

BMW K100RS

GRAND MEISTER FLASH



FOR ONCE, THE HYPE WAS RIGHT.
TEST BY PETER WATSON

YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE the subtleties of the BMW publicity push. First, the launch of the new K100, followed up with a flurry of test days for prospective punters. Next, the launch of the RS version and another round of dealers opening their doors to high rollers with an extra grand to spare. The RS costs £4290 without any extras; the naked 100 is a mere £3290. And to follow? The launch of the touring RT, leaving a trail of publicity that should last until news of the 1985 model changes can be released.

Only inhabitants of labour camps and desert islands can therefore hope to escape the new generation four-cylinder BMWs. And on the street reaction has been immediate. BMW twin owners who tested the K100 began at once to cast about them. In desperation, two even approached me — my credit rating is obviously not public knowledge — hoping to unload their wonderful twins in order to finance a deal on the even more wonderful fours.

As Roland Brown demonstrated in April, there are bargains to be had among BMW's flat twins. Yet no-one really believes the official line that the twins will continue. Once the triple is released next year, be prepared to wave the boxers farewell.

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In admitting that further horsepower extraction from the one-litre twin would lead to 'compromises which are not acceptable to BMW' the company's engineers were just stating the obvious. Many of us would say that the excision of the twin's flywheel was the final and unkindest cut of all. The gain in performance simply wasn't worth the extra roughness, especially down the rpm scale. But faced with cheaper and cheaper performance from Japan, even BMW was forced to make unpleasant compromises.

They've put all that behind them with the K100RS, which answers all the criticisms of the K100. Where the high-handlebar K100 was a torture to ride at speed, the RS is pure enjoyment. It will transport you and a heavily laden pair of panniers at a tad under 130mph for as long as your licence can take it. And if that's no big deal from a 1000cc four these days, the uncanny stability of the new RS really is.

Only when you're down to the last millimetre of tread in the centre of the rear tyre can you provoke the slightest of weaves. The improvement on the behaviour of the twins at much lower speeds is quite remarkable. It's this combination of virtues that makes the RS worth over £4000 and makes the K100 look and feel half-finished.

The RS really hits the Japanese where it hurts, because it emphasises all the characteristics which legend chalks up to the credit of European motorcycles. Its power delivery is superb. You can idle along in fifth at less than 2000rpm and then power away without a hiccup from 25 miles an hour to 130. Hang on to third or fourth gear at over

6000rpm and the motor really flies. With its seeming lack of weight or obtrusive bulk the RS simply flows round bends. Flicking it through the twists and turns of English A roads will convince you that it is, quite simply, superior. It must have convinced the Japanese that the European industry can still hack it.

Which is not to say that BMW have been afraid to borrow selectively from Japan. Check out the oil-level sight glass in the black, ribbed sump. Look at the way that the cast alloy footrest unit is rubber-mounted at five points on the left. And just take in the instrumentation, which is so far over the top that it makes the Japanese look conservative.

The engine design brings you back to Europe, or more especially Germany, in its coldly logical functionalism. A flat four of this configuration is not a new idea. Ariel designer Val Page produced a fan-cooled prototype firmly consigned to oblivion by his boss Edward Turner, so adjectives such as 'unique' and 'original' are a trifle strained. But just consider the advantages.

As soon as you lay the cylinders over to the left and produce the flying brick you've begun to lower the centre of gravity and improve access both to the 'top' and 'bottom' ends of the motor, not to mention the cam drive at the front. You have also provided yourself with a large open space above the brick which just begs to be filled with a radiator and an airbox. Since this has already started to look like a car engine, you merely emphasise the family resemblance in the cam covers and radiator surround. Above the gearbox sit alternator and starter motor, arranged in classic automotive fashion.

This is not an engine to frighten the home bodger, although most will be dealer serviced. Only the Bosch LE-Jetronic fuel injection looks forbidding, but who wants more than two Bings to balance and much of the crisp responsiveness of the engine must surely be credited to its fuel supply system. If you want to shim the valves, these sit on top

of the valve buckets, so all you require is a tool with which to squeeze the springs. It's also going to be easy for BMW to uprate the top end with four valves per cylinder and you'd be foolish to take the motor's 'long stroke' label too seriously. This may be a 67 x 70mm engine, but it's hardly a slogger. While there's adequate power available at the flick of your wrist, the real excitement lies beyond 6000rpm.

The motor feels tough, even if it isn't quite as mechanically silent as we'd imagined. The exhaust system may be a styling disaster, but at least it's constructed in stainless steel. A prettier version is probably on the stocks, Japanese-style, for next season.

