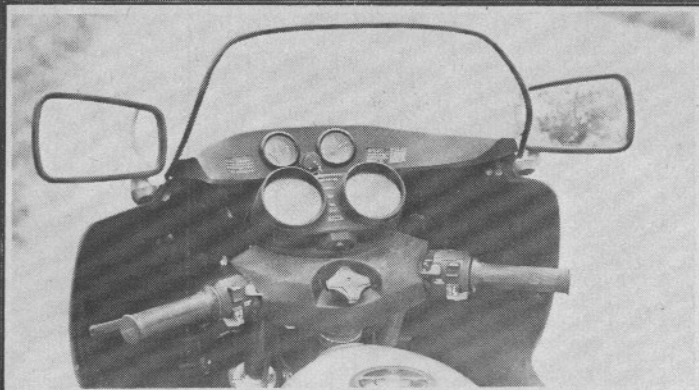
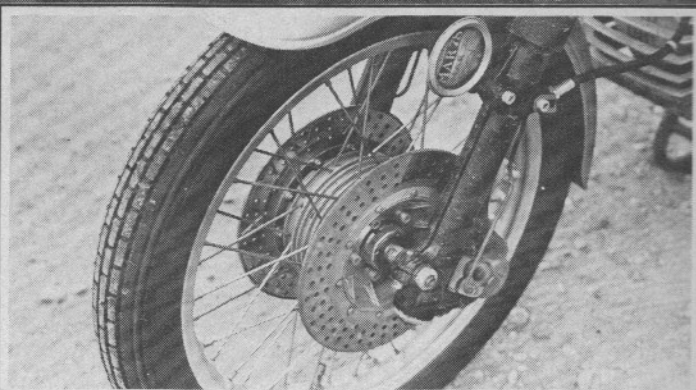
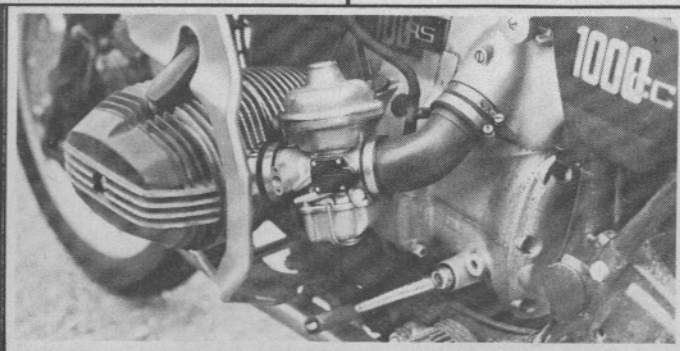




Mid-way through the test the handlebars were repositioned in an attempt to improve riding comfort. The only difference it made was to make the left bar foul the fairing.



The wet-weather braking performance of the twin drilled front discs was better than average.



The oil leak from the left-hand gearbox casing was persistent from 1600 miles onwards.



SUPERTOURER

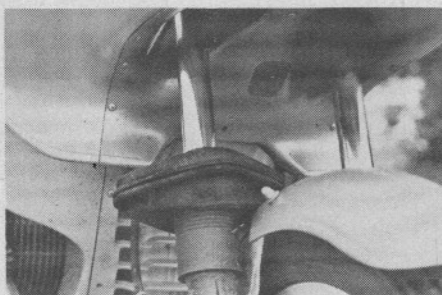
Six months and 10,000 miles with the BMW R100RS

RIGHT from the time one tried to dump me I have regarded all BMW flat twins with a degree of suspicion. The incident happened several years ago, during a press demonstration run in France when the factory launched the then new 900 series. The memory of those handlebar heaving, gut-turning seconds is as vivid now as if it happened yesterday. There were six of us all on brand new 900's blasting down one of those arrow straight, tree lined roads France renowned for. Suddenly the road surface changed from smooth to corrugated tarmac, the corrugations running across the road. Within a split second of the front wheel hitting the ripples the R90 became a bucking, heaving brute. Its handlebars flapped determinedly from stop-to-stop and me, with even more determination, trying to hang on and keep the whole lot from plunging off the road into those very solid looking and very large trees.

