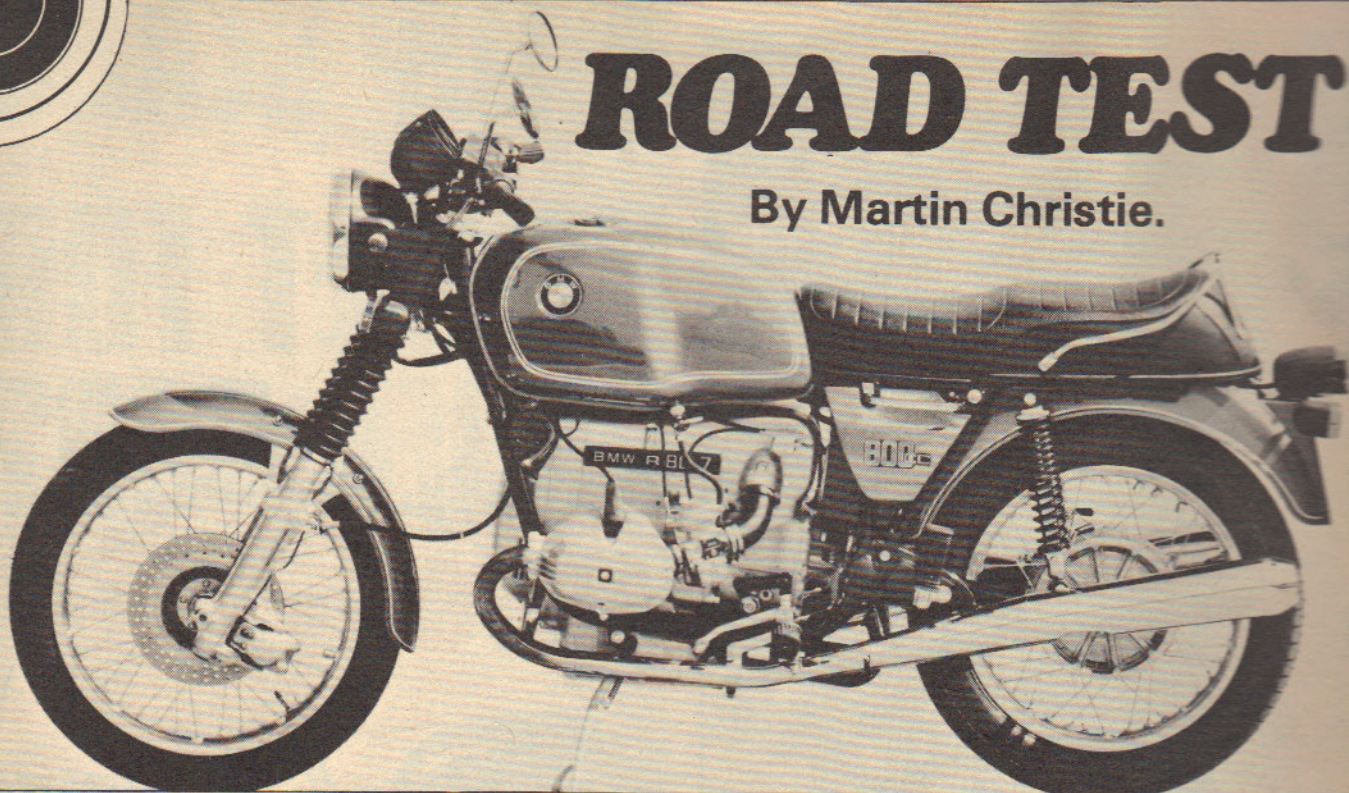




ROAD TEST

By Martin Christie.