Ever conservative, BMW have employed the strength and rigidity of the engine/gearbox unit as a frame member without abandoning tubes for the remainder of a superlative chassis. Interestingly, the rear Monolever arm has been considerably beefed up but also lightened as it's all alloy. Rear suspension response is always so good that you tend to forget it, concentrating more on the traditionally softly-sprung, long-travel front fork. This has massive, 41.4mm stanchions but the Brembo calipers promote a falling lift effect that feels a little odd if you've become used to the latest Japanese designs. I'd never imagined that BMW would buy anti-dive because it's simply not their kind of engineering, but firmer damping would help.

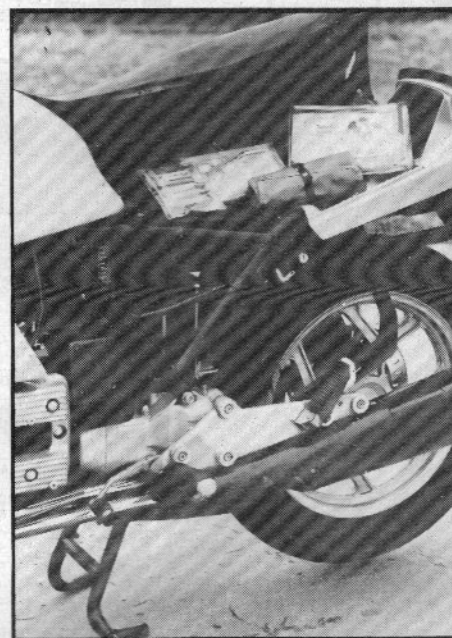
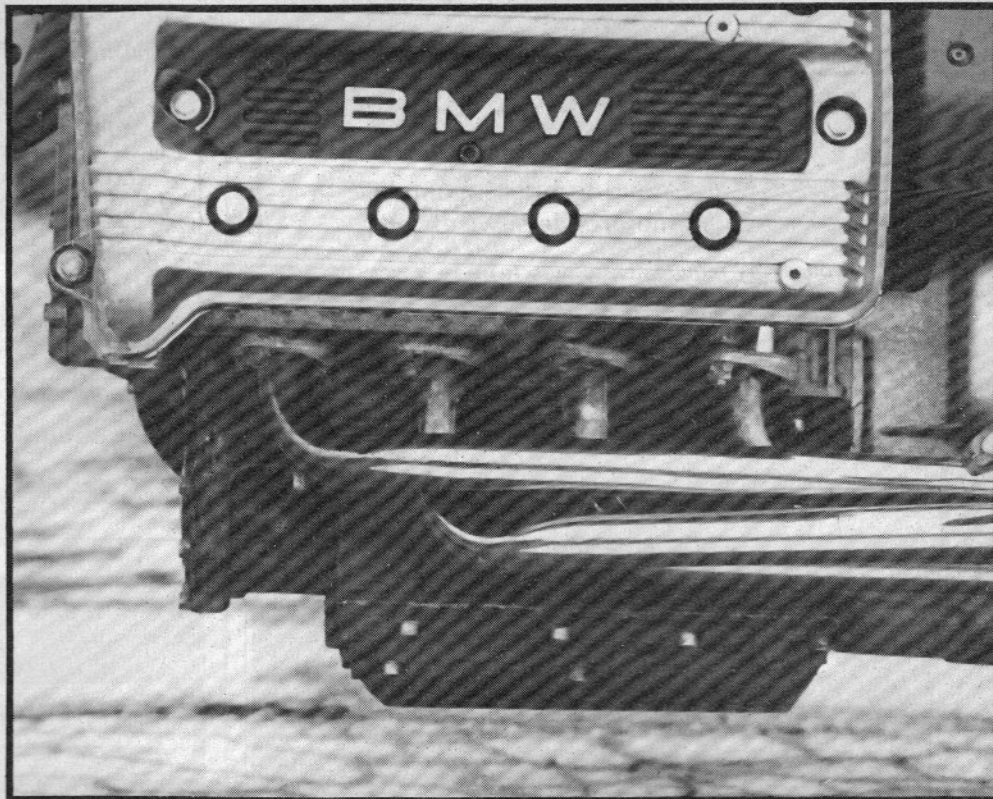
There's also an almost subliminal thread of vibration which reaches you throughout the rev range, right up to the redline at 8500. The engine smoothes out perceptibly beyond 4000rpm, but the residual buzz would have earned this design balancers in Japan.