That tank slapper was the most vicious I have ever experienced and although it was all over in what must have been seconds it left me a very de-tuned ex-BMW fan a long way behind a fast disappearing bunch of journalists still forcing on and completely oblivious of the drama that had been taking place behind them.

So what has that one isolated incident have to do with a long term test of the R100RS, BMW's current £3,000 flagship. The answer is very little, but I relate it to give some idea of the rather jaundiced frame of mind in which I approached this test. And my first few minutes with the RS did little to endear me to it. Having collected the almost new machine from BM's Chiswick offices I had travelled but half a mile before it came to a shuddering stop in the middle of that mini Brands Hatch otherwise known as the Chiswick roundabout. It had run out of petrol and as both fuel taps were already on reserve there was nothing for it but to push the £6-a-pound BM across two lanes of fast moving traffic. It was during all this that the BM collected its first scar, a three inch long gouge in the pristine silver blue petrol tank paintwork. Apparently the plastic buckle on my riding jacket had caused the damage as I pushed the bike. It turned out to be an early warning that the durability of the BM's finish was less than perfect. By the end of the test paint had flaked from several areas of the fairing and the tank was looking decidedly tatty.

When I collected the RS in late April the plan was to put in 10,000 miles and then return the bike to BMW in September. However, in the space of the first five weeks of ownership the BM had covered nearly 4,000 miles; 2,000 of them long distance commuting between Peterborough and



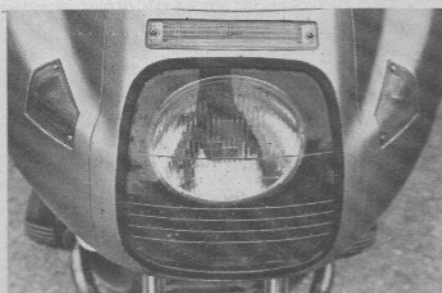
One of the BM's most annoying detail faults was the right hand gaiter which refused to stay in position, in spite of being glued into place on two occasions by BMW.

Bideford in Devon and 1,600 more in four days of concentrated riding in France. In fact, the bike was in almost continuous use, so much so that the first 600 mile service didn't happen until 1,500 miles had been clocked up.

Initial impressions over those first 1,500 miles were mixed. Even at that early stage it had to be admitted that the bike was an exciting one, not in the sense of its out and out performance because it was being held down to 70mph during the running in stage. But, like no other bike I have ever ridden, it would quite happily put 270 miles under its wheels in five and a bit hours of fairly restrained riding and do it with little or no effort on the part of the rider. On the debit side the engine was far from smooth and the gearbox action was as bad as only a BMW's can be. Average fuel consumption over these first 1,500 miles worked out at 49mpg and one pint of oil was needed to top up the sump.

Within hours of its first service the big BM was in France in company with a Dunstall Suzuki GS750 and Kawasaki Z1000. The plan was to put in 1,600 miles of hard and reasonably fast riding to see just how the

The paint on the fairing was easily chipped by flying stones. The halogen headlamp was particularly powerful.



two multis from Japan and the German big twin compared. The first drama came when we discovered the BM's rear tyre had picked up a four inch bolt on the journey down to Ramsgate. By some miracle it had gone clean through the tread and out of the sidewall without touching the tube. This was to be the nearest the BM got to trouble during the whole trip, but unlike the Suzuki or Kawasaki, at the end of the exercise the motor was showing outward signs of the punishment it had taken. Both cylinder head gaskets were oil stained and the rear left-hand gearbox casing was covered in a film of oil.

ENGINE

The motor is far from smooth and its roughness became even more noticeable when the two 40mm Bing carbs went out of synchronisation, which proved to be frequently. In fact, for the last four thousand miles of the test and after the BM had received its 6,000 miles service at Chiswick, the engine developed a definite rough edge from 4,500rpm upwards which was almost certainly due to poor carburation.

Despite its less than perfect balance the big flat twin makes a formidable motorway cruiser knocking along at a steady 100mph on a little over half throttle and with 6,000rpm on the tachometer. Used like that the sensible five gallon tank gives a range of between 180 and 190 miles before going on to reserve. Over the entire test fuel consumption averaged out at 49mpg with a worst of 38mpg and a best of 60mpg.

