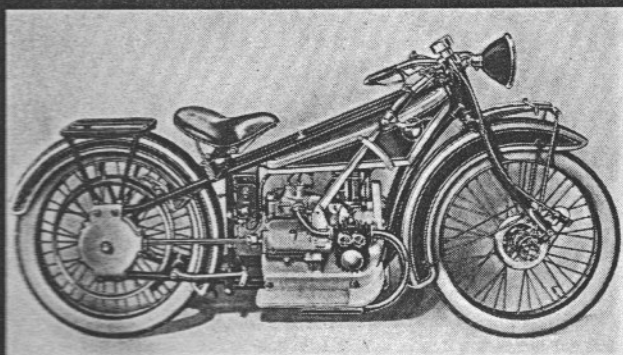


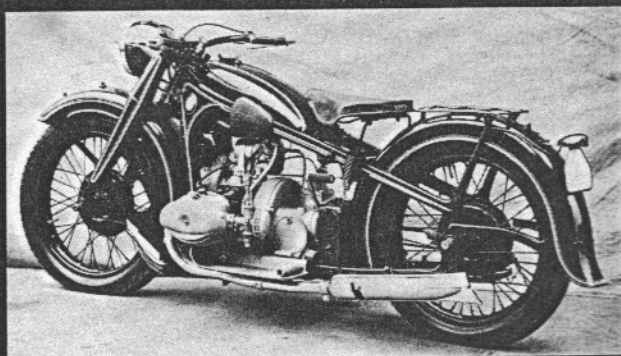


The road to the K1



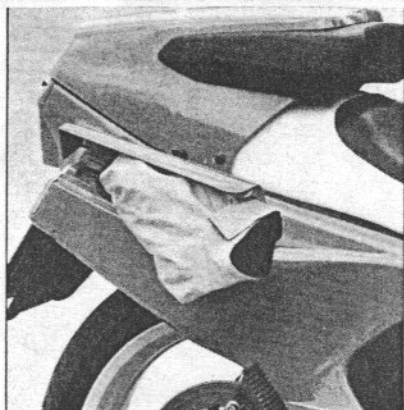
1923 R32

BY 1923 BMW'S FIRST ACROSS-THE-FRAME-MOUNTED, 500CC, side-valve, flat-Twin produced a then-remarkable 8.5 horsepower at 3300 rpm. This engine's radial-finned cylinder heads were cast into each cylinder as a single part, with removable valve caps. The transmission was a three-speed, hand-shift job. An exposed driveshaft transmitted the engine's power into a bevel-box differential.

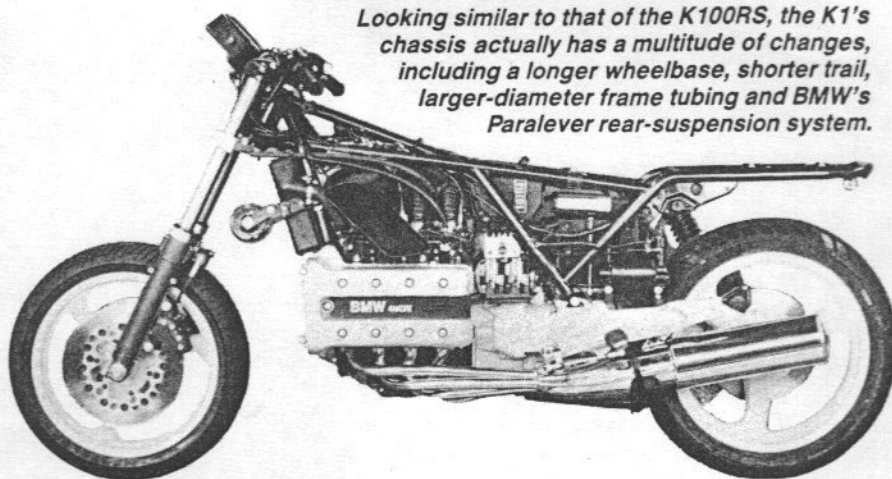


1935 R17

BY 1935 BMW HAD TWO 750CC ENGINES AVAILABLE: one with side valves and the overhead-valve R17. The R17's short-stroke, 83 x 68mm engine produced 33 horsepower at 5000 rpm. By this point, a drum front brake was being used and the rear brake was an external clamping device around the driveshaft. The R17 also sported the first production telescopic fork with hydraulic damping.



