

ROAD TEST

To Ireland with a BMW R100S

THE TRIP had been planned for some time. Only the choice of motorcycle remained in doubt. We finally decided on the BMW R100S because its immediate predecessor, the R90S, was regarded by many as the ultimate sports tourer. We wanted to see how this latest version compares, and how it measures up to its awesome price tag of £2,549. The best way to evaluate a touring machine is to take it on a tour. Many magazines, particularly some of the American monthlies, place all the emphasis on performance over the standing-start quarter-mile or on lap times around some racing circuit. These aspects are of only secondary importance to the touring rider. What really matters to him is how the machine performs over long distances out on the road.

This philosophy was largely to blame for my setting out on a round trip of 1,400 miles over 13 days through that freezing Christmas period. The destination was Ireland. Testing BeeEmms on the Continent is becoming a trifle *passé* these days.

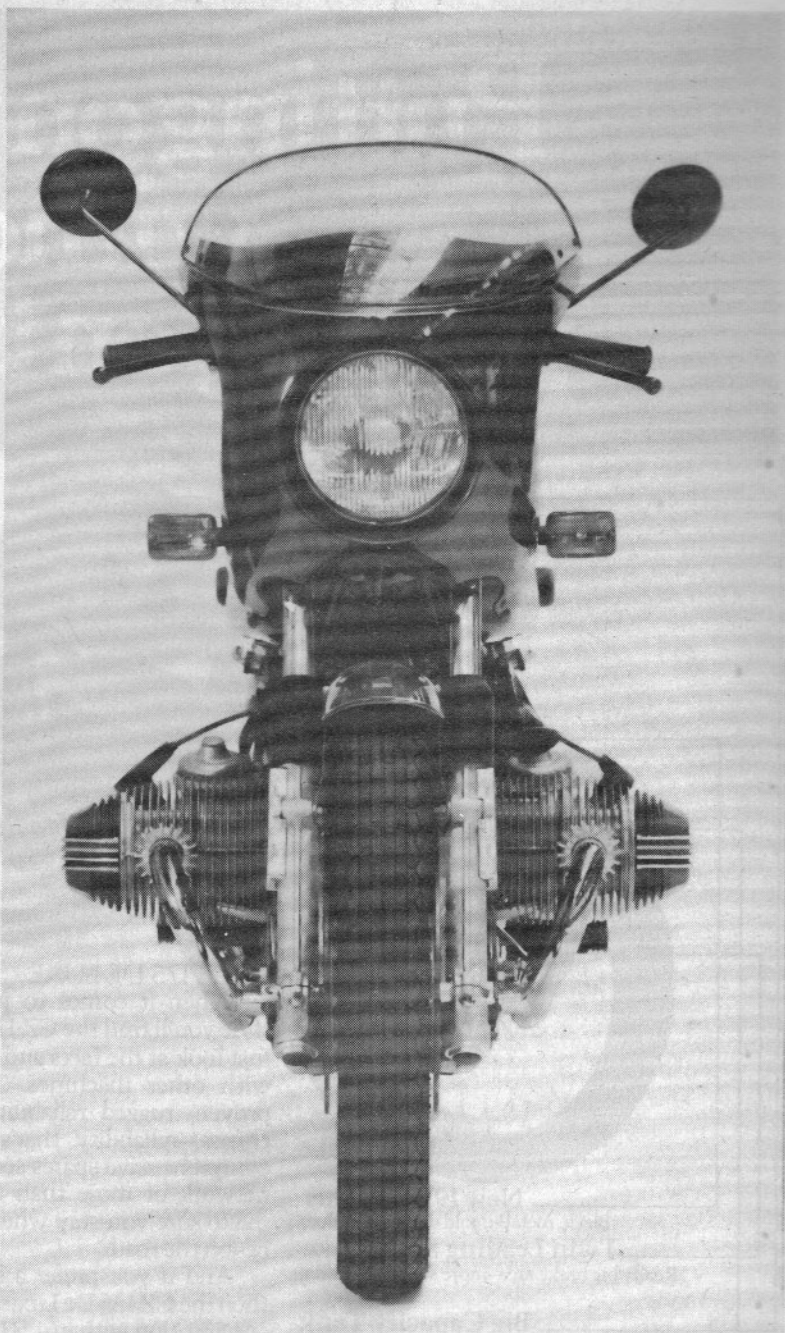
Ireland is a splendid motorcycling country with a variety of well-surfaced roads, beautiful vistas and precious little traffic compared to Britain. Also, speed testing could be carried out with less danger to life and licence.

