

The Long Ride

It was all quite straightforward . . . a ride by K75 from the Arctic to Morocco

THE telephone rang a few minutes after I came back from the doctor, having assured him that I planned a quiet month. "Would you like to ride a K75 from the Arctic to Morocco?" How was I to find the time at short notice. My wife knows . . . "You'll manage it somehow". I did.

The plan was to make a promotional film about the new 750, and two riders, ultimately myself and Terry Snelling of *Motorcycle News*, were to be the pilots. A film crew would accompany us recording high and lows. There are not many in my world who would refuse such an offer. Ten days later I was sitting on a twin-engined Otter swooping into the little airport at Narvik some 300 miles inside the Arctic circle. If I expected to find the population on snow-shoes and riding in sleighs, I was mistaken, for it was raining polar bears and reindeers. The flight from Oslo had been low enough for us to see plenty of snow on the hills and also to have our breath taken away by the succession of Fjords. Our route was not going to follow the Nor-

wegian coast, which was a pity, but at least we were able to enjoy it on the flight up.

At the pre-ride briefing the plan was explained. We were to aim for about 300 miles a day, which would get us to the south of Agadir in Morocco on time, with the ride scheduled to take 11 days. That was when we thought Agadir was 3,300 miles from Narvik. We were soon to find how far it really is. At the same briefing Terry and I were fitted out in the corporate image, with all the BMW equipment, leathers, System 2 helmets, boots, gloves, oversuits, riding suits, and, er, interesting waterproof overboots and gloves. The latter were merely rubber washing-up gloves. Not a lot of warmth in them but they really worked when it came to keeping out the water. I wonder why I never thought of it before. I never got on with the red overboots — found them a right agony to put on, *but* they did keep feet dry and warm, and that is what mattered. Also included in the package were BMW inner panniers bags, tank bag

and stuffer bags. Great, but we had, somehow, to carry this and all of our clothing to Narvik. Terry managed to use all the bags as they were intended and actually squeezed leathers, helmet and oversuit plus two weeks clothing into the company issue. I settled for a large suitcase! As we had a support truck following, there was no problem on the road. The support truck carried a spare bike (in case one of us bent one), tyres and spares. Poor Joe Campagna, BMW zone manager, was the elected driver and had to drive it to Narvik ahead of us, try to keep up on the trip, and then drive it home again. A round trip of almost 7,000 miles. Luckily Mark, the "sound" man, shared the driving from Narvik, but it was quite an endurance test. It was hard to tell whether he was pleased or not that the only thing we needed during the trip was a drop of oil and an indicator lens! Understandably, BMW did not want to risk the trip and its considerable investment so this kind of back-up made sense.

Narvik, 9am, October 5. The bikes lined up



ready to go. Snow-capped hills in the background made a pretty picture even though the bikes were pointing the wrong way. I felt this meant a bit of a tight turn on bikes we had yet to throw a leg across, and winced at a manhole cover in the way. "Action, shoot!" cried Richard Tierney, the director. I dropped the clutch, gently, put the bike on full lock to keep it in camera, realized things were even tighter than I thought, dropped a foot as I bumped off the kerb . . . and the road had disappeared! The manhole cover loomed large and I knew that all was not well. "Cut". I picked myself off the ground.

9.10 am, October 5. The official version. I eased the angle on the bike and pulled away, far more elegantly, and our big ride had begun. The only damage was a cracked indicator lens and bruised ego. The rest of the journey was to see the crew ribbing me mercilessly over my acting début.

Our route started off in the opposite direction, north towards a new link road that would take us across the Norwegian/Swedish border towards Kiruna. The scenery was breathtaking, everything that I had ever expected from Norway, and soon, turning east to cross the mountains, we were in snow. The border was open for non-commercial traffic so there was no need even to slow down, which was

a pity because we never saw the film crew's car having their carnet checked. The next 100 miles were on snow-covered road in scenery that was as dramatic as it was beautiful. We saw perhaps a dozen other vehicles in this time. Just enough, in fact, to have cut us a path through the snow. The K75 was being asked to cope with difficult conditions on its baptism, but after a few cautious miles while I found my feet, so to speak, we were away and the car never caught us until the lunch stop. The temperature was around zero but I was too well cocooned in my BMW thermals, leathers and Motomod suit to even notice the cold. The two-stage-heated (hot and very hot!) handlebar grips were brilliant. Even in sub-zero temperatures there was no need for other than the middleweight BMW gloves. There are few tourists in this part of the world and we seemed to have northern Lapland

