



Starting back from John O'Groats, Crichton is all smiles; that was before he got lost!

a new road bridge across the Cromarty Firth, cutting out quite a few miles, so I decided to take this route. After more petrol at Inverness, and more admiration for the bike, the journey back to Perth was wild and wet. All the road works had become a sea of mud and my gloves were soaked right through. I began to shiver uncontrollably and a touch of cramp had begun affecting my left leg.

For once, I was grateful that the Gold Wing's range almost forced me to stop every 100 miles for so. When I harp on about too frequent refuelling, I'm not criticising the consumption, which averaged a very good 42.32mpg throughout, but the fuel tank capacity. From "full" on the tank-top mounted gauge, the needle went into the "reserve" portion within 90 miles. Against this, I never actually had to switch the reserve tap on, and I've since learned that the gauge can read "empty" when in fact there's quite a lot of fuel left. For this reason, I'd do away with the gauge altogether and put a clock in its place. This would be much more useful on the type of journey the Wing was built for.

There were plenty of occasions when I really wanted to know the time, but couldn't bother stopping and taking off my gloves to see. I tended to rely on shop and church-mounted timepieces, but there aren't many of those on motorways!

At Perth it started really belting down, so I was forced to stop for a few minutes in the

shelter of a filling station. It remained wet and miserable back across the Forth Bridge and into Edinburgh, when again, thanks to the terrible signposting, I found myself smack in the city centre along Princes Street instead of going around the back roads, as I had managed to do on the way up.

Edinburgh at 4.30pm can be a difficult place to get through, and it seemed ages before I was back on the A1 and heading for Berwick-upon-Tweed. Heavy traffic made this part of the journey a nightmare. It was impossible to see past the spray of lorries to overtake safely, and by the time I reached Berwick I was half drowned.

The Gold Wing had continued to perform faultlessly. The brakes were still good despite the atrocious weather, and the rain hadn't affected the ignition in the slightest.

By now, stopping for fuel really had become a chore. The pound notes and receipts in my pockets were wet through and jumbled together, and as all feeling had long since gone from my hands, it took a long time to remove and replace my soaked gloves.

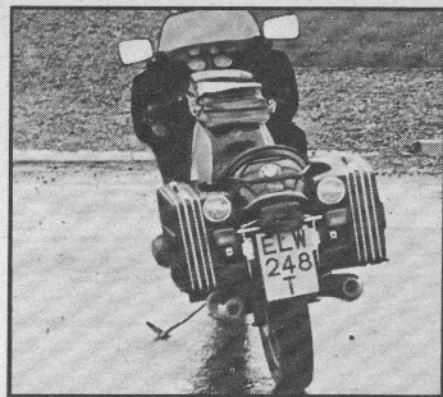
At last, on the long stretch down to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, somewhere near Alnmouth, the weather cleared up, and through Gosforth and Newcastle city centre the roads were dry again. It's all motorway from Newcastle to Darlington, where I spent half an hour with relatives and ate my first real meal of the day.

Just before nightfall, I set off on the final 160-mile leg to Peterborough, straight down the A1 on a fine, dry night.

Instead of getting rougher after such a long journey, the Gold Wing actually seemed to improve on the homeward run. Almost glad to be able to put on a bit of speed again, it boomed out its joyful song as the miles sped by. As darkness fell, the fantastic headlight cut through the murk and again the bike and I were one being, going home at last.

Peterborough was reached at 11pm, and after 1,917.2 miles the motor was purring away on tickover as if it had just come out of the showroom. It had used no oil whatsoever on the journey, nothing had stopped working, nothing had shaken loose and the tyres, which people say wear out after 1,000 miles, were still good; at least nothing deteriorated in the slightest handling-wise.

So, far from being a challenge, the journey had just been shrugged off by the Honda, and it would have been ready to do the same trip all over again. I could have set off without a single spanner, too. And surely



that's what a really good touring machine is all about!