Dual gloveboxes, one on either side of the tail section, are large enough to hold a rainsuit and extra gloves. Also, the rubber back-pad on the removable tail piece is adjustable over an inch-and-a-half range.



Looking similar to that of the K100RS, the K1's chassis actually has a multitude of changes, including a longer wheelbase, shorter trail, larger-diameter frame tubing and BMW's Paralever rear-suspension system.

earth-shaking, the real-world difference between it and its two-valve counterpart is striking. The K1 possesses a mid-range power punch that seems as strong and smooth as that of a Hurricane 1000. From 2000 rpm up, the bike pulls strongly, but when the tach needle hits 4500 rpm, the bike leaps forward, pulling hard until just before redline, where the power begins to taper. Because it still spots some of its competition as much as 38 horsepower, the K1 won't win an all-out, top-speed run, but should still be capable of pulling a respectable 150 miles per hour.

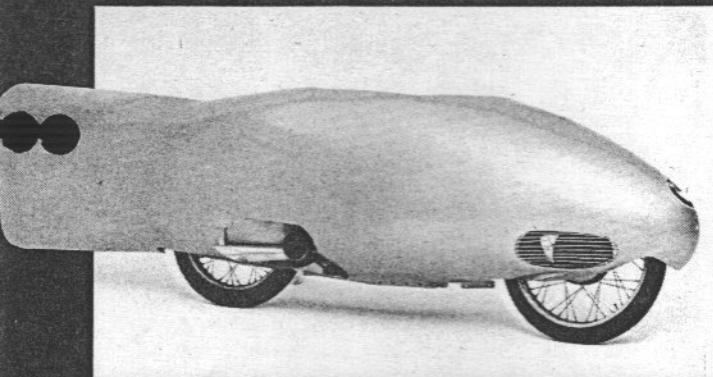
To help the bike's chassis deal with the uprated engine performance, BMW's engineers used thicker tubes in the K1's frame than they did with the K100RS. As a result, the bike's chassis is extremely stiff, and at high speeds, exhibits none of the flawed handling habits of the K100RS: At paces that would have the RS wobbling, weaving and grinding, the K1 is just hitting its stride.

The K1's improved frame is matched by its suspension. The 41.7mm front fork is far and away the best BMW has yet put on a production motorcycle. Built by Marzocchi, the fork has firm damping combined with highly progressive springs. Also, the Marzocchi specification includes

teflon-coated bushings to reduce fork-slider stiction. Over small bumps and pavement ripples, initial fork travel is soft and slow, but as speeds increase and the fork moves into the deeper range of its travel, the springs get stiffer and the damping action greater. The result is a taut ride that stays compliant regardless of speed.

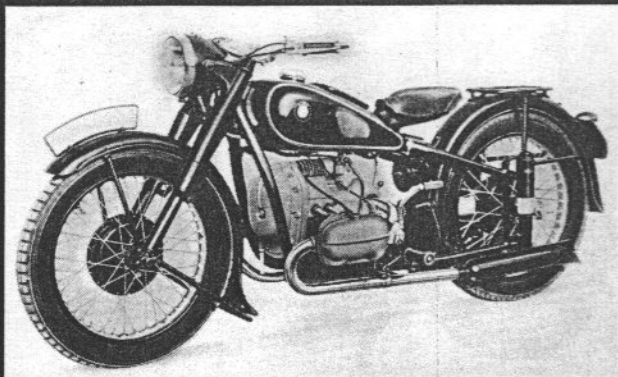
At the rear, BMW has installed its Paralever system, introduced on the R100GS dual-purpose bike. This system adds about two inches to the K's wheelbase and a few extra pounds, but the result is an almost-total lack of driveshaft-torque reaction, one of the handling bugaboos that shaft-driven motorcycles have had to suffer through. With Paralever, the machine does not lift its tail under acceleration, and the chassis will not fall on its suspension—eating up precious ground clearance—if power is chopped on the entrance to a corner.

