

"ROAD
TEST"



BMW K75S/100RS Comparison

Just why has *BMW's* market share risen? Mick Walker discovers at least some of the reason's in a marathon test of the German manufacturers K series sportsters

With the exception of market leaders Honda, the German company BMW are currently the most widely known motorcycle marque inside and outside the two wheel world.

This is because both companies have, over the last few years, made great efforts promoting their respective brands. The fruits

The new K75S is the best handling K-bike yet

of this have benefitted both, but in differing ways. Honda is now viewed very much as the Ford of the motorcycle industry, whilst BMW have strengthened their hold on the top end, the prestige sector.

For some sixty years the German company had been associated with the flat twin, but in

late 1983, all this changed with the introduction of the first of the new K series, a four cylinder based around what BMW labelled the Compact Drive System. Then late last year an extension of the original, a three cylinder triple.

When a new BMW is launched, both the



parent company in Germany and our own British importers in Bracknell, go about the whole business in a highly professional and successful manner. Witness their very latest, the K75S sportster. Not content with a simple soulless mail-shot, BMW organised a real launch with the superb and traffic free west coast of Scotland as a magnificent backdrop for a few lucky members of the press. Not only did a gleaming line of the brand new K75S triples greet our eyes, but there was a chance to test most of the '86 range to boot.

Based near Aberfoyle, the original plan was for all of us to do around 500 miles over a couple of days and then each ride a K75S back south covering more miles over the following two weeks, before returning the machine to BMW's Bracknell headquarters. However, I decided to take this a stage further to produce an in depth comparison test between the newcomer and the well established K100RS including the limited edition Motorsport model. Being able to step straight off one model onto another was a great advantage, as was the ability to ride several different machines of the same type, ranging from brand new to relatively high mileage.

Previously, when testing earlier K100s I had

been generally impressed, but with certain provisos, namely mid-range vibration and a couple of problems caused by water getting into the fuel via the tank cap, and ditto for the panniers when parked on the side stand.

In their press handout BMW say that the introduction of the K75S completes the K series range, if so what about the rumoured K75RT? Taking BMW at their word, there are now five K-series models. Two use the three cylinder 750 engine, and three the four cylinder 1000. With four of the conventional flat twins in the 650/800 category the company now have a comprehensive range of bikes to cater for (dare I say it), the older more experienced rider, than ever before. Having said that, without hesitation it is worth stating that of all these the new K75S is the most sporting. This may seem a strange statement, given that its engine is to an identical state of tune to the touring C model. The difference lies in its running gear. The wind tunnel designed fairing adds another 6mph to maximum speed, even though it doesn't offer its rider much protection from the elements.

Another difference to the C, is the use of a rear disc brake (straight off the K100RS) instead of the previous drum. But the major

change lies in the suspension. The front fork spring travel has been reduced to 135mm and two springs in each fork leg provide a double progressive rate. Entirely new is the damping system. The damper is fitted only in the left fork leg. BMW claim this allows better oil flow behaviour and finer tuning. The rear mono-shock has also been revised internally to provide better sensitivity.

Otherwise the S retains the same characteristics as the K75C. This means although on paper the engine produces 83% of its maximum torque at a low 2500 rpm, whilst the figure for the K100RS is only marginally different at 85%, this does not reveal any noticeable difference where it counts, on the open road. Here the smaller unit is more akin to a Japanese inspired design with its taste for revs, whereas its larger four cylinder brother is quite happy to remain in top for the majority of any journey. This is not to say the K75S is not tractable, just that it thrives when driven hard through the gears. As a point of interest the K100RS is quite happy to engage top at 30mph - whilst below 40mph on the K75S you're wasting your time. A feature of riding the K100RS after the triple, is that for the first few miles you are constantly trying to change into

The RS is distinctly more sporty in looks and riding position than the new triple



top when you are already there, such is the torque bound nature of the four cylinder unit, compared to the much freer revving three.

At anything below 80mph I preferred the smaller bike, this was because below this speed the engine was dead smooth, whilst the K100RS has quite a bad patch of the vibes at around 3500 rpm (between 53-59mph). Strangely above 80mph I found the larger engine came into its own and was actually smoother than the triple which seemed to suffer a slight amount of vibration just above this figure, particularly when new (up to 1000 miles). It is worth noting that on machines with more than 2500 the K100RS also became smoother, but never lost its roughness in the same way.

With 75hp (90hp on K100RS) the K75S not only lacks the torque of the larger unit, but also suffers as a pure motorway bike where the 1000 scores well. But on minor roads, city work or riding hard over anything other than a dead smooth surface the K75S is definitely superior. Unlike the C version, the S also scores against its bigger brother in price - it's £755 cheaper at £4131. It's also some 14kg (32lb) lighter, but regrettably the tall seat height is the same.

Gearbox action on both bikes is truly superb - as good as anything with chain drive, but without the mess. The clutch is not quite as slick as the best of the Japs, but light years ahead of that on many big bore Italian machines. Conversely the brakes, even though equipped with Brembo calipers did not match those found on most Italians equipped with triple Brembos. However in their favour the BMW stainless steel discs did not rust and were exceptionally safe to use, only blotting their copybook with the front units needing careful watching below 5mph to avoid grabbing.

