

The last of the big bangers bop down the boulevards



BMW R100CS

THE IDEA OF BMW MAKING A street racer out of their somewhat traditional flat-twin doesn't seem right, does it? We've all read reports of how well the big 1000s can eat miles, loaded with enough camping equipment to keep a boy scouts' troupe in beans and mash for a month, and still deliver the essential excitement ingredient which makes up real motorcycling. And I've ridden enough miles — on my own 75/5 and other test bikes — to know that BMWs can be hustled along twisty country lanes at a rate which'd embarrass many would-be hotshots. But BMW, the factory, offering a street racer?

Well, fact is, it isn't such an uncompromising balls-out single purpose bike as Ducati's 900SS, a bike which was designed as an over-the-counter proddy racer anyway. BMW's R100CS has the same 70bhp @ 7000rpm motor as that fitted to the RS and RT models and its street racing image comes from its lower weight of 441lb dry, 22lb less than the super-smoothie RS and 4lb heavier than the unfaired, unencumbered plain ordinary R100 (which has the 'slow' lower compression ratio motor). Plus the CS has the bikini handlebar mounted fairing that used to grace the 'S', and its final drive ratio is slightly lower than the other 1000s at 2.91.

When the CS was launched earlier this year BMW said it was to be available only in one colour — black — and wire spoked wheels would be fitted, so it was with some surprise that when I turned up at their Bracknell HQ, a red smoke test bike with cast alloy wheels was presented. Apparently, the red is the one colour option (sounds like someone's marketing dept chickened out) and wire spoke wheels were proving too expensive as an exclusive extra when the rest of the range uses the high pressure die cast alloy type. All the same, this spec doesn't sound much to qualify as a street racer — even on the last row of the grid — but the main changes for '81 are to things which will have aggravated self-servicing owners in the past; some changes affect the ride, some ease of maintenance, and the rest reduce the weight of the engine/transmission unit.

Anyone who's ever replaced an air filter on a BMW will appreciate what a giant step in common sense the new black plastic airbox is. Instead of fiddling for half an hour with the old aesthetically-pleasing but annoying alloy casting, you now pop four spring clips to undo the lid which reveals a flat paper air filter which lifts out leaving the carburettor 'elbow' inlet tracts in situ. Now it's a five-minutes-if-you're-fumbling job. BMW recommend replacing the element every 10,000km (6,200 miles) unless riding in dusty conditions. Cost: £6.52 inc VAT.

Next, that other regular job — setting the twin contact breakers — has been eliminated with a Bosch contactless pulse generator using Hall Effect amplifiers and an integral centrifugal advance/retard mechanism. Advance begins at 1500rpm and by 3000 it's fully advanced to 32 degrees BTDC.

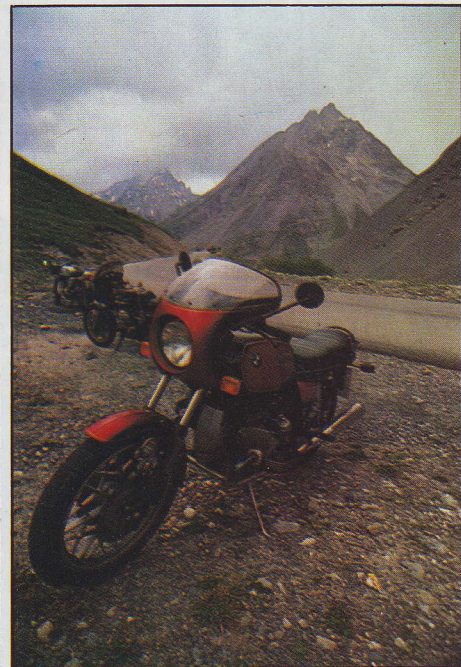
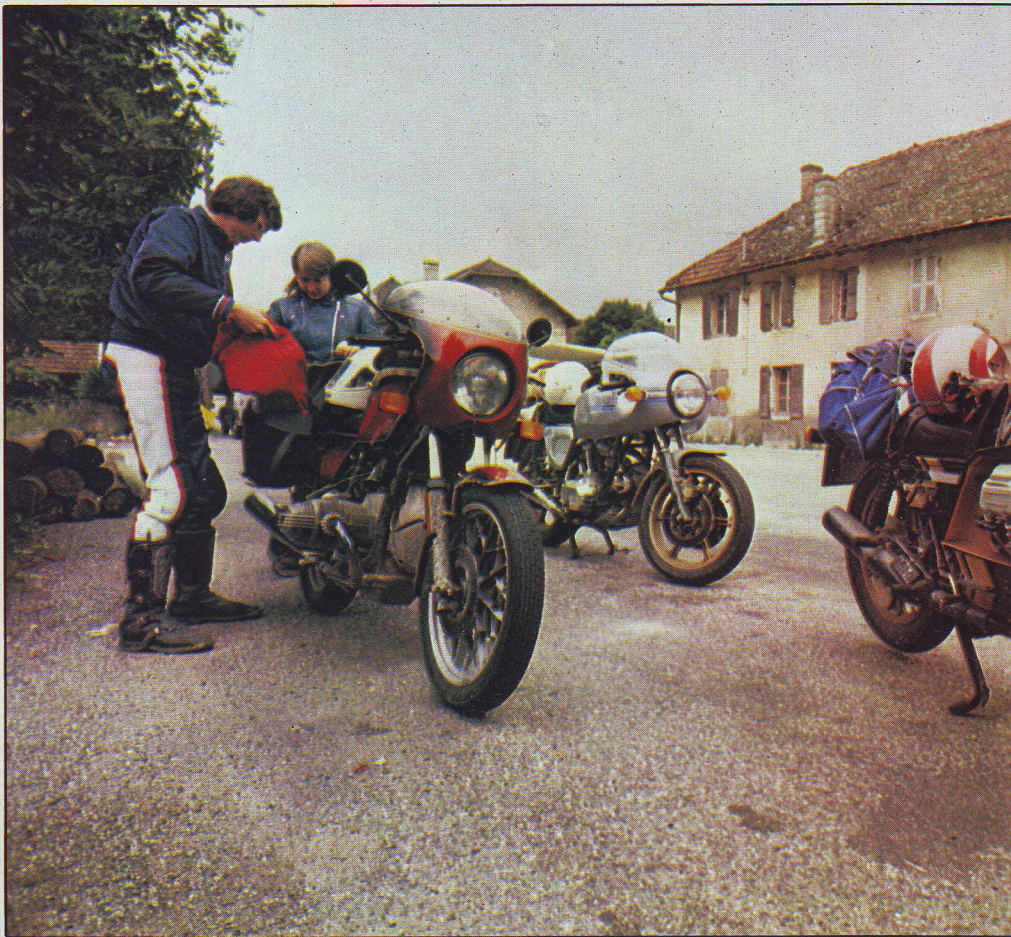
Thumbing the red starter button on the right 'bar and hearing and feeling the distinctive Bee-Emm tickover beat — you can almost sense the sideways energy creation — you then appreciate the change of location for the choke lever. It's now on the left 'bar above the switches and has three positions: full on, half on and off, all easily set by a flick of the thumb. As you engage gear,

the lightened clutch operation is a mere two finger job on the dogleg-shaped Magura lever. However, clutch engagement is still pretty sharp; this and the accompanying rise up of the suspension are what first time riders usually comment upon.

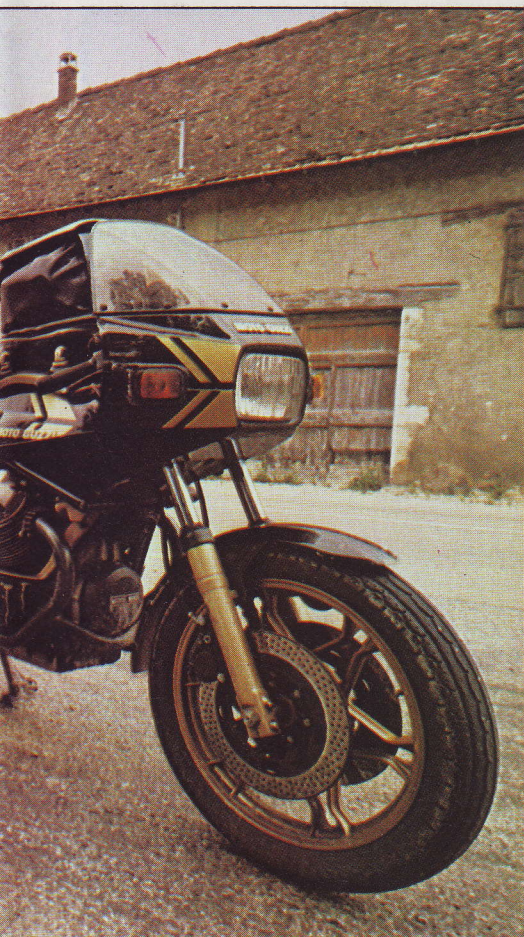
There's no mistaking what bike you're on once you're moving — no bland across-the-frame four ever sent out power pulses as huge and emphatic as the BMW's. Previous 1000cc BMW test bikes have all seemed to smooth out their engine's low rpm vibes at around 3000 but the CS's threshold was between 3500-4000. Even then, the mirrors' images would become blurred when rolling on the throttle in the higher gears. This change for the worse may be an inevitable result of lopping 8½lb off the combined single plate clutch/flywheel assembly in an effort to make the rpm rise and fall more responsive to the throttle.