Peter Kelly

Total recorded mileage: 1,917.2

Average mpg: 42.32

Best: 46.00

Worst: 40.00

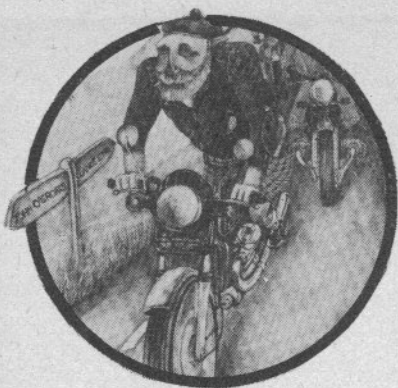
BMW RI00RS

ORIGINALLY the idea for this Land's End to John O'Groats trip was for each member of staff to choose his own bike, route and the amount of time he wanted to take. Of course the plan inevitably became modified. But each of us tackled the marathon differently, and so the data panels are for information and not comparison.

For instance, at the end of the first day, after setting out from Land's End, I covered 473 miles, checked into a hotel in Carlisle, went to the pictures, burnt my mouth out at an Indian restaurant and had eight hours in the Land of Nod. Meanwhile my colleagues, who had all set off at different times anyway, were at various other points north.

Initially, when the idea was revealed, I decided to approach the road test from a touring point of view, taking about three days and going by country roads. A few readers at the Motor Cycle Mechanics Show in London in January had said they would





like to see a few more touring articles anyway.

In choosing a machine, the BMW marque immediately sprang to mind. I thought about the MV Agusta America because of its beautiful sound. But these are no longer in production, and getting hold of one would have, probably been nearly impossible. Whatever I contemplated, my thoughts always funnelled back to BMW. Consider the marque: long range fuel tank, comfort, relatively light weight, good performance and handling, reliable and civilised.

Since I was already beginning to compromise on the original plan, including choice of route, I thought I would go for the 450cc R45 because it is the only one we have not so far tested. BMW staff informed me that the actor Sir Ralph Richardson had the only test model and they were not sure when he would return it. Would I like an R100RS?

There could be only one answer. Even better, BMW agreed to supply one with Krauser panniers. The machine comes complete with a clock, which I regard as almost essential, and furthermore the chances of foul weather were obvious, so the fairing could well be worth its weight in gold, I thought.

As things turned out I don't think I could have fallen in for a better choice. Not everything went as smooth as silk, but the blue and silver road bullet commanded admiration and respect, from myself, other road users and people from all walks of life. I also discovered that people automatically assumed I was a rich man because I rode a BMW. Inquisitors whose curiosity unearthed the truth that it did not actually belong to me had me choking on the admittance.

The advantage of the fairing displayed itself soon after collecting the machine in London. Deciding to ride through London before donning my oversuit and riding boots, I found there was no wind around my ankles and I was quite warm enough in jeans, shirt and anorak. I ended up riding the 80 miles home without stopping.

The low screen threw a lot of windrush noise around my helmet, which I suppose could have been alleviated somewhat by having a closer-fitting visor. I also found too much of my weight resting on my wrists and hands because of the forward riding position. Perhaps a taller rider would not have this problem. At least the first aid kit fitted to the front part of the seat was not the problem I thought it was going to be because I was sitting further back than I normally do on other BMW models. Apparently, for 1980, the first aid kit has been

relocated to the rear of the machine.

In general, I found that the faster I went the more comfortable the BMW became because I was leaning further forward taking some of the weight off my wrists and pulling on the bars to whisk the rather slow-handling flat twin through corners. Extremely high cruising speeds can be retained thanks to the fairing, because the rider does not have to fight against wind pressure. In fact the BMW offers too much encouragement to go fast. Its true environment is a country without speed limits.

For this test, a speed-restricting factor did enter the picture. Setting out for Land's End on Monday, May 14 I found that the engine would cut out on one cylinder after any length of time at high cruising speeds. It was a warm day and I suspected spark plug overheating.

The motor would still pull between 70 and 80mph on one cylinder, but obviously the problem had to be tackled. Fitting a pair of plugs one grade harder was the obvious step. I tried so many garages without success that in the end I gave up. I did try recommended grade Champion and NGK alternatives to the Bosch plugs fitted. They made no difference. But so long as 70mph was never exceeded the problem did not arise. I emptied the carburettor float bowls to see if impurities in the fuel could be the culprit, but they were clean.

