KRAUSER MKM 1000 BMW

When it comes to motorcycles, nothing is so sweet as defying logic. When you like something, you like it—you have to answer to no one. As the saying goes, "The heart has reasons of which reason knows nothing."

When the *Cycle* staffers slip into their road tester mode, they have to adhere to logic, because their topic is the objective world of machinery. A is better than B because A is faster and has more mid-range. Hard to argue with numbers, and there's no disputing the value of the knowledge gained.

Everyone knows that's not the whole story of motorcycling. That's why, among other things, style influences buyers. And that's why there's a perennial fascination with the exotic and the unusual. That delight has led to entrepreneurial ventures of all kinds. Craig Vetter gambled on producing the Mystery Ship. He drew to the wrong suit.

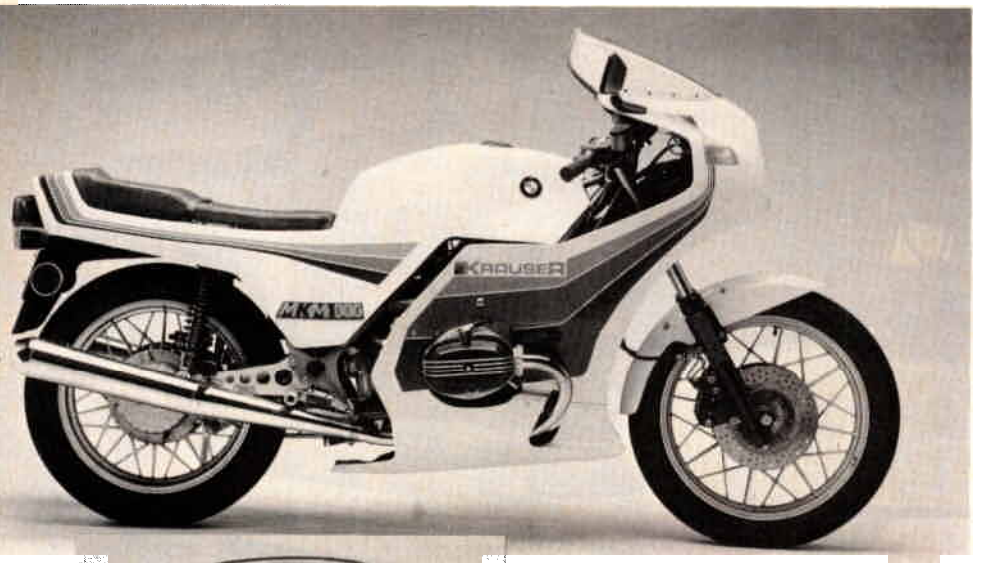
In the last couple of years a different phenomenon has become common.

TAKING THE "UN" OUT OF UNOBTANIUM

Bimotas, CB1100s, RD-LCs—they're the bikes we drool over. Think you can bring one from Europe and hide it here? Maybe, but it's more likely that the MKM 1000 is one of the few flash bikes you have a chance of keeping in the country.

Americans have found that the Japanese manufacturers are producing some models for Europe but not the U.S. Okay, blame the EPA. Their requirements, after all, emasculated such long-time favorites as the two-stroke RD400. And it was an irony that any cynic could have predicted that shortly after we lost the RD, Yamaha improved it nicely—adding water-cooling, new styling and a single-shock suspension system.

But there's more to the situation than that. Europe has Honda CBX550s and CB1100Rs; Honda has chosen to keep the little CBX Europe-only, and only this year has begun importing US-styled 1100s, the latter being a less radically stylized version of the European bike. Marketing plans rule these decisions, which is fair enough, but my oh my the E-bikes seem to have everything a performance nut could want. There may be a bit of I-can't-have-it-so-I-want-it psychology at work here, but that too falls under



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the chapter, "The Heart Has Reasons . . ."

Many people have taken the unavailability of certain bikes as a personal challenge. They have, by means shady and expensive, gotten Europe-only models into the U.S. Some magazines have gone so far as to feature "illegal" machines on their covers, and *Cycle* included the Yamaha RD350LC and the Honda CB1100R last month in "Visions East."

There's an implicit assumption in every one of these presentations—namely, that you can make the machines legal pretty easily or, failing that, pull a fast one on the government and *somehow* keep your shiny bit of contraband here in the country.

When we contacted Bob Gregg of Krauser USA to borrow an MKM 1000 for a feature article, we talked to him about the steps he had to take to get that new line of machines completely and truly certified. He had done more than browse leisurely through a few of our bureaucracies. He had, in fact, obtained and examined all the paperwork necessary to make a motorcycle legal in the U.S. And, more to the point of this story, most of the requirements apply equally to a manufacturer and an individual.

In 1980 Gregg brought in the first prototype MKM. Like any person or company that imports a motorcycle, he had to fill out NHTSA/DOT's HS Form 7. Customs officials entered the picture here and assigned a case number. He was required to check one of nine boxes—the one that described the state of the vehicle and his plans. For example, checking box two indicates the vehicle conforms to all safety standards, box five that the importer is a non-resident and is planning to keep the vehicle in the country less than a year, and such oddball ones as box six: "I am a member of the armed forces of a *foreign* country," etc., etc.