It's a completely new clutch which though still a single plate car type dry unit, is now 165mm diameter across the plate instead of the previous 180mm. I first thought this'd reduce the service life but, apparently, the actual driving area of clutch lining is only 1.2mm thinner in diameter. The plate lining material is still 6mm thick, same as on the old clutch, while the driven plate is thinner, smaller and perforated to save weight. The flywheel isn't really a wheel any more but a three spoked cross holding the starter ring; that's still the same diameter.

Add this quicker motor with the other major weight paring of 6½lb from the cylinders (by substituting gsnikal plated bores for cast iron liners in the aluminium cylinders and you get the fastest accelerating BMW we've ever tested. It clocked a standing start ¼-mile elapsed time of 12.96 seconds — the first time we've had a



BMW dip below 13 seconds. Sounds a bit slow when compared directly with some big 11-second Jap multis but remember that's a track figure which is only an indication of the maximum performance available. On the road, it's a different story. We'd expected a fairly rollicking top speed, too, having seen an indicated 127mph on some, er, unofficial test strips but unfortunately intermittent rain and intermittent action



Guzzi (replacing last year's floating calipers) but retain their own stainless steel drilled rotor. However, they've opted for metal based disc pads instead of Brembo's usual asbestos-based organic pads to improve wet weather braking. Certainly, there's no appreciable lag on wet roads, and we went through three bad storms while traversing the Haute Savoie Alps, but swapping from the CS to the 900SS showed how Brembos can be set up — hard braking is such a finely controlled experience that it's as much a delight as getting, say, your favourite corner just so. No doubt BMW thought such ferocious brakes would be out of place in their bikes' unrushed, competent rather than startling, image.

Not all was sweetness and light two-up; BMW never have fully sorted out the location of centre and prop stands properly though they do position the main stand centrally so that it's (relatively) easy to remove either wheel in case of a puncture. But with another's weight helping compress the suspension and thus reduce ground clearance, left hand bends need careful lining up. Perhaps this was exacerbated by the truly excellent and most wonderful new road tyres of the decade (hah, it is only 1981) fitted: Metzeler ME11, front, and ME77, rear. We first encountered the severe grounding problem a half-hour after disembarking the P&O ferry in Boulogne; we were in a hurry because, as usual, a cock-up in international time zone understanding meant we arrived in France at 11pm which is not a good time to find a hotel. After several abortive attempts at small villages, we decided that Abbeville, the nearest big town, was our best hope and Getting A Move On was the mode. Overtaking a truck into what appeared to be a gentle, uphill left turn of the sort I used to think I was pretty hot at, my brain suddenly realised

the deception and that it was, in fact, a sharp, off-camber, steeply-inclined 90-degree left and we were completely off line, heading for the Armco which my poorly adjusted headlamp had by now picked out. Picking the CS upright for a heavy dose of brakes then smacking it right over resulted in a shower of sparks, several squeals from La Passenger, and my erratic line inscribed on the tarmac by an engraving tool sometimes known as the centrestand.

After this, it grounded on the fast sweeping turns of the N6 as we cut across the low hills of east Lyons, again on the tight hairpins of the big hills leading up to the 4,700 feet high Col de Telegraphique — determining the radius of the line taken, and on the dips in the road surface everywhere which'd suddenly appear halfway round a bed, bottoming the suspension. Normally this sort of behaviour is thoroughly out of order when touring but the Metzeler tyres suit the CS admirably, in both dry and wet conditions, refusing to let go under all sorts of provocation. They bear little resemblance to Metzeler's of a few years ago which had a good wear-rate but not much stick; these new tyres are part of a complete Metzeler revamp but should not be confused with the 'Sport' series. The Sports are ME77 and ME99s but in soft compound; they are available for street use and we'll be reporting soon on their suitability.

The CS's ability to be flicked through bends is slightly at odds with its excellence as a tourer though I'd prefer a different fairing for that role. Considerable mileage was clocked on the main A6 Autoroute south of Paris, in both directions, as a means of getting to our destinations without completely busting the *Bike* subsistence budget. For the sort of high speed cruising possible on such a road — where, even if you're holding a steady 100per, there are still Porsches and

from the test track's electronic timing gear meant we came away with a mere 116.8mph recorded. Our usual hectic schedules meant we were unable to re-arrange a test session.

And it certainly was a hectic schedule: during the two week test period we logged over 3000 miles on the CS, a figure which should indicate just how *useable* the BMW is, unlike many street racers. Not all of this was during our continental jaunt to Bardonecchia and one memorable summer's evening ride on quiet Hampshire A-roads saw 90 miles pass in one hour ten minutes. That was one-up, of course, and quite a different ride to the northern Italy trip which I undertook two-up, plus luggage. The extra weight almost made the CS handle and hold the road better — I say 'almost' because a bit of speed, acceleration, braking power and ground clearance is lost and thus the two rides aren't directly comparable. One-up, the long travel soft suspension is just too long for my liking, allowing the bike to pogo over bumpy surfaces. This fore-and-aft rocking sensation can be controlled by rolling on the throttle to extend the rear shox — in effect, the torque reaction is acting as another suspension medium.

There aren't many bikes which can beat BMW's feeling of solidness on the road when cruising, one or two-up, however. The extra weight of another person helped compress the suspension, reduce the amount of travel and thus the only vagueness in the handling. Occasionally, the CS felt underbraked despite the new Brembo system now fitted; it wasn't suffering from fade but, surprisingly for Brembo, fairly heavy lever pressure is necessary. Reasons for the difference in braking power are hard to pinpoint exactly: BMW use the same double piston calipers as fitted to the Ducati and Moto



Mercedes arriving in your mirrors at regular intervals — a frame mounted fairing giving full upper body streamlining is essential to ease the fatigue otherwise created by wind-blast. The little CS fairing took some of the wind up to around the 90-100mph range but sustained 100-plus wasn't on. These are slightly ridiculous speeds in over-policed Britain where many motorists and almost all bureaucrats think that no rider/driver is competent enough to sustain that kind of speed — funny, in these days of European standardisation, that we're so far removed from the French, Germans and Italians in this respect. Whatever, the CS's bikini also provokes a most un-BMW like weave at over 100mph which reinforced my dislike of hand-lebar gubbins.

A full fairing might also improve the fuel economy at high speed — to monitor the difference between ordinary roads and autoroute, I filled up at Tournus just before rejoining the A6 north and then spent the next 40km calculating that the last tankful had lasted for just under 200 miles, working out to an average 49mpg over a range of hills that'd required much swapping between third, fourth and fifth gears to maintain a high 70s mph average. It'd also been the split between the CS and the other two bikes since we'd decided we were stopping too often for each other. (Y'know the sort of thing: 'Shall I put my waterproofs on?' Ten minutes later: 'Oh, it's started raining...'). Next time we saw Brecon and Jim was while lunching at an autoroute restaurant poised right above the north bound carriageway: they streamed underneath gaining a lead of 25 minutes.

