



The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

The more things change, the more they stay the same. And Dave Hamill's getting bored.

A BMW is a BMW is a BMW. The bike industry may have its ups and downs, its foibles and follies and its slavishly followed trends, but somehow the classic boxer twins from Munich steam majestically on their way; essentially unchanged in God knows how many years, but staying head and shoulders above the rest. Depending on which way you look at it, they're either nirvana on two wheels or dinosaurs; living fossils from a bygone era which have somehow lingered on into the latter half of the twentieth century, to confound the pundits who think that if it ain't got umpteen cylinders, it ain't no bike.

Fossils or not, BMWs have the sort of charisma and reputation that most other manufacturers can only dream of. Their reliability is a matter of legend, as is their superlative finish and rock steady handling characteristics. Despite these glowing attributes though, there must be one question hanging ominously over BMW's headquarters like some latter day sword of Damocles. What next?

BMW's flat twin must surely have reached the end of the line in its present configuration. Oh sure, people have been saying that for more years than I'd care to remember, but with the advent of the current thousands, the high water mark was reached when there just wasn't any more meat left on the cylinder walls to shave off, and every last ounce of power had been squeezed from what was, after all, a venerable concept in engine design.

Not that this atmosphere of *fin du siècle* is showing any signs of halting BMW's inexorably Germanic march towards perfection. At first sight a new Bee-em tends to look like just about every other Bee-em that's gone before it, but get a bit closer and you can generally spot a whole host of cunning improvements, rationalisations and sensible modifications lurking under that blandly uniform exterior. Yesiree, BMW sure seem to keep an ear close to the ground when it comes to assessing con-

sumer reaction to their product, and you can bet that this year's niggling flaw will be next year's smoothly efficient piece of perfection.

So it is with the R80/7, son of the now sadly deceased R75/7, which was regarded in many quarters as the best goddamned bike in the whole wide world. Nothing earth shattering here; none of the showbiz sensationalism of big brother R100/RS. Just a few loose ends tidied here and there, and 50 more cc's prised out of the engine in a bike that seems almost to be marking time for its successor.

Why an 800? Well, it seems to me that BMW's marketing department might have to answer for that one, because the move upward from 750ccs neatly fills a gap in the existing model range. On the one hand, there's a whole battery of big, powerful thousands; very desirable, very expensive. On the other there's the 600cc 60/7, the Cinderella of the range, and a hard bike to sell when there's a 750 costing only marginally more. If you were the man who makes the decisions within BMW's corporate hierarchy, what would you do? Easy, bring out an 800 and kill two birds with one stone.

Like I said, don't expect radical changes from the R80, just small, but nevertheless significant improvements. Chief among these is what BMW, with uncharacteristic pretentiousness, call Kinematic shifting. I won't crack the by now well worn joke about thinking that the word "kinematic" has something to do with the cinema, but it does seem a bit of an overblown way to describe what seems suspiciously like a good old rearset mechanism. It works like this (he said, frantically ploughing through BMW's copious and beautifully presented press literature). The gear pedal is pivoted on the left footrest, connected to the gearbox via a short balljointed rod and sheathed, if you'll excuse the word, in a neat, all-enclosing rubber gaiter.

TESTING BMW's LATEST



The purpose of all this technology is to overcome the notorious clunks and graunches which have been synonymous with Bee-em gear shifting up till now. Owners of previous models will know all about this phenomenon which is rather out of character with the BMW image, to say the least. Actually, the new mechanism works extremely well, the short travel pedal giving crisp, precise gearchanging at the expense of a very occasional false neutral. Sure, it still clunks, but at least now you won't get heads turning in the street every time you change up.

What will make heads turn, is another of Bee-em's '78 innovations, an audible turn signal indicator. Got in Himmel, zis Chermans, zey haff der senses taken leave off! I mean, a bleeper's bad enough but when, for unfathomable reasons, the thing cuts out when you pull the clutch in or hit neutral, it gets cringingly embarrassing. There you are, sailing through rush hour traffic, changing up and down to your heart's content on your super-silent kinematoshift, when you feel the need to indicate. What follows goes something like "bleep bleep bl eep bleep bl ... bleep". Certainly made me feel a right gonzo, and in the unlikely event of my ever acquiring a BMW, 'bout the first thing I'd do when I took delivery would be to take a pair of wirecutters and silence that dastardly bleep for ever.

