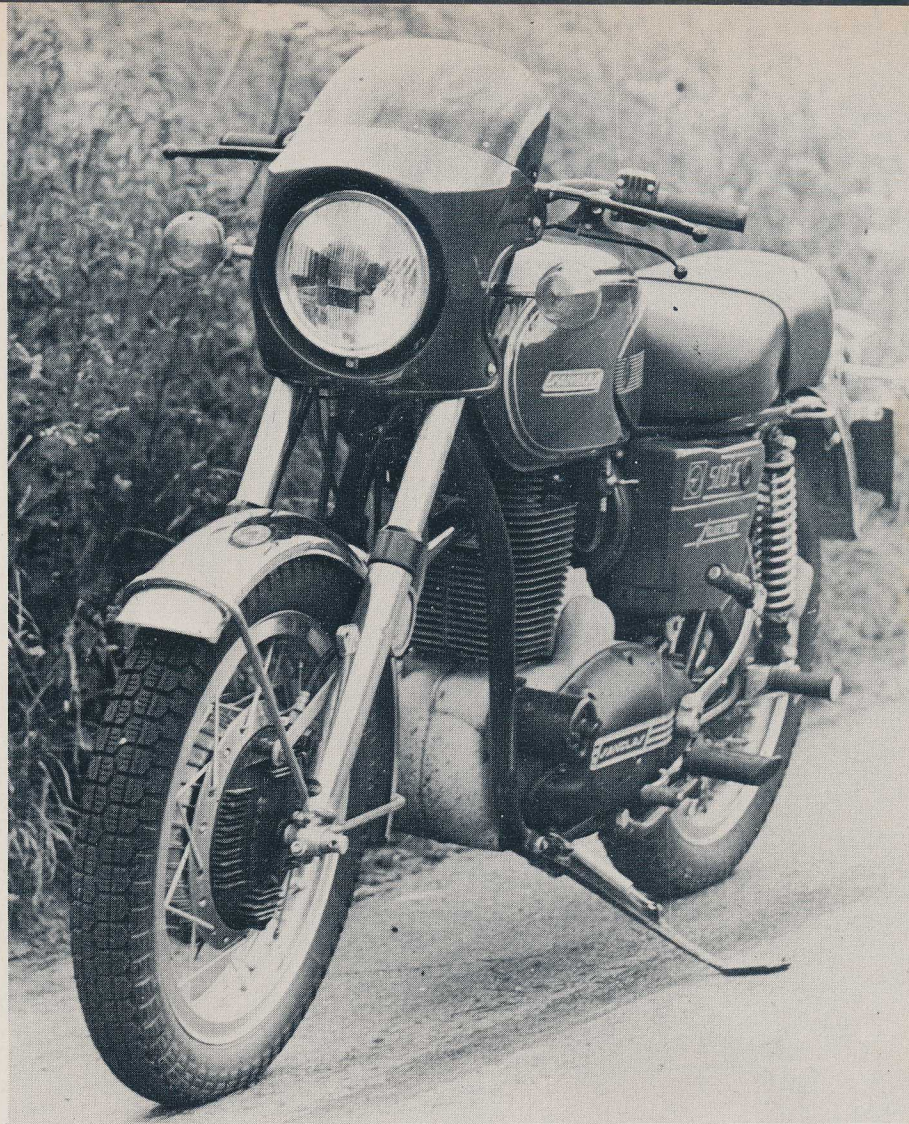
Perhaps the non-flex frame assists in elevating the vibration level to a point where even the most committed thumper advocate starts complaining. The Spanish vibes are not the high-frequency type that make their presence known by promoting tingling in the extremities and act as minor irritants. There is nothing at all insignificant about the Sanglas shakes — they crumble the rider's resistance into total submission, making 200 km journeys seem like trips to the Pole and back. The dreadful vibes also send the tacho needle leaping around the dial. Speedo accuracy is not enhanced either.

The instruments are accommodated in a console shielded by a handlebar fairing and screen. Idiot lights get in the act, at the expense of reducing the 500S's traditional thumper rating by a few percent. Turn indicators, lights on, high beam, ignition and oil are all there. The switches, mounted on attractive looking black chrome bars, are really nothing to write home about, while the extra-thin hand grips are guaranteed not to cushion the rider from the smallest vibration.

Telesco front forks and same-make rear shock absorbers work well, as you'd expect. The rears are of the gas variety, equipped with plastic "Hydrobag" reservoirs which look rather vulnerable to accidental damage. But the otherwise heavyweight Telesco equipment combines with the frame to produce excellent handling. In the traditional way of thumpers, the Sanglas lopes along with an unhurried air that gives the rider a wonderful sense of security and allows every manoeuvre to be performed with plenty of time in hand.

The Sanglas is also disappointingly slow, damn it. Gritting the teeth and ignoring the vibration, it's possible to hit 136 km/h — and that's definitely a rotten show from a 1977 500. According to the manufacturer the 500S produces 26 kW at 6700 rpm with the maximum 38 Nm torque coming at 5500 rpm.

Old timers reckon half the thumper mystique was embodied in the starting procedure. First you activated the decompressor by pulling the appropriate handlebar lever, then you spun the engine a few times to free the clutch. Next you ticked the carb, drew some mixture into the cylinder, brought the piston up on compression, eased it over



Electric starter juts from left crankcase and decompressor lever is sited under clutch lever. Chamfered footrest invites extreme angles of lean — a joy with super strong Sanglas frame and Telesco suspension.

tdc using the decompressor (otherwise known as the valve lifter), and then you were all ready to give the kick starter an almighty prod. With practice the thumper would usually fire into life after the second or third attempt.

That same technique is needed with the Sanglas. The kicking crank resides on the left-hand side above the gear shifter and the huge decompressor puller sprouts beneath the clutch lever. But as a concession to the '70s and to assist those owners incapable of performing the starting rites, an electric starter is included. The motor is powered by a 12 V 38 amp battery (helping endow the headlamp with searchlight-like intensity) and a touch of humor comes from the enforced use of the decompressor to entice the engine to crank at starting speed.

Yesterday's thumpers were by nature vibrators. They were equipped with generous working clearances in the mechanisms, usually a result of less refined mass-production machining than today.

Today's Sanglas succeeds brilliantly in reproducing the racket of the old

engines. Engine noises are suitably amplified by passing through the fuel tank, combining with those escaping around the sides to produce the most incredible din. Conversely, exhaust boom is decently hushed by the long black silencer that stretches from amidships to beyond the back wheel. Could it possibly be a reverse noise thruster?

One way and another, the Sanglas 500S is a bad joke (the joke being on the erstwhile British importers when they calculated the retail price at \$2280). As an updated venerable British thumper (unit construction replacing separate engine and gearbox), the Sanglas is simply that — warts and all. It clatters, vibrates and performs inadequately. It proves pretty conclusively (and reminds those of us who have forgotten) that the late-'40s/early '50s British thumpers were not so very wonderful, but the best most people could get and afford at the time — or that could be mass produced.

Sorry nostalgia freaks, you're better off buying that 400 twin. *