At the same stop, we filled up again — for the second time on the autoroute — to learn that 90-100mph cruising drinks fuel at 39mpg. Then it was through the toll booth which lifted 27 francs from us, and joining the heady rat-race of Citroens and Peugeots vying for the right line round the Paris Periphique. In case you've never been there, Paris has a sort of south and north circular but instead of the ridiculous excuse for a ring road we have around London, the Periphique is non-stop and very fast — at least, it is usually but this summer they've started road-works on the 'Paris Est' loop which we'd hit and got stuck in on the way down. Naturally, to me at least but then I'm often accused of taking my motorcycling too seriously, it seemed obvious to take the non-roadworked 'Paris Ouest' route on the return. As we cruised in the outside lane surrounded by other motoring hooligans all doing 75mph, we spotted B&J intent on circumnavigation of the French capital. They'd taken 'Paris Est', missed the admittedly poorly signposted N1 turn-off, and were doubling back to the south.

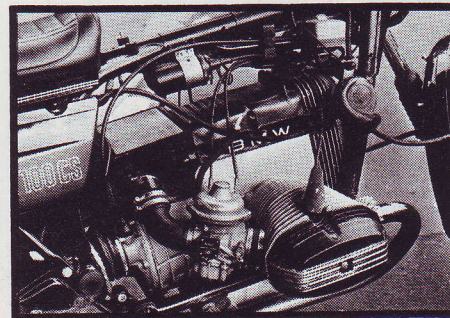
This incident did at least provide entertaining thoughts for me when we did hit traffic queues through the Paris suburb of St Denis but more tangible excitement was to follow. It was a classic scene, I thought romancing to myself; realising we were ahead of our fairly lax schedule and were within striking distance of catching a ferry back to England four hours earlier than intended, we sped into the northern France rural landscape chasing the dying rays of the setting sun. With a bright orange glow from our left, and longer and longer shadows being cast on the right, we — the CS, myself and passenger — slipped into that rare empathy where no words are necessary to communicate. The CS responded almost with as many thanks as I did to the more varied roads now passing under its wheels, and the pace hopped up as this living, breathing, mechano-human thing broke speed limits, swept past cars as though



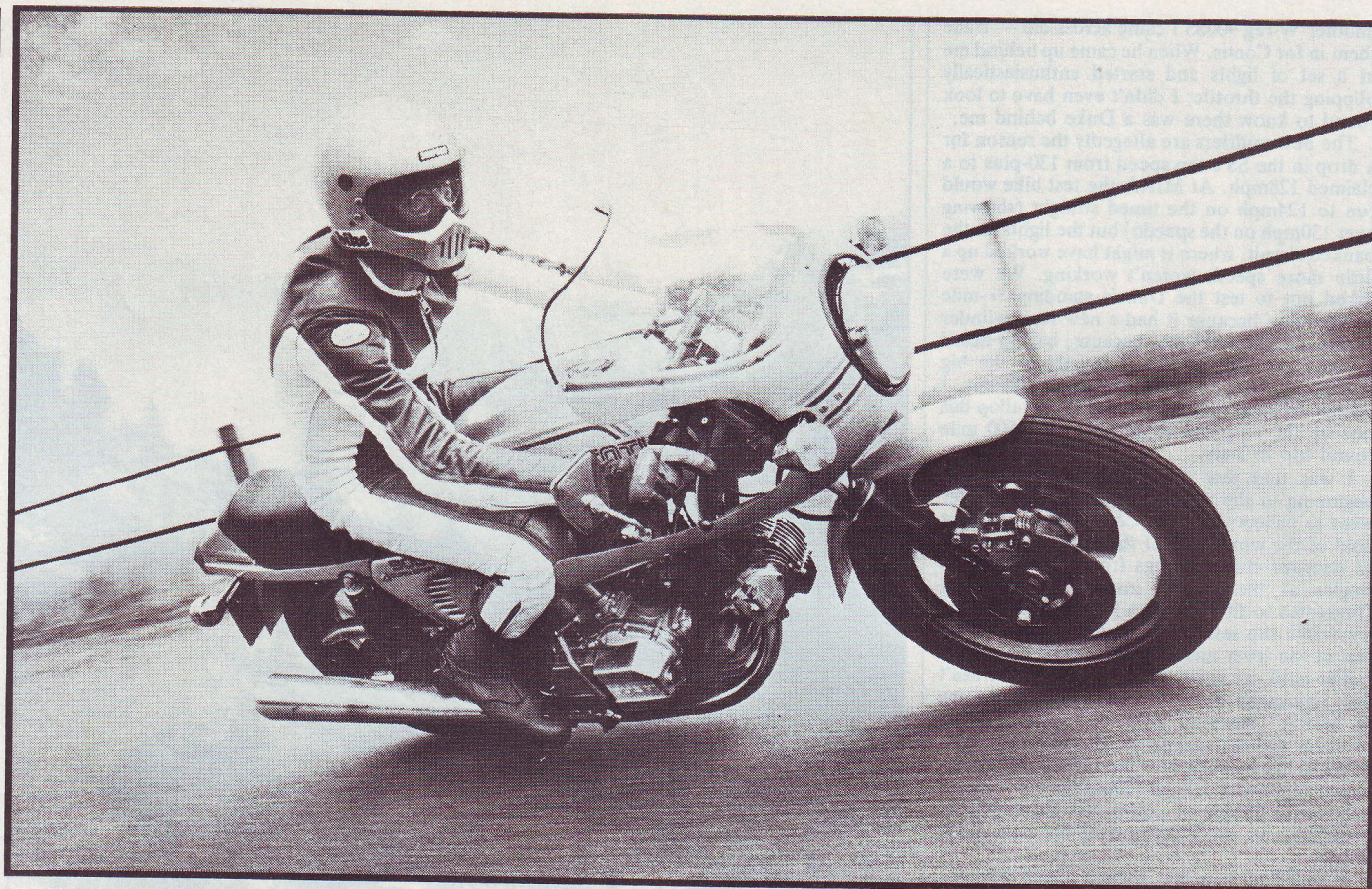
they were still, and cornered with perfect precision. It sounds loopy, as though I'd swallowed a bottle of awful autoroute red wine with that awful autoroute meal, but we'd already ridden so many miles that day that everything the bike did, I could sense immediately and make the correct next move. The reason is obvious: it was one of those occasions when all is well in the world, and I was riding skilfully for a change. Maybe, just maybe, Ronald Reagan and Comrade Brezhnev stopping thinking about neutron bombs for a while, too.

The only blight on the CS's ride was a strange surging sensation when feathering the throttle. It felt as though the lightened flywheel was allowing wind-up in the transmission.

Two stops later — one for petrol, the other to relieve bum sore spots — we caught the 8pm



Above: With the top of the new air filter box removed — see clips — the flat paper element is easily replaced.



Would you buy a used car from this man? Would you let your daughter marry him? Would you tell him his Ducati was an antique — a nice antique?

ferry from Boulogne with a half-hour to spare, leaving B&J to their sight-seeing tour of Paris. The smarting raw skin on inner thighs was probably inevitable with the high mileages we'd been clocking relentlessly over the previous few days and is no reflection on the BMW's comfort ratings. They must still rank among the top three (Hesketh first, Suzuki GSX1100 second) now that the first aid kit has been relocated from under the rider's seat to the rear hump. An hour after clearing Dover customs we were back in south London lining up the pizzas and Peroni beers we'd missed in Italy (not another *Bike* cock-up but the dire consequences of eating a homemade black cherry flan which postponed further eating plans for a couple of days). The last bit of the ride up the M and A2 was the only part in darkness, apart from that very first night to Abbeville, and the BMW's H4 60 Watt headlamp, now correctly adjusted for Britain, sent out a penetrating spread of light that even my tired eyes could cope with.

A good night's sleep later, back in the office and comparing notes, I couldn't help thinking how lucky I'd been to have drawn the CS for the trip (though it wasn't a bit of luck left entirely to the gods). It was the kind of ride which really summed up the competence of the big BMWs. Of course, the Ducati and Moto Guzzi are quicker and as good, if not better, handling; equally, they're far more demanding and fatiguing to ride. Just think what a bike it'd be if BMW could let their designers' hair down and produce a hotshot pukka street racer with short travel suspension, powerful touch-me-if-you-dare brakes, outrageous styling and even quicker motor — it'd be quite an experience.

Dave Calderwood

DUCATI 900SS

BORES WHO ASSAIL YOUR EARS WITH trite stories or tiresome questions at traffic lights are obviously a hazard of this job but the nit on a CX500 who chased me up the Essex Road deserves some kind of prize for epic tactlessness: 'I was going to buy a Pantah the other week but my mate put me off,' he squeaked. 'He told me Ducatis were antiques — nice antiques — but antiques. Do you think yours is an antique?'