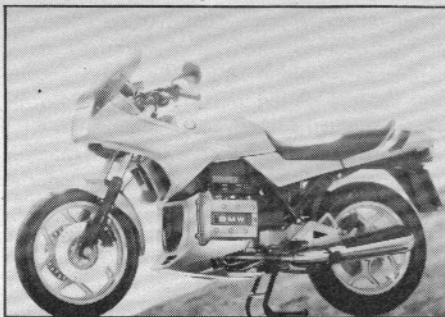
Compared to the K75S, the fairing on the K100RS is one of the best features of the whole machine. Not only does it offer much superior protection from the elements, but gives its rider a real sense of security. In addition the mirrors serve a real function - during a cloud burst my hands remained completely dry whilst travelling along the M11 motorway in Essex, amazing but true. The fairing on the K75S is by comparison a real disaster, allowing wind to buffet the rider's shoulders at anything above 60mph, whilst the mirrors although remaining crystal clear, offer none of the protection afforded to the larger model.

Another failing of the K75S is the power of its horn, or rather lack of it, compared to the penetrating note emitted from the ones fitted to the K100RS.

Both Ks use stainless steel exhaust systems, ugly, but effective. Of the two, the unit fitted to the K75S has the best appearance, but against this the pipes on the smaller engine end up an angry shade of blue, whereas the K100RS remained a straw colour on all the machines I used (and saw) during the test period. I also noticed, as on the K75C tested last year, that the K75S would on occasion pop back on the overrun, something I've never experienced on any of the K100's.

A feature of both engines however, is that when parked on the side stand for more than a few minutes a plume of white smoke is emitted for the first few seconds after starting the engine. This also happens to a lesser extent when left on the centre stand overnight. Even so, throughout the test period none of the machines used any oil!

Previous complaints of leaky fuel caps and the highly annoying dual fuel warning lights have been rectified. The speedo is still prone to



Top: The list of accessories for the K75 includes a belly pan. **Below:** the radial shod, white painted, black engined limited edition K100RS Motorsport



misting up in wet weather, however. The lifting handle for the centre stand is much appreciated, although the mousetrap action of the currently fitted side stand is not. The latter can easily catch the unwary off balance.

Most of the K series machines tested had panniers fitted. Not only do these blend well with the lines of the machine, unlike most others, but they are completely safe even at maximum speed. Not so long ago manufacturers were warning riders with panniers fitted not to exceed 70mph. BMW deserve praise here.

On tyres, I notice that most of my fellow journalists tended to pick machines with any make of tyre except Continental. As I was one of the last to collect a K75S when returning to England I found myself with a machine fitted with a pair of these 'unwanted' tyres. Actually I was pleasantly surprised and although I didn't go round Snetterton or Brands Hatch with them, I found the Continentals perfectly suitable for everyday use, providing grip in both wet and dry conditions. In fact on one K100RS fitted with Pirelli tyres, these tended to lose adhesion at the front in slippery conditions.

Tyre wear seems a good feature on the K series. A friend of mine has done over 12000 miles and is still on his original rear tyre!

At first glance (and feel), there is not much to give the rider (or passenger) any real hope of comfort from the relatively hard saddle. But as the miles unwind you suddenly realise that although firm that seat is really good. Many seats give the initial impression of being comfortable and turn out just the reverse. With the K series sportsters, it's just the opposite.

I also had a chance to sample the top of the line K100RS Motorsport. This caters for someone wanting a more aggressive and exclusive machine than the standard model. For an extra £192 the owner gets one of only 120 machines imported. Finish is in an attractive metallic pearl white, decked out in BMW Motorsport details, while the windscreen, engine block and wheel rims are in black. Front suspension is straight off the K75S,

with Pirelli Radial tyres as standard. Performance is identical to the standard model, but handling improved over uneven surfaces.

Finish of the normal K100RS and K75S is in a range of rather reserved metallic shades including dark blue, red, gun metal grey and silver. I also rode a K100RS in all black - a most attractive scheme, which suited the BMW well.

The K75S triple has, I feel, been clearly aimed at those who would never have previously considered one of the German bikes and should find favour with riders weaned on Japanese multis, or those wanting to ride harder than BMW's touring image would previously allow. Meanwhile the K100RS caters for those wanting to go slow or fast, but either way concentrating on major A-roads or motorways, because under this type of going the machine is at its best. In addition, anyone brought up on British or European machinery will find its torque power delivery to their liking and will more easily accept its vibration envelope.

Both machines would be unlikely to top any conventional performance rating in their respective classes, but if taken overall, the picture is very different. Here I feel is the secret for BMW's present level of success, combined with the fact that neither will be obsolete either next year, or the year after. These features will I'm sure mean that there will be even more converts to the BMW camp in the future. I know that at the end of the six weeks and 5000 miles, I was genuinely sorry to end the relationship.

Specification K75S (K100RS in brackets)

Engine:	Inline flat three (four) 4-stroke with two overhead camshafts, water-cooling and electronic fuel injection
Capacity:	740cc (987cc)
Bore and stroke:	67x70mm
Compression ratio:	11.0:1 (10.2)
Max power:	75hp at 8500rpm (90hp at 8000rpm)
Max torque:	68NM at 6750rpm (86NM at 6000rpm)
Ignition:	Electronic
Starting:	Electric
Transmission:	5-speed
Clutch:	Single dry plate
Rear drive:	Crown wheel and pinion, with Palloid gear pattern
Battery:	12V 20ah
Generator:	480W
Headlight:	12V H4 55/60W
Seat height:	810mm
Dry weight:	(with fuel tank) 235kg (253kg)
Tank capacity:	21 litre (22 litre)
Standard equipment:	Digital clock, brakedown kit, tool kit
Max speed:	130mph (137mph)
Fuel consumption:	
average:	52mpg (51mpg)
driven hard:	40mpg (41mpg)
Price:	£4131 (£4886) (RS Motorsport £5078)
Test bikes supplied by:	BMW (GB) Ltd, Bracknell, Berks.