



RAFTWERK

Colin Schiller rides the new BMW RS and wonders what difference a grand makes.

Those of you suspicious of my pre-breakfast trans-Saharan mileage claims are not unjustly so. After all, used to the experience of being damp I may be, but it's still bloody wet; familiar with the sensation of permafrost I doubtless am, but it still hurts. No, whereas I do travel the distance I claim, most of it has been behind the sanctity of a Polaris-adorned 550 and the exotic luxury of a BMW R100RS full fairing.

The latter is almost a unique accessory in motorcycle design. It is still the only full fairing, as far as I know, that positively aids riding stability and enhances top speed while at the same time providing almost total weather protection and stunning good looks. Caught out in the rain on an old RS with only a wetsuit, most riders wouldn't give a flying Derryboot — your hands remain bone dry, your feet feel only the most minor sensation of damp, and a leather jacket would be adequate to keep all but the most torrential of downpours off your shoulders. Indeed, the most uncomfortable experience of the 260-mile round trip to MIRA aboard my old tug was feeling the Little Chef burger about to make its regular guest appearance.

This year's K100RS, however, is a totally different *jeu de ballon*. Riding to MIRA aboard the new steed with Dabbo following up the rear on the R65, the poison dwarf was almost keeping warmer and dryer than I was. After all, he still had the Boxer's laid-out pots to keep the tootsies warm, and a pair of imaginatively entitled 'hippo hands' seemed to offer more protection against *Jacque Le Frost* than anything fitted as standard to the K100RS. For the first time aboard a BMW, Toddington services seemed to offer a certain *je ne sais croissant*.

The sensation of vulnerability came as something of a rude

shock to this inveterate Beemer groupie, as did a number of other features of the Grand Turismo K100. Can it really be so high off the ground, or am I a shortarse? Can it really brake so viciously, or am I wimp? Can the damping really be so soft at the front, or am I a wally? Can the fairing really be value for money at a grand more than standard, or is the length of my Middle Eastern shonk obscuring my good senses? Yes I know there's some evidence to suggest that I'm a tight, shortarsed wimp who drives like a wally but that doesn't disguise the fact that the 'ultimate experience' turned out to be nearly exactly that on a couple of occasions...

Anatomically and ergonomically, differences of the KRS over the naked K100 are obvious: bars, in the traditional RS style, are low, angled back and so small that you wonder when you first take control of them whether steering with a set of mole grips on the head nut mightn't be easier. Footrests are in the same position as on the K, but overall sedentary attitude is now somewhat of a semi-crouch making the new BM feel almost sporty. This leaves the bonce exactly where the old RS left it — in the draught at the top of the fairing edge. But, cognisant of the moans and groans of rheumatoid stately barons who couldn't stand a bit of fresh air on their stiff upper lip, BMW has augmented the dinky little screen with an adjustable whale-tail. Effecting this in the upright position, however, does not convert the RS to an RT, and whatever wind tunnel the fairing's lip was designed in, it sure wasn't modelled on the A3.

Fact is, there's a huge difference between the defective qualities of the Boxer's RS fairing and that fitted to the new ►



K100, and most of this seems to stem from BMW's desire to keep the new machine's profile rather sleeker and its image a shade sportier. On the original RS, with a sculpted tank and narrow engine block, there's plenty of room between the fairing outside edge and these components for smaller riders to tuck their legs inside, and even big bods can get their whole torso behind it. Not so the K100's armour: cut much lower to the front and much closer to the sides around the tank, the K100RS looks more like a Suzuki Katana than its predecessor and affords the sort of protection normally associated with a smaller, three-quarter fairing — which I s'pose it is. Though adequate to remove the physical strain of riding against the wind over long distances, the KRS doesn't have the amazing waterproof qualities of the R series fairing. Damn it all, your hands get a veritable soaking and your waterproofs actually get damp. To 95 per cent of the motorcycling population, this sort of relative deprivation would be meaningless; to the BMW-phile it might be critical.