His mate was entitled to his opinion but asking a bloke on a brand new 900SS whether he thinks it's an antique really is asking for a bunch of fives in the mush. Had the three grand's worth of what is generally considered the ultimate superbike been mine, I would have been tempted to rub the youth's face all over the radiator of his blandola bike's motor, but as it wasn't, I made do with roaring up the road as loudly as the Silentium mufflers would permit, casting muttered aspersions upon yon antique merchant's midget brain.

Arriving at my home a mile away just a few seconds later, I reflected on the misguided youth's words while I struggled with the 900SS's quaintly hard-to-operate steering lock. I could see how, when viewed from the comfy seat of a bike designed to be a small car, the lean, rangy Duke might look like a survivor from a forgotten age. Probably, I thought as I leaned down to tighten yet again the lefthand pillion footrest, CX Man had simply misunderstood.

The Super Sport is no antique. What it is is a low tech bolide in a world where high tech is all the rage. It's as starkly functional as a step-thru or a CZ commuter, only the function it's totally dedicated to is going very, very fast in a very

precise manner. It's the extent to which it achieves this aim which makes it, probably, the best roadgoing superbike in the world.

Even the famed and feared desmodromic valve gear which opens and closes the valves positively instead of using springs is not as confusing as it looks and, according to *Bike*'s own RP McMurphy, can be owner-adjusted with little more than practice, determination, systematic workmanship and a set of empty yogurt pots. Mind you, if you believe McMurphy, you'll believe anyone. Whether desmo gear is really a necessity or simply the incarnation of a beautiful engineering idea is a matter of debate.

Unfortunately, even low tech supercycles cannot forever evade the grasping hands of our bureaucratic lords and masters and this year the little men in shiny shoes have done for the SS's wonderful but very loud exhaust note. Once there was a time when the booming bark from the twin Contis was the ideal thing for startling the wits out of dozy, dope-smoking Renault Four drivers up the High Street, and when Quaddy was a scruffy reporter with a bent CB200 the sound of an accelerating Desmo was seductive music to bored ears.

Alas, came the rosy day when I first slung a leg over an SS, the Contis had given way to Silentiums. Even though they manifestly failed to live up to their name, the richness of the old zorsts was gone. The Silentiums' contribution to keeping the SS within current noise regulations is, er, debatable and it would be advisable to keep away from ministry men with noise meters, especially if you should accidentally quickly detach the quickly detachable baffles on the end of each muffler. This makes the SS a major source of noise pollution though I'm told it does little for performance. On balance I'd ignore the claimed improvement on low end torque given by the Silentiums and do what the guy on

another W-reg 900SS I came across did — trade them in for Contis. When he came up behind me at a set of lights and started enthusiastically blipping the throttle, I didn't even have to look round to know there was a Duke behind me.

The new mufflers are allegedly the reason for a drop in the SS's top speed from 130-plus to a claimed 128mph. At MIRA the test bike would run to 124mph on the timed straight (showing over 130mph on the speedo) but the lights on the banked circuit, where it might have worked up a little more speed, weren't working. We were asked not to test the Duke's standing ¼-mile acceleration because it had a new rear cylinder barrel. I'd phoned C&H because, having heard many a sad tale of the sensitivity of the big Dukes' clutches to even normal treatment, I wanted to be quite sure it was OK to wallop this one up the strip before going on a 1,500 mile round trip to Italy.

I was told that the test bike's clutch was beginning to slip a little but when John Hunter went to collect the bike, C&H told him I'd got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Ducati now fit stronger clutch springs from the 450 desmo singles at the factory instead of expecting Ducatists to fit them at a later date when the inevitable slip sets in. This gives a pretty heavy feel at the lever and I went through agonies in traffic until my wrist got used to it, so I wasn't very impressed when the clutch started slipping at MIRA. Running with the wind was no problem and the speedo needle would spin past 130mph but heading into the breeze started the clutch slipping at around 110mph in top. Coburn replaced a couple of plates and there was no recurrence of the slipping over the next 1,800 miles.

A continual nuisance, though, was a difficulty in finding neutral when the motor was running unless you slipped it into neutral before coming to a halt. Removing the cable slack by turning the large adjuster at the lever (easily accomplished, even in gloves) helped somewhat but I felt it wise to slacken it off again for long high speed runs.

The seat is about the only other thing which has changed and I found it comfortable enough up to 300 miles at a time, if not exactly in the BMW class, but we're now into areas of Ducatism which baffle, annoy and sometimes even enrage the most ardent Ducatists: The new seat is held to a grotty fibreglass base by two screws and a bit of Meccano, while mention of the seat lock is an occasion for polite laughter. Chromed plastic indicator shells are to be sniffed at on a £3,120 machine, the paint is soft, the idiot lights blinked on and off at *their* discretion, the instruments are bigger liars than most and mists of oil would appear all over the motor.

Ducati faced up to junking their awful tin box switchgear some time ago but the Japanese item on the left bar featured side-by-side rocker switches for lights on/off and hi/lo beam. Anyone who's experienced this arrangement should need no reminding of the chances of hitting both rockers at once but I learned my lesson one dark night after taking two successive right-angle bends in the fading red glow from a switched-out halogen bulb. Tape up the on/off switch or remove it to some safe place. The headlamp's very good, though.

Firing up is a job for men and big gurls 'cos you have to kick it. First depress the plungers on the throaty 40mm Dell'ortos to flood them, flick the throttle a couple of times and then, holding the twistgrip shut or nearly so, kick the lever. Most times the Duke burst into life first go and rowped away while I blipped the throttle until the neighbours started looking at me like I made



pies out of kittens. Other times it spat back through the open bellmouths or kicked back with a kind of lazy insolence before starting next prod.

Then, nerves a-tingle, it's out on the open road with the Desmo urging itself forward incredibly smoothly, an urgent tautness being the overwhelming impression, not to mention an awareness that there's 864 very pokey cc's of 90 degree V-twin wrapped up in a mere 440lb or so of bike below you. So instant is the motor's response, and so lean and hungry is the Duke, that it feels as if it's not running at all but is attached to a cord held by a giant who gives a huge tug every time the throttle opens even a fraction.

The absence of vibes, the slinky screen to take the wind off your chest and the alert crouch dictated by the high seat and pegs and the long reach to the handgrips, leave it up to the bike to find its own pace and I found that for relaxed

cruising, things all came together at an indicated 95mph. With only slight provocation from my inner self the speed could rise to 125mph or more without any loss of comfort or poise.

Scorching down A roads will never be the same after riding the 900SS. There's the rising wail from the pipes as it peels out of corners, and the way it goes through them... oh God. Down, down, with nothing like hitting the deck (it *can* be done, I'm assured by the editor — the one with the Hailwood Replica-inspired limp), the 'bars rock steady in my hands and only the faintest hint of squirminess from the front Phantom from time to time. Really fast sweepers of the sort which seek out every deficiency in a bike's roadholding make no impression on the SS although rapid flip-flops through esses find it a bit reluctant to be picked up, put over and shoved down again. For loonies, street racers and one percenters everywhere, I'm convinced this product is a major contribution to road

safety. Or at least staying alive a couple of extra days.

All this would be a little less useful than a one-legged man at an arse-kicking party if it were not for the brakes. The triple Brembos were ferocious stoppers even when they were being showered with fuel surging out of the tank during crash stops from 124mph at MIRA. On the road, they provide every kind of retardation from gentle slowing in traffic under the lightest of pressure from one finger, to tyre squealing stops in less distance than you'd believe possible.

The Brembos proved themselves beyond doubt on the Autoroute du Sud near Auxerre when a lorry I intended to pass pulled out in front of me just as I was closing on him at about 110mph — about double his speed. There was nowhere to go but under him, and nothing to do but brake. To say the Duke made it with inches to spare doesn't mean there was plenty of stopping space but that superbly powerful, progressive brakes can make the difference between stopping safely or smacking into something. Jim Forrest, who was yards behind me on the Le Mans, drew level with every anchor slammed on and was going for the big laundry bill while I still had a bit to spare. And, yes, I *have* been more scared in my life. But not much.

Riding the 900SS the first 500 miles of the journey to Italy loaded only with a tank bag and a waterproof oversuit lashed to the seat proved it an adept tourer, although the sense of urgency ever-present beneath the lazy rumbling (4,500rpm equals an indicated 90mph) made it slightly less relaxed than the Guzzi or the BMW. Its acceleration and narrowness make it an ideal bike to play tail-end-Charlie on because it was the easiest to hustle past traffic when catching the others.