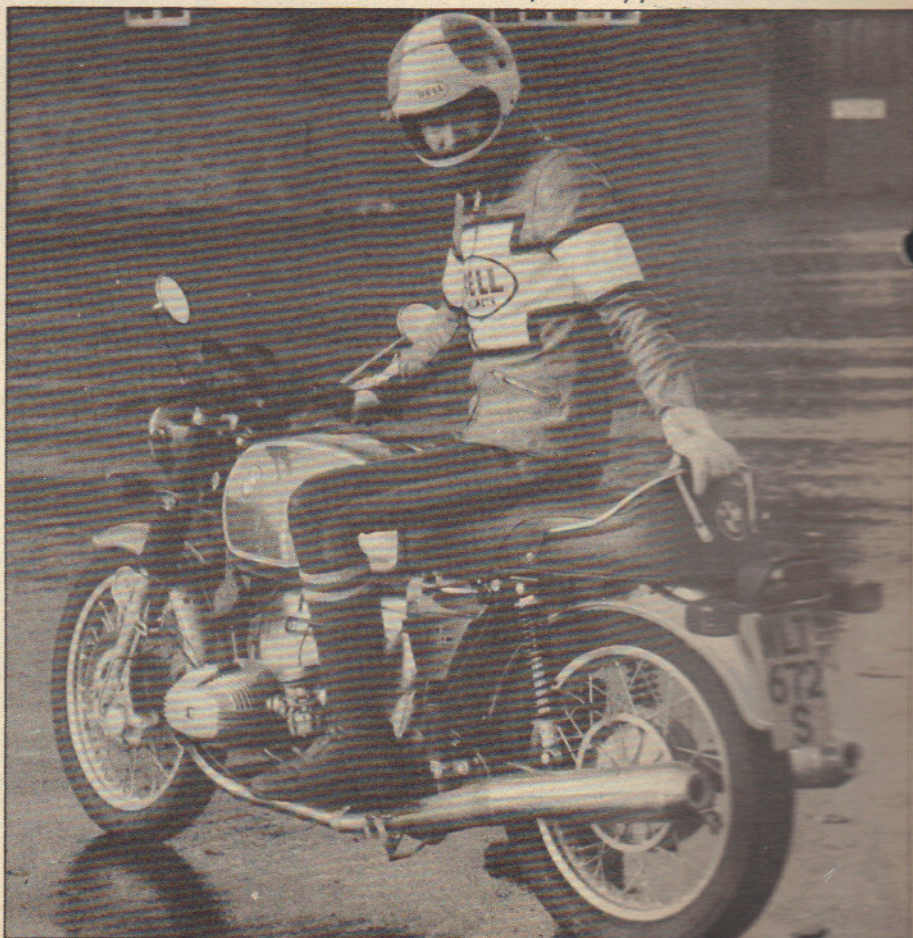
BMW R80/7

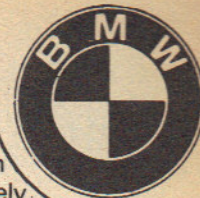
Very little different in appearance from its 750cc predecessor, the R80/7 features an extra 52cc capacity, audible turn signal indicators, better gear change — and is more competitively priced.

IT IS over six years since BMW brought out their first seven-fifty, marking the German firm's first serious step towards competing in the 'superbike' market. They were not going to change their policy of building quality to contest the big bike class with Japan, but they were out to show that they could build machines of equal performance.

BMW's have always been something of an acquired taste: something you have to get used to and learn how to ride. But anyone who has, will confirm that for any horsepower it gives away, a Be-em can still be ridden faster, for longer, and in more varied conditions, than anything else on two wheels. That being said, a lot has happened in those six years. Our expectations, and perhaps even our abilities have been raised to an almost alarming extent. The big bike market has become a horsepower battle among the top factories, vying to produce an even greater monster breathing more fire and burning more rubber better than any before.

So compelling was the bandwagon that even staid, conservative BMW couldn't resist, going up to a 900 and then to a 1000 — though ironically, like Kawasaki, their original





900 was the real fire eater. What was the reason for this escalating power play — was it really the demand from Joe Public, or was it more the factories themselves elbowing each other for prestige among the slide rules and the speed statistics?

Well at least if the manufacturing world appeared to go crazy in the last decade there is the reassuring sign more recently that reason has begun to prevail. It was a little voice once crying in the wilderness, now growing to a multitudinous roar, to say enough is enough. It is the voices of the real motorcyclists, the ones who actually have to *live* with their machines day in day out, not just wheel them out on Sunday mornings to polish before adoring spectators. Be-ems have always been amongst the vanguard of those real motorcycles. Only their price and associated prestige has set them apart and on something of a pedestal among the Barbour-suited brigade. Despite the flamboyant two-tone metallic excesses of the 90S, they have always had a cobbly, chunky appearance that has classified them as an acquired taste — the unique rather than the popular. Their styling

has always had more to do with practicality than sophistication. The great flat twin cylinders stick out like sore thumbs to anyone who feels his power plant should come compact and chromium-plated. But in many ways the R80/7 is something of a milestone — not especially for anything BMW have done themselves. There is nothing sensational about it. A cursory glance will confirm that it is just another horizontally opposed pushrod twin.

In exotic specifications, power output and sheer gadgetry, many competitors have far outstripped it. But it is a question of how much importance you put in statistics on paper, on how much on pleasure and controllability on tarmac.

