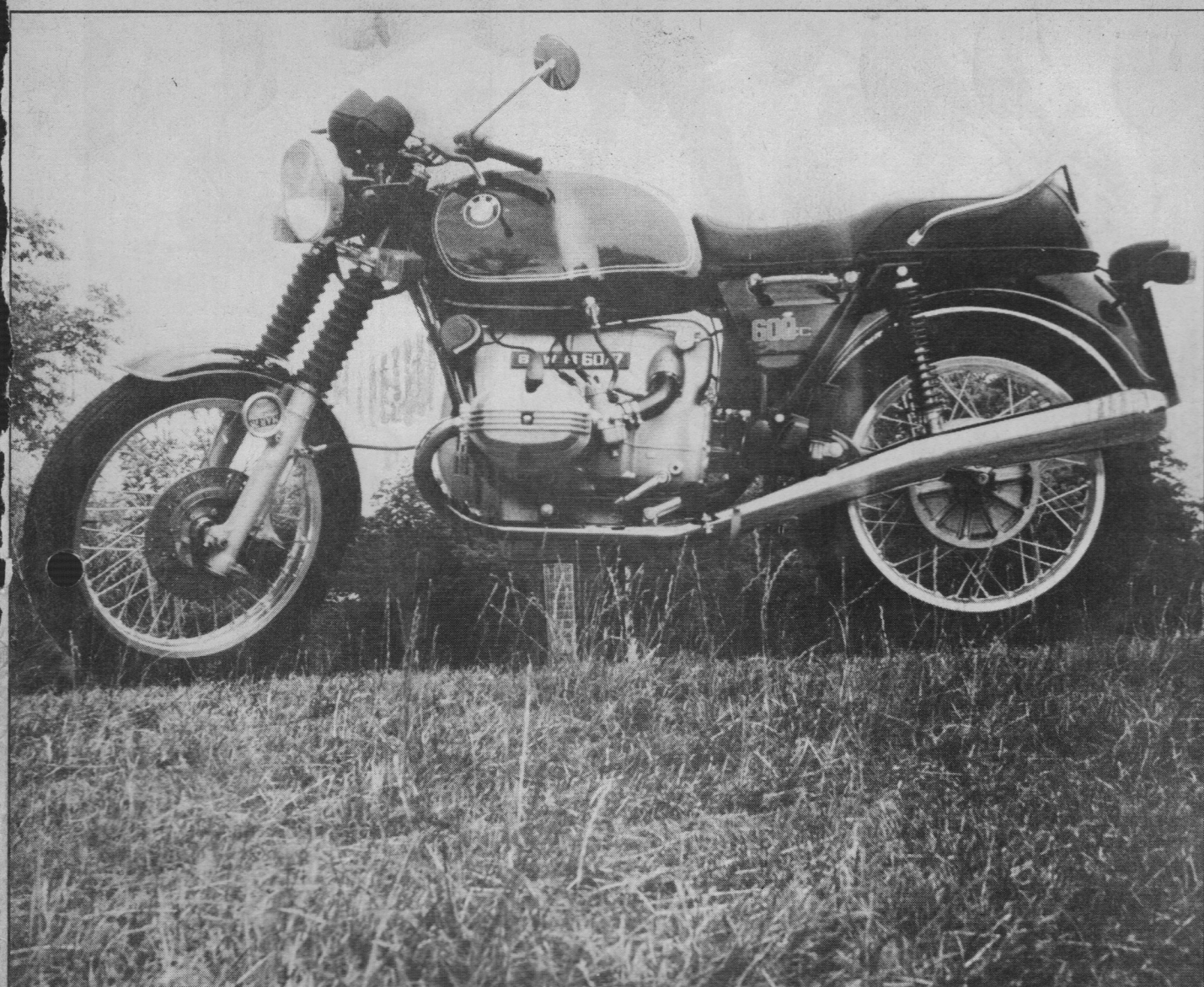




THE oft-repeated American adage about the infallibility of cubic inches seems to have left an indelible imprint on the minds of riders and designers alike. Two years of praise and persuasion by road testers has failed to convince the majority of British motorcyclists of the overall superiority of the Morini 350, yet many riders still dismiss it as a mere 350, a very costly one at that. The same goes for the BMW 600. Many riders of my acquaintance choose to ignore it as being under-powered and over-priced, without ever having put one through its paces on the road.