Because the Paralever system takes care of the usual shaft-drive torque reaction, BMW was able to fit a shock with a softer spring than that of the K100. For riders over 175 pounds, the spring is just about right, but riders carrying less mass will probably find the spring too stiff and may want to opt for a lighter one. As it is, when set on the



1937 Streamliner

BMW'S EARLY AERODYNAMIC EXPERIMENTS WITH wind tunnels and scale models led to this aluminum-encased land-speed-record machine. Ridden by Ernst Henne, the bike, powered by a supercharged, 500cc flat-Twin which reportedly churned out almost 100 horsepower, streaked to 173 miles an hour to set a world record just before World War II.



1938 R51

THE R51 FEATURED A NEW, WELDED-TUBE FRAME TO accommodate its plunger rear suspension. This movement of the rear wheel also required the addition of a driveshaft U-joint placed at the end of the shaft. Three engines, a 500, 600 and 750, were available, all of them with four-speed transmissions, and foot- and hand-shifters. A toolbox was built into the top of the fuel tank.

lighter preload settings, the rear shock provides a soft, compliant ride, but allows a rider to quickly use up the bike's cornering clearance, as I discovered. Bumped up a couple of notches, the ground-clearance problem lessens considerably and high-speed stability improves, especially over rough roads, although this comes, of course, at the expense of ride quality. Remember, though, this BMW is a pure sportbike, not a sport-touring machine, so it seems reasonable for BMW's engineers to have sacrificed a little comfort for more control.

And improved control is exactly what you get from the K1: Its handling is razor sharp. The bike bends easily into

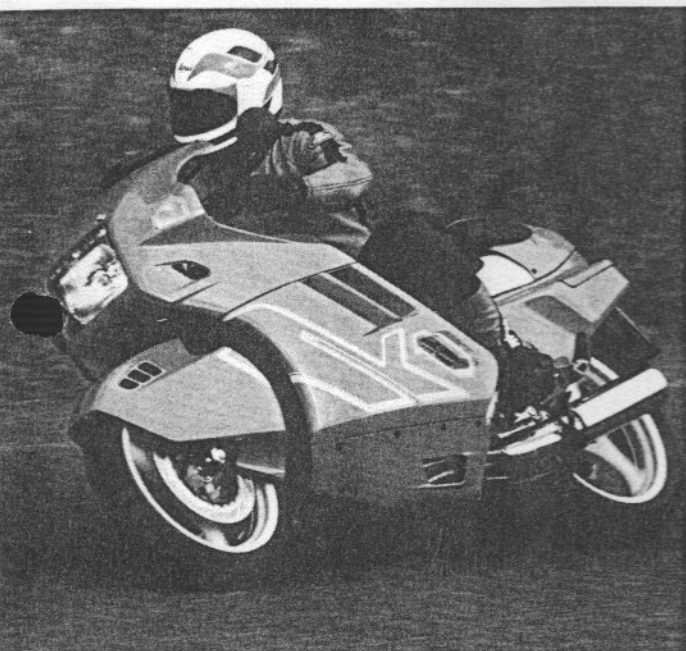
corners, feeling much lighter than its claimed 571 pounds. Only at walking paces does the rider feel the bike's weight. Fortunately, the handlebar provides plenty of leverage, even at the slow speeds necessary when negotiating traffic jams on the tight, winding, cobblestone streets prevalent in the villages throughout Italy.

Thanks to its stiff chassis and fine suspension, the K1 works corners with a rock-solid stability much like Yamaha's FZR1000, in the minds of many, this year's premier sport implement. It stays effortlessly on line and requires only a light push on the bar to change lines in mid-turn. In tighter corners, the K1 consents to deep entrances and to being slammed hard over, and doesn't wobble, shake or otherwise resist aggressive riding techniques.