For all the technological advances, the manufacturers are still searching for what could be called the 'ideal' motorcycle — that perfect combination of performance and all-round handling. Of course, every individual has their own ideals, or think they have, while the promotions

That large tank (a whole 5 gallons) and really comfortable ride combine to make this machine a true tourer.

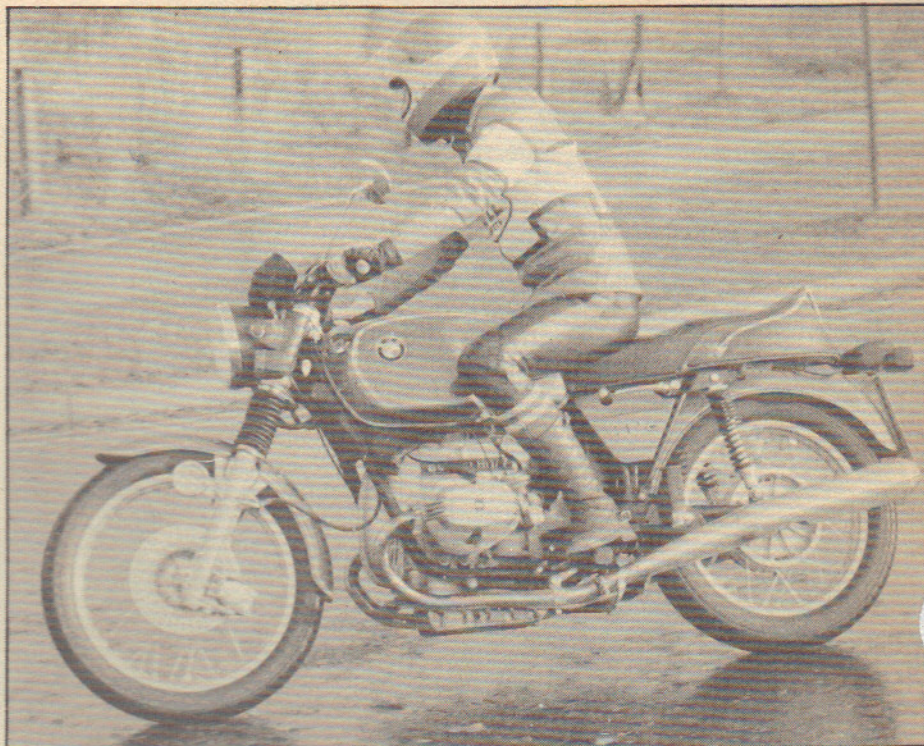
men would have us believe our ideals were the dreams they create. In their search for impressive figures, surely most are now having to admit they have gone overboard at the expense of a personable machine to ride on the road. Not only is this reflected in the figures for cc, lbs, bhp, mph and mpg, but also quite dramatically in the most important one at the end: pounds and pence. What has happened is that there are now many large capacity motorcycles rubbing shoulders with the once exclusive BMW on price, and in many practical terms, offering a less acceptable motorcycle.

BMW's have always been overpriced, and appeared at one time to be getting even more out of touch. However, late last year, coincidental with the launch of the 80/7, the concessionaires made a direct move to bring the retail tag more in line with the opposition. That, and the fact that so many others have bumped theirs up to get into the BMW league, has evened out the odds. So now for just £500 down and £50 a month for the next three years a brand new hand-built eight hundred Be-Em can