Up at the instrument panel, even more changes have taken place. Especially welcome was the electronic tachometer, which was accurate enough to set your watch by, if you're foolhardy enough to set your watches by tachometers, and free of the ineffectual seesawing motion which many mechanically driven units seem annoyingly prone to. To prevent the speedo behaving in precisely that manner, a damped needle is incorporated, and both instruments have spiffy new green scales with butch little white needles. Rest of the instrumentation and switchgear are as before, which is fine by me because they simply don't come better, even on Japanese bikes.

A couple of other '78 innovations I can't get quite as enthusiastic about are the first aid compartment built into the seat front and what BMW call an impact plate, which covers the cables and other gubbins in the central handlebar area. OK, I'm the first to concede that carrying a first aid kit is a great, sensible, idea. Trouble is that to fit it in, BMW have had to cut down on seat padding, turning one of the best bum perches around into something that'll make your pelvis want to declare UDI after a 100 miles. In a bike that's designed as a mile-eating tourer, this is a bit naughty.

The uh, impact plate is another good idea that falls flat on its face because it hasn't been handled

very well. It's made in structural foam, complete with press-out panels to hold extra instruments, ice making machines, colour televisions and all the other little extras that put Bee-em owners a cut above the rest.

So what's been going on in the engine department? With displacement up from 745 to 797ccs, you'd expect at least a couple of extra ponies to join the old 750's 57 at 6400rpm. Well you'd be wrong, because BMW only claim 55bhp at 7000rpm. Strange. This is more than compensated for by an increase of torque output from 43.1 lb/ft at 5000 to 46.3 at 5500. This might be why the bike's power delivery is as smooth and constant as big brother's, while in drag starts, it consistently beat the R100S off the line. While I'm speculating, I'd hazard a guess that the 80's new, flat-topped Bing CV carbs might be responsible for the decidedly revvy nature of the engine. The needle went up the dial without any sign of hesitation, in a most un-Bee-em like manner, and there always seemed to be stacks of acceleration available whenever I needed it.

On the track, the 80 showed itself to be something of a wolf in sheep's clothing and for a touring bike, it shows up well against some of its supposedly more sporty contemporaries. Revving hard and taking full advantage of the redesigned gearchange, it flicked through most bends with hardly any effort; although really low speed corners induced a slight twitch from the back end. Come to that, it wasn't as happy on white lines, London potholes and the other obstacles that the Ministry of Transport sees fit to live up biker's lives with. Not that the twitching was anything more than a minor irritation; the 80 stuck to its line tenaciously, proving once more the basic soundness of the BMW cradle frame and long-travel suspension.

BMW list top speeds as 110mph with the rider upright, and 113mph prone. Hmmm... personally I never even managed to see the ton, and I think you'd need a very long straight to crawl up to anywhere near 110. This showed up especially against the R100S, the fastest bike in the range, which left the 80 standing above 60mph. Still, if it loses out on top end, the 80 has enough mid-range power to keep all but the most throttle-happy biker happy.

Thanks to the vagaries of international hi-finance, an R80/7 will set you back in the region of £1899, which puts it squarely in the middle of the one-litre Japanese superbike market. Is it worth buying 800 sober ccs of Bayerische Motoren Werke's pride and joy, as opposed to 1000 or more ccs of flashy Japanese iron? That, dear reader, is up to you, but for your money you can count on superlative finish, a long, trouble free running life and more than enough poke for all but a very few situations.