And so it was that one chilly mid-December morn saw me bump-starting the 980 cc BMW down a hill in south-east London. Bump-starting a new BeeEmm? Well, the first R100S reached us in such a poor state of tune and in such poor general condition that cold-morning starts were tough and go (or rather, touch the button and don't go).

BMW have seen fit to remove the kickstarter from their machines; it is now offered as an optional extra in cold climates. This utter reliance on the electric starter is foolish, because even when warm the engine hesitates slightly before firing. The starter transmission ratio has been increased on all the /7 series, but if the points and ignition timing are not spot on this is to no avail. A kickstarter would be much appreciated as a standby.

Loaded down with a tank bag and well-packed Krauser panniers, and with the rider

Unmistakable view of the BMW... of any BMW. The fairing on the R100S is as for the discontinued 90S—less all-enveloping than that on the top-of-the-range thousand



swathed in endless layers of clothing, it was necessary to wake a neighbour to help push the bike down the hill.

An inauspicious start, but once under way the BMW soon redeemed itself. It took an hour to trickle through London's rush-hour traffic and reach the M1, but the R100S handled the maze of cars, taxis, buses and suicidal pedestrians with consummate ease.

Even loaded heavily with baggage the machine could be manoeuvred through heavy traffic with less difficulty than many smaller bikes. The R90S had a reputation for being slightly overgeared for easy town trickling, but the greater spread of torque offered by boring out the engine to 980 cc overcomes this and actually makes the R100S eminently suitable for commuting.

The delay in starting meant pressing on a bit to catch the ferry at Holyhead. Riding

not too far behind a blue Bentley Corniche engendered a sense of relative security based on the probably erroneous assumption that if he could get away with bending the speed limit beyond all recognition, so could I. In any case the BMW cruised comfortably at 100 m.p.h. for over an hour, a feat as effortless for the rider as it was for the engine.

Never before have I been able to maintain that sort of speed for any length of time without undue strain on man and machine. The small cockpit fairing contributed greatly towards easing fatigue by taking the force of the wind off the chest and therefore off the arms. The only real manifestation of speed other than the position of the speedometer needle was the constant pressure of the full-face helmet's chin protector against the rider's lips. Mechanical and exhaust noises were inaudible.

Average fuel consumption for the test was 46 mpg—very close to factory figures

and were quiet at town speeds.

The comfort for which BMWs are renowned is still there on the R100S. The short, narrow and low handlebars are well suited to low-speed pottering and to fast cruising. The seat seems quite hard initially but this firmness means better support and greater comfort as the miles roll by.

The narrowness of the tank at the rear, and indeed the slim proportions of the whole machine barring the cylinders, puts the rider's legs comfortably close together. The footrests could stand being placed two inches farther back for my taste, but this applies to virtually every motorcycle in production today. Anyway the rests are already too close to the adjustable pillion footrests, and moving them back would only compound the problem.

Handling and stability at this sort of speed was good, but on sweeping motorway bends a nasty weaving set in at 105 mph. This I immediately blamed on the 35-litre Krauser panniers, which are not recommended for speeds above 85 mph. Even fully loaded they caused no problems up to 100 mph.

The panniers themselves cost in the region of £120. At this price one would expect perfection, but the well-used units fitted

to the test bike leaked badly in heavy rain. The suitcase-style internal straps had rotted with constant wetting.

On the credit side the panniers looked an integral part of the machine, they would take a full-face helmet, could be locked in place and were quickly detachable. When the panniers were removed from the machine the matt black brackets blended well and were not obtrusive. However at the price the panniers should be watertight.

Once off the motorway and into Wales on the A5 the temperature dropped noticeably and the fields were covered in snow. Having learned to my cost that reserve was good for only 15 miles I pulled in for petrol as soon as the main tank ran dry. The fast trip up the motorway had returned 33 mpg, which I consider acceptable at that speed.