Still, the RS is a good deal more convenient to ride than almost any production motorcycle I can think of. I quite enjoy the wind buffeting to the head (keeps you awake really) and there's minimal pressure on the torso. Mirrors are a tad too close to the shoulders and do get vibey higher up the range, but the worst thing is that they're almost exactly the same height as the modern breed of car door glass. To avoid jettisoning them down the road (they ping off on contact to avoid fairing damage) you have to learn the art of late braking, which involves rushing through the traffic to a point where protruding car mirrors prove prohibitive, slamming on the RS's anchors which compress the forks some half a dozen inches, and sliding the BM's mirrors 'neath those of the surrounding jelly moulds. It's good fun really 'til you misjudge it and find the car on your outside has got a couple of bods in it with Scotchbrite tape round their heads.

These chaps might be the same blokes who've been trying to catch your attention for the last few miles 'cos, like the old RS, the low bars and the proximity of the fairing provide you with the pretence of riding a thoroughbred sports bike and prove remarkably deceptive in judging your own velocity. With the weight of the rider now (happily) planted on the front end and the bars almost cut in half to fit the new clothes, the RS steers a little

BMW K100RS

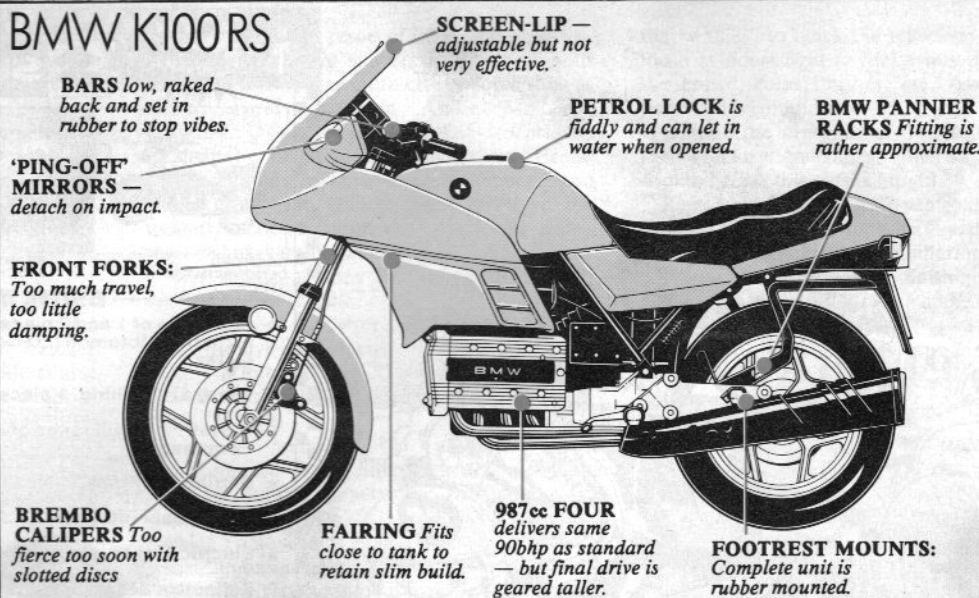
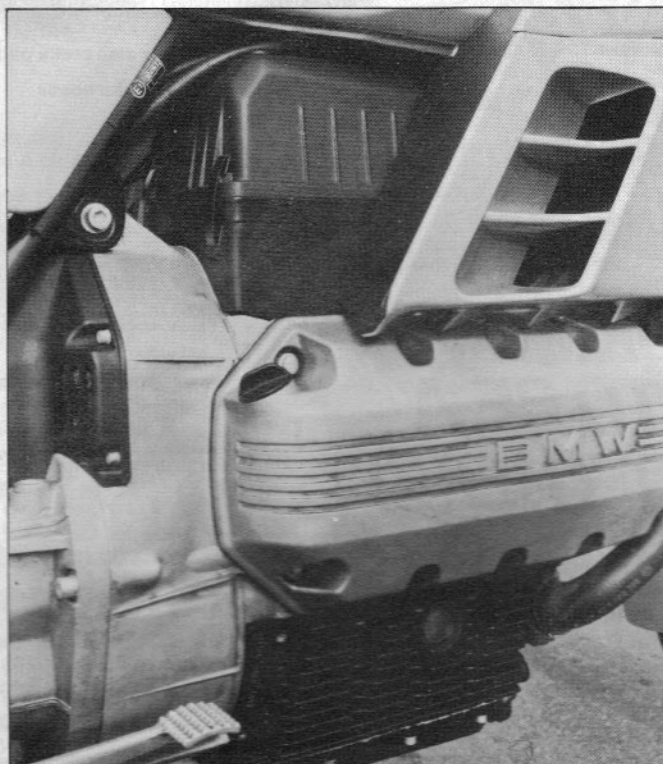
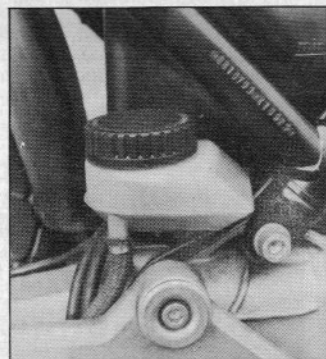