BMW R80/7 £1899

PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed - 106mph
Standing Quarter Mile - 14.2secs
Fuel Consumption - Hard Riding - 38.7mpg
- Cruising - 49mpg
Best Full-Tank Range - 245 miles

ENGINE

Type - horizontally-opposed air-cooled four-stroke twin, overhead valve
Displacement - 797.5cc
Power - 55bhp at 7000rpm
Torque - 45lb/ft
Bore & Stroke - 84.8 x 70.6mm
Compression Ratio - 9.2:1
Induction - two 32mm Bing constant vacuum carburetors
Exhaust - two-into-two with balance pipe
Oil System - wet sump
Ignition - battery and coil

TRANSMISSION

Clutch - single-plate dry
Primary Drive - direct
Final Drive - shaft and crown-wheel-and-pinion, 1:3.2 ratio

CHASSIS

Frame - duplex cradle with single reinforced top tube
Front Suspension - telescopic forks, leading axle
Rear Suspension - swinging-arm incorporating drive shaft housing, three-way spring-shocks
Wheelbase - 58in
Weight (wet) - 472lb
Fuel Capacity - 5gall
Tyres - 1.85 x 19 front, 2.15 x 18 rear, Metzellers
Brakes - single drilled disc front, s/s drum rear

INSTRUMENTS - 150mph speedo with trip, 9000rpm rev counter redlined at 7250rpm, warning lights for oil pressure, main beam, indicators, brake fluid, neutral, generator

EQUIPMENT

Electrical - 12V 28A/h battery, 280W alternator
Lighting - 60/65W H4 quartz-halogen headlamp

OPTIONS - Sport fairing, clock, voltmeter, twin discs, alloy wheels, luggage equipment

Test bike supplied by BMW Concessionaires GB Ltd

I blame not the Germans for messing with the BM. I blame the Americans. Them and the Japanese.

"The Americans," I hear you cry (actually Howard Hengis, Horror of Herne Bay). "What de hell has Peanut Power got to do with the European aristocracy of motorcycles, the very bastion of Tradition? How can anyone blame America for decisions taken in Munich and carried out in Spandau, Berlin? And if the Japanese have had any effect in the comfortable precincts of BMW-dom, surely it's been to lift their sturdy but staid machines out of a one-way rut."

No. Still I blame the Americans. It is the inexorable power of the greenback, with all its associated overkill, that's created the climate of modern motor-biking: clean-breathing and socially responsible. And it's only for the Americans that the Japanese deck their appliance-bikes up with gizmos, light-shows and assorted superfluous paraphernalia. As a result, we have the gadgetification of the BMW.

I'm not opposed to gadgets as such. They may detract from the purity of the machine, but still I dig BMW's clock, the Gold Wing's fuel gauge, Yamaha's self-cancelling indicators. It's when the icing starts to overwhelm the cake: when the baubles start to intrude on the pleasure of riding, that they start to irritate unreasonably. I'd thought that BMs would be sacrosanct... forever free from over-gadgetry. Not so - along with BMW's typical small, but significant, changes to the latest in Teutonic ironware come some "improvements" so incongruous as to be counter-productive.

I'll be specific. The objects of my scorn are two apparently insignificant alterations. One bleep is the bleep-bleeping bleeper, a noisome device that bleep-bleeps when you use the indicators: thereby summoning dogs from miles around, setting old lady pedestrians on suicide dashes against the lights and generally getting you pitying looks from the world at large. It's made worse by some ritzy switching that disconnects it in neutral or when you're declutching, so it's idiotic cackling is erratic as well as discordant. Hell, if BMW couldn't match Yamaha's self-cancelling ingenuity, they should have done their riders the courtesy of leaving the cancelling up to them.

The second is the wanton destruction of the most comfortable seat in motorcycling. And that's a far greater crime. I, like lots of other riders, like to shift forward on the seat when I'm pressing on. So what do BMW put in the formerly plush nose of the seat? A hard box concealed just millimetres beneath the padding, containing a first aid kit. "Ve haff decided to sacrifice your organs for ze sake on ein sales gimmick, Hein?"

Bleep!

