

THE ROAD climbed gently through the pines, passing a rushing stream on the left and a late patch of snow on the right; logs floated downstream in little groups. All around towered white peaks, glistening brilliantly in the hot sun of late afternoon. I was in a pottering mood, and the bike beneath me was quite content to purr smoothly along as though we had all the time in the world; with a gentle breeze around my ears and hair for the first time in years, I wished we did. That was my first encounter with the BMW R45, a brief familiarisation run in the Austrian Alps before its European launch the next day.

The R45 and R65 are the latest in BMW's long line of flat twins, and they continue the tradition while incorporating several new virtues. They have been built to give BMW a wider market for its machines than the limited superbike field, and they follow the usual pattern: flat twin four-stroke engine, pushrod-operated valves, five-speed gearbox, shaft drive.

Among the innovations is a torsion damper in the drive shaft which is designed to make for quieter and smoother gearchanges. It works. Gone is the familiar Bee Emm clunk, and the gearbox action is now altogether more pleasant. Good news for owners of larger models is that the modification can be incorporated into earlier machines — if the entire shaft drive mechanism is changed.

Although similar in appearance to the larger twins, the new 473cc and 650cc machines look smaller and more compact. In fact the engine is 2.2in narrower, due to a shorter stroke. The swinging arm is shorter by 2in, and the saddle height is a mere 30.5in. Attractive new styling seeks to make the most of these differences while retaining the unmistakable BMW profile.

Beautifully finished in either metallic bright red or metallic silver-beige, the new models feature the almost mandatory seat tail compartment. The saddle is dark brown, and the RS-style cast alloy wheels are fitted as standard. A large new instrument console incorporates a matching speedometer and electronic revcounter (redlined at 7,500rpm) containing warning lights for generator, oil, neutral and main beam. The ignition key is centrally mounted, and the entire console and handlebar mounts are covered with a pliable moulded plastic shroud.

The front brake master cylinder comes out from under the tank, as on other Bee Emms, and now perches on the right handlebar. One of the designers explained that technically it doesn't matter *where* the cylinder is, but on the new models there was no



room under the tank, which now conceals all the major electrical connections. The designer went on: *"In Sweden there is a law which demands that the brake master cylinder is next to the brake lever. This is ridiculous and we will oppose it. It is not the law for cars."* Right on!

The switchgear is different too. The cluster on the left bar contains the horn, dip switch/flasher, and the indicator switch which works in the horizontal plane — I used to get on fine with the old right-hand vertically operated switch, but a lot of testers did not. The right hand cluster now houses just the starter button and kill switch. The quartz halogen headlight is smaller than before at 6.3in, but still puts out a 60/55W beam. The smaller size was chosen to put less weight and mass on the handlebars, and it should still give a better beam than anything else in its class.

A restyled fuel tank holds 4.8 gallons, including 0.4 gallons in

reserve. The silencers are upswept at a more rakish angle, but then level out so as not to hinder the touring rider who wants to fit panniers. The header pipes still go bright blue after a few miles on a new machine. The solution used by most other manufacturers is to fit twin-wall pipes, but BMW engineers say they would be too heavy and expensive to produce. Both machines weigh 452lb dry, which is really a little excessive for the R45's power output.

Suspension at the front is taken care of by a re-designed telescopic fork made by Fitchel and Sachs, and offers 6.9in of travel. The steering head, like the swinging arm, runs on tapered roller bearings for precision and durability. Rear suspension offers 4.33in of travel with three-way adjustable spring preload, adjusted by an integral lever. A single front disc of drilled stainless steel is fitted, with a second disc available as an option. A ventilated drum is built into the cast

rear wheel.

The R45 engine displaces 473cc and delivers 35bhp at 6,500rpm, with 27.5 ft/lbs of torque at 5,500rpm. Two 28mm Bing constant pressure carburetors feed the pots, whose bore and stroke are 70 x 61.5mm. A 27bhp version with a slightly different specification is sold in Germany, where an artificial insurance class offers a discount of more than £100 to riders of bikes producing 27bhp or less. The 27bhp model will not be imported to the UK.

The R65 displaces 650cc and like the R45 runs on four-star fuel with 9.2:1 compression ratio. The stroke is identical to the smaller model, but the bore is 82mm. It produces 45bhp at 7,250rpm, and 36.9ft/lb of torque at 5,500rpm. Carburetion is by two 32mm Bings.

To sample the new machines as effectively as possible, BMW had laid out a 60-mile test route from our Austrian hotel through the Allgäu region on the German-Austrian border, incorporating every kind of road from autobahn to Alpine pass. With 60 journalists from Britain, France, Switzerland and Finland vying for 20 test bikes, myself and a

colleague were out at 8 a.m. and away down the road before most of the others had their leathers on. He rode an R65 and I an R45. For the first couple of miles we followed road-racer and new MCI contributor Cliff Peters on another R65, but eventually he vanished into the distance while we were still getting the feel of the bikes.

The immediate impression was one of comfort. The new saddles offer an excellent perch and combine with handlebars and footrests to give a natural and untiring riding position. The first aid kit, under the nose of the dualseat on larger current Bee Emms, is tucked away in the seat tail on the new models and this undoubtedly helps. The hand grips taper towards the switches, giving a wider section at their extremities that suits the palms well.

