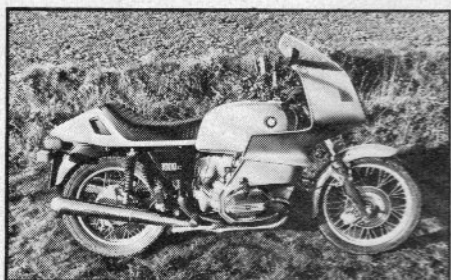


BMW R100RS



JUST OVER two years ago I found myself sitting behind a typewriter asking the then almost unbelievable question, 'Is any motorcycle worth £1,799?'. Well, I'm still here — and it feels like it sometimes — but BMW has raised the price horizon slightly. To £2,899, which is the current price of their R100RS: one litre's worth of Bavarian wallet-masher.

Now I could answer that question — substituting any numbers of suitably astronomical complexion behind the pound sign — by saying yes, if you think so. Which won't mean a great deal to you if you're living on the dole in West Hartlepool, your girl friend's just told you that she's pregnant and the rent is six months in arrears. The sheer obscenity of asking nearly three grand for a mere motorcycle may make you want to go out and pour paint stripper over the first RS you see. Quite clearly it is not worth such an amount, but is it a good motorcycle?

I found out how good the RS is once I'd really started to use it, with the first whiff of open road heading north out of London up the Hendon Way. Sensing that the gent who was trying to block all three lanes with his Cortina was going to need some persuading out of the way, I thumbed the horn switch. Hot blasts of seething malevolence singed the atmosphere from the twin Fiamm horns buried in the depths of the fairing. He moved, and quickly. Excellent: these devices rate Severe Palpitations on Watson's patent Grandmother Frightening Scale.

Yet farther up the road, and about to overtake a lumbering truck at some highly illegal speed, I rediscovered the innate superiority of BMW's perforated twin discs. With ten yards between us the truck lurched into my lane and I prepared to quit this cruel world in a flurry of expensive metal and plastic. In the end I definitely got the impression that the truck driver knew he'd done *something* to make a frantically decelerating motorcycle appear between his cab and the Armco. Real, uh, lifesavers are those brakes.

The rest of my time with the bike was altogether less exciting, even though the weather attempted to make good this deficiency with a mixture of rain, freezing fog, snow and black ice. A 400-mile round trip through this meteorological extravaganza failed to faze the bike and therefore its rider, snug behind that swoopy fairing.

This seven-piece coverall and the engine's revised power characteristics — and not its elevation to 980 cc — are what makes the RS different from the good old, dirt cheap 90S. It's good and it's bad. It protects you right up to

36 bike

your helmet, it definitely improves stability at high speed, it almost looks like £2,899. But it also dictates a tiring riding position, effectively destroys the smooth Bee-Em image by directing large amounts of mechanical noise at the rider, and comes equipped with some rather poor detail features.

The change in the BMW's personality wrought by fitting this wind-tunnel wonder is quite amazing. It looks like — well, I'm not quite sure what it looks like. An out-and-out performance blaster? The Jota kicks sand in its face on both acceleration and top speed. A tourer? Not with a screen as low as this one. Methinks the poor old thing doesn't know what it is supposed to be these days.

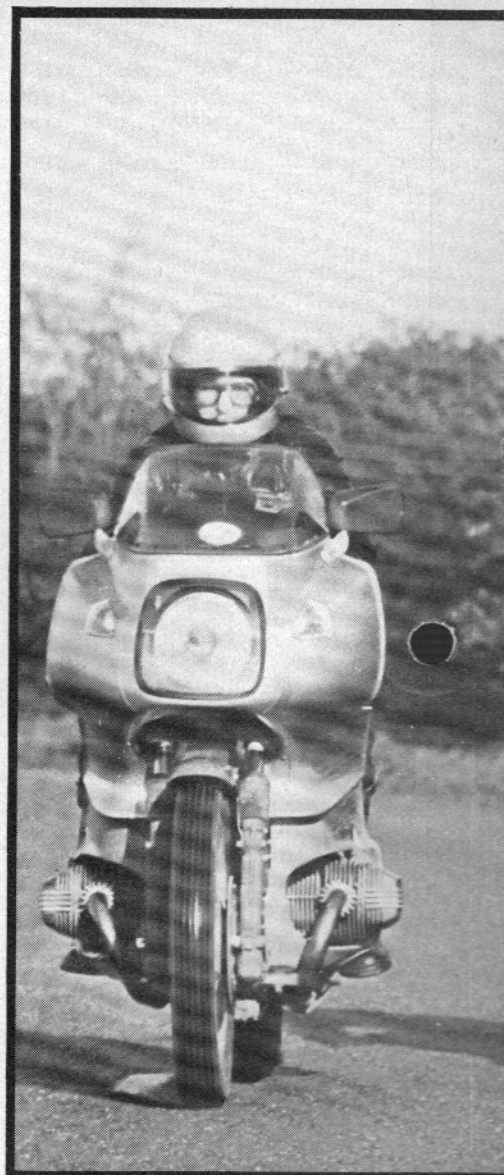
We all found the riding position a trifle strange, with arms thrust forward and down at full stretch by the narrow, swept-back bars that just clear the fairing. After an hour or so, with no wind cushion to lean on, you feel elbows and wrists starting to ache. On a BMW, my life, the motorcycle we said represented the golden mean for riding position — one to fit any shape or size of human being. Could it be that Helmut designed the fairing and left Wolfgang to design a pair of handlebars which wouldn't knock chunks out of it moving from lock to lock? It certainly feels like it.