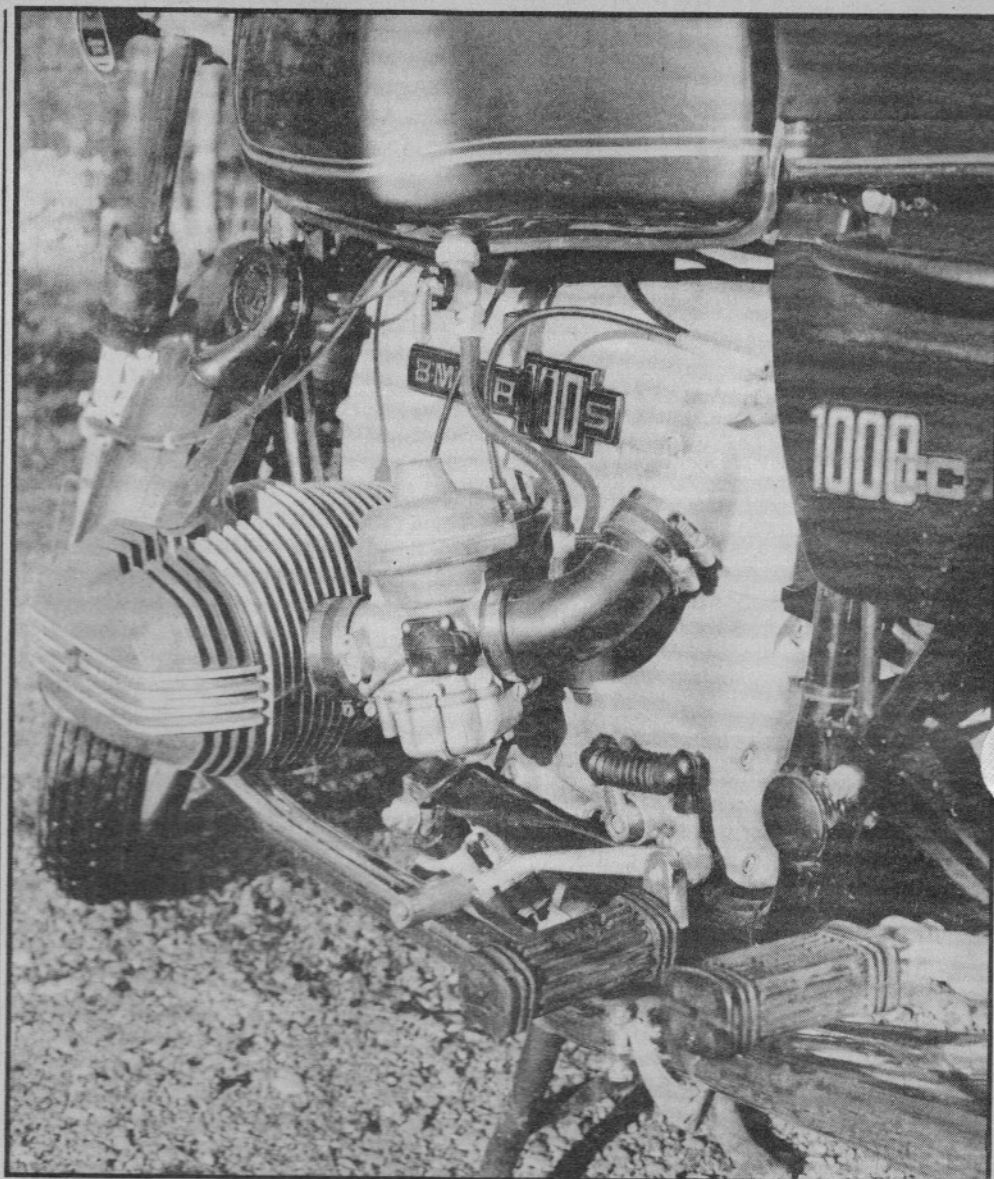
I thought I'd lay a few bitches on you first before really getting into the praiseworthy bits, because apart from these blunders, the R100S is a truly magnificent machine. It's groomed and refined, sleek and expensive and deceptively fast as well. It is in fact BMW's fastest motorcycle, and thus at the pinnacle of sporting good taste. Or is it?