I gently released the clutch, put the bike on full lock to keep in camera, put one foot down . . . and then, somehow, managed to fall off! It was not an auspicious start to our trip, or to my acting career

all to ourselves. 250 miles were covered before lunch but we began to learn that arranging to meet the support car a couple of hundred miles up the road could have its problems. Not for the last time, we squandered a couple of hours before the rendezvous was made. The crew had hired a Volvo Estate with metal-studded tyres, which was a daft decision by the hire company because the snow disappeared after 150 miles, never to return and the crew were stuck with tyres that had almost no braking grip. It didn't pay to let 'em ride too close!

The night stop was at Lyksale and, because of delays for filming, the last 100 miles were in the dark, with a little drizzle and occasional patches of fog. It wasn't too disastrous and we arrived in good time for a bath before dinner. We nearly missed the Arctic Circle, just after a place called Jokkmopp and, while it is doubtless crawling with tourists during the high season we never saw another vehicle during our half-hour filming session there. Not long after, the Volvo nearly demolished a herd of elk, which at least explained why it was usually on the menu.

We had covered 450 miles since leaving Narvik and it had been very much easier than either Terry or myself had expected and neither of us were very cold.

Someone had the bright idea that it would be great to film in early-morning light, so we were



my mirror told me that, with any luck, the crew had caught us up and a garage with a café attached provided us all with a much-needed break. The crew had been swapping drivers every half-hour, with them all suffering with tiredness. We knew how they felt! This was the leg I'd rather hoped my wife could ride with me. I'm glad it didn't work out.

The last 50 miles saw the Scorpio (the Volvo had been left at Hamburg) acting as pathfinder for us but, typically, the fog cleared. It was comforting to know that we were with friends, though, and when we arrived at our château at Lesoux, near Clermont, it was midnight, the chef had gone home, the bar was closed, and I felt very much less than perfect. Supper was a lump of bread and cheese that the crew had failed to scoff during the ride! Washed down with lukewarm Perrier. Yuk. Things could only get better. We'd covered 479 miles.

What a difference a night's sleep makes. The summer had arrived during the night! The château was revealed in all its glory and life seemed good again. It was amazing how we had ridden backwards through the seasons in just five days, from winter in Norway and Sweden, autumn in Germany and Holland, and now we were back in the summer. Like a time machine, and very confusing. Inexplicably, Terry chose this day to wear his thermal long johns for the first time. Not for long, though.

The day's ride made it seem all worthwhile as we wound our way through the Dordogne towards Biarritz. The temperature was well into the 70s, we were able to shed our top layers for the first time, and the roads were terrific. A really great morning's ride and we even surprised ourselves by making our rendezvous at more or less the right time and place, although, as it turned out, even that was going to present its problems. Richard Tierrey arrived soon after to say he'd been doing his sums and decided that there was no way we were going to get to Morocco in the time available. The original projection of 3,400 miles was going to be passed well before arriving at the other end of Spain and there were still another 1,000 miles to travel in Morocco.

In a way it was a disappointment for I'd been really looking forward to another ride through the Atlas mountains but, realistically, we all knew that it was the end of Plan A. Plan B, a finish at the southern tip of Spain, had always been on the table just in case we hadn't been able to get permission to film in Africa. It was just going to take a couple of days longer than we expected. The change of plans meant that we would stop two nights in Biarritz to allow the film crew to get some extra footage. Call it good fortune or just our luck but the next day both Terry and myself were to get a dose of galloping asparagus.