And that strange standard seat. A real your-place-or-mine passenger perch and if you like large ladies, forget it. Sold without passenger pegs by law in Germany when so equipped, I'd opt for the RS with a dual seat every time because the humped solo saddle just doesn't work as anything. It doesn't provide the comfort and support of a racing seat and it sure ain't companionable.

You know what a BMW sounds like: smoothly purring but for the occasional agonising scrunch of cog on cog. The RS still sounds like that to outsiders, but at anything over 5,000 rpm waves of induction roar and pushrod clatter well up at the rider, reflected by the fairing. Contort yourself enough to get down below the screen and you nearly get your ears blown in. It sounds strained, almost — dare I say it — *agricultural*. Not at all swiftly smooth, effortlessly silent. A timely reminder that this engine design is no technical masterpiece in modern terms, but one which will hardly impress someone who's lashing out with this kind of confetti.

But the detailing was the biggest bringdown. One RS I rode had a loose black plastic seat hump hand-hold, both the bikes I tried had displaced fork slider gaiters, and stone chips were showing black through the Polaris Light Blue of the fairing, which although very securely mounted is tacked together with ugly self-tapping screws. The screen is far from being optically perfect, and now it's even more difficult to top up the engine oil. With fuel lines and two cables in the way it's difficult enough just getting the dipstick clear to check the level. The German Disease rears its ugly head once more: logical, brilliant design relieved by flashes of real stupidity. And I definitely got the impression that constant improvement has given way at times to change for change's sake.

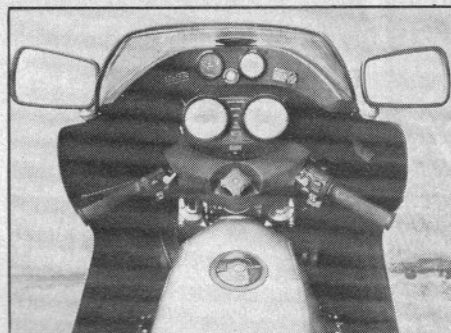
Take the ignition key, whose folding plastic head has now shrunk to such an extent that it's difficult to grasp between ammeter and clock in the cockpit. Or the switchgear modification. The old stuff was a delight to use and welcomed the gloved thumb like a long-lost friend. Joe Lucas-type extensions on the switches are a real regression, making turn-signal operation awkward, even painful. Fairing mounted mirrors are fine, but they do tend to vibrate and I never glimpsed an undistorted image at high speed through those fitted to the RS.



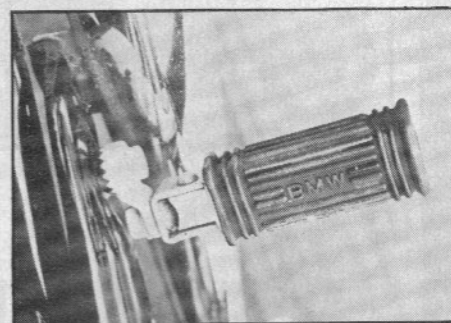
All of which may sound like pathetic carping, but the fact is that BMW set the standard. Other manufacturers to emulate with the R90S in 1973 and in many important areas they are now in danger of falling short of that standard themselves. In claiming to have reached near-perfection with the RS they have set themselves up for deification or crucifixion. Reach a high standard, claim to have surpassed it, and you better deliver.

As I mentioned earlier, revised power characteristics are the obverse of the RS coin. Power is up from 65 to 70 bhp along with the 4 mm increase in bore measurement, and torque is slightly improved. In fact our RS was slower at the top end than the R90S of October '75 — 121 against 126 mph — but felt considerably improved lower down the rev range. Pulling out of slush-covered slow bends it chugged away quite happily at low revs in third and even fourth gears with no transmission snatch. At the same time it slipped effortlessly over the legal limit with rather less than 4,000 rpm on the dial.