If you're bringing in a Europe-only bike you'll probably check the same box Gregg did—number three. "Such merchandise was not manufactured in conformity with all applicable safety standards, but has been or will be brought into conformity. . . . " In other words, we'll make it legal.

You may be thinking, at this point, I'll just check box two—the bike's legal. You *can* get it into the country this way, but if you're ever caught by the law, you may be up for fraud. The guv'ment doesn't like people who check wrong boxes.

Let's say you're law-abiding, though, and want to run your bike without living in fear of the black-and-whites. You will, as Gregg did, proceed with plans to make the bike legal. This consists of picking up a copy of the "Code of Federal Regulations" number 49, referring to Transportation. This manual, 691 pages of seven-point type, details more than you thought there could be to know about rules rules rules—for private vehicles, accessories, urban transportation, you-name-it. We recommend it if you have insomnia.

There are subsections on motorcycles. They will tell you everything your machine must have to meet NHTSA requirements. For instance, hydraulic brake hoses must be permanently marked with the block letters "DOT" and they must be at least one-sixteenth-inch high.

Of course you have to fill out a form signifying your bike does indeed have these things. Form HS-336B. The form and your signature on it, again, are your real concern. Get caught with an illegal bike and it's no big deal. But if you *say* it's legal and it's not—that's when the spit hits the fan.

So Gregg made his MKM conform to the necessary standards. But it took 18 months. And he had promised, on one of those forms, to have it legal in 12 months. He knew the rules, but when 13 months rolled by he simply didn't have it legal. Besides, after 12 months, then 13, then 14, then quickly 17, there still was no word from NHTSA or the Customs officials. Hey, Gregg thought, just another screwed-up bureaucracy.

Well, no. All the promises were in The Computer. And computers never forget.

NHTSA's electric brain, after 18 months, spit out a piece of paper that said *Nail Gregg.*

The fine for not making the bike legal in 12 months was twice the import duty. Gregg paid the $1400 gladly, because the alternative was to have the friendly Customs goons confiscate his bike.

So by early 1982 Gregg had one prototype MKM with DOT stamped all over the appropriate parts and stickers listing all sorts of esoteric information and his machine's turn signals X distance apart. In short, he had a bike that conformed to all the innumerable standards most of us never think about and probably don't care about.

Which brought him to page 6 of Form HS-336B. In every mechanical way, the bike was legal. But there was more.

At the bottom of page 6-of-6, Form HS-336B, it says, "Please note that a person importing motor vehicles for resale is a manufacturer . . . and must comply with the following regulations." The second of the seven regulations following that note forms the Catch 22. It is 49 CFR 567—Certification.

Now before we get to Certification, let's emphasize that note: *Any* person reselling an imported vehicle is, according to the government, a manufacturer. If you bring in a Europe-only bike, you can wade through the regulations and make that bike America-legal. Which means as long as you own the bike, it's legal. Happy riding. But as soon as you resell it, you have become a "manufacturer."

Without getting into the other regulations governing manufacturers (Defect Reports, Consumer Information, etc.—which, if you're patient, you could probably cope with) we'll cover Certification.

For a private party to meet the Certification requirement, the original manufacturer must name the importer as an agent. Let's take an example. Your buddy wants to sell you a bootleg CB1100R he brought in through Canada. The original manufacturer (Honda)

must name the importer (your buddy) as an agent. We can dispense with the rest right there, because there isn't a chance in the world that Honda is going to appoint any corporation other than American Honda to represent them. Bob Gregg, Vice President of Krauser USA, was in a different situation. Krauser—the German manufacturer—appointed Gregg an agent, and he got the MKM certified.

Before he was through, though, Gregg went on to meet the EPA and CARB requirements and another NHTSA rule (the VIN code). But the point is, before you buy a bike not clearly manufactured for the U.S., it behooves you to make sure it's legal. How? Simply ask the owner for the EPA Certificate of Conformity and the DOT Statement of Compliance. If he says the dog ate them, just call those agencies for a photocopy. And, remember, having registration and a license plate doesn't make a bike legal. The EPA and DOT henchmen are still there to get you.

