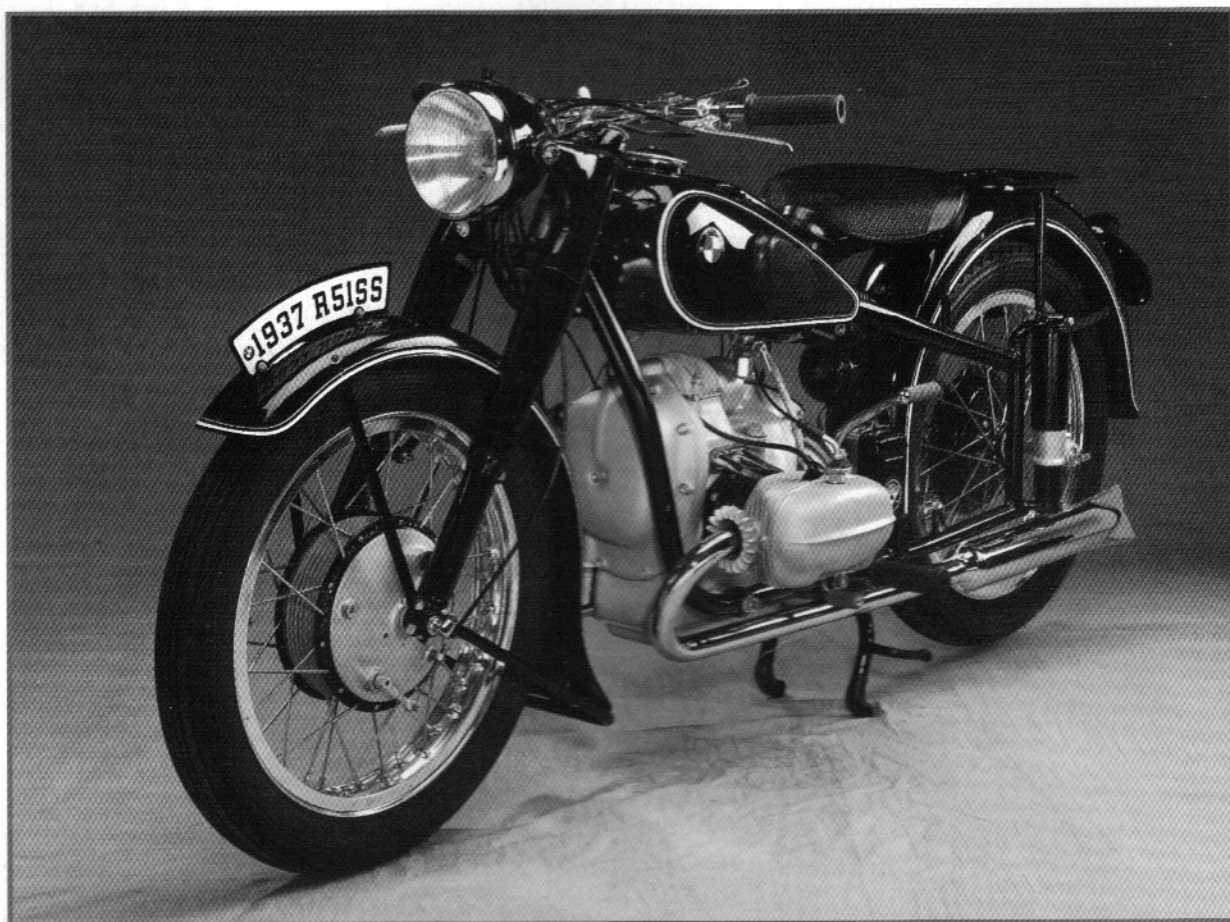


1937 BMW R51 SS



BY MARGIE SIEGAL

Germany's Bayerische Motoren Werke was formed in 1916 to produce aircraft engines. After World War One, the BMW factory turned to manufacturing motorcycle engines. BMW's first foray into motorcycle production was the "Flink" (no kidding), a light two stroke. The first of BMW's trademark horizontally opposed motors were built in 1921 and sold to various companies, who incorporated it in their frames.

The first complete BMW, designed by Max Friz, was introduced in 1923. This shaft driven 486 cc machine, with three gears, was advanced for its time. The flat twin four stroke engine had a compression ratio of 5:1, side valves and force feed cir-

culation oiling. Spark was supplied by a magneto. Later versions of the first BMW, the R 32, had front as well as rear brakes. In 1925, an overhead valve model was introduced.

BMW became known for quality motorcycles with advanced features. The company introduced single leading shoe brakes to its line in 1926, aluminum cylinder heads in 1925, a four speed gearbox in 1933, and one of the first commercially manufactured telescopic forks in 1935. A Danish manufacturer, Nimbus, had come out with telescopes a few months earlier.

The one area where BMW lagged behind industry pacesetters was in converting to foot shift. Although Velocette introduced a commercially viable foot shift