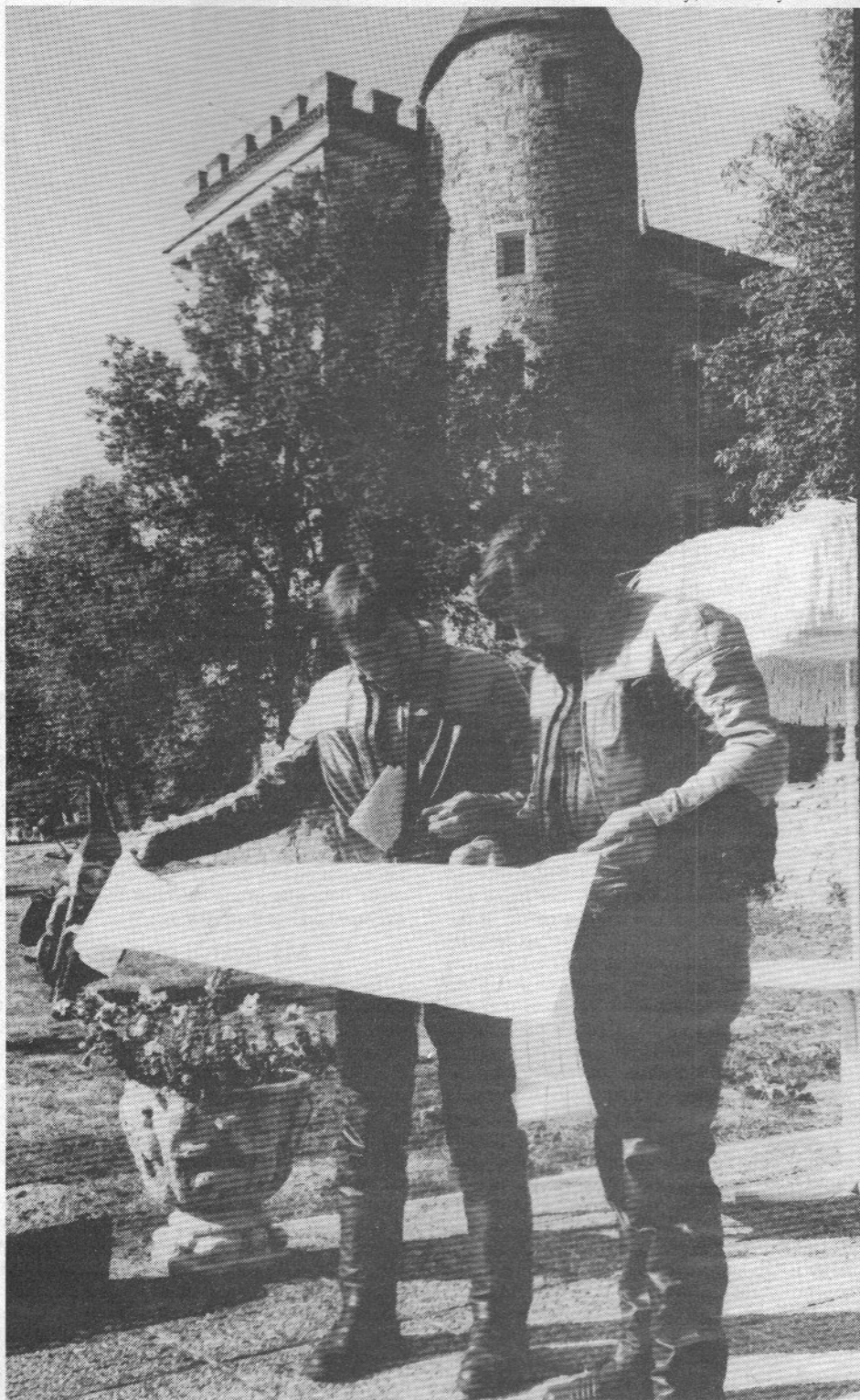
The arrival at Biarritz was tempered by the knowledge that the next day was a rest, but after another long day in the saddle we felt a little jaded, especially as we'd spent an hour looking for the Château Brindos, one of the better kept secrets of Anglet, just up the road from Biarritz. It was another superb, if expensive, pad to rest our helmets. At the evening meal we had seafood cake for starters, then stuffed goose, and marinated strawberries washed down with fine wines, which certainly put back what the day took out, and we retired to our suites (merely calling them rooms would be doing them an injustice) sated.

Next morning was a different story! Just the

Problems . . . we weren't going to achieve our original objective. The 3,400 miles projection was going to be passed well before we arrived at the southern tip of Spain. We'd never see Morocco

two riders had the problem, which seemed to point to the cheese of the previous lunchtime, which was the only common denominator. They would choose this day of all of them to send us shopping in the local market. The pungent smell of cheese just about finished me. I had a long debate as to whether I could manage dinner that night and decided to settle for something simple like whole stuffed pig.