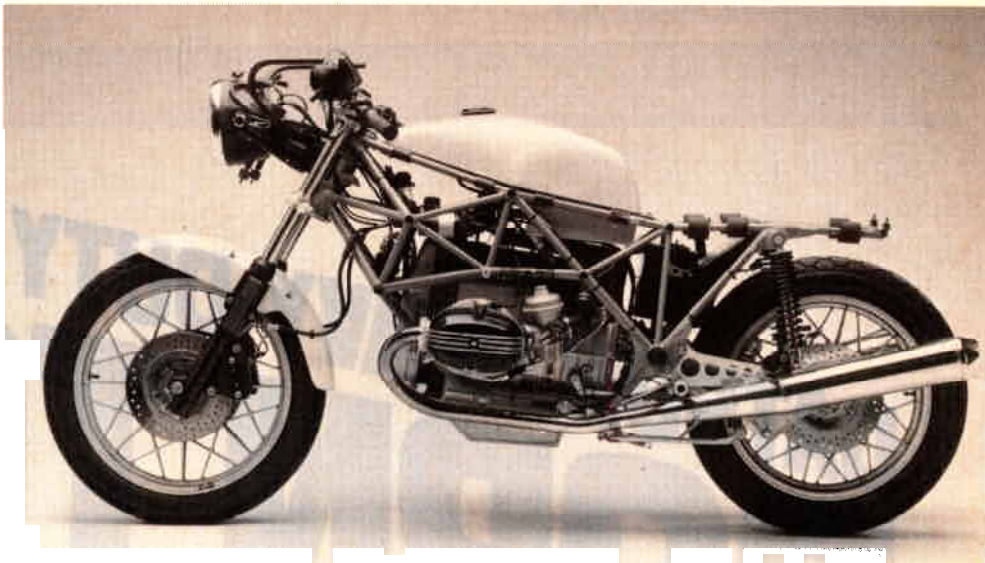
So after nearly two years of legal maneuvering and work with a prototype, Gregg was ready to import fully certified production MKMs. The first shipment of machines arrived last fall, and we picked up one of those bikes to see what kind of machine Krauser had finally produced.

One of the standout features of the MKM is its frame. Krauser engineers used narrow-diameter, straight tubing—nearly 50 pieces—to form an intricate maze of triangles. The result is an exceptionally rigid chassis which weighs a mere 25 pounds.

The MKM bodywork provides the bike's flash and streamlines it. The styling package consists of a single-piece windshield/fairing, a lower fairing section and a single-piece tank-shroud/seat/tail-section. All the fiberglass weighs 13 pounds, and that includes the windshield, mirrors and seat.

The bodywork has some nice touches. Dzus fasteners secure the pieces and provide for particularly easy removal—you can pull all the parts in minutes. Also, slots in the frontal area of the fairing direct air to the oil cooler, the oil pan and the base of the cylinders. Detailing of the fiberglass reflects patient craftsmanship; of course it's up to you to decide if the color scheme suits you.

For a couple of reasons Krauser decided to use an essentially stock engine and the basic running gear from BMW's R100RS. First, the Krauser people knew that if they used the stock Beemer engine, they could "piggyback" through EPA certification. More important for the consumer, the BMW factory was willing to carry the full factory warranty if Krauser used the basic machine unmodified. So, with each



MKM you get warranty service available at any authorized BMW dealer, even though BMW of North America has nothing to do with importing or manufacturing the MKM.

The production K-bike differs from the prototype we rode in 1981 in several details. The rear-sets are gorgeous cast-aluminum pieces which attach to chromed-steel levers. The gas tank uses a standard RS cap, and the overall finish is more refined. Also, the final versions feature equipment from 1982 RSs, rather than the '81 gear.

Gregg explains that Krauser had certain goals in mind while developing the MKM. They were to build a bike that was lighter than the BMW RS, with more ground clearance, a stiffer chassis and which—because of the above—handled better.

They met their goals. We spent hours in the Pacific canyons and came away believers. The MKM, fully gassed (with 5.6 gallons), weighs 498 pounds. That's a pound under the lightest sport 750—Kawasaki's KZ—and embarrassingly less than the best full-liter sport bikes. Kawasaki's Lawson Replica, for instance, weighs 543 pounds, Suzuki's Katana 556.

Hustling through corners with the MKM is a delight. It's rock steady no matter what you do; it reacts slowly to steering input and tracks like a guided missile. In this respect it shows its heritage. You know that the people who developed this machine felt most at home on high-speed roads that present to the rider—in equal doses—weather ripples, wonderful curves, potholes, and 120-mph straightaways. When you're on the Krauser, you'll do best to search out Alpine-like highways—fast and gracefully twisty.

The MKM is designed for cruising at high speed. The fairing blocks the wind effectively at low speed (anything under 60 mph), so there's little buoying effect; consequently, your weight on

your hands is tiring. Above 60 some wind slips in from the sides and it hits your helmet full on, which turns your café crouch into a pretty comfortable position.

For maximum smoothness, the Krauser people rubber-mounted the engine, and it makes a difference. The MKM is the smoothest—vibration-wise—BMW we've ridden. There is, of course, the typical high-amplitude thump of the big twin, but it's so muted that you barely sense it.

After spending some time on the MKM, you tend to overlook the peculiarities which initially may have drawn a critical eye. Sure, the seat is hard, the riding position is unequivocal and the BMW shocks perform like, well, like BMW shocks (marginal). Reason will tell you those deficiencies are to be disparaged. Then you hear something else from inside you, whispering—Hey, this is pretty nice. At that point, it's appropriate to consider the MKM's price tag—$11,895. If that doesn't jolt you back to the cold world of logic, then it's time to listen to your heart. ■