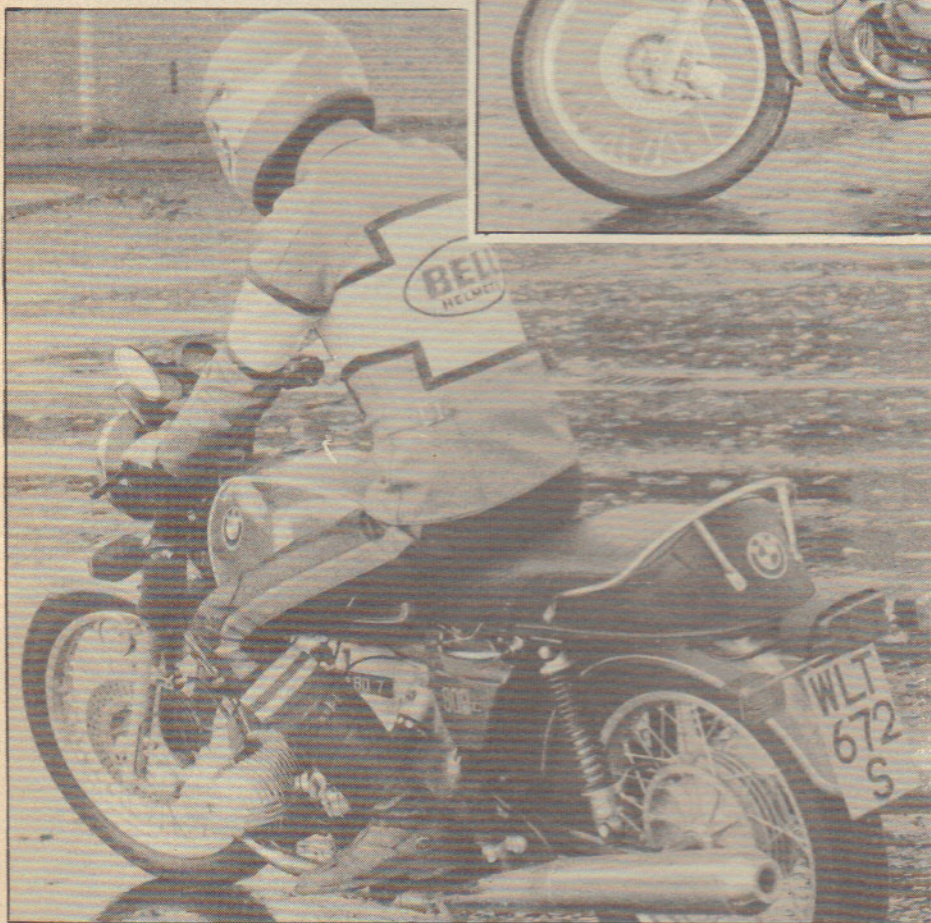


be yours. In traditional terms, it still feels like a horrific cost for two-wheeled transport, but in the light of the present market place, what you get for what you pay doesn't seem quite so unreasonable any more.

It may come as a surprise to my readership, and to the Inland Revenue, but I am not in the two-grand motorcycle purchasing class. However, if I were, and it is not an unreasonable dream, I think I would buy an R80/7. If you then think that makes me biased for writing this test, then that is true. I am biased, because I have also done many miles on all its direct competitors, not to mention its



It's when the roads are wet and greasy that you appreciate the low weight and sure-footedness of Bee Em.



All the more reason why it should work well.

A lockable petrol cap, however, is a curious item often more aggravating than useful. They became the fad on bikes about the same time we began to worry about the fuel crisis, and the high price of it. Is it really to stop silly people siphoning your tank dry, when on a motorcycle anyone with any sense will simply disconnect the feed pipe? I can not believe they were introduced simply to prevent practical jokers putting sugar in the tank, because when you think about it there are so many other, and far more dangerous ways of sabotaging a stationary motorcycle still unguarded. In any case, BMW's new petrol cap — which screws in like the stopper of some old hot water bottle — is a sufficient deterrent because even the owner will have difficulty getting at the fuel.

I am in two minds about the audible indicator warning that is a little beeping sound that comes on when either flasher is working and when the clutch is engaged in gear. When such gadgets were introduced on Japanese bikes more than a year ago, they were extremely embarrassing and confusing to anyone else in your vicinity. In fact the Department of the Environment specifically requested importers not to fit those systems because it was feared they would be mistaken by blind pedestrians for a Panda

statistical superiors, and for all their gloss and glamour, if I had to choose one to live with permanently, it would be the Be-Em.

Certainly it has its faults. Nothing is ever absolutely perfect, but BMW, having what is basically a perfectly balanced concept, seems to take a perverse pleasure in finding irritating oddities to tag on. The prop stand holds the bike so near to a tottering vertical, and the spring that launches it is so strong, that you never dare use it. That hasn't changed for more than five years, and if anything the spring has got stronger. Try

explaining to your favourite insurance company how the bike did £200 worth of damage just by falling off the stand.

A novel innovation on the new bikes is the ignition key that folds at the head, a fiddly operation difficult enough in the actual ignition switch. When you try applying it to the supposedly lockable petrol cap, or the just inaccessible seat lock, it is virtually impossible without the risk of sheering the key itself.

I can see a good reason for the seat lock. It secures the simple frame — prong helmet holder, and protects the tools and other goodies underneath.

crossing tone. Whatever, Be-Em's design seems to get round most of the offense by cutting off in neutral or when the clutch is disengaged. And certainly, on a bike that is inherently dangerous to pedestrians in congested city streets because it is so quiet, the bleeping warning does have some advantages.