Average fuel consumption for the test was 46 mpg, with a best figure of 52 mpg—impressively close to the factory's claimed average of 51 mpg. The 5½ gallon tank gives a range of about 240 miles. The R100S is quite economical compared to some of its contemporaries, and this sort of consumption is reasonable considering the performance available. Our average figure included commuting, touring, sporty riding through

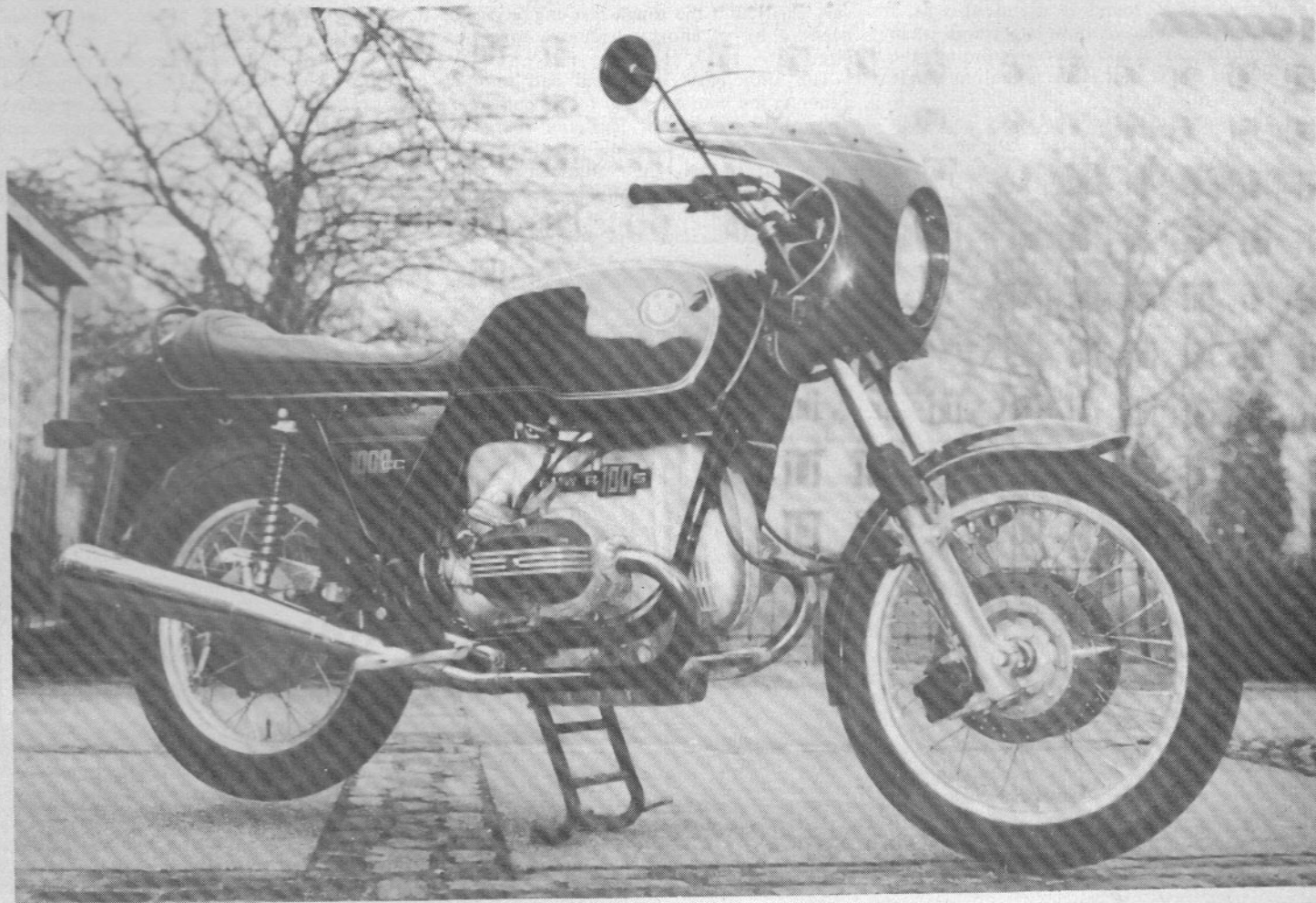
mountain roads, and acceleration and top speed testing.

Never have I ridden along the A5 without meeting roadworks, and this time was no exception. The delays made me even more anxious to catch the ferry on time, and this was compounded by the snow which had started to fall lightly but before long it was coming down steadily.

The little nose fairing on the R100S tends to direct spray from the road right at the rider's face, and my visor needed frequent cleaning. Visibility became a problem: polycarbonate visors have their limitations.

Despite its heavy load the BeeEmm handled the severe bends of Snowdonia with ease. The twin disc brakes were tremendous, transmitting more feel to the rider than any brakes I have tried before or since. The dog-legged clutch and brake levers made operation even easier. Braking performance in the dry was quite incredible and more than adequate, as it was from high speed in the wet.