Once you've examined the strange 'three decker' switchgear and the excesses of the instrumentation it's almost superfluous to mention that a university department was involved in this area at the design stage. It just reeks of the Technical University at Aachen and a determination to out-tech the Japanese for the US market. Okay, so we know that it's more logical to have indicator switches on both clusters, but if you then fit self-cancelling flashers — and do it very neatly in combining them with the mirrors at the front — it's often still a two-thumb job as you switch on and then cancel manually. Finding the starter button first go — it's on top of the kill switch — wins you a coconut, too. The switchgear can be learned quite quickly, but for all the originality of thinking it's no better than simpler arrangements. And that's what counts.

Words fail me when I recall the instruments. Lights glow to warn you that you have seven liters left and, dumkopf, four liters. A red light refuses to go out until you've operated a brake to prove that the brake light filament is intact. You even get an idiot light to show you that the choke, whose lever is staring you in the face, is on. The digital clock is great. Some people even like the gear indicator, but where is the coolant temperature gauge? BMW says you don't need one; I think they just ran out of room ...

A similar fussiness can be detected in the design of the locking fuel cap, which requires two experienced hands to open it. The vaunted one key system also proves irritating when operating the traditionally-sited steering lock. The hinged plastic top of the key constantly folds over on you as you fiddle and curse. But the classic mismatch is to be found on the huge pannier cases in which I managed to pack all the Chateau Tesco required to fuel a lively house-warming.

The mounting system for the BMW cases is superbly simple. One plastic moulding achieves what Ken Craven used to do with half the Forth bridge, and the cases are off and very positively on again in seconds. But the locks which secure them might have come from a Woolworth's fibre-board suitcase, circa 1948. A child with a hair grip



(Above left) Fairing brilliantly succeeds in making anything less than 100mph feel slow.

(Right) Seat hinges up to reveal toolkit, first aid box and small library.

could filch your goodies in seconds while the internal hinges are also a bad joke. When Mike Krauser wakes up in the night with tears streaming down his cheeks, this is what he's been laughing about.

The RS fairing, which has so much to do with its staggering stability even when heavily laden, hugs the tank very tightly. With little room for errors and the highest quality of finish, I wonder what the rejection rate is on these mouldings. An intricate and attractive series of vents and louvers lets hot air out but also channels it up in roughly the direction of your hands which are protected by the large mirror/indicators. I don't imagine for one moment that the hot air gets near your freezing mitts, but it's fun to watch steam rising through these vents as you warm the engine up after a wash and brush up. Heated grips are still available as an option.

I came to appreciate the fairing very much,

although it took quite a while for me to get used to the position of the mirrors. These units fulfil a multiplicity of roles and ping off into the scenery if struck hard enough. The mirrors within them are easily adjusted and large, but inattention and a new pair of contact lenses led me to have a conversation with a professional BMW rider that began with a rather formal statement about speeds of up to one hundred miles an hour.

That's one of the problems with the RS. BMW-riding policemen will even desert their posts protecting the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and tear off after you on R80s just to have a chat about wotlitdo and so on. Other motorcyclists are equally discerning. A Guzzi owner I met on the A303 wanted to know what it was like on A roads, and a sales suit who was 'thinking of investing in a K100, y'know' refused to be convinced that a fairing was worth another thousand quid as he filled

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up his fully-faired Vauxhall Cavalier at the pumps.

Having once got on the RS, I found it difficult to get off, inventing plausible excuses to go looking for Spring in south Devon by way of the A303, a road that combines flat-out straights and tight turns without being over-policed. But first there was the visit to the dyno, for *Bike* is at last in a position to tell it like the US magazines can, with real horsepower figures and revealing curves.

If BMW claim 90bhp at the crankshaft, opined the gentleman who operated the machinery, then our 84.42bhp was, um, suspiciously good. He even went so far as to slander BMW's 'compact drive system' — the same old set-up, it's just BMW being snide about Japan's convoluted shaft-drive power trains — with the opinion that we might have been given a road-test special. Actually, over 84bhp at the rear wheel is good, but then BMW have always been refreshingly conservative about performance claims so let's give them the benefit of the doubt.

The RS power curve compares very favourably with something like Suzuki's GS1000, or the 80.4bhp at 8755rpm maximum of a CB900FD. Just as it refused to bog down at low revs on the dyno, it pulled cleanly from low down on the road. Such power characteristics are both attractive in the breadth of response and excellent roll-on while being quite exciting enough for boy racers.