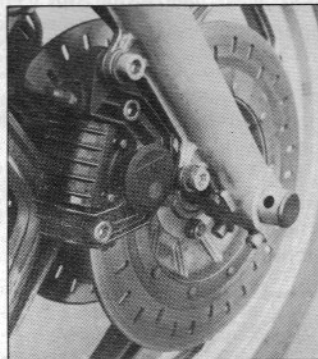
Diagram by Mark Watkinson



Off-side of engine is a bit of a yawn. Note oil viewer in black finning and 'orrible black car radiator hose.



Not the sort of attention to detail you'd expect on any four-grand superbike, let alone a Beemer. Rather disappointing.



Front anchors are about as progressive as traffic police, and they work on the same principle: throwing you over bars.

slower than its naked counterpart, making rapid changes of direction both more difficult and more arduous. However, it's a small price to pay for the added stability the RS has over the K

and does not affect the delightful neutrality of the directional gear, whatever the speed. This means the pilot is not constantly crapping himself about 'oversteer' or 'understeer' and can instead get

on with gridding away at the alloy pegs, which start gnashing at terra firma far too early in my opinion.

It's a shame, however, that such delightful steering is compromised by 'touring' damping: this is, after all, the sporting model. And, whilst Revelle came back from Nice opining that the naked and faired variants felt like two completely different motorcycles, I have to confess that I found them rather similar. True, the top-end flutter of the high-rise bar model has been banished for good on the KRS▶

SECOND OPINION

Although I came out in favour of the basic K100 on test back in September, I wasn't able to give the Bee Em an unequivocal thumbs up. Sure, it handled well, stopped on a sixpence and accelerated like a train (*Is this copy for Mechanics? — Ed*), but riding above 90mph was hard work and, somehow, the bike didn't look quite right.

Fortunately, the RS is a different proposition: the fairing really makes the bike and combined with the seemingly random collection of tank, seat and radiator, make the RS one of the nicest looking bikes on the road. The fairing's pretty functional too — you can cruise all day at 130 as easily as at 70mph (give or take a few endorsements).

The lower bars are a change for the better, too: there's more of the rider's weight on the front end, making the RS more stable than the basic K100 without sacrificing any of the steering's preciseness.

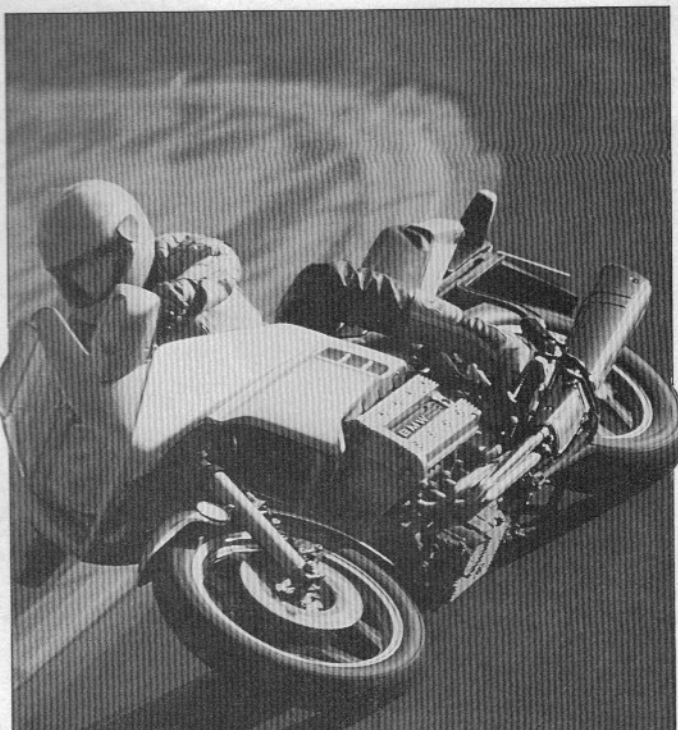
Mind you, I do still have a few teensy reservations. The fairing could have been an inch larger all round, the better to keep the rain off. The front suspension still needs beefing up, and will someone please market a replacement exhaust? But, all in all, if I had the money I think I might just be tempted.