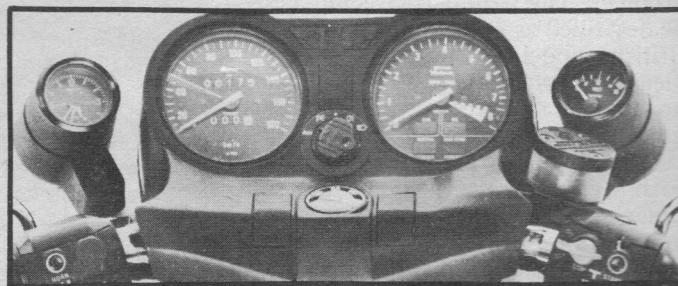
The second noticeable feature of both machines — particularly the R45 — was the way the tacho needle always seemed to be nudging the redline, which is an unusual occurrence on

larger Bee Emms. To overtake cars the smaller twin needed plenty of revving and advance planning; the 650 had slightly more mid-range urge, but the difference was really noticeable later that day when we took an R100/7 and R80/7 over the same route. A flick of the wrist was all that was needed with the larger machines.

We started the climb up the Oberjoch Pass, a delightful road with tight hairpin bends every 30 yards and breathtaking scenery. Two more facets became apparent: the new bikes really handle, and they have prodigious ground clearance. With the endless succession of uphill bends, this stretch was a continuous exercise in flicking the bikes from left to right without cease, and the shorter wheelbase of 54.8in made itself felt. Flicking the bikes from side to side was a smooth and effortless task — the bigger twins made us work harder. The new machines have a nice neutral feel to their geometry, and they can be flung about in a grand old fashion.

My colleague, riding behind me, pointed out when we stopped that his own R90S would be scraping its cylinder heads at the angles of lean we had been enjoying on the trip up the mountainside. That's where the

*Maybe the styling is a little more angular, but it is still unmistakably BMW. Thankfully, the narrow, flat handlebars have been retained — but so has the unfortunate, folding-top ignition key.*



narrower engine width comes in; I believe the pots are also placed slightly higher in the frame. The superb Metzeler or Continental tyres, 18in front and rear, were well able to cope with the cornering stresses. The bigger bikes proved more of a handful, despite their broader spread of torque, and on the R100/7 I grounded the footrest and caused a small rear wheel slide.

At the top of the mountain road we swapped bikes, and it was obvious that the R45 is the smoother of the two. The 650 is endowed with far quicker acceleration, but some vibration could be felt through the footrests with a particularly rough patch around 4,500rpm. The 450 has the sweeter motor, even if it does have to work harder.

Over a long, straight, but extremely bumpy stretch of flat road the suspension was put to its severest test and passed with flying colours. Both wheels stayed in line without a steering damper, and the ride was comfortable even though the forks and shocks were working overtime at more than 70mph.

Out on the autobahn there proved little difference between the two machines for top speed. With a 14-stone rider laying flat on the tank wearing leathers the R45 managed an indicated 160kph (or 100mph) exactly, which corresponds precisely with the factory's claimed figure. The R65 came up with 170kph, or 106mph, and the factory claim of 109mph should be possible when the engine is fully run in. When I tested the old R60/7 for MCI last year we managed a top speed of 103mph, so the R65 offers a slight increase in performance over the model it replaces. If memory serves me well, the R60/7 was also a smoother motorcycle, but perhaps our test R65 was rougher than normal. Even then, at 5000rpm it smoothed out like any other BMW and remained glassy smooth all the way up to top speed.

Both new models are claimed to produce 90% of their maximum torque over a 3,000rpm range, but certainly the R45 needed downshifting to get past some slower traffic along the test route. Both models had impeccable gearboxes and light clutches, so that task was no real problem. The 27bhp R45 could best be described as gutless, but the 35bhp British model has altogether more pleasant performance. It is probably no match on acceleration for the quicker Japanese 400s, but should keep with them for top speed. And with a potential 240-mile touring range it is obviously more suited to long-distance travel than any of its rivals. Although the R65 is

undoubtedly the quicker of the two, for some perverse reason I found the 450 more pleasant to ride. Both are finely balanced riders' machines that will bring the pleasures of owning an exclusive and elusive BMW to those with shorter legs and smaller wallets.

Wallets, money, price: that's where the future of these machines will lie when they are imported to this country in September. No price has yet been fixed, but the R45 especially will have to be fairly competitive to survive in the same market as Honda's CX500, for example. The R60/7 (a beautiful motorcycle, in case anyone wants to

grab one before it is superceded) now sells for £1,699. Allowing for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations I could see the new 650 selling for much the same price, putting it £200 below the R80/7. For the 450 to sell in competition with its R65 brother, the R45 would need to be about £1,499. We'll have to wait and see. But at those prices the new BMWs could bring luxurious and quality motorcycling to a new market: those of us, male or female, who want the best and are prepared to pay a little extra for it, without having to get into the superbike league.



*An engine unit which is 2 in. narrower overall means that cornering clearances have been improved.*