At a little over 550lb, the RS is a light litre and it feels very manageable. The steering is very responsive, even around town, and I found that the way I could change line on country roads translated perfectly to slicing across London in the rush hour. There's a 550-like way in which you can pitch it over, secure in the knowledge that nothing is going to ground but the pegs and that you have the frame, suspension and brakes to cope with just about anything.

Well, not quite anything, as I discovered. For the new RS will remain imprinted on my mind after an incident that could have occurred on any other machine. Imagine yourself sitting behind a Post Office Leyland EA van waiting at a set of traffic lights at the exit to a trading estate in north Watford. Consider that you know that if someone uses the pedestrian crossing button linked to these lights you will not get a green. As he had done countless times before, the driver of the van began reversing backwards to run over the D-loops which will eventually activate the lights.

By this time I was already paddling the RS backwards, swearing at 110dba inside my Bell and thumbing every button in sight in the hope that I'd hit the horn. As the rear step of

the van rode smoothly up over the front Metzeler and on to the mudguard I resigned myself to being scraped along the tarmac per Post Office shovel as I could feel the reversing BMW teetering on the edge of keeling over. Almost at once the van stopped, I hit the horn and I was free to lift the RS on to its centre stand using that handy fold-away handle. Tearing my helmet and gloves off in a convincing demonstration of injured pride, I gave vent to every obscenity I could muster at such short notice. The driver said he was sorry, while his mate wisely kept his mouth shut.

The anger I felt at losing some paint from the front mudguard — the near loss of life having paled into insignificance in comparison with this trivial damage — was quite genuine. Already I had developed such an affection for the RS as a near-perfect all-round sporting beast of burden that I took the assault very personally. Thinking about it later made me see that the way I could slip into its comfortable riding position and reel off a quick 300 miles without feeling tired had warmed me to the essentially practical nature of the RS. It's no poser's toy, but a complete package for the serious motorcyclist willing to pay for such a skilful blending of the right ingredients.

Despite the fears of the faithful that in building another four BMW would just produce a bland Euro copy of something that the Japanese could build for a lot less, the RS has real character. Its gearchange is pleasant without being super-slick, it feels devoid of torque reaction and it's a whole lot of fun to ride. Given the overall quality of BMW engineering it should become a machine that you get to know and appreciate over a long period. At least that should soften the financial blow you'll suffer on purchase.

In many ways the K100RS is a considerable improvement on the old R100RS. Its engine is smoother, stronger and liable to stay in tune much longer while being just as easy to service. Far better than this in many ways is the matching improvement in stability at all speeds and under a very wide range of differing loads. Its improved handling means that you're liable to see the previously unimaginable outside road test circles: people going crazy on a BMW. No question about it, this is a licence loser.

Naturally you're faced with the final question of whether it's actually worth the asking price of £1000 more than the K100. Well, the equipment is certainly lavish. Under the seat you'll find the usual splendid tool kit, little bottles of compressed air to blow up your tyres after you've repaired a puncture and what at first appears to be Dr Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* in a pocket edition but is actually the BMW accessory catalogue. Buy a K100 and you'll end up junking the handlebar and fitting a fairing anyway. The original item is probably a better buy than some aftermarket tat.

Just as important for some people are the overall aesthetics of the machine. BMW claim somewhat primly that the RS 'achieves a unique, timeless appearance without the use of an extravagant paint job.' Agreed; naff it is not. And BMW's tasteful use of a single subtle shade received the ultimate accolade from the gentleman manipulating the machine's throttle on the rolling-road dyno. Having waxed lyrical about its power characteristics and taken it round the block for a spin, he eyed its looks critically. 'Be nice with a few stripes doncher think?' he said. In Munich, lightning-forked across the sky and the gods spoke angrily in thunder. In Berlin, blood rained from dark red clouds. I looked up at the sky over east London and secretly smiled.

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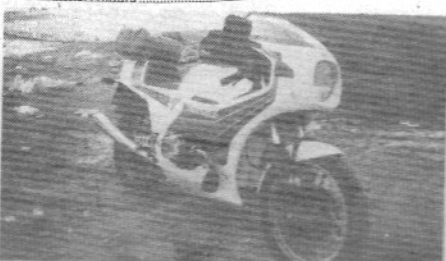
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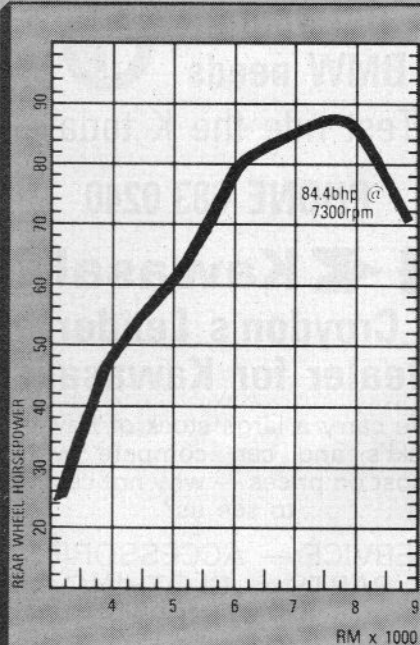
The writer on 800 cc BMW