Chris Dabbs

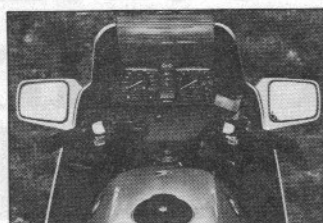
but, rather than being more firmly damped and thus more stable, the RS feels just as squidgy under the forces of braking and the aggravation of rural tarmac. Someone at BMW had promised Mark that the RS had stronger fork springs. A thorough examination, however, revealed the front ends to be identical. Perhaps this was wishful thinking on the part of a factory development rider.

Certainly, beefing up the front-end'd be the first recommendation I'd make. It's no good BMW eschewing anti-dive, air-assisted forks and the like when the front end dives like Maradona in front of the penalty linesman. Quite honestly, the KRS doesn't need all those inches of travel to make it comfortable. Not only does the soft damping radically compromise control under braking, but it really is the villain in getting the front end twisted up when you hustle the RS through rapid changes of direction. On smooth tarmac and at all speeds, the RS, like the standard K, is a virtuoso of directional stability. But dial in a few bumps, the odd 'deceptive bend' and a stationary milk-float and you'll wish you'd never saved the four-and-a-bit grand, particularly as with our test bike you simply couldn't pull on the front anchors without hurling yourself from the saddle. However, though I'm not a particular fan of the standard K100's brakes either, I'm prepared to concede that our RS may have had a warped near-side disc, as it simply wasn't possible to come smoothly to a halt, and you could feel the rotational pulse of disc against pad coming up through the lever. Fortunately, I had no problem with the back stopper, which proved very powerful and progressive, if a little vague in lever action.

Whilst stopping smoothly might prove problematic, moving smoothly does not, with the fuel-injected horizontal motor delivering unflinching grunt from 1000rpm in top onwards. It has to be about the most flexible litre unit we've tested this year and, with slightly taller gearing than the standard K, feels a mite more relaxed at speed on the motorway. On the KRS, 70 equals 4250rpm 'stead of the K's 4500, and 100mph needs only 6250rpm as opposed to the K's 6500rpm. As per standard, there's a distinct step in welly at both 4500rpm and again at 6500rpm, though if you aren't employing opposite full lock with your elbow every time you open the throttle, it simply feels refined and progressive.

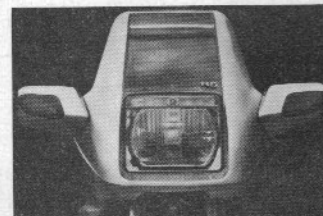


Boy Dabbs does what comes naturally. Unfortunately, what came naturally was a citation for 'driving without due care and attention'.



Extremely neat cockpit comprises same gear as standard K plus digital clock. Note silly fuel gauges on speedo, and indicator cancel button in front of indicator start button.

Like the difference between the Boxer RS and the standard 100T, you'd only be kidding yourself by pretending you could feel the extra few mph the KRS has over the basic model. Strangely enough, with the taller gearing, we managed to hustle it



Indicator/hand protectors/mirror units ping off on contact with walls, terra firma or Cortinas, to avoid damage to fairing.

through the 440yd sprint almost two-tenths of a second quicker than the standard model which, at 12.25secs, means it ain't far off the pace of even the quickest litre Jap tugs. But with not even a traffic light working in Nuneaton, let alone a timing light, we were frustrated in our attempt to find the extra 3mph top speed, though test pilot Kemp managed a 133mph run before the lights went down and was convinced the extra speed was there. "Who cares anyway, Col, it's indicating 140mph; let's go and have

some nosh." Perhaps the real deceit of the K100 engine is that, rather than being in production for only a couple of months, you'd think it had a pedigree stretching back for years.