The only time it admitted any limitations was when Jim drove it up the mountain at the Stella Alpina rally. At first he stormed up the rutted, dusty track ahead of me but after a while I left him behind when he stopped to take photographs. Next time I saw him, he appeared to have contracted mountain fever. 'The f*****g thing!' he roared as he slithered by on the mud and shale. 'It won't get out of f*****g gear! The bloody clutch ain't working and how am I supposed to go round those f*****g hairpins when it's got f**k-all steering lock!'

The poor Duke was very hot and clouds of steam were boiling off the mud caked round the front cylinder so a halt was called while Jim and the bike cooled down. 'I tell ya, if tha' bloody bike started falling over the edge, I'd f*****g let it go,' muttered Jim but a 10-minute respite restored the Ducati, at least, to its usual self and it made the long, dusty, stony, muddy trip back to Bardonecchia without trouble.

The only other 900SS I saw on the mountain was being pushed back down and that the test bike made the trip up and back without serious problems says a lot for its powers of withstanding a prolonged bashing on a barely-surfaced track in bottom gear 80 per cent of the time. Should you think that taking it up the mountain was unusual, I ought to point out that a typical French diversion the day before had sent us on a four mile scramble along a woodland cart track. Under those conditions, it was with fears for the longevity of the motor's innards that I watched the unfiltered carbs hungrily sucking in quantities of gritty dust.

Fitting filters on the Ducati twins is difficult because the carb on the front cylinder is already perilously close to the rider's leg and there's precious little room round the rear cylinder's carb. When we noise-tested the bike at MIRA, a

tiny hesitation in the throttle response was noticeable when cracking on the power around 4,000 revs but by the time we reached Italy it would fluff noticeably when powering away from midrange; the problem stayed with it until it went back to Coburn and Hughes. It appeared to be a carburettor fault but it didn't affect response from higher speeds.

On the way back from Italy, the 900SS blew two fuses, once because Jim had accidentally pushed the dipswitch to 'flash' and it stuck there with both filaments burning, and once because the grottness of the fuse panel under the seat has to be seen to be believed, letting the fuses jiggle about until something goes.

Most of the travelling was done at a steady 80-90mph and the Ducati returned between 50 and 54mpg during the trip, usually going on to reserve at around 150 miles.

There's definitely some magic about a 900SS apart from the legendary status which had all us new boys on *Bike* queueing for a ride but most of what makes it such a great, balls-out, joy to ride can be put down to putting a low-slung, inline V-twin in a properly rigid frame, getting the steering geometry right and finishing it off with superb brakes and a suitable riding position.

The suspension works on the well known Italian principle that if it ain't stiff it ain't worth a you-know-what, and it spends far more time keeping the wheels tracking straight and on the road than it does keeping the rider insulated from the jolts. I like firm suspension, as long as it doesn't chuck the bike around over ripples and bumps, so the test bike was OK by me.

Whether it was strolling through town like a prowling panther or parked outside a pub, the Duke always showed pure class although there was no escaping the fact that it's totally uncompromising in what it offers. In return it demands more love and attention than your average two wheeler and anyone who goes for one can expect it to fine tune *them* into sussing every tiny deficiency and hesitation most riders wouldn't even notice.

The 900SS is a serious bike for serious motorbikin' which makes no concessions to those who want to take their riding more light-heartedly and I'd have to be pretty sure I wanted what it offers before I mortgaged my life to own one. One thing's for sure — if that's what I wanted, no other production bike could give it to me.

Brecon Quaddy

MOTO GUZZI LE MANS II

TWO BLACK DOTS RACING ACROSS the northern French landscape; the searing howl of a charging Ducati closely following the deeper roar of a Guzzi Le Mans being held flat out down the long, undulating straights and hurled insanely round the frequently encountered bends. Yes, you've guessed it. It wasn't a couple of naughty, speeding French garçons out for a spin but Jim Forrest, the mad lensman of Brixton, and Rod C. Dynaqueb (aka me) high on speed, travel and fatigue, racing to reach Boulogne before the sun went down.

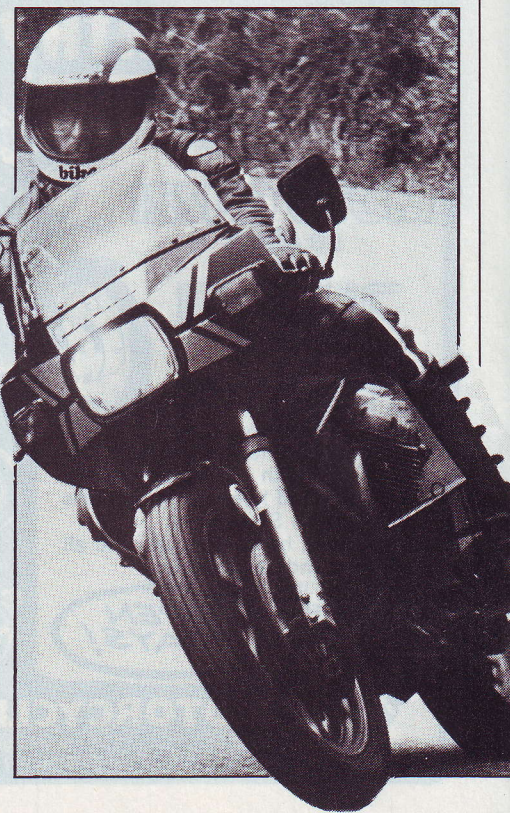
OK, so it's easy to go fast in France where the roads are as good as the cooked snails (and not nearly as greasy) but the significant thing about this particular blast was that we'd already been travelling 11 hours that day and had covered more than 550 miles before really letting rip on the final leg to the ferry. Nor was it the kind of fast riding you'd have expected after such a long haul — you know, a kind of brainless determina-

tion to get to your destination and ease the screaming muscles and stabbing pains from a bum battered by hours in the saddle, when consciousness narrows right down to the unwinding strip of tarmac ahead of the front wheel.

Truth be told, I was enjoying myself almost as much as if we'd only popped out for a Sunday afternoon race to the boozer and back. The excellent windscreen and a riding position I got on very well with had reduced the imagined tortures of a day-long ride to little more than minor aches and two tender areas of bottie. The incredibly relaxed thud-thudding of the big 90 degree transverse V-twin motor soothed nerves over hours of constant 90mph riding leaving the mind alert for all that fast overtaking on the A roads past Paris. And in spite of the speed, there seemed all the time in the world to watch the rolling patchwork of fields flying past in the warm evening sunlight.

Had I only known the sun was setting as fast on the Le Mans MKII as it was on Abbeville, Samer and the countless little villages we flashed through, I'd have made more effort to savour the experience. Pictures of the MkIII Lemon appeared in one Italian mag before we collected the black/gold MkII from Coburn and Hughes but the word was that it would be many moons before they appeared in the showrooms this side of the Channel. But when I went round to return the Ducati a couple of days after coming back from le Continent, there was the new Guzzi, large as life and almost as ugly, sitting in the back yard. I even got to sit on it. Jeez, you go to Italy to write an appreciation of a bike and you come back to find yourself writing its epitaph.

It was in August '79 that *Bike* first tested the MkII and Dave Calderwood became a member of the growing band of Le Mans riders to encounter pain at the knee/fairing interface but the black/gold I was riding had changed a little since those days. The barrels are now nikasil plated to give them super-tough wearing surfaces at the cost of a chance of a rebore, and the electrics have been improved by increasing the



MOTOGUZZI LE MANS II

battery size to a 32ah item which shouldn't be so badly affected by cold weather. Air-assisted suspension is now featured throughout the range but the valves on the shocks and teles are notoriously resistant to attempts to get air past them and Coburns had set the pressures fairly high in advance because they knew we'd be loading up for the trip to the Stella Alpina.

The system should work well because the air you put in goes into sealed rubber chambers like, er, super-thick condoms which act as a spring against the damping oil. The advantages of such a system are that you don't have to worry about blowing any seals (the Paoli shocks on a Monza we tested happily withstood 120psi on one occasion) and the only place they may leak is round the valves.