To be honest, the pinnacle is beginning to look a little shaky. The Sport is still one of motorcycling's greatest thrills, but its idiosyncracies and shortcomings are becoming increasingly obvious as its cheapo slant-eyed rivals at last begin to improve more than just their engines. No amount of bleeping can disguise the fact that the present series of BMW flat twins has been developed about as far as it'll go. At one litre, the motor is pushed to its limit without the pistons showing through the fins; and it feels like it. The long-travel suspension has to a large extent been superseded (in part just by good roads). And the rescue job on the gearchange only just misses being too little too late. Nope: you no longer get as much extra motorbike for the extra money.

I'm sorry to have to face these truths, 'cause I still like BMs, and I'm prepared to put up with the odd demand to reap the manifold benefits of luxurious versatility and refined performance. The smooth hum of the engine shall comfort me. The logical controls shall give me strength. Almighty power leadeeth me ahead of quiet exhaust pipes and the shaft drive shall go on. For ever and ever, BM.

Who else is prepared to look past minor failings and a major price-tag? Those who do will still see a magnificent piece of motorcycle: but it's getting easier to understand those who turn away.

In a sense, the R100/S is BMW's forgotten bike. The R100/RS - classy, costly and silver-faired (or in gold now, Sir) - has grabbed the glory that once belonged to the R90/S (hold your head and watch



MORE POWER FOR THE

Big bangs and tall gears make an exec

the numbers). The test bike is a direct descendant of the bikini-faired style-seated 900 Sport, both visually and mechanically, and it doesn't look new any more. By the same token, the top banana RS will also be eclipsed one day: but for now it's the BMW you notice, while the rest become patterns in the background.

Now hear this. The R100/S may keep a low profile, but it is more motorcycle than the up-market RS in just about every possible way.

Proof comes on the road and on the test track as well. The Sport is faster than the RS by a good margin, right up until rider-fatigue takes a hand in the equation as the rider without the fairing begins to feel the pain. The latest one-litre version of the Sport is decisively BMW's fastest road bike, now or ever before. On quarter-mile test runs, it will lift its front wheel into the air in first and second gears without any artificial assistance like dropping the clutch or heaving back on the bars. This in spite of a pronounced forward weight bias from the low-slung engine. It'll stand on its back wheel on the road too, with little provocation. You'd better believe it's a lot faster than it looks and sounds. Compared with the RS we tested just one year ago, it is reliably faster through the standing quarter mile (13 seconds dead, with a best of 12.9 compared with a best of 13.6) and although it only has some two mph on top end (up to 126mph) it gets there quicker.

It achieves this superiority over big brother not by having extra power (it is in fact five bhp down,

though the torque's the same) but by being much lighter. The RS fairing adds 23lbs weight, and it's enough to make the difference. The Sport also has a higher final drive ratio, so though the weight advantage has it stepping faster off the line, taller gearing means it gives more miles per hour.

This performance puts the BM Sport well in the same league as all but the very latest Japanese biggies, and all with that aristocratic air that reminds you and everyone else that you paid extra. It is so capable and relaxed at high speed that, if it wasn't for the clatter of the tappets, you could hear the clock tick.

Yeah, the clatter of the tappets. The central-camshaft long-pushrod rig has been improved and refined over the years, so now the valve gear is less susceptible to over-revving damage than before. Even so, the ticky-tacky noise lingers to remind us of the relatively agricultural engine and the antiquity of its basic concept. BMW twins are so similar (from 600cc to 1000cc little changes but piston size) that criticism of one engine mostly holds good for the rest, and I don't want to repeat everything Mighty Mammal said about the R80. There are some points that relate exclusively to the big one, though.

One-litre is the limit within the existing barrels, but there is another, better reason why the engine should grow no more. In its biggest form, the horizontally opposed twin is so lumpy that it is positively unpleasant below 3000rpm, and since that corresponds to some 55mph in fifth, you can't just