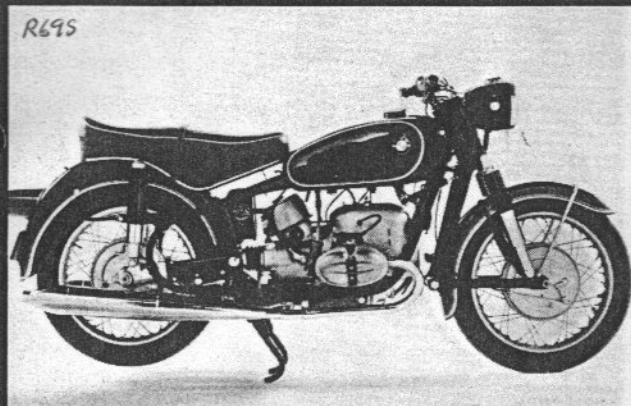
Much of the confidence the bike instills can be attributed to its tires. The first machines are fitted with Michelin M59 radials, but later bikes also will be available with Dunlop and Metzeler radials. Regardless of brand, the tires are the widest by far that BMW has ever used—a 160/80-18 mounted on the rear, 4.5-inch-wide rim and a 120/70-17 on the 3.5-inch-wide front. The Michelins gave the bike great traction and the round profile on the front helped to make the transition from straight-up to full-lean effortless and progressive.

Those premium tires will be appreciated in light of the K1's Brembo front brake. It is a precise, powerful, twin-disc, four-piston unit that provides great feedback whether the rider is feathering off speed in a corner or howling the front tire in a full-on panic stop. And in most cases, a single finger will take care of the braking duties. As an added incentive for American riders, every K1 imported here will come with BMW's ABS anti-lock brakes as standard equipment.

Given the tremendous sporting potential of the K1, the folks at BMW could have easily gone overboard and designed racer-crouch ergonomics to match. Instead, they opted for a more-comfortable solution. The handlebar is low, but it is fairly wide, and while the footpegs are high and rearward for a BMW, they are still not as tucked-up as those on a GSX-R or a FZR. The overall riding position>

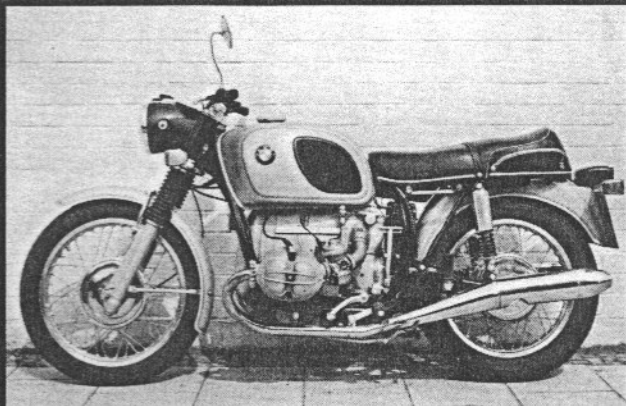


The K1's cornering prowess marks a new high for BMW, putting the bike on a handling par with its Japanese competition.



1955 R69

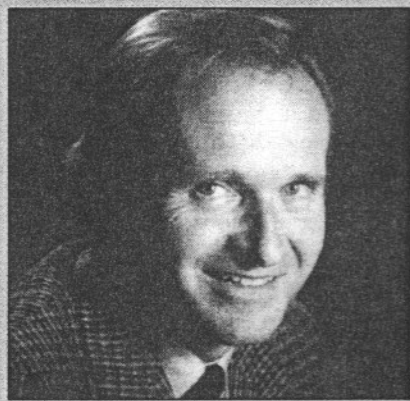
AFTER THE WAR, BMWs STAYED FAIRLY UNCHANGED until 1955. The R69 had a 600cc engine with a new clutch and redesigned four-speed transmission. The driveshaft was enclosed inside the right leg of the swingarm and footpegs replaced floorboards. An Earles-type, leading-link fork was used as well as a revised rear suspension. The R69 also had a double-leading-shoe front brake.



1969 R75

THE R75 FEATURED ALUMINUM CYLINDERS AND heads, a new, one-piece crankshaft, stronger connecting rods, a revised four-speed transmission, electric starting, a 12-volt battery and a new, lighter frame. A long-travel hydraulic fork drew mixed reactions from hard-core BMW riders who missed the Earles fork. A larger fuel tank was welcomed by all, as was a large, dual seat.

Q&A



Hans Koudella

The new K1 assumes the flagship role for BMW motorcycles. Its performance and styling stretch toward the outer limits for the usually conservative German company. Because of the importance of the K1 to BMW, we talked with Hans Koudella, vice president of the BMW motorcycle group in the U.S., to get his thoughts on the new K1 and its place in America.

Q The K1 will be very expensive in America. Do you see difficulties because of the price?