Not so some of the details. The silencer gets grosser every time I look at it and BMW's claim that it hasn't had one complaint either from dealers or the public must mean that I've been riding a different bike. The headers, however, I find even more offensive. If BMW needs a lesson in emission aesthetics, it should take a look at the three-into-two system fitted to the Laverda 120 — quel bellissimo! The silver paintwork is so drab atop the huge engine bulk: I've seen better looking fridge motors. The side-panels, cut short to continue the lines of the bodywork, reveal an untidy four inches of wasteland twixt their bottom edge and the frame rails. The seat is uncharacteristically hard, the indicator cancel I couldn't find without looking in an A to Z, and the fuel lights start worrying you unnecessarily at about half distance.

There are two more things for which I can't forgive BMW on a £4250 superbike: firstly, the incredibly tacky looking and untidily sited rear brake master cylinder (yuk); secondly — and more importantly — a tank filler which, as soon as you open it, lets a great reservoir of water which has built up on the tank top pour in the hole. I spent three wet days of my two week tenure pushing the bugger home.

Despite such infelicities, however, and the handling limitations imposed by BMW's Captain Sensible philosophy rather than any design error, the KRS is still a magnificent sports/tourer based on a concept the Js either don't understand or see no point in. It's fast, it's functional

and it oozes quality. In fact, BMW's anxiety that the K might somehow dilute the company's image of uniqueness on which much of their sales is based has proved erroneous. It is the very idiosyncracies of the marque that might prove its liabilities. Because, though selling crates full of Ks to established Beemer junkies might massage the corporate ego, selling shiploads of fours to the average bike buyer is the only way BMW is gonna pay off the £60 million development bill. And to wean potential customers away from Laverdas and Ducatis, not to mention Suzukis and Kawasakis, BMW at some stage is gonna have to build a real sports bike. Make mine an RS for sure. But give it a really sporting edge. Colin Schiller **WEB**

SPECIFICATIONS

Model	BMW K100RS
Price inc taxes	£4299
Warranty	12 months/unltd
Customer Contact	BMW GB, Ellesfield Avenue, Bracknell, Berkshire
ENGINE	
Type	Longitudinally-mounted, water-cooled, horizontal in-line four
Capacity	987cc
Bore/Stroke	67x70mm
Lubrication	Wet sump
Comp. ratio	10.2:1
Carburation	Bosch jetronic fuel injection
Ignition	Bosch electronic digital
Power (bhp)	90 @ 8000rpm
Torque (lb-ft)	63 @ 6000rpm
TRANSMISSION	
Primary drive	Gear
Clutch	Single-plate dry
Gearbox	5-speed
Final drive	Shaft
Overall ratios	13.3, 8.78, 6.75, 5.50, 4.92 to 1
ELECTRICS	
Power source	460W generator
Battery	12V/20Ah
Headlamp	55/60W
CHASSIS	
Frame	Tubular space-frame with engine as stressed member
Front susp.	Telescopic fork (185mm travel)
Rear susp.	Monolever fork with single shock adjustable for 3-pos preload
Front brake	2x285mm discs
Rear brake	285mm disc
Tyre type	Metzeler Perfecto
Tyre sizes	100/90 V18; 130/90 V17 (tubeless)
CAPACITIES	
Fuel tank	22 litres (4.8gal)
Oil	3.75 litres
DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase	59.6in (1516mm)
Seat height	31.9in (810mm)
H-bar width	27.2in (690mm)
Grnd clnce	6.9in (175mm)
Rake/trail	53 deg 4.13in
Dry weight	495lbs
PERFORMANCE	
Top speeds (mean)	133.5mph (see text)
Best one-way St ¼-mile (mean)	133.5mph (see text)
Test weight	588lbs
Fuel cons.	48mpg
Range	225 miles
EQUIPMENT	
Fairing, fuel lights, gear indicator, toolkit, steering lock, speedo, tacho, self-cancel indicators, puncture kit, first aid kit, grab handles, hazard lights, clock.	