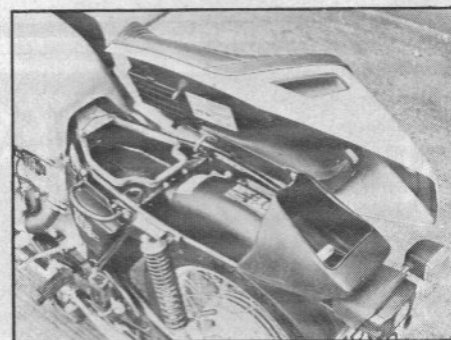
Hardware changes include those heavier, redesigned rocker covers, alloy pushrods and a return to 40 mm constant velocity Bing carbs after a brief flirtation with 38 mm Dell 'Ortos on the R90S. Here and there the motor has been



R100RS boasts the best appointed cockpit in motorcycling.



Like the Jota, the BMW offers adjustable pillion footrests.



Underseat area offers plenty of room for tools and the Bee-Em owner's caviar sarnies.

beefed up internally, and the gearbox clunk has been attacked once more. Personally I find little to choose between German or Italian fuel squirters and never ever managed a clean third-to-second shift. One interesting fuel feature was the fact that I recorded three separate consumption figures of 46.3, 46.5 and 46.7 mpg, a remarkable consistency that is doubtless due to the fairing's reduction of aerodynamic drag. A mere 2 mph difference between prone and sitting up top speeds also speaks for itself. With a cavernous five-gallon-plus tank I nearly always managed to see 200 miles appear on the trip meter before it was time to switch on to reserve.

BMW's have always managed to give you a unique and almost uncanny feeling of complete security and stability at speed. The ability to maintain cruising speeds of over 100 mph for as long as your licence holds out must be one of the machines' most attractive features. The RS even manages to improve on this reputation. Now that the fairing generates so much extra stability — a claimed 20 per cent — the odd squirming and twitching you experience crossing cat's eyes and surface irregularities is ever more disturbing. To the rocklike stability is added a strange feeling of Olympian isolation from the elements,

even the rest of the machine, all engendered by the fairing. At times I felt that it was all too civilised, too sophisticated, but the thought of exposing myself to the full horrors of winter weather soon changed my mind. Following frame stiffening round swinging arm and headstock, only the RS of the new 7 range now sports a steering damper, and I never felt the need to activate this device.

The ride remains supple, firming up on compression now at the front end, still soaking up the bumps at the rear with those five-inch stroke Boge shock absorbers. I hate to think what that sort of movement — albeit superbly controlled — would do to a chain if BMW were stupid enough to employ anything but fuss-free shaft drive.

I've often tried to pin down exactly what it is that makes riding a BMW so enjoyable. You don't go scratching around at great speed, it's just that when you actually look at the speedo it's invariably indicating a figure probably about 20 miles per hour in excess of the speed you thought you were going. As a total package it's usually so consistent and well harmonised in all departments from switchgear to suspension that it makes every bit of the journey a real pleasure in consequence.

Very soon, if you're plutocratically endowed with cash, you'll be able to get the British BMW concessionaires to spray up your RS in some different colour. From April you'll even be able to have one with those incredibly complicated cast wheels. Cost for the spray job around £150, wheels £200.

I suppose what really offends me about the RS isn't the bike itself, but the people who are going to buy it. I just happen to detest their attitude to expensive objects with feelings akin to undiluted loathing. In this case the object happens to be an outstanding motorcycle, but that won't influence their decision to buy.

Because of its price RS buyers will be just like the rich shit who stopped by our one-litre photo session. Yes, he'd got an R90S and a Piper Cherokee and a BMW car, of course. Quite obviously he'd accumulated all these trendy possessions so that he could drop them casually in conversation. Well, what he obviously thought was casually: a mortar attack would've been more subtle. So you better just keep on dreaming up there in West Hartlepool; come the revolution we'll all have BMWs to ride.

Peter Watson
bike 37

ONE LITRE GIANT TEST

Continued from page 42

quality too. Part of the reason is that Laverda swallowed their Roman pride and went to Japan for their switchgear and instruments. Yep, that's why they look the same as those on your Suzuki — the handlebar switch units, speedo and tachometer are made by the very same Nippon Denso company. And they work. The light switches aren't the best you could find (Suzuki owners will know it is possible to hit the wrong switch and kill the lights), but they're vastly better than the average Italian nastiness.