But braking from low speeds in the wet suffered that awful delay common to all stainless steel discs. The much-vaunted drilled holes had negligible effect in these conditions. This is another fault common to most modern machines, and although the





Contrast with the picture on the previous page . . . the travel-stained BMW in Ireland

rider can make allowance for it this is really not good enough. The back brake did its job well.

The electric clock fitted inside the fairing is ideal for pacing yourself when catching a ferry, and I found it useful also as a constant reminder of how late I was when commuting to work. Since returning the R100S to BMW that clock is the one single feature I miss most.

The snow gave way to sleet and then torrential rain. I reached Holyhead six hours after leaving home, or five hours from the start of the M1—about my par for the 270-mile trip. The Sealink ferry was of course delayed, so all the effort in reaching the ferryport on time was in vain.

The BMW attracted a lot of attention in Ireland, especially in Dublin. Apparently only one 1,000 cc BMW had been bought in the country and the owner had written it off four days later!

After its journey through the snow and ice of a Welsh winter the machine was filthy, encrusted in salt and grime. It

obviously had not been cleaned in a long time, either, because a whole tin of Gunk was needed to restore its former glory. The machine is not hard to clean, and the chrome and paintwork come up like new very easily. But the rough-cast engine casing needs a lot of effort to remove ingrained dirt.

The alloy parts in general had suffered although the bike was only four months old. The wheel rims, fork legs and rear hub especially needed careful attention. The finish was generally good, although the gold pinstripping was a bit shaky in places. Rust was evident at the silencer ends and on the chromed balance pipe in front of the engine.

What the R100S lacked in years it made up for in miles. Ours had 5,400 on the odometer when we collected it, and never have I seen a machine so abused and neglected in such a short space of time. Some people reckon that 6,000 miles in the none-too-gentle hands of the Press equates to perhaps 100,000 in the hands of one owner. This

must be taken into account in considering our comments on the test machine.

When we laid our hands on the BMW it had the following faults: almost bald rear tyre; broken right-hand fairing mounting; slightly bent handlebars; wrong points gap; incorrect ignition timing; incorrect carburation; leaky right-hand front fork seal; oil seepage from both cylinder bases.

In the interests of safety and a fairer ride I booked the machine in for a service and tyre change with Ireland's friendly and enthusiastic BMW sales and service agent, Paddy Maddock. In the meantime the machine had to be bump-started twice more from cold.

After a service and fitting a new Continental tyre we found the fork crown locknut unscrewing itself at tickover in a petrol station forecourt! Back at BMW service shop Mr. Maddock torqued down the fork crown nut and locknut, and I felt a little safer.

The Continental tyres could not be faulted, wet roads or dry. If the rear cover lasted 5,500 odd miles in road tester's hands the owner should be able to improve on this figure considerably.

The engine ran faultlessly throughout the rest of the test. Over the 1,400 miles it used just over one point of oil; some of this is accounted for by the oil weeps from the cylinder bases, the rest must be accounted for in part by abuse early in the machine's life. The leaks from the cylinders may stem from not torquing down the heads and barrels at the first service. On all the /7 models new O-rings around the cylinder base are supposed to prevent any leaks.

Up on the switchback roads of the Dublin and Wicklow mountains the BeeEmm handled extremely well for a softly-sprung tourer. The only item to ground on a bumpy bend was the foot of the sidestand.

On a 400-mile trip to Roundstone on the west coast and back through Birr, the R100S ran perfectly despite non-stop torrential rain. After 400 miles in the saddle in those conditions I was still comfortable apart from being soaked to the skin. High daily average mileages should be second nature to this machine.

The return journey to England was undertaken two-up with an awful lot of luggage in sub-zero temperatures before sunrise, and it became only a little warmer later in the day. The M6 was covered in snow and ice