It does make them stop and stare when the only other alternative would be to blow the BMW's massive wind-horn and frighten them into a heart attack. On the whole though, I think it would probably start to get on my

nerves and I would be tempted to disconnect it. It is a continuing puzzle that such integral detail should be so absurd, when the complete motorcycle is so generally well thought out. BMW's have always surpassed for the main facilities they offer — and the R80/7 is obviously no exception. In rider comfort, handling characteristics, and safe braking power, it has no match in overall performance — and I stress the 'overall' part to make the real distinction.

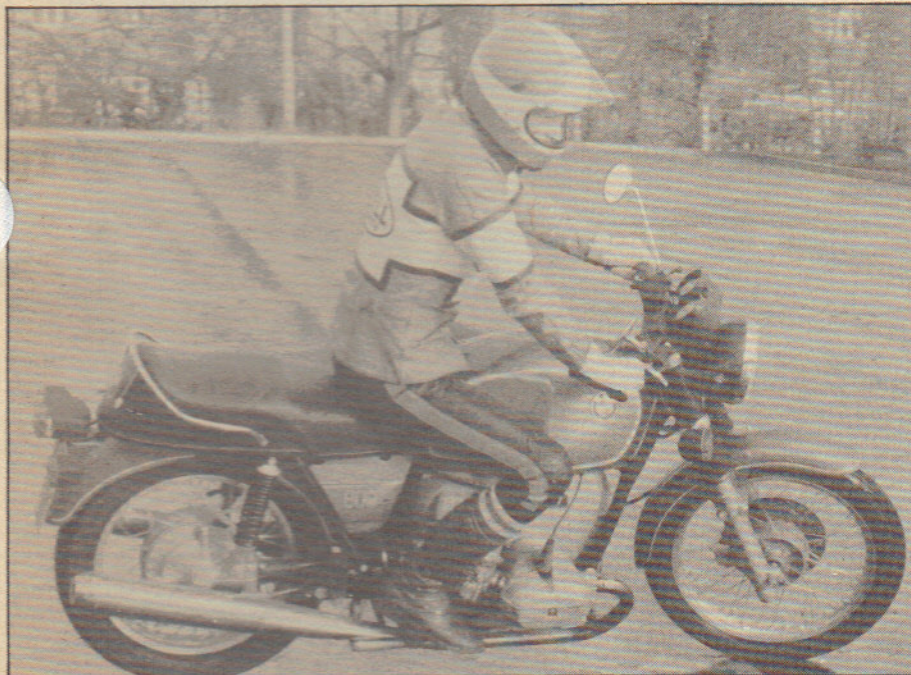
It was my 'luck' to be testing the

bike during the most miserable part of our dreary winter — the cold, greasy, drizzling bit. But though the climate could have been more pleasant, there was at least some reassurance in having a BMW to cope with it. For it is precisely in such conditions that the real qualities of the machine stand out. Most bikes are nice when the sun is shining, but when the clouds turn black and threatening, many can be a nightmare. That is when you can rely on the sure-footed shaft drive, the lazy torque, and the responsive brakes of the BMW.

It is a mark of the extent to which our expectations have been raised that a humble seven-fifty is no longer sufficient to provide adequate power for a big class tourer. The simple change for the 80 series has been an increased bore — raising 52cc's of extra space inside, and a slight boost of compression from 9 to 9.2 to 1. With a claimed maximum power of 55bhp, the output is not staggering by present day standards, but ample for the lightness and litheness of the chassis. The extra cubes have appeared to provide more zest all the way through the rev range.

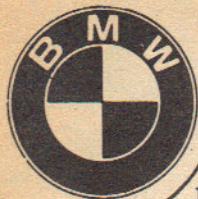
Acceleration was noticeably increased from the old R75, and certainly cruising and ultimate top speeds were much improved. It does seem hard to believe that a comparatively small difference has made such a distinction. However, beefing it up has definitely made an already good bike into an exceptional one. More cubes mean greater flexibility and more comfort. In top gear it can be pottered around at below 20mph and still be tractable. At the same time it can be cruised at 80mph, still well below the rev ceiling, and with power available at hand. As ever the BMW engine will rev freely and naturally when allowed to do so, producing the familiar torque reaction. But it is not lumpy, and still content to dawdle in mid range revs. There is no power band, rather like the old R60 — just a flexible drive system.

The gear selection is of course a source of endless fascination. Extending the pedal system by means of an absorbent linkage has removed a lot of the harshness in the previously direct method of engaging the cogs. It does make it feel easier on the foot, and perhaps in part reduce the clunking and clumpety character of changes—but the box still needs that touch of mechanical sympathy to get the real smoothness out of it. Like every BMW, when cold, it takes two prods, and



A vinyl covered foam pad conceals the top fork yolk. Perforated disc brake disperses water film to aid wet weather braking. Machine has benefited greatly from detail improvements over the years although the audible indicator warning hardly rates as a plus factor.