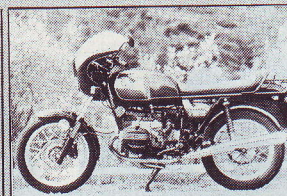
Unfortunately the whole idea falls to pieces when faced with adjustment because most British garage air lines, bicycle pumps or pressure gauges simply don't make an effective seal against the Schrader valves; the gnat's burp of air you put in to get the recommended 35-45psi just comes straight out again. There *are* ways of dealing with the problem, ranging from carrying round an appropriate O-ring to bung into airline connectors, to investing in expensive pumps specially made for air suspension systems, but I left well alone and put up with the bumps when the Le Mans wasn't loaded.

By far the most striking change is the black/gold paint job. Not to everyone's taste perhaps but it certainly looks special when you get close enough to see that the black is really a very tasty, subtle gold-flecked metallic. Only we Brits can buy black and golds, but although it was simple enough to think up the colour scheme, it was another matter entirely getting it applied to the Guzzis. Apparently, Alessandro De Tomaso includes colours among the long list of product details he wants to be personally involved with and although the factory agreed with C&H (for it was their idea) that black and gold would be truly amazing and wonderful, everyone had to wait weeks for the elusive Mr Big to be tracked down and say 'Arignt, itsa hokay,' before the factory paint boys could go into action.

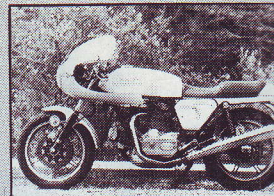
The plush paint job completes a softening of the Le Mans' styling started by the change of fairing on the first MkIIs. MkI's, you'll fondly remember, had that tiny flyscreen and a red and black paint job so rendolent of horny Italian sportsterism that Bill Haylock's prose threatened to burst into flames any moment when he tested one back in that hot August of '76. The bigger fairing and the introduction of a clock on the MkIIs began to hint at a sports/tourer role, although the narrow seat was still there to trap the unwary.

Let's face it, the black/gold is a long way from being the debut of a soft, squashy land-cruising Le Mans but the new touch of richesse definitely suits the bike's image of a sportish bolide for those who can afford something special. I mean, shoving a motor directly descended from WW2 light troop carriers into a 59-inch wheelbase frame and expecting the result to scamper through twistery in a blaze of brain-cell killing response is a bit like trying to make a powered-hang glider out of tarred felt roofing and a spare Gold Wing engine.

In fact, my initial reactions to the Le Mans (bearing in mind I was bottle fed on Haylock's copy) were consternation and an awful dismay at the thought of wrestling the thing to Italy and back. Wrestling was the word for it on my first ride from Luton to Reading. The twistgrip



**BMW
R100CS**



**DUCATI
900SS**

Engine	ohv flat twin
Bore x stroke	94 x 70.6mm
Capacity	980cc
Compression ratio	9.5:1
Carburation	2 x 40mm Bing CV
Bhp @ rpm	70bhp @ 7000
Max torque @ rpm	56ft/lb @ 6000
Primary drive	Direct
Clutch	Single plate, dry
Gearbox	5 speed
Electrical system	12V 28AH battery, 280W alternator, breakerless coil ignition

Lighting.....

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	57½in
Seat height	32¾in
Overall width	29½in
Ground clearance	6½in
Weight (with 1gal fuel)	450lb
Fuel capacity	5¼gal

EQUIPMENT

Indicators	Yes
Electric starter	Yes
Trip odometer	Yes
Steering lock	Yes
Helmet lock	Yes
Headlamp flasher	Yes
Others	Cockpit fairing, first aid kit, tyre pump, anti-theft cable lock

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	
front	3.25 x 19in Metzeler
rear	4.00 x 18in Metzeler
Brakes	
front	2 x 260mm discs
rear	SLS 7.9in drum

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	
prone	123mph (est)
sitting up	116mph (est)
Standing ¼-mile	12.96s/104.8mph
Speedometer error	
at indicated 30mph	26.7mph
at indicated 50mph	45.4mph
at indicated 70mph	65.2mph
Fuel consumption	
overall	49mpg
ridden hard	39mpg
PRICE (inc. VAT + Car Tax)	£2995
Guarantee	12 months/unlimited mileage
Supplied by	BMW (GB) Ltd., Ellesfield Avenue, Bracknell, Berks.

ohv flat twin
94 x 70.6mm
980cc
9.5:1
2 x 40mm Bing CV
70bhp @ 7000
56ft/lb @ 6000
Direct
Single plate, dry
5 speed
12V 28AH battery, 280W alternator, breakerless coil ignition
60/55W H4 headlamp

ohc V-twin
86 x 80mm
864cc
9.5:1
2 x 40mm Dell Orto
n/a
n/a
Gear
Multiplate, wet
5 speed
12V 14AH battery, 200W alternator, breakerless coil ignition
60/50W H4 headlamp

60in
32in
27in
6in
443lb
4gal

Yes
No
Yes
Yes
No
Yes
Half-fairing

3.50 x 18in Pirelli
4.25 x 18in Pirelli

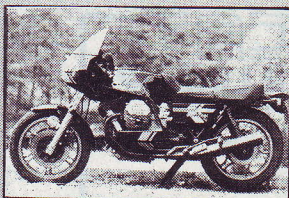
2 x 280mm discs
280mm disc

124.5mph
121mph
12.8s (est)

26.5mph
45.7mph
63.8mph

50mpg
48mpg
£3129

12 months/unlimited mileage
Coburn & Hughes, 53-61 Park Street, Luton, Beds.



MOTO GUZZI LE MANS II

ohv V-twin
83 x 78mm
844cc
9.5:1
2 x 36mm Dell Orto
73 @ 7300
n/a
Direct
Single plate, dry
5 speed
12V 32AH battery,
200W alternator,
c/b coil ignition
45/40W headlamp

59in
29in
28in
7in
476lb
5gal

Yes
Yes
Yes
Yes
No
No
Full-fairing, linked brakes

3.50 x 18in Pirelli
4.25 x 18in Pirelli

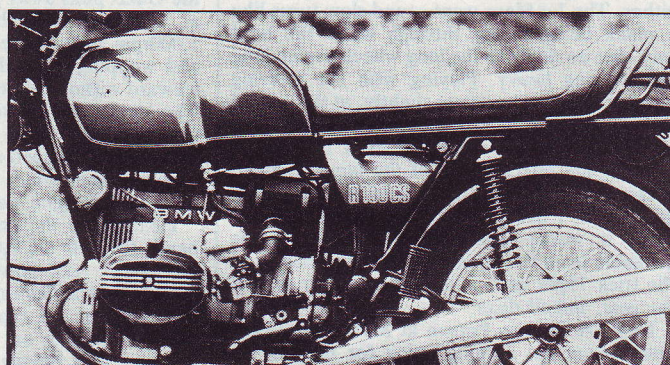
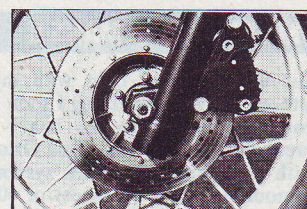
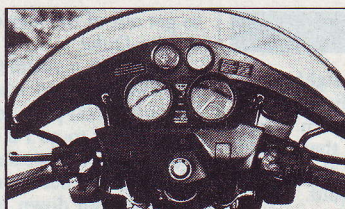
2 x 300mm discs
260mm disc

125mph
118mph
13.95s/103.84mph

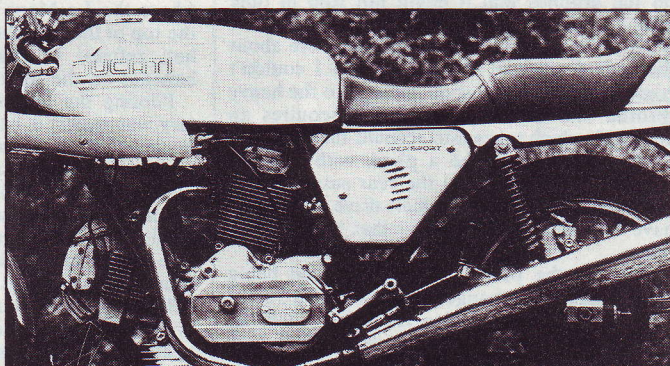
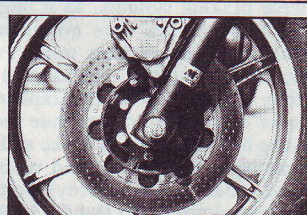
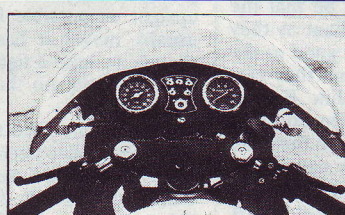
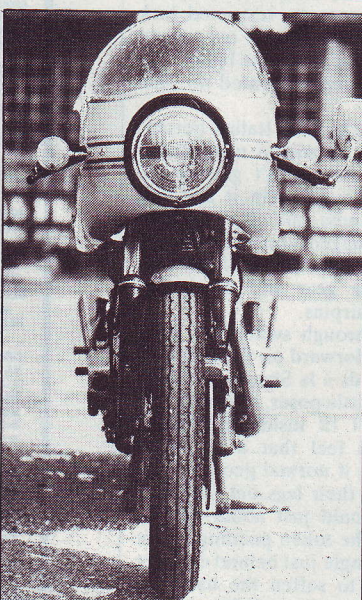
30.4mph
50.7mph
72.4mph