Motorcycle designers too have allowed themselves to be lulled into the false impression that horsepower is the basic ingredient of a good touring machine. And so we have a superfluity of so-called touring bikes that will accelerate like a bat out of hell and deliver high theoretical top speeds. But they frustrate the long-distance rider with their small petrol

tanks and limited touring range, poor rider positions, ghastly seats and frequent oil changes.

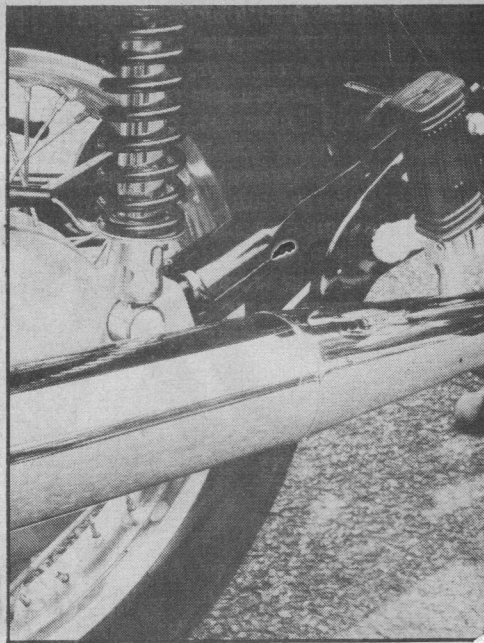
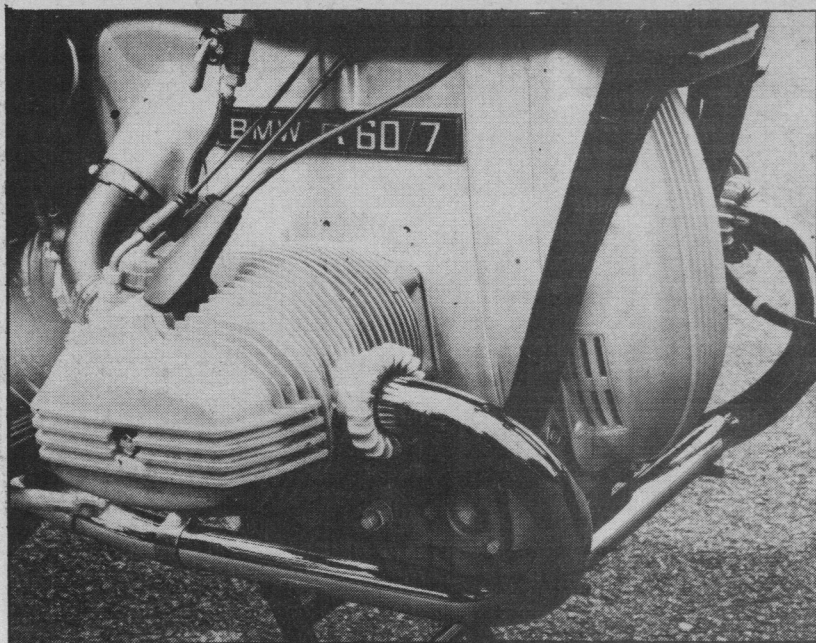
The manufacturers need to strike a balance between all these variables, and that's precisely what BMW has done with the R60/7, the latest in a long line of 600cc flat twins from the German factory. A motorcycle that excels in one or two areas but is merely average in all the others will necessarily limit the rider's pleasure to the machine's particular forte. So we have incredibly popular bikes with blinding acceleration; others with impeccable handling; still others that are nimble in traffic.

Many motorcyclists will have forgotten the sublime pleasures of a bike with a smooth and progressive power delivery, comfortable riding position, tireless cruising in the high eighties, good ground clearance and predictable brakes. The same machine can straighten out some twisty road or cover 600 autoroute

miles in a day with comparable ease. Such a bike offers the balance we are seeking: it pleases not by doing one thing exceptionally well, but by doing everything more than adequately.

If that sounds like an over-lavish description of the BMW 600, let me hasten to add that two weeks of living with and riding this beauty over many and varied miles have convinced me that it meets the real needs of a vast number of motorcyclists, if only they realised it. On paper and in the dealer's showroom the rash of multi-cylinder 750s may seem a better choice, but out on the road the littlest BM gives away virtually nothing in comparison.