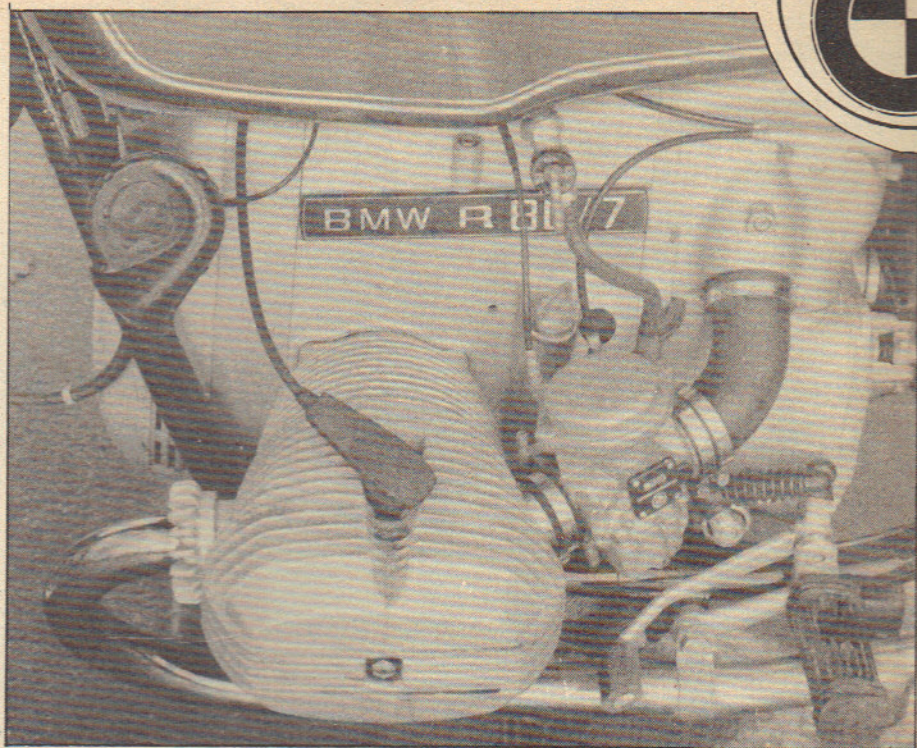


possibly a slight roll forward to get into first gear, although selection on the move was sweetness itself, and the stiffness problems with early five speed boxes seem to have been well sorted out.

The brakes — a single disc on the front, and a drum on the rear, I would rate very highly. Some might suggest that twin discs are essential for a machine of such potential performance, but I am not convinced that this is anything but overkill. Given the nature of the machine, the way it can be ridden, and the use it is likely to be put to, the brakes are perfectly matched. There is no surplus of power for stopping in the single disc, but it is just right and that is how it should be. In all weather conditions, moreover, there is a lot of feel to the front calipers which I would suggest is more useful, and of course the trusty old weatherproof rear drum is excellent.

With the long travel suspension, and controlled damping it is very difficult to get the back wheel to hop under braking and lock the rear wheel — a common complaint with modern superbikes. And at the front end the suspension again compensates for the braking power sufficiently to maintain excellent control over steering even with the disc hard on. Steering itself, with the low BMW bars is precise and perfectly gauged on geometry, to the extent that it can be guided with little ease at very low speeds, and with stability at high ones.

There are also nice practical touches which BMW have even now begun to shout about in their own adverts. The wheels are quickly detachable — and come away from the chassis in less than three minutes



The rewired remote style gear linkage has virtually eliminated the infamous BMW hallmark of clunky changes — after all these years. Note position of cable operated choke for the Bing carbs.

when required. I can vouch for that, because not for the first time in my career, I had to repair a rear wheel puncture. Part of the ease is the simplicity and cleanliness of the shaft drive system. Another part is the fact that the bike balances perfectly in its own length on the mainstand, so that if one wheel is removed, it naturally tilts onto the other. Also, with or without wheels, it can be swivelled through 360 degrees by no more than a push on the curled feet of the stand.