A Not really. This is a very exclusive motorcycle. Only 2400 of them will be built, and 1400 of those will remain in Germany. You have to remember, we wanted a special motorcycle, one that was a BMW and more.

Q So you think it will be successful?

A In certain regions. America is really many countries, and I think riders in California especially, but also riders in New York and Texas, will appreciate the machine. Those regions are crucial. Also, we have discovered that many of our BMW car owners ride Japanese motorcycles. Now we have something for them.

Q With all the attention given to the K1, can we expect to see

some of its technology filter back to the other K-bikes?

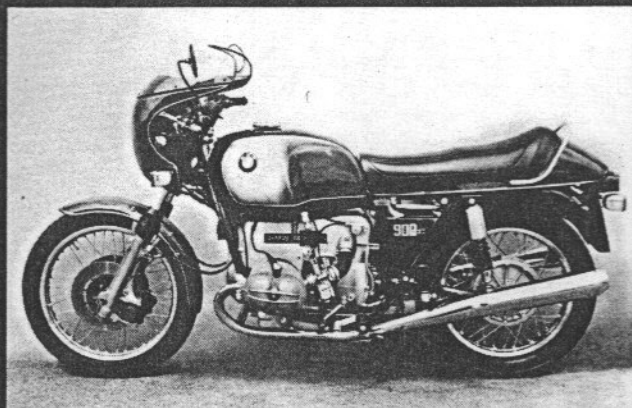
A Some things must be kept secret, mustn't they? I can say that BMW is working on a series of models and concepts. We always try to meet the market's demands, so I expect the position of BMW to be strengthened. I think our K-bikes and now the K1 prove BMW's commitment to motorcycling.

Q What about the Boxer-Twins?

A Well, I can tell you, we didn't need a seventh-place finish at Daytona (in this year's Pro Twins GP race) to convince us that we need to update our Twins. We already know what the European noise regulations will be in the near future and we know what we have to do. That doesn't necessarily include liquid cooling. We are working on major improvements, but they are down the road.

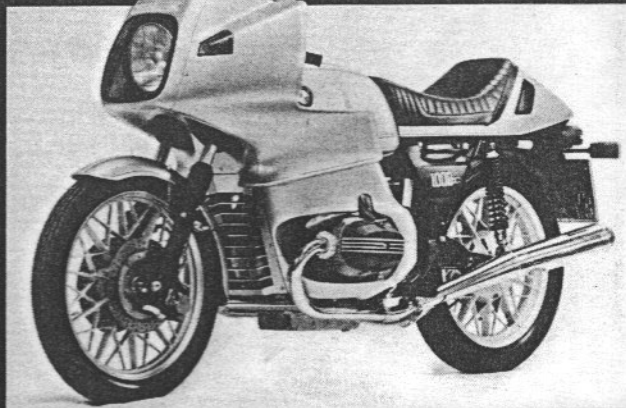
Q So you see a good future for the K Bikes and the Boxers?

A Yes, it is the will of the BMW motorcycle group to stay in the business, and so our products cannot look old. It's important that BMW stays a leader in the business and that we have a commitment to both lines. We have to look ahead and we are already working on that.