My cast-iron constitution was more or less back to normal the next day, but Terry suffered



Snelling and Preston study the map after struggling through another gargantuan breakfast in a 5-star schloss

**Light on fuel,
with plenty of
speed, and
comfort . . .
the K75 is an
impressive
motorcycle**

*Flashback back to
the big freeze, as
one of the intrepid
men — no beard: it
must be Preston —
takes a breather*

for a few days more. Didn't put him off his nightly glass of beer, though. With the revised schedule, the destination for the start of our ride into Spain was Vittoria and a return to Parador Argomaniz. Not entirely a coincidence for I suggested that it was near enough to allow us some on-the-road filming, which we managed and, for the first time, arrived at our night stop in daylight. It also gave us the chance to do some filming around the parador. If you see the film, watch out for the off-road piece with both of us riding in a cloud of dust. The K75 was not intended as an off-road bike but handled the modest tracks in the manner born and we just knew we had some good film.

The Argomaniz was as good as I remembered but, having fewer guests to serve, the menu was not quite as exciting as when we called in the summer holidays. It was still very acceptable, though, and the house plonk at £1 a jug easily surpassed the expensive stuff of the night before. We had only ridden 160 miles that day and felt relaxed and fit. It was coming up to 3,000 miles since Narvik and instead of getting travel-weary I was feeling better every day. It was almost a disappointment only to have to spend half a day in the saddle. The K75 had become very much a part of me, with the exhaust note now sounding, to me, just like a three. The bumpy Spanish roads had produced a phenomenon that had not appeared before. On fast bumpy bends with the power turned on, the machine was apt to give a little shake of its head. After it had happened a few times I came to the conclusion that it was just a little bit light at the front, perhaps making a case for a shorter wheelbase after all. It was never a real problem, and a fairing would doubtless cure it. I wouldn't be surprised to see BMW announcing a small change in steering geometry before long, though.

The rest of the machine's characteristics were

improving with familiarity and I began to feel a change in my attitude to the bike. I had always quite liked it and had soon begun to really like it.

Now, though, these feelings were changing to something deeper. I had lived with it, and for it, for eight days now and blow me if I didn't find myself wondering if, just possibly, I preferred it to my R100SRS. I had to admit that it did everything the boxer did but better. Fuel consumption was infinitely better and, at 58.25 miles to the gallon for the whole trip, was almost exactly the same as when we last went along this road on the K100RT. This time, though, we were going rather quicker. During one afternoon on our day-off, when we did just 100 miles pottering around behind the film car, I averaged no less than 70 mpg.

My petrol budget

To many, fuel consumption is of no consequence. To me, it is. My petrol budget dictates how far I can ride the bike and the K will probably travel 20 per cent or more than the R, all other things being equal. There were other advantages, too. We agreed that the roads in Spain were the worst of the trip and the K clung to them like a leech. The boxer just could not have held on in these circumstances. The mid-range acceleration scored, too, and the five-speed gearbox was almost redundant. The bike develops 83 per cent of its power at 37 mph in top gear, and in real terms, this means that when rapid overtaking was necessary (which was quite often) it was just a question of winding on in top. The little digital gear indicator rarely indicated four. The annoying thing is, I found myself actually glancing at it to see what gear I was in. Just shows how easily I am corrupted. The left for left and right for right indicator buttons had less success with my subconscious and, unless I concentrated, it was easy to get it wrong.

Strange thing is, although the indicators were self-cancelling, most times I used the over-ride button to cancel — which is more than I seem to do on my own machine.

The seat was firm, almost too firm I thought at first, but I had long ago stopped feeling saddle sore, with the worst time coming after a couple of days' riding. Now I felt fine. It is the same shape as the one used on the K100RT, which won't please all passengers. I found the handlebar shape exactly to my taste and the little cockpit, which I had dismissed as cosmetic, was better than expected. It took a surprising amount of wind pressure off and made 100 mph cruising much less tiring.

There were only a couple of days left before we reached the Mediterranean and I found myself wishing that we had been able to complete Plan A. The sunshine helped. Our route across the plains of Spain took us to Avila, to the north-west of Madrid. It was a superb day's ride, warm, traffic-free with some good photographic locations to please the cameraman. We were able to film on one road, a main road at that, for nearly an hour without being interrupted by other traffic. Avila was full of Americans doing the grand tour. Some expressed amazement that we were riding a bike all the way to Cadiz the next day. We didn't like to mention where we'd come from. The Parador in Avila was up to the usual high standard, with the bonus of a choir, returning from a religious festival, serenading me below my window as I went to bed. It was lovely, and my previous lack of enthusiasm for Spain, already eroded during our earlier holiday trip, now disappeared completely.