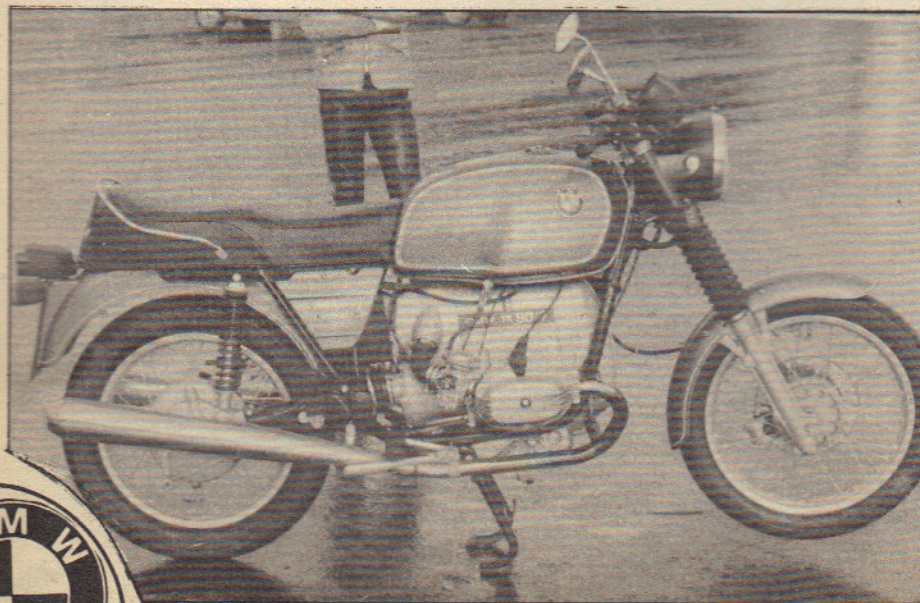
Unmistakably BMW — those lines whilst perhaps not the most attractive certainly exude rugged quality.

Such practical items for the average motorcyclist seemed wasted on a machine of such expense that it was beyond the pockets of those who would most appreciate it. Perhaps on present day terms, they are worth more serious study.

The bike also carries all the items you are likely to need in a roadside emergency, even if you had never thought about it. The quality 22 piece toolkit will cope with anything other than a major engine rebuild. It comes in a pouched roll, and fits in a detachable plastic tray which can also be used as a temporary home for nuts washers and things. Then there is a clip-on hand pump, and now even a basic first aid kit tucked into a pocket under the front of the seat.

Rumour has it the next innovation will be a bleeper system that automatically calls 999 when the bike is on its side for more than three minutes. For the serious touring rider, of course, its performance potential is legend. You can pump 250 miles of petrol into the tank day after day and hardly need to worry about checking the oil between changes. And there are virtually no other routine adjustments apart from the tyre pressures. It is a bike built to be ridden, and ridden long and hard. It is a bike with an excess of comfort and control. And it is a bike with no vices, only idiosyncracies.

If you can afford it, buy one. I would.



SPECIFICATIONS

BMW R80/7

ENGINE

Type: Aircooled, horizontally opposed, four stroke twin with light alloy cylinder head and barrels plus cast iron liners. Two plain main bearings and plain big ends.

Valve operation: Push rod operated overhead valves. Clearance adjustment by screw and locknut on rocker tips.

Capacity: 797.5cc

Bore and Stroke: 84.8 x 70.6 mm

Compression ratio: 9.2:1

Carburation: 2 x 32mm constant velocity, butterfly-throttle Bing's breathing through paper element filter.

Lubrication: Wet sump pressure pumped with 4 pint capacity for engine (replaceable paper filter), 1.4 pints for transmission.

Electrics: Crankshaft mounted 280 watt alternator charging 12 volt 28 amp/hour battery. Twin coils and contact breaker ignition.

Claimed power: 55 bhp at 7,000 rpm.

TRANSMISSION

Primary: None

Clutch: Dry, single plate diaphragm

Overall gear ratios: 14.78, 9.61, 6.94, 5.54, top 4.98:1. Selection by left side, one down four up foot lever.

Final drive: Enclosed shaft with universal joint and helical gear pick-up.

Bevel gear rear hub: 3.36:1 reduction ratio.

FRAME

All welded tubular steel full loop double cradle.

SUSPENSION

Front: Two way damped telefork with 8 in spring movement.

Rear: Pivoted fork with two way oil damped twin units. Five position spring pre-load adjustment, giving 5 in movement.

WHEELS

Front: Light alloy non-valenced rim with steel spokes and 3.25 x 19 in Continental type, single drilled, 10 in diameter stainless steel disc brake with floating hydraulic caliper.