In terms of absolute performance, I knew the engine would pull 125mph indicated and even with the panniers nudge over 120mph. The handbook recommends 82mph as maximum with the panniers fitted. Sometimes the machine will start to weave slightly over 110mph, but at 80mph there is absolutely no problem with the panniers.

One drawback with the panniers fitted is that the helmet lock on the left side of the seat cannot be used. To lift the seat, the right pannier has to be taken off. The pannier unlocks with the press of a button so that inconvenience is minimal. And of course the panniers lock on to the bike as well as having locking lids. They also look as though they are an integral part of the machine.

After spending Monday night at a Penzance hotel, the next day was equally sunny. I rode the short distance from Penzance to Land's End, then up to Carlisle, wearing only a shirt and two-piece leather suit. During the middle of the day I was too hot. In these sort of conditions the fairing does tend to retain too much heat.

Wednesday was completely the opposite. My breath hung in the atmosphere as I stepped out into rain which persisted all day. At one fuel station, as I pulled out my flask of coffee the cash desk attendant took pity on me and called out over the intercom to come inside and warm myself by the fire.

Thank goodness for that fairing under these conditions. It allowed me to keep up an unbelievably high average speed while I was on the road. It's the best fairing for protection and looks I have come across.

Up front, the headlight is on all the time. It cuts out only when the electric starter is used. The engine requires full choke to light up and then half choke almost immediately while it warms up. Drive engagement is still very direct, although the torsion damper has made gear-changing much sweeter.

Range from the 5.3 gal tank is well over 200 miles. The furthest I went between stops was 230 miles. On that particular tankful it



Trial by Robinson: the CX500 "in the dock"

averaged 52.4mpg. When I filled it, only 4.37 gallons were required meaning that there was still almost a gallon in reserve.

Wednesday's ride of 394 miles ended at 5.10pm, or so I thought, at John O'Groats House Hotel. Just after midnight I had to go out on a rescue mission to fetch Dave Walker, whose Ducati had run out of petrol seven miles down the road.

It was still raining on Thursday when I ferried Dave back to tank up his bike. We swapped machines for a while and succeeded in taking a wrong turn along a single-track road. The Ducati displayed much tauter handling and more instantaneous braking response, though the riding position was Sunday afternoon cafe racer.

In contrast, the BMW felt as though it had a bolt upright riding position.

Where the Ducati tracked through rough patches and the odd mound of gravel without flinching, the BMW was a lot more sensitive and tended to slide off. The BMW was also prone to wiggling slightly over white lines. Yet it felt much more civilised and I was glad to be back on board even though the hard-seated Ducati had been a barrel of fun.

The brakes on the BMW required a great deal of pressure if they were needed in a hurry. This was especially the case two-up. The front brake lever moved along only half of its possible travel, reducing the degree of leverage it could have had. Tapered grips on the bars gave the rider a choice of handlebar diameter to suit hand size.

Dave and I kept up some pretty fleet road speeds in the wet before going our own separate ways on the homeward journey. At two minutes to midnight I called a halt to my riding for that day because my neck was aching quite a bit and some of my clothes were still wet, mostly thanks to the ride on the Ducati.

Friday was rain, showers and then sunshine as I arrived home. The bike had used a pint and a half of oil and the centre of the rear tyre had worn down by one sixteenth of an inch. The rear shoulders were worn much less than that, and wear on the front cover was negligible. Two bolts had dropped out of the fairing, the absence of one allowing the left lower to clatter against the

MOTOR CYCLE MECHANICS

frame when the machine was throbbing at low revs.

I was disappointed not to have been able to try a harder grade of plug just to see if my suspicions that plug overheating was the cause for the occasional temporary loss of cylinder.

If I'm lucky, perhaps I'll get to ride the £3,200 RS again and find out for sure!

Brian Crichton

Recorded mileage	1,896
Fuel consumption:	
average	48.7mpg
best	55.7mpg
worst	42.4mpg