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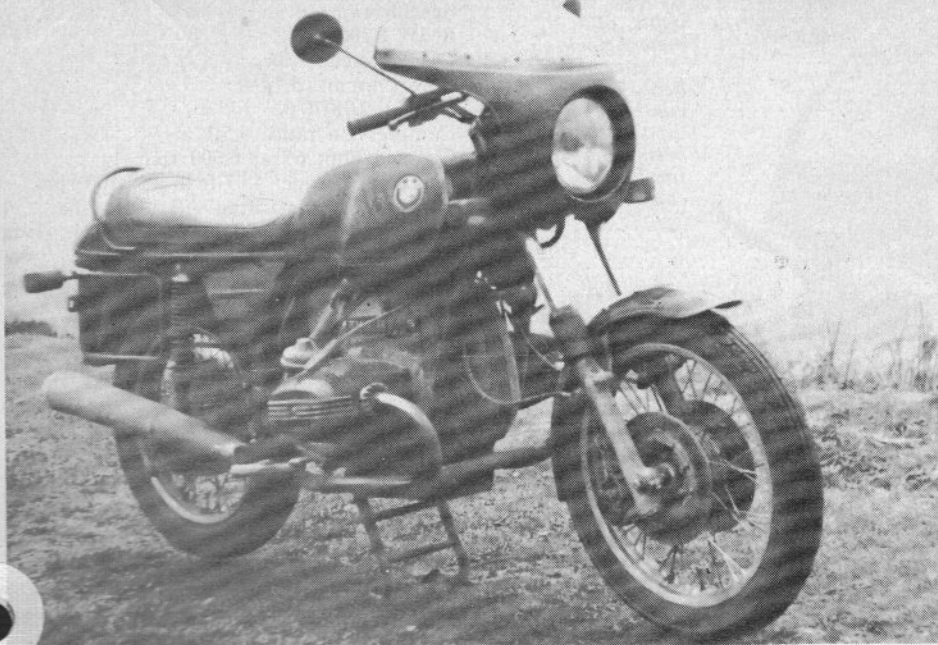


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in the fast lane, and the service areas were giant skating rinks. The BMW handled all this without complaint, and even on the twisty, snow- and ice-covered lanes in Hertfordshire I could feel the tyres going sideways but the machine is so well balanced we never felt too insecure.

Lights and switchgear are the standard

by which all others should be judged. The 65/60W headlight Halogen was superb, but I would have liked a little more depth of penetration from main beam. The horn was excellent. The indicators were bright enough to be seen in sunlight.

Switches were easy to operate, and despite what you might read elsewhere the ver-

tical right-side indicator switch is the best of its kind apart from Yamaha's self-cancelling system. However the left-side vertical dip switch needed too much pressure from the thumb to move back to main beam: after a while it really hurt.

The clock we have already praised. The matching voltmeter is an essential fitting on a machine which relies solely on battery power to start the engine. Speedometer accuracy was good with an indicated 60 mph being an actual 61 mph.

On returning the machine BMW kindly loaned us another R100S for comparison. The first one had been thrown up the road on both sides; the second had not. Both were the same age but the second had done only 2,500 miles in the same time. So it was fair to assume that the second machine had led a less harsh life and was more representative of the breed.

Starting on the second bike was easier and more certain. The switches were less sticky. Engine noise, although minimal on the first machine, was even quieter on the second. Not a smear of oil was in evidence around the cylinder base, but the right-hand front fork seal leaked oil badly. There is no reason other than fashion why the two sportier BMWs should not be fitted with the fork gaiters worn by the R60/7, R75/7 and R100/7.

Both machines we tried shared a curious fault: with the petrol taps switched off a steady trickle of fuel still issued forth, making tank removal for maintenance impractical.

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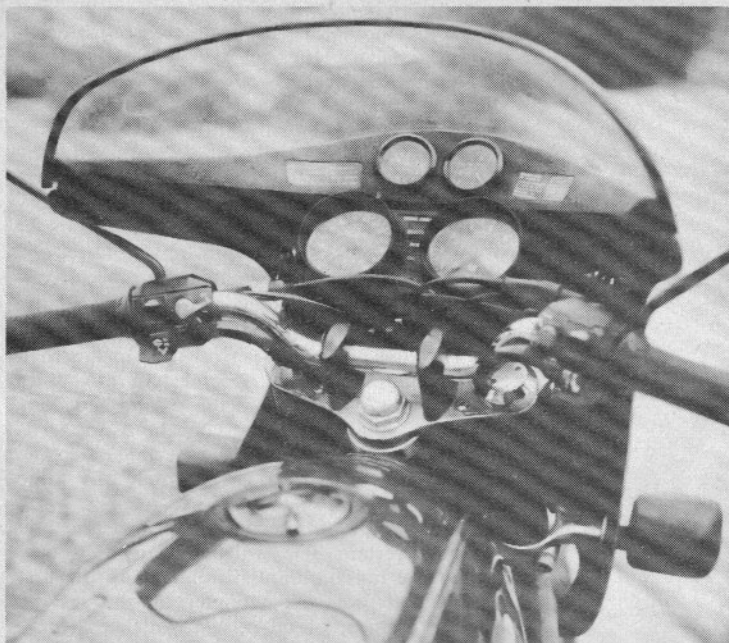
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Cockpit of the R100S: "idiot" lights, rev-meter, clock ... everything's here. Winker controls and dip-switch have been modified for further convenience