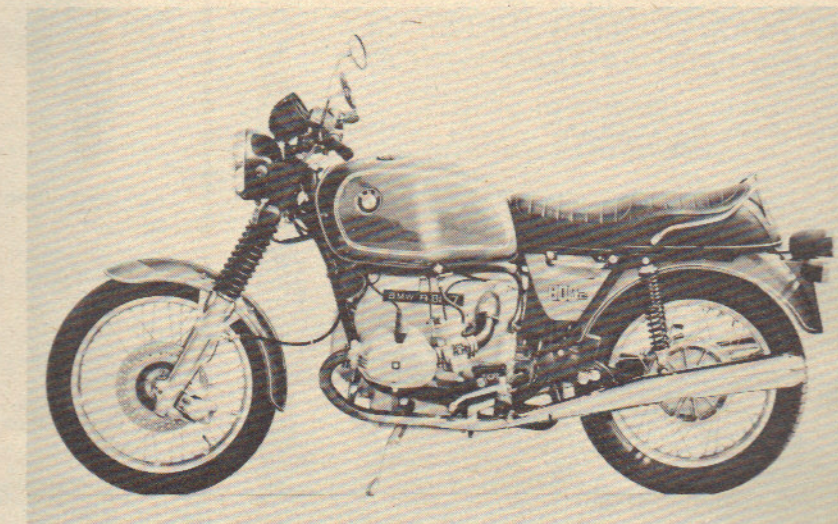
Rear: Light alloy non-valenced rim with steel spokes and 4.00 x 18 in Continental type. Rod operated full width 8 in. diameter leading shoe drum brake.

INSTRUMENTATION

Matched illuminated speedometer and rev counter housed in console with centrally mounted warning lights for indicators, main beam, neutral, battery charging, oil pressure and brake cylinder fluid. Odometer with separate trip meter.

EQUIPMENT

5 gallon (22.6 l) fuel tank with locking cap, including ¾ gallon (1.2 l) reserve. Main and prop stands, turn signals with audible warning device, electronic tachometer,



electric starter (no kick starter) 7 in. dia 60/55 watt Halogen headlamp with flasher, 22 piece tool kit, first aid kit, twin mirrors, air pump and helmet lock.

DIMENSIONS

Weight (claimed dry): 430 lbs (195 Kg).

Wheelbase: 57.7 in (1465 mm).

Ground clearance: 6.4 in (162.5 mm).

Seat height: 32 in (813 mm).

PERFORMANCE DATA

Fuel consumption: Average 46 mpg (16.3 Km/l)

Speed: Maximum speed with rider crouched in two-piece leather — 117 mph (188 Km/hr)

Gear speeds: (at 7,000 rpm) 38, 57, 80, 99, 110 mph (61, 92, 128, 159, 117).

Speedometer accuracy: 2 mph fast at 30 mph, 4 mph fast at 60 mph

CUSTOMER INFORMATION

Importers: BMW Concessionaires GB Ltd., 361 Chiswick High Road, London, W4.

Colours available: Black, blue or orange.

Price: £1899 including VAT. Delivery charge £20.00 extra.

Warranty: 12 months, unlimited mileage, parts and labour

SPARE PARTS (inc. VAT)

Exhaust valve (each)	£12.21p
Inlet valve (each)	£5.34p
Piston (each — standard size, including rings, pins etc)	£42.66p
Air filter	£3.03p
Exhaust pipe	£24.03p
Silencer only	£37.80p
Balance pipe	£13.13p
Speedo cable	£5.34p
Contact breakers (each)	£3.32p
Brake pads (pair-front)	£11.15p
Brake shoes (each rear)	£8.84p

THE COMPETITORS

	Price	Max mph	Overall mpg	Fuel Tank gals	Claimed Bhp	Dry Weight	Type	Warranty
BMW R80/7	£1,899	117	46	5.0	55	474	OHV	12 months P & L
Honda CB750 K7	£1,335	112	40	3.7	67	480	Horiz. twin OHC	12 months P & L
Honda GL1000K2	£2,009	118	40	4.2	80	571	4 cylinder Liq., cool flat four	12 months P & L
Kawasaki Z1000	£1,799	125	47	3.6	83	529	DOHC 4 cylinder	12 months 12,000 mls P & L
Moto Guzzi 850 T3	£1,799	122	47	5.25	68	437	OHV V-Twin	18 months P & L (Autogard)
Suzuki GT750	£1,195	122	35	3.7	70	507	2 stroke 3 cylinder	6 months P & L
Suzuki GS750	£1,350	120	44	4.0	68	492	DOHC 4 cylinder	6 months P & L
Yamaha XS750	£1,470	113	46	3.7	64	510	DOHC 3 cylinder	6 months P & L