Apart from its price, which we'll deal with later, the most likely criticism to be levelled at the R60/7 is its lack of horsepower. The factory claims only 40bhp, and some modern 350s and 400s costing less than half as much are said to

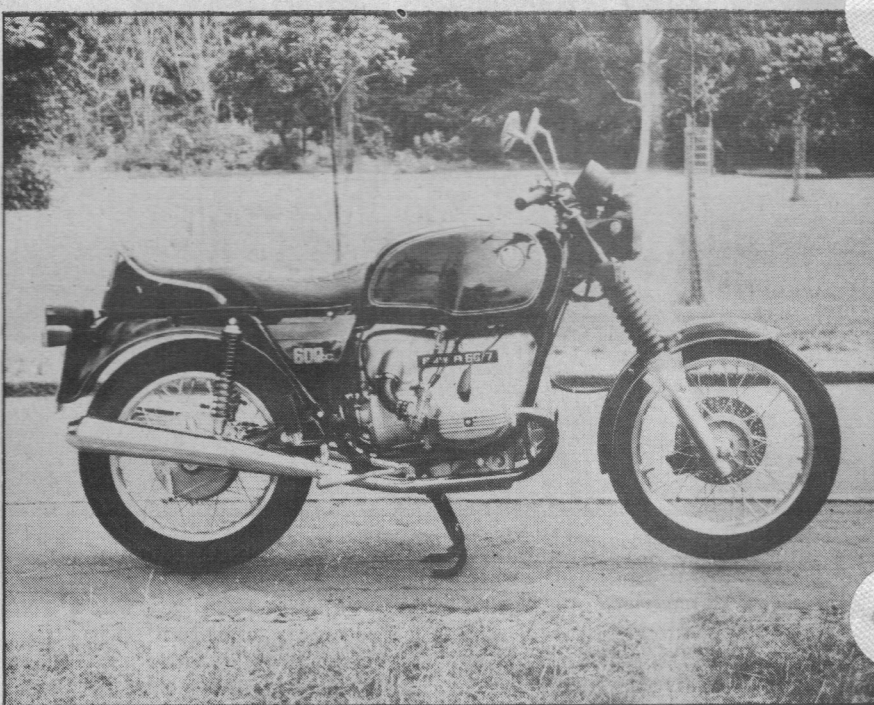


produce nearly that figure. But the BMW's top speed of 100mph sitting upright is only a few mph down on many of the current 750s. Lying prone and inspecting the fork crown nut at close quarters produces 103mph at 6700rpm, whereas most 750s will return more than 112mph with a similar riding position. But the 'tester's crouch' is hardly practicable for any distance on the open road, so the upright top speed is a more realistic guide.

Acceleration is brisk without being earth-shattering, but it's still sufficient to hold its own with similarly-sized bikes and will leave most cars standing, for a 0-60 time of just over seven seconds isn't exactly hanging about. Speeds in the five gears are roughly as follows: 1st 40mph; 2nd 60mph; 3rd 80mph; 4th 95mph; and 5th 103mph. The gears are well spaced and acceleration is nicely progressive, without any discernible power band.

Maximum power is developed at 6400rpm and falls off noticeably after that, so there is no need to reach for the 7000rpm red line. Maximum torque is 35.4ft/lb at only 5000rpm and the spread is wide enough to encourage staying in the higher gears even at low speed, although acceleration in fourth or top is sluggish until you pass the 3000rpm mark.

The engine also runs at its smoothest beyond that point. Below 3000rpm the motor feels slightly rough, although not unpleasantly so, and from 2500 to around 3000 the mirrors become very blurred. However at 100mph their images are sharp and crystal clear, and with the current stringent speed restrictions,