Another Parador, the Atlantique in Cadiz, signified just about the end of the road for if you look at a map you will see that it is about as far south-west as it is possible to get. However we planned to go even further south the next day, to Tarifa, the furthest point south in Europe and the nearest to Africa, which was just a spit across the straits of Gibraltar. Between times, we were stuck with Cadiz, which may well have great charms to offer but concealed them under a sprawling mass of dilapidated houses. I wasn't too struck with Cadiz but the Parador was superb, although perhaps a little too modern to be a real Parador.

The last 1,000 miles had been over some pretty awful roads (and, to be fair, some very good ones) and we had been riding increasingly harder to achieve less distance than in Scandinavia. The bikes had taken quite a pounding, especially on the road from Cáceres to Seville. We agreed it was the worst road of the trip and Terry said the worst road of his life. I know one in Portugal that beats it for this title!

The next day was a 60-mile jaunt along the coast to Tarifa. At least, that was what we thought. It turned out to be the most unpleasant ride of the whole trip. A tremendous wind sprang up and we had to cross a long, long causeway and it was a tremendous struggle to stay on the bikes. Just when we thought we were past the worst, Terry screeched to a stop, for once showing his feelings even from behind his beard. He'd left his passport in the hotel! After a few "rats" and "bothers" the van caught us up. They were aware of the problem because we'd forewarned them on the two-way radios we'd recently taken to carrying. Good old Joe was equal to the occasion, as always, and a crowd of astounded Spaniards, not to mention two

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equally astounded riders, watched an immense pile of boxes and bags fly out of the van and create a mountain on the pavement. Finally came the spare bike. The first time it had been needed in the trip, and Joe grabbed his helmet and charged off back to Cadiz while we continued to Tarifa and the "end-of-Europe" filming. Mark took over the van. In the meantime the crew had sussed out a breakfast stop in Tarifa. I was in need of it for I don't function at all on an empty stomach.

The end of the road. Three thousand seven hundred miles and nine days' riding (plus a little bit) after leaving the snow of Norway, here we were looking over the sunny Med. The temperature was in the 70s and had been a great deal higher for most of the ride across Spain. Our final "Official" leg was a ride up an unmade cliff road to film our end-of-ride chat. We wondered what we were going to say when asked to do it, yet we talked non-stop for 40 minutes filming. The trip had been so much fun and the bikes had performed so well that we were both still high with the elation of it. I suggested, only half joking, that I wouldn't mind riding the K75 back to England, perhaps in the subconscious hope that I could tuck it away in my garage, hoping they would forget I had it.

That last unmade bit did have me wondering if I was going to end the journey as I had begun it, flat on my back. Especially when they asked me to turn round and do it again! One or two others later admitted that the same thought crossed their minds. I wasn't surprised, they had reminded me of my original oopsie at every opportunity, completing the adventure by presenting me with an imitation Narvik manhole cover inscribed Rambo, a title I had earned when wearing just about every item of riding gear I had with me. It was a hilarious end to the journey of a lifetime. I had loved almost every minute of it and filled my mind with places I



Filming on the move...

Some stopping places on the route

Holland

Kasteel Wittem, 6286 AA Wittem, Zuid Limburg (tel 04450 1208)

France

Chateaux de Codignat, 63190 Bort L'Etang, Lezous (tel (73) 70.43.03)

Chateaux de Brindos 64600 Anglet Biarritz (Cote Basque) (tel (59) 23.17.68)

Spain

Parador Nacional Argomaniz, Vitoria, Spain (tel: 945/28 22 00)

Parador Nacional "Raimundo De Borgona", Avila, (tel: 918/21 13 40)

Hotel Atlantico, Cadiz (tel 956/21 23 01)

We decided not to include the stopping places in Norway and Sweden because the prices made your eyes water!



The first 1,000 miles... Bleak weather in northern Europe

Conclusions... 750 three or 1,000 four? (Or does the boxer still hold pride of place for me?)

want to go to with Brenda. Trouble is, I doubt if I could afford most of them. Loved the ride, loved the bike, and really enjoyed the companionship of my fellow travellers.