53mpg
45mpg
£2999
12 months/unlimited mileage
Coburn & Hughes
see left

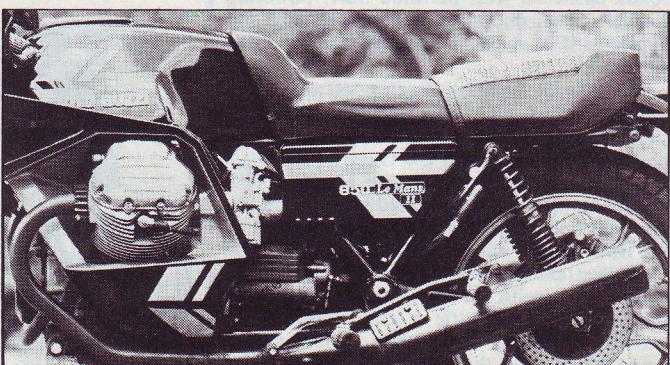
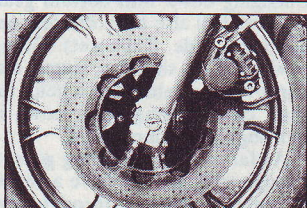
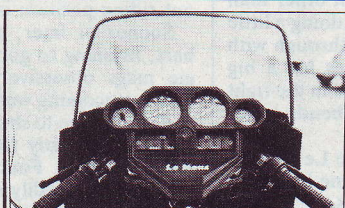
BMW R100CS



DUCATI 900SS



MOTO GUZZI LE MANS II



MOTO GUZZI LEMANS II

put up a spirited fight with my right wrist, although it was something I soon adjusted to. If you don't adjust to the heavy return spring pressure from the 36mm Dell'Ortos, there's a kit with an alternative return system, though the rumoured price is in excess of 60 quid.

Cornering wasn't an inspiring experience either. The Le Mans went round slow turns like a plank being swung through water the hard way, due no doubt to the long wheelbase making the steering heavy. Playing with the steering damper improved matters slightly, at the cost of making the Guzzi wobble more in sweeping bends taken at 60 or more. As if this wasn't enough, the effectiveness of the famous linked braking was seriously not up to its usual standard (well, I had to stand 'ard on the pedal to make it work) and there was more stopp available from the unlinked front disc than from the trick 75per cent at the front, 25 per cent at the rear, linked discs.

Now, A Certain Person at Moto Guzzi concessionaires has a thing going for the test Le Mans and he has expressed a dislike of viciously fierce braking systems, so it might be that the test bike's brakes were not as brilliant as they could be. They certainly weren't as good as the Monza V50's (*Bike*, August '81) and they certainly nearly put photographer Jim Forrest under a truck in France while the Ducati I was riding had less room to brake and even then had something in reserve. And no-one can blame brave (but not foolhardy) John Hunter for refusing to top speed test the Le Mans at MIRA on the grounds that it might not stop in time after the timing lights.

As it turned out, the weak brakes were about the only feature of the test Lemon I couldn't come to terms with. I soon got used to the heavy throttle and the handling simply requires an approach which takes into account the facts that a) the bike's built like a plank with a heavy weight in the middle; b) the rear suspension is markedly affected by the shaft drive and c) you have to, oops, watch out for that torque reaction.

Keeping the power on in bends and being careful when you change down is where it's all at with the Le Mans. Going round on a trailing throttle will start it weaving and it will kick disconcertingly when you open up on the exit. Changing down into bottom gear at other than low revs will also have the rear end doing a little hop (or a slide, if it's wet). Going through with power on all the way round makes for a big improvement, although it helps to be in the right gear 'cos changing up or down in bends is not thoroughly recommended.

As far as tight cornering goes, the Le Mans is enough to give shaft drive a bad name but when it came to peeling through series of Alpine bends tarmac with petrified Surf, powering through hard smoothed out the bumps and ripples as if by magic as the driveline extended the shocks.

Jim rode the Le Mans the first 500 miles from London and I took over from him, secretly planning to get back on the Duke as soon as possible. Jim had found the Guzzi's handling a vast improvement over his own Honda 900FZ workhorse but to me it seemed heavier and less responsive after the 900SS. Following Dave on the BMW in traffic required careful anticipation of his overtaking manoeuvres if the Le Mans was going to stay with the Bee Em. If I didn't start winding on the throttle a good few seconds earlier, the Guzzi would take so long to get going that it'd miss the gap and I'd then be trying

to get out of the way of Jim, whizzing up behind on the Duke.

Dropping a couple of cogs would punch the Le Mans forward when the rev counter needle hit the 5,500-plus interest zone but if Dave decided not to go I'd end up treading heavily on those brakes. Acceleration below 5,000rpm is deliberate rather than startling and although it could be run down to about two grand in top, the Guzzi pulls away pretty slowly. Fast cruising at 85-90mph put the Lemon in the 4,500-5,000rpm zone where it began to wake up a little and wopping open the throttles sent it surging forward without hesitation to well over 120mph. The Veglia clocks are no longer the inaccurate toys they used to be and the test bike's speedo may even have been under-reading over 70mph, so the 125mph which so readily appeared on the blast to Boulogne was probably a true speed.

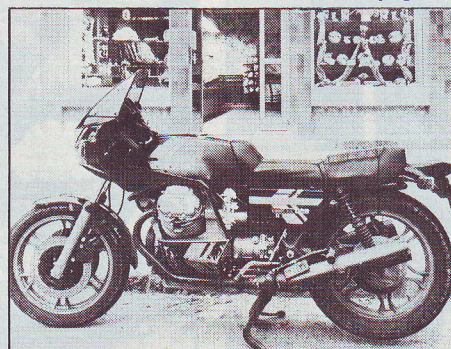
Heading up the first sets of zigzag mountain bends towards the 8,600 foot Galibier pass, the Le Mans' lazy power delivery and low end torque were a blessing in the hairpins where the instant clout on tap from the 900SS needed careful handling on the poorly-surfaced turns. Jim was also having to run wide on loose or greasy-surfaced corners to keep the Duke as upright as possible because its restricted lock usually meant it has to be leaned over quite sharply to take a tight line in a slow bend. The generous lock on the Guzzi presented no such problem.

By the time we'd reached the Italian border, via a short dirt-tracking excursion near Briancon, I'd decided that Jim wasn't getting the Guzzi back at all if I could help it and this blatant display of selfishness paid off at the rally where the Le Mans chugged unconcernedly to the top of the mountain while the 900SS got very hot, refused to change gear and drove Jim bananas on the tight hairpins.

Piloting the Guzzi through switchback twistery was easiest if I sat forward on the seat with my knees thrust outwards à la Sheene. Nothing to do with being a racy little poser, of course, it's just that they wouldn't fit inside the fairing lowers. Perhaps Guzzi feel that a Le Mans wouldn't be a Le Mans if normal people could ride it without hanging their legs out. My own short, fat hairy legs would just about tuck in behind the lowers but the token padding where my knees touched the angle just behind cylinder heads didn't do much to soften the battering they got. Over long distances, a slightly knees-out riding position is more comfortable.

Sooner or later, all the sitting in late night bars, listening to good music and reading *Froggie* mags obsessively documenting Brian and Di's forthcoming wedding had to come to an end and it was time to shuffle out on to the main drag in Modane ready for the 600 mile ride to the midnight ferry. Four hundred miles later, Paris was getting steadily nearer at a constant 90mph and I was pretty impressed with the Le Mans as

continued on page 78



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MOTO GUZZI LE MANS from p.36

a fast tourer. The fairing keeps the wind off admirably, the narrow, lowered 'bars and low seat are surprisingly comfortable (the seat is much more comfortable than I'd been led to believe), and the fairly high, rear-set pegs are nowhere near as cartilage-popping as the Duke's.