TRANSMISSION

While the RS was having its 6,000 mile service an R607 was loaned to me by BMW.

Its gearchange, to say nothing of the smoothness of its engine, was so far superior to that of the RS, that there was little comparison between the two. For the first 2,000 miles of the test the RS change was just about acceptable but from that stage on the clunky, noisy change from fourth to third and third to second got steadily worse and in the end was so bad that on a long journey the gearlever's action was heavy enough to bruise the top of my gearchange foot. In short, the BM's gearbox has become even more unpleasant to use than before and it is hardly surprising that the new models now have modified change levers designed to absorb some of the harshness.

CHASSIS

For my money the BM has the finest chassis in the business and it is for this rather than anything else that the machine is still bought in its thousands by the enthusiasts. On the RS the matching of handling, steer-

SUPERTOURER

ing and ride has been done almost to perfection and the end result is a machine that can be ridden really hard all day long without any special skill or bravery being needed. Put quite simply the thing goes where you aim it and is capable of doing about 10mph more than most of its rivals. This is particularly true on wet roads when the light but positive steering combined with the grip of the Metzeler tyres makes the RS one of the safest big bikes currently available. A motorway in torrential rain and high cross winds is in my book the last place to be on a motorcycle but caught out in such conditions on the M5 the BM was stable enough to ride safely at 70mph while other riders sheltered under motorway bridges, their bikes unrideable in the treacherous conditions.

The chassis wasn't without its faults, though. The long travel front forks suffered from poor rebound damping and on very bad road surfaces would knock heavily. The drilled twin disc front brake and hub rear brake needed unusually heavy lever pressure when applied at highish speeds and even then they lacked the stopping power of similar set ups on bikes carrying considerably more weight. One thing to be said in their favour was that they seemed to be little affected by heavy rain and not once during the test did they cause concern by refusing to work when the discs were still cold and wet.

Now as much a part of the RS chassis as its superbly stable suspension is the much criticised fairing. To be truthful I didn't think too much of it at first sight, dismissing it as an expensive gimmick that had merely been stuck on to justify the BM's excessive price. Events proved otherwise and it's the type of worthwhile design development that other manufacturers should be looking at, instead of trying to outdo each other with 90bhp plus road bikes the full potential of which can only be used by the most determined rider and then only during the short time the police will allow him to keep his licence. As the RS proved on more than one occasion, outright power and performance doesn't equal effortless long distance high speed touring. Put up against the 80bhp sprinters on a day's run, the BM would finish hundreds of miles in front, and not only because of the range given by its five gallon fuel tank. Its main advantage is in the protection that the fairing gives to the rider from the strength-sapping effects of sitting unprotected in a 100mph blast of cold air.

So while the fairing isn't perfect it does the job it is supposed to and offers a good compromise between the demands of style and practicality managing not to look cumbersome but at the same time offering excellent protection even in really heavy downpours of rain.

WHAT WENT WRONG

In two words, very little. Which is just as it should be after a mere 10,000 miles on a bike of this price. The rear light bulb failed at 1,200 miles and again at 8,000, probably

through vibration. The head gaskets were blowing oil at 2,500 miles, almost certainly caused by over revving of the engine following missed gearchanges and the gearbox developed a minor oil leak which persisted right through the test.

Cause for most concern was how badly the paintwork and some of the brightwork had deteriorated. Both silencers were showing signs of extensive rusting and the exhaust pipes had blued right back to the silencers. The rear wheel spindle which had never been plated was badly rusted and one of the lower yoke pinch bolts was also rusted because it, too, had not been plated. Flying stones and other road debris had chipped the paint on the front of the fairing and the paint had lifted on the inside of the fairing where it runs round the right hand cylinder. One of the fork leg gaiters was in its usual resting place on top of the mudguard where it had been for most of the test. It resolutely refused to stay glued in position despite two attempts by BMW.