One feature that demonstrates the thoughtfulness of minor design points on the Jota is the centre stand. I know it's not much to get excited over, but the 520 lbs Jota is far easier to roll onto its stand than most 300 lbs 250s. There's none of that embarrassing red-faced struggling and heaving when you park outside the pub. One reason why Laverda seem to achieve a higher quality of finish and equipment than other Italian firms is that they make the majority of parts themselves instead of buying in from component firms. Suspension, brakes, electrics, etc., are from big name outside suppliers, but other hardware is constructed at the factory, or at Laverda's metal foundry subsidiary. It just so happens that this foundry turns out aircraft quality castings for MV helicopters. No wonder that engine looks such a beautiful hunk — a living, fire-breathing piece of sculpture in polished and matt sandcast alloy. The wheels, too, are Laverda's own, made in a special malleable aluminium alloy that bends rather than breaks.

The rest of the bike is tastefully, but conservatively, styled. It would be a pity to detract from the impact of such a beautiful motor anyway. For almost £2,400 you might expect more refinements, like a fairing and shaft drive, maybe. But then drive shafts soak up power and the Jota wouldn't be so fast. Anyway, as I've tried to intimate, BMW-style sophistication isn't Laverda's ballgame. They're out for the fastest thrill on two wheels, full stop.

Yea, Royce was right, this is real rough, tough biking stuff. The Jota is truly a bike fit to perpetuate the tradition of one litre legends like the Vincent Black Shadow.

Bill Haylock



Summary

FROM THIS trio of bikes it would be impossible to pick a winner or a loser. They're all fine, impressive machines, but each in its own and very different way. Each one represents a different facet of the one litre class, and your personal preference will depend not just on the depth of your pocket, but what kind of person you are.

Most popular of the three is bound to be the Z1000, largely because you can buy two for the price of one BMW R100RS. Taking into account the effect of inflation, it represents even better value at £1500 than its smaller and less sophisticated predecessor, the Z1, which cost almost £1100 at its introduction four years ago. Lined up with the stylish BMW and the thoroughbred Jota, it does look a little brash and vulgar, though. But still, why worry about being vulgar when that price brings one litre horsepower into the grasp of your right hand?

The BMW will appeal to those very people who dislike the Kawasaki for its vulgarity. The R100RS may fall short of BMW's tradition of

superlative quality in some respects, but carries more prestige than ever with the impressive new styling. BMW riders always seem to be a special breed of motorcyclist — the wealthy (at nearly £3000 you gotta be) and the more mature who appreciate comfort and refinement. No doubt they will continue buying the new BMW. Not necessarily because it offers the best in the one litre class, but because it is the biggest and most impressive BMW.

The Laverda appeals to a small minority. To those who are old enough to have the money and young enough, in years or in heart, to appreciate a machine that was designed as the ultimate two wheeled projectile. It's a spartan, uncompromising device that was never intended for a mundane workaday existence, but you can't help admiring the single-mindedness that has gone into its conception, to produce the ultimate thoroughbred sportster. Perhaps the Jota is the only bike of the three that sums up what one litre biking has always been about — performance and prestige, in that order.

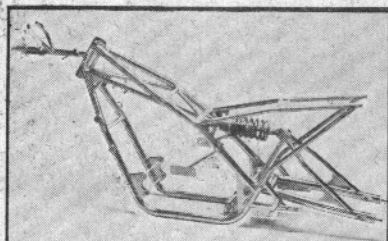
FASTER FRAMES

Continued from page 54

his advice is always given with safety in mind. With such low machines, he believes footrests should be in the conventional position to maintain balance.

He can supply some of the necessary goodies you'll need to make the bike complete, like Arlen Ness rear fenders, seat bases which can be finished as required, Bunt's own springer forks, chromed or unfinished, and CMA cast wheels.

Uncle Bunt's Chop Shop, Frogs Island Sawmills, Brightwell, Oxon (Brightwell 67067).



62 bike

Dixon Racing

IF SHELLING out for a frame kit seems a little, er, drastic, you could do no worse than approach Yoshimura engine goody chief David Dixon about his Z1/900 frame stiffening kits.

For a mere £9.80 he'll supply two extra frame tubes and three gusseting plates. The welding?

Your problem, mate, once you've dismantled the machine enough to ensure nowt gets burned by the welding torch. You attach the small front pipe between the downtubes near the headstock and the other between frame loops derriere the motor. Gusseting braces the top tubes and the other plate mates with the long rear tube you've just fitted. Obviously some re-spraying may be in order after the graft but it is cheap, and, I understand, a well used and successful handling improver on racing Z1s.

Dixon Racing, Farncombe Street, Farncombe, Godalming, Surrey (Godalming 21010).