Specification BMW R100S

Displacement: 980cc.
Bore (in/mm): 3.7/94.
Stroke: 2.78/70.6.
Compression ratio: 9.5:1.
Claimed bhp: 65 at 6,600 rpm.
Maximum torque: 55.7 ft lb at 5,500 rpm.
Carburetors: Two Bing V94, 40mm dia.
Gear ratios: 1st, 4.4:1; 2nd, 2.86:1; 3rd, 2.09:1; 4th, 1.67:1; 5th, 1.50:1.
Front fork travel: 7.87in.
Rear wheel travel: 4.92in.
Ignition: battery and coil.
Battery: 12V 28 amp hour.
Alternator output: 24W.
Fuel capacity: 5.28 gallons.
Wheelbase: 58in.
Ground clearance: 6in.
Seat height: 32in.
Weight: 440 lb dry, 485 lb wet.
Price: 2,549.

While we saw 115 mph on the first R100S, the second (supposedly in mint condition to make up for the first) could manage only 105 mph. This figure remained consistent whether the rider sat upright or lay prone on the tank. The engine seemed to have trouble breathing and would not pull 6,000 rpm in fourth or fifth gears; the red line begins at 7,000.

The second machine was not fitted with panniers. Wheel alignment was as accurate as the BMW people could get it, and tyre pressures were correct. Yet the bike went into a weave in a straight line at speeds over 90 mph. This weave never threatened to throw the rider, nor did it get any worse. It was more the sort of instability one associates with a light front end and a short wheelbase on a smaller machine.

Now we know that test bikes have to be taken as representative of what you can buy in the shops. But we also know that all BMWs do not share the same faults as our brace of R100Ss. The problem with the first machine can be blamed on abuse and insufficient maintenance.

The BMW concessionaires tell us that fitting a steering damper to the R100S would cure the weave experienced with the second machine. This damper is an optional extra on all but the R100S where it is a standard fitting. The frames on the /7 series are said to have been strengthened, obviating the need for a damper. If it takes a damper to cure that weave, be damned sure you get one thrown in as part of the purchase price.

Neither test bike came with a tool kit, but by all accounts an owner can expect to find the usual impressive BMW tool roll with puncture repair outfit and tyre pump under the hinged lockable dualseat.

Modifications to the five-speed gearbox on the /7 models are said to have made the gearchange smoother than ever. But it is still a bit notchy and rarely fails to clunk in the lower ratios. The single-disc dry clutch with diaphragm spring gave a relatively heavy action at the lever. But we grew used to both these characteristics and neither should

be the least bit off-putting to the prospective buyer. More likely to be off-putting is the price.

Is the R100S really worth £2,549? We think not. Enthusiasts who have made up their minds that they want nothing else may disagree. It is indeed a fine motorcycle. But there is a great opportunity cost in buying an R100S. For almost £1,000 less you could buy a Honda Gold Wing which would fill the bill as a tourer admirably for the majority of riders. The extra cash would more than pay for two good touring holidays. Even those riders who appreciate the finer handling and considerably lighter weight of the BMW (a highly commendable 4440 lb dry) will wonder if those qualities are worth an extra £1,000.



Narrow Irish road stretching away into Irish mist ... invitation for quiet, effortless motorcycling the BMW way

Shaft drive and reliability must be two of the main attractions of a BeeEmm for the touring motorcyclist. The Gold Wing has both. The new Yamaha 750 has both, too, and costs rather less. Even taking BMW's longer service intervals (5,000 miles) and greater fuel economy into account, it would be many years before the price differential narrowed sufficiently to make the proposition more attractive.

For the rider who yearns for a BMW we think the R75/7 might prove more than adequate. On paper its performance and specification differ little from the R100S: out on the road the R75/6 we tried last year endeared itself as the sweetest motorcycle this writer had ever ridden. And at £2,099 its price approaches the level ordinary mortals might afford.

P.R.