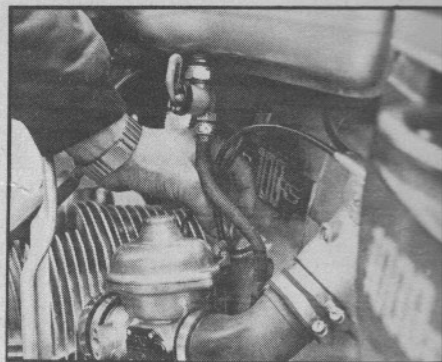
VALUE FOR MONEY

Assuming a full list price purchase, and that is a big assumption in these days of discounting, an RS will part you from £3,088, on the road. If it's bought on credit then the total cost will be considerably more than that. Is it, indeed is any motorcycle, worth that sort of money? In the case of the BM the answer must be no; about £2,250 to £2,400 would be a more realistic price but while the factory can sell more than it is currently possible for it to make the pricing policy is unlikely to change.

The secondhand value of the machine tends to confirm the bike is over-priced. Without telling them who we were we asked six dealers to give us a straight, no part-exchange purchase price on a secondhand, six-month-old RS with 10,000 miles on the clock. The worst offer was £1,900, while the best was £2,250. The average of the five offers we received, one dealer refused even to give a price, was £2,070 which put the average depreciation cost over a six month period at a staggering £929. To be fair about it another six months use and 5000 miles on the clock would probably knock only a further £100 off of the bike's secondhand value, but even so a third of the purchase price lost after a year's use is a high price to pay and BMW have not helped the situation any by introducing a new mag wheeled RS. As three dealers pointed out the new model is bound to have a detrimental offset on the secondhand price of the old model.

Forgetting price for a moment and putting it up against bikes like the Gold Wing, the Z1000, the big Harleys and Moto Guzzis, the RS is still in a class of its own, but time is running out for the flat twin engine which is now showing all the signs of over development and has clearly lost some of its former sweetness.

For my money the XS750 Yamaha is far better value doing nearly everything as well as the RS, but at half the price.



Checking the engine oil level was a dirty and fiddly job.

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Air cooled, push-rod flat twin four stroke. Twin 40mm cv carburetors, wet sump lubrication, single cb and coil ignition, 12V, 240W alternator feeding 28 a-h battery. displacement 980 ccm bore x stroke 94 x 70.6 mm compression ratio 9:1 claimed output 70 hp DIN at 7,250 rpm

TRANSMISSION

Crankshaft mounted single plate dry clutch and five speed gearbox, driving through an enclosed drive shaft with helical drive at bevel gear crown wheel and pinion in rear wheel. primary reduction 1.000 secondary and overall reduction 3.000 or 2.91 option

gearbox ratios: ... 4.40, 2.86, 2.09, 1.67, 1.50 mph/1000 rpm in top 17

CHASSIS

Telescopic forks with 7.9 in travel, rear swing arm with 3 pre-load adjustable dampers and 5 in travel. Twin perforated hydraulic disc brakes at front, s/s drum brake rear.

front tyre Metzeler 3.25 H 19 rear tyre Metzeler 4.00 H 18 wheelbase 57.7 in trail 3.54 in ground clearance 6.5 in seat height 32 in overall length 84 in overall width 29 in dry weight 464 lb test weight 511 lb fuel tank 5.3 gal inc reserve66 gal oil tank 5

PARTS PRICES inc VAT

front mudguard 5 handlebar 11 speedo cable 5.0 cb points 3.50 set of pistons/rings 67.42 exhaust system 180.13 list price 2999.00 delivery (including no. plates, petrol, tax & PDI) 89.43 warranty: 12 months, unlimited mileage, parts and labour.

RUNNING COSTS

	£
FUEL 198 gal (9700 miles at 49mpg) ..	168.00
OIL 8 pints ..	3.12
TAX 8 months ..	14.70
INSURANCE Fully comp., rider over 25, Norwich Union ..	70.00
SERVICE 5000 miles, excluding materials ..	21.00
Oil, Oil filter, CB points ..	9.50
Two rear tyres at £26 each ..	52.00
DEPRECIATION ..	929.00
TOTAL ..	£1267.12
RUNNING COST, PER MILE ..	13.1p