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Tested on Bosch LPS 002 dynamometer at Motad Ltd, Unit 2, Maverton Road, London E3

BMW K100RS

Price (inc taxes)	£4290
Guarantee	12 months/unlimited mileage
Engine	4cyl, dohc, watercooled
Bore x stroke	67 x 70mm
Capacity	987cc
Compression ratio	10.2:1
Fuel supply	Bosch LE-Jetronic injection, 34mm venturi
Air filter	Paper element
Oil capacity	3.5 litre (6.16 pints)
Max power @ rpm	84.42bhp
Max torque @ rpm	8.7kgm (63ft lb) @ 6000 (claimed)
Clutch	Single plate, dry
Primary drive	Gear
Gearbox	5-speed
Electrics	12V 20Ah battery, 460W alternator, 60/55W H4 headlight

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	Metzeler
Front	100/90-18
Rear	130/90-17
Brakes	
Front	285mm (11.2in) discs
Rear	285mm (11.2in) disc
Suspension	
Front	Telescopic
Rear	Monolever swing arm with single preload adjustable unit

SPARES PARTS PRICES (INC VAT)

Air filter	£10.57
Oil filter	£5.83
Head gasket	£11.14
Front mudguard	£55.80
Front indicator/mirror	£47.14
F/brake lever and master cylinder	£82.31
One side panel	£12.40
Total	£225.19

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	1516mm (59.7in)
Overall width	960mm (37.8in)
Seat height	810mm (32in)
Weight (inc 1gal fuel)	252.2kg (556lb)
Fuel capacity	22 litres (4.8 gal)

PERFORMANCE

Top speed, prone	132mph
Top speed, upright	128mph
Best one way	134mph
Standing 1/4 mile	12.2 seconds
Fuel consumption	
Overall	44mpg
Ridden hard	40mpg
Speedo accuracy	
At ind 30mph	30mph
At ind 50mph	50mph
At ind 70mph	68mph
Supplied by	BMW (GB) Ltd, Ellesfield Avenue, Bracknell, Berks.

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The Mail on Sunday, September 22, 1985

Part Two

MOTORING

100 years on
—the powerful
descendants
of a basic idea



STUNNING: The 125mph BMW K75C — a new breed of bike

A dash of macho

THE motor cycle has come a long way since being born by mistake 100 years ago.

When Daimler and Maybach built an odd wooden-wheeled contraption in 1885 they were actually trying to invent the car.

To celebrate the motorbike's centenary, I have tested two of the most recent machines on the market. They illustrate vividly just how sophisticated the two-wheeler has become, without losing its basic appeal.

The stunning new BMW K75C joins the K series of machines, featuring a water-cooled engine laid flat across the frame.

The K100 four-cylinder one-

litre bike is well-established and the K75 is very similar, but with one cylinder lopped off to make it a 750cc machine with 75bhp power output.

Comfort

The official figures are 4.5 seconds for 0 to 60mph and a maximum of 125. And my test model zipped up to three figures on the autobahns very sweetly.

The low setting of the engine across the frame keeps the weight well down and makes the bike superbly agile through the

corners. I give it top marks for looks, ride comfort, powerful braking and crisp instruments. I'm not so happy, however, about engine noise at low speeds, or the firm seat.

But the BMW is beautifully engineered and built to last — although that costs you. Retail price is £3,750.

For £2,000 less, you can now buy an intriguing sports Honda which is really a sensible return to the basics of biking. The XBR500 is a simple, air-cooled, single-cylinder four-stroke which combines good performance with economical running. Its 499cc engine produces a lusty 44bhp,

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giving a maximum speed of more than 100mph. While it feels a thumper at low speeds, it irons out sweetly as speed rises.

And the layout is so simple that home maintenance should be easy.

Honda makes a feature of the detachable seat cowl, which gives storage space over what would be the passenger's half. Being tall, I needed that bit of seat, and I was more comfortable with the cowl off.

The Japanese bike may lack the BMW's finesse but it scores strongly for value. And both are clever blends of engineering and marketing skills — with an extra dash of macho thrown in.