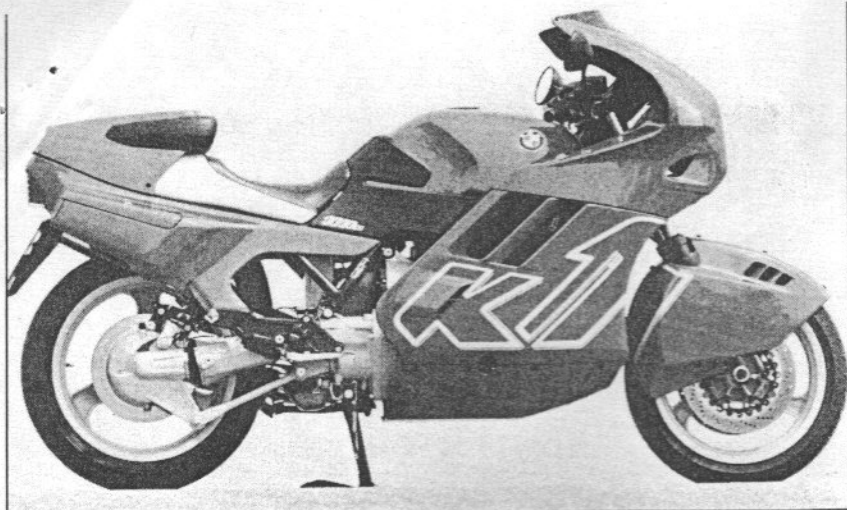
1973 R90S

O VERBORING A 750CC ENGINE PRODUCED A 900CC ENGINE for 1973. Two models were offered: a standard version and a sport model called the R90S, which featured a higher-lift cam and a higher compression ratio. The first of the factory café racers which preceded today's sportbikes, the R90S featured a quarter-fairing and a stunning, "fogged" paint job.



1976 R100RS

A WIND-TUNNEL-DESIGNED FAIRING CREATED BMW's first sport-tourer, the R100RS. The eye-catching RS looked modern, sporty and fast. And its 980cc opposed-Twin engine was the most powerful production BMW to date. A stronger clutch, better five-speed transmission, larger-capacity battery, new fork valving and a stronger dual-disc front brake drew praise from buyers.



Available in blue-with-yellow and red-with-yellow paint schemes, BMW's ultra-modern K1 will be in U.S. showrooms by late fall.

falls between that of the Hurricane 1000 and the Katana 1100, but the K1 has a seat with a more comfortable shape and slightly firmer foam than either of those two bikes.

There is more room behind the K1's fairing than on the other K-bikes, so most riders will not bang their knees on the inner panels, a common complaint with the K100RS. Overall, the fairing does a pretty good job of protecting the rider from the elements, with the short windscreen directing airflow toward the rider's shoulders.

One thing the fairing doesn't do, however, is duct engine heat away from the rider, meaning, unfortunately, that left shins and inner thighs get roasted. Other K-bikes run a little on the warm side, but the K1 puts off excessive heat. It may be that in their quest for the most aerodynamic motorcycle shape possible, BMW's engineers traded rider comfort for aero-efficiency.

Because the machines ridden by the press in Italy were the very first off BMW's production lines, some details were a little ragged and may be improved as BMW sorts things out. Still, nearly every journalist complained about the styling and the fit and finish. The styling, while a little unorthodox and bulky, is a matter of personal taste: Everywhere I parked the bike, it drew a crowd of Italian admirers, crying "moto-bella."

But if styling is personal taste, the quality of the fit and finish is another matter entirely. Judging from the bikes I saw, BMW has allowed the K1 to fall behind not only its own products, but those from Japan as well. The bodywork seams didn't match, the glovebox doors on the tail section fit poorly and the inner panels of those boxes, as well as that of the tool compartment in the fairing, are roughly finished and offer sharp edges to unsuspecting fingers. And the screws which hold the two-piece front fender together are unsightly and crude. For a motorcycle that in all likelihood will cost \$13,000, these are justified complaints.

For now, however, the essential consideration about the K1 is how it works, and there it is difficult to fault the machine. It pushes BMW into the future with overall performance that could prove equal to, if not better than, that of its competition. I'll table the final judgement until *Cycle World* can test a U.S.-model K1 in the company of other bikes, however.

When the K1 does come to America in the fall of 1990, some of its fit-and-finish problems should be cleared up. I hope so. A motorcycle that works this well and costs this much should be absolutely the best it can be. Anything less is an injustice. ☐



1984 K100RS

B BMW'S LONG-AWAITED NEW ENGINE FINALLY ARRIVED and it was like no other engine in motorcycling: a dohc, 1000cc inline-Four laid on its side. Fuel injection replaced carburetors, stainless steel headpipes routed the spent gasses into a single silencer and a single-sided swingarm (first introduced on the GS80 in 1980) let buyers know BMW was getting serious about sportbikes.



1988 R100GS

D RIVESHAF-INDUCED REAR-END MOVEMENT HAD long been a major complaint on shaft-driven motorcycles. The R100GS introduced BMW's Paralever system to help reduce this effect. Floating the rear gearcase and utilizing a parallel (to the swingarm/driveshaft) torque arm proved an effective cure. Indeed, the GS, a dual-purpose bike, was hailed as the best-handling BMW Twin ever. ☐