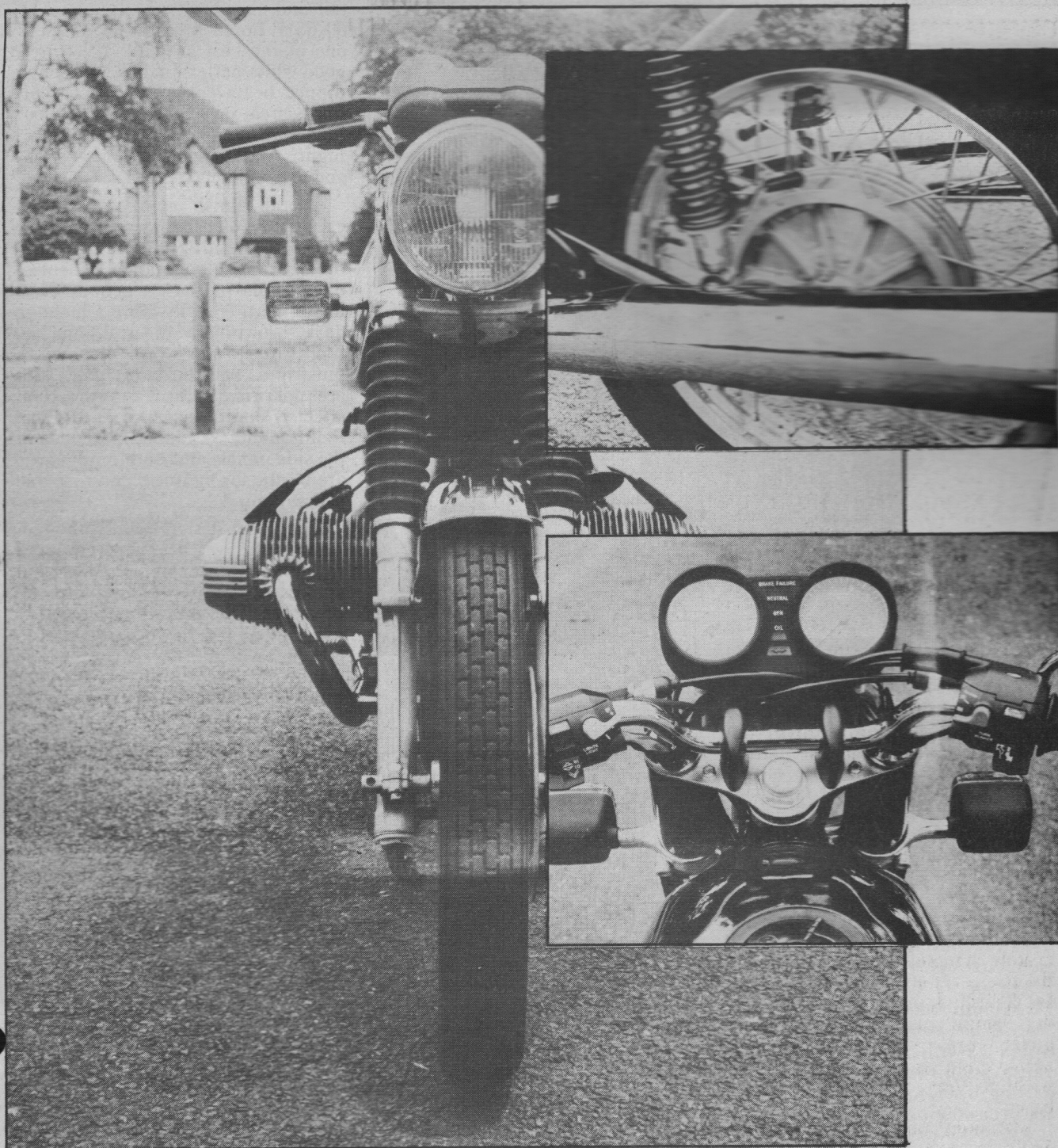
that is when you need them most. Anything above 45mph in top results in smooth and effortless cruising.

The only time I found the engine suffering from lack of displacement was struggling up an autoroute gradient, when the BMW slowed to 80mph in top and needed shifting to fourth gear to get things moving more rapidly again. But to all intents and purposes the R60/7 can be left in top gear and cruised comfortably at 80-90mph even with a pillion passenger.

The gearbox on any BM was never the smoothest device on two wheels, but the /7 models have a revised box for easier changes. The infamous BMW clunk is still there and was

most noticeable when changing from first to second; it varied in degree of loudness and sometimes was barely audible, but never went away completely. The only other complaint concerns the change from fourth to fifth. It showed great reluctance to shift cleanly and often needed a double nudge of the toe, but the two R100S BMWs I rode recently did not share this fault, so it may have been peculiar to this particular machine.

The Japanese seem to have a virtual monopoly of light clutches these days, and the BMW unit felt slightly heavy in comparison, but after a day or two my lazy wrist became used to this and it never caused further bother. The clutch



itself is a robust single plate dry unit running at engine speed — hence the gearchange noise. This never causes any harm; it merely challenges the rider to try and change gear better next time.

The frame on /7 models boasts an additional transverse tube beneath the steering head as well as reinforced gusseting to stiffen that area. The swinging arm pivots on adjustable tapered roller bearings which take up all free play. The frame is a duplex cradle affair in conical steel tube, and its performance complements the