The Phantom tyres provide unfailing grip although I was never totally happy with the ribbed fronts. The Guzzi won the Best Wobbler award on the evil rainurage grooving south of Paris, incidentally. Naff points are the brake and clutch levers which require an abnormally long reach with your fingers (you can't help feeling that Guzzi designed the bike round an orang utan), and the strip of idiot lights tucked away where you can't see them over a tank bag. Whether or not you go for the switches, which appear to be made out of left-over Monopoly houses and hotels, is a matter of personal preference but I found them easy to use except for the indicator switch which hasn't enough travel. It's hard to hold the throttle open and thumb the start button at the same time but the test bike preferred a couple of squirts on the

throttle's accelerator pumps and then being turned over with the twistgrip closed. There's a cold start lever on the left of the tank which flicks on or off.

There are no mirrors. I've seen Lemons with ordinary mirrors screwed into the holes in the lever brackets and poked through the fairing but they look awful. We used a bar-end job but it was hard to get a good view behind because the bars are so narrow and steeply angled. Throughout the test, the Lemon returned an overall 54mpg, only dropping to 49 point something mpg under the provocation of that blast to the coast and if you are very careful, you should get 60mpg or even more. Is this not the sports/tourer/fun bike you've been waiting for to take your girlfriend to the great Continent?

No, it's not. Not with that pillion seat, anyway. Anyone who designs bikes without grab-rails or adequate means of holding on is a pretty nasty person and the person who designed the Le Mans' seat is even nastier. The only thing to hang on to is the seat strap embarrassingly hidden under the rider's bum. You can hang on to the indicator stalks if you want — until they break. The pillion pegs are high and rearward-set, and a shortish ride back from Luton into

London had my legs aching. The upswept silencers restrict your choice of throwover panniers unless they feature an adjustable centre-section to account for the narrow seat which, unlike the V50 Monza's, doesn't have a hard tail but squashes down at the back and tips the pillion down towards the rear light. Even Ducati's totally uncompromising 900SS has far more sensible arrangements for a passenger.

But for one person, a person not given to bouts of extreme looniness requiring meganoise, savage acceleration and magnetic roadholding, the Le Mans is a pleasant side road away from the Japanese sportish mainstream, although anyone who seriously thinks the stock bike is a sizzler is a wishful thinker. Compared with the Ducati, and even with the precise BMW, the Lemon is a bit of a tractor under its warpaint but, of the two Italian bikes in the test, I liked it best as a way of covering long distances at sane but not slow speeds. If I could afford to give in to my every whim, I'd have one. Trouble is, by the time I've saved up the necessary £3,080 on-the-road price I don't suppose there'll be any left. ■

Brecon Quaddy

KATANA 650 from p.66

mounts at the front. It's a massive 23 litres (that's five gallons innit?) giving a range of at least 150 miles before hitting reserve.

Over 850 miles the fuel consumption worked out to 42mpg 'ridden hard overall' you might say. If you wanted to get 60mpg I've no doubt you could but it takes someone made of sterner stuff than I to hold back from using the bike to its full and besides that's missing the point. The Katana is a head turning, fast scratching sports-ster that can hold its own with some of Europe's

best street racers and knocks most other 650s sideways. In fact since riding the Katana our man Quaddy has forsaken his XJ650 in favour of a bicycle.

And for posers (as acceptable a euphemism for 'show offs' as I have yet to find) it'll get you enough attention to o/d on with some to spare. Why even the big ligger RP McMurphy was seriously considering coming down to the pub on the pillion! Could this be a first?

At the car tax included price of £1728 you're looking at the discounted price of a 900FZ, not

an unpleasant motorcycle by anyone's standards albeit chain drive. But no, it's not the possibility of the big Honda, or even the charismatic V50 Monza plus sixty quid that would sway me from the 650 Katana. It's knowing that the 750 Katana with its outrageous nose-parts, clip-ons and anti-dive front fork will probably be coming off the boat pretty soon. And if Suzuki decide not to bring it to these shores then it just has to be the 1000 or the 1100. You see, for me, a better looking motorcycle than a full blown Katana has yet to be conceived. ■

STELLA ALPINA from p.41

there always seemed to be more bikes coming down the trail than were arriving in the town. There were lots. Who cares anyway: no-one was countin'.

Back in Bardonecchia, by the war memorial, a poorly-shaved Frenchman was putting a three-foot-long spanner into the toolbox of his Electraglide, which itself contained more or less all the bits he'd need to build another 'Glide. Well you know what it's like getting spares for these foreign bikes . . .

Ho Ho, I said. Bet you never went up the mountain on that. 'Did twice, so there,' he said in perfect French. Then he launched into a pantomime demonstrating (I'm pretty sure) that his bike's swing arm bearings were on their way out so he hadn't been able to go this year. Either that or he'd been having too much fun bopping around Bardonecchia to leave.

The thought of bopping round the town was appealing, especially as one bar was serving pretty passable Bass ale, but it was time to put my helmet back on and follow the others out and homewards. Others were pulling out too, the luckier ones to continue their holidays.

Later, I found out that the best part of the rally had apparently yet to start. The two or three dozen

riders who stayed another day were taken on a three day tour round little known and very beautiful parts of the scenery. Well, that's what I was told. I'm going back next year to find out.

FINDING SNOW IN JULY

THERE ARE LOADS OF ways to reach Bardonecchia, which is Italy's most easterly town.

If you're going from the UK, the Southampton/Le Havre ferry offers a quick motorway trip to Paris but we took the P&O ferry from Dover to Boulogne. The crossing takes only 1hr 40mins and there's a sailing every two hours with hot foot served from the cafeteria every trip. They even let us tie down the bikes to our own satisfaction!

From Paris, the A6 Autoroute du Sud offers a rapid if boring trip southwards for 180 miles to the turn-off for Tournus where the N75 and N504 will take you another 90 miles to Chambéry. Alternatively, you can stay on the autoroute, pay a few francs more in tolls and get to Chambéry via Lyon and the (N6) although it's a longer journey by 40 miles.

From Chambéry, follow the N6 signs eastwards for 50 miles until you reach St Michel de Maurienne, where an agonising choice faces you. You can turn right and go over the 8,700 feet

Galibier Pass, which is the second highest in the region (it used to be a mere 8,500 feet but the tunnel at the summit caved in and you have to go right over the top). It's narrow and twisting and it'll probably be raining at the top but it's well worth the effort. When you've descended the other side, head for Briançon and another switchback climb to Montgenevre on the Italian border, thence to Ulzio where you turn left for Bardonecchia. Distance from St Michel de M. is 70 miles.

If you're in a hurry or you don't like heights (in which case you shouldn't be going to Stella anyway), stay on the N6 until you reach Modane and then take the Frejus road tunnel (there's a toll) which comes out on the rally's doorstep.

This time, the mileage from St Michel de M. is only 18 but you're missing a lot.

Thirdly, there's the Col du Mont Cenis, where the N6 crosses into Italy and becomes the S25, although it's the E13 all the time, if you get the Euroroute classification idea.

You just stay on the N6 past St Michel and Modane and it eventually climbs over the Mont Cenis pass and down to Susa, where you turn right and head back westwards to Bardonecchia. The pass isn't so high as the Galibier, merely 6,800 feet above

sea level, but the road is wider and better and there's plenty of scope to be a complete looney on the hairpins going up and down or on the 15-mile 'level' bit in between and the scenery on the Italian side is wonderful.

Mileage from St Michel to Bardonecchia via Mt Cenis is about 71 but it beats the tunnel hollow and is a good alternative if you want to, or have to, return northwards after the rally.

When you reach Bardonecchia, the rally campsite is free and is well signposted. If you arrive on the day, just head for the town centre by the station and you'll soon find someone to show you the way on to the mountain road. A good map to buy is the Michelin 1cm pour 2km map (number 77) which covers all the approaches to Bardonecchia plus the road up Mount Sommeiller.

Total mileage from the Channel coast is between 520 and 620 miles depending on which ferry you take and how many passes you feel tempted to drive over.

Make sure your bike's tyres and transmission are in good order — there's nothing desperately rough about the mountain road but it does involve a lot of low gear slogging and there'll be more to come if you stay on for a couple of days. Date for next year's Stella isn't yet definite but we'll let you know as soon as we have it. ■