* * *

I have never made any bones about my preference for the traditional BMW flat-twin. It still has much going for it, not the least being its comparative simplicity and, therefore, ease of maintenance. There can be no doubt that ownership of one of the K series means much more reliance on your friendly local BMW dealer. Not in itself a bad thing, and I have no complaints about my local dealer. It is the thought of being at the mercy of someone else that bothers me with the K. With the R there isn't much we can't cope with on the road and, having owned one for a number of years, there is a great network of truly knowledgeable experts at the end of a telephone to give me advice and encouragement should I need it. The K just hasn't been around long enough to have earned that kind of tradition.

However 7,000 miles on a good example of each of the options has made me wonder just a little. In normal give-and-take going they make much less hard work of a journey and handle much better on bad roads than the boxer. The performance of the Ks, both of 'em, in mid-range is quite outstanding with, not surprisingly, the bigger bike having the edge. Naturally there are faster bikes around these days, some very much faster, and when I described the performance as outstanding I mean by my standards. It give me just about as much performance as I can safely use.

My passenger expressed a definite preference for the R100 at the end of our holiday; described in last month's issue. The K was a sweeter bike and had better suspension but she found that the ridge on the pillion seat of the K became extremely uncomfortable at the end of a long day's ride. The traditional unstepped seat on the R gave no such problems. On such things are bikes made or broken. The only passenger who was carried on the K75 was sitting backwards with a camera in his hand, so his opinion was not considered valid!

What of comparison between the 75 and 100? In most cases there isn't one, because the two

machines are pretty well identical. The suspension was much the same and, incidentally, was kept on the softest setting even with a full load, with no sign of bottoming. My own choice of setting has always been the softest setting I could manage without bottoming. On a long trip the ultimate in ground clearance and handling characteristics has always been the lowest of my priorities.

The brakes on both bikes were about equal but I had a preference for the drum rear brake as used on the smaller machine. It was slightly more sensitive and actually seemed to work better. The controls were identical but on all models the early warning fuel light has been dispensed with and now a red light glows to say that there are four litres left. I used a tank bag virtually all the time so had to lean over to see the light, anyway, so it didn't much matter. I just filled up around the 170/180-mile mark, with an occasional early check, just in case. Just once on the K100 the red light came on after only 50 miles; the tremendous heat of that day seemed to have created a small problem which never appeared again.

The difference between the two machines was



... and time for a close-up

much more noticeable when it came to the engines. To be honest, I had no complaints at all about the engine and on my K100RT there was no vibration to speak of. Perhaps we had a particularly good one but it really was an extremely sweet engine and I loved it. Then I rode the K75. The 100 was sweet, this was sweeter. The addition of twin balance wheels on the drive shaft had moved it into a different league, and I found this engine beginning to make me wonder. Could I be seriously thinking of parting with my lovely new R100RS for a K75? It was a question that nagged away at me

for much of the trip. I haven't really answered it yet but feel that had I not just bought a specially nice motorsport version of the biggest boxer I would be giving very serious thought indeed to buying a K75. What am I talking about? I am giving serious thought to buying the K75. It is just a matter of pound notes that is holding me back.

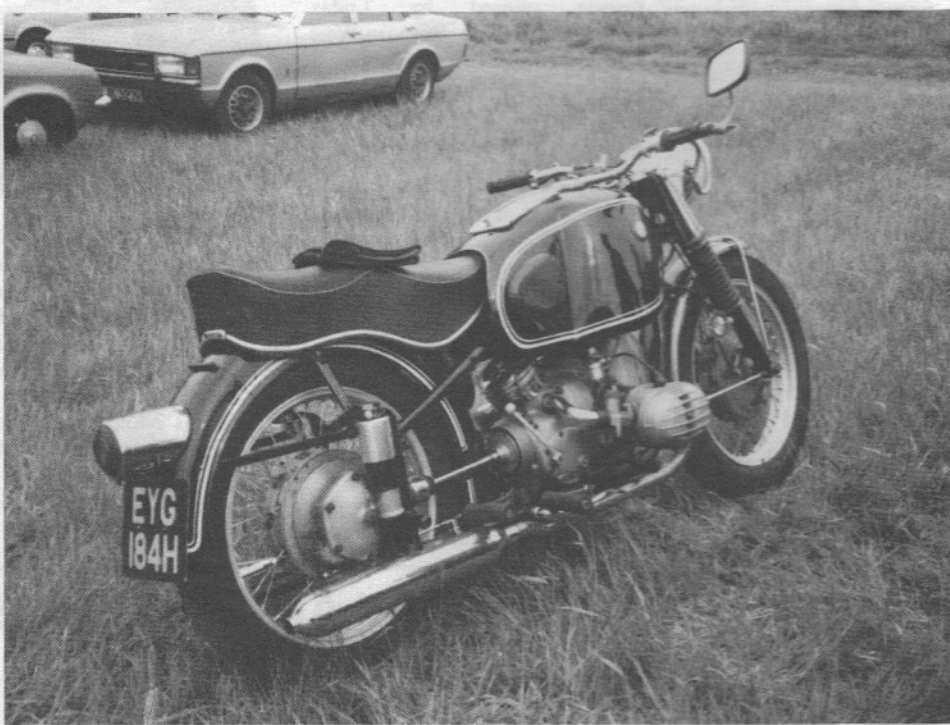
The bigger machine definitely scored on handling, and that was in just one area. The front end of the 75 did, occasionally, wag its head and, with the added weight of the RT fairing on the K100, that one never did. I can't say it would stop me buying the bike for I think that if I do I would fit a fairing anyway. Perhaps I should wait for the S model in the spring?

As I've mentioned, fuel consumption was just about identical at a very acceptable 57/58 mpg. I feel that the 750 would just about have the edge, all other things being equal, but either way it is the fuel consumption that makes me begin to feel I want to own one. And the way it accelerates in top gear . . . And the way it hangs on to the road when the going gets tough. In fact, come to think of it, there is much that I like about the BMW K series and last summer gave me the chance to get a little deeper under the skin than I usually manage. I discovered that this beauty was more than just skin deep. B.P.

The film of Bruce Preston's and Terry Snelling's journey will be on show in BMW dealers next spring, coinciding with the arrival of the K75S. It had also been purchased by BMW organizations in Spain, Japan and other sales are being negotiated.



Journey's end — almost. Fearless cameraman ready to take on-the-road shots from the pillion of the backup 750



The sort of bike that surely makes the founders of British Bike Clubs wish they had decided on 'Classic Bike Club' as being a more suitable title. George Nixon's B.M.W. R51/3 was first registered in Germany in 1953 and imported into the U.K. in 1969. The 494cc OHV Flat Twin drives through a four speed box, having a hand as well as foot gear change. The giant 'Hoske' tank, is date stamped 1954 and holds 9 gallons! George bought the bike a couple of years ago, after it had lain unused for a decade and we spotted it in the spectators park at the Castleford Club's British Bike Rally in June. Very tasty indeed.

OLD BIKE MART JUNE 1986

were to transfer about £500 to his account in

being reunited with an old friend. We had been

through a hell of a lot in just a couple of weeks, and 4,000 very hard miles and I was, and am, very attached to it in spite of the problems that I had with the importer, Brian Goss, which had left me vowing never to touch another KTM again.

The bike was wheeled out into the sunlight. Nothing was missing and the only obvious signs of its holiday in Dakar was a little rust and a seized-up rear-drive chain. The tyres were flat but not punctured. I just couldn't believe it. Petrol was procured and it gave a cough and then fired up. The first thing that struck me was that the front lights were still working. They contained the bulbs that David Jones of Newtown had fitted when he sorted my direct-lighting system and the same bulbs had been on during the whole time I had ridden the bike, special sections and all. Amazing.

I inflated the tyres and gingerly set off for the ferry terminal. I took on more petrol and could hear no rattles from the engine at all and no signs of the oil leaks that had worried me in my last few days in Africa. The weather was glorious and I decided to press on to Calais. Anyway, I was so enjoying being back on the bike again that I was loath to get off it. Sealink had come up with more tickets for my passage so I just wanted to get the bike back to Dover where my car was waiting, complete with trailer, to take the bike safely back to Greenwich and home.

The rally represented a challenge to me, one that no other Briton had attempted before. It presented me with all kinds of problems because I was breaking new ground and had no one to seek advice about on the points concerning the rally, and I mean *all* the points, relating to detail and major things. A veritable wealth of experience has been gained, a lot of it the hard way, and when I go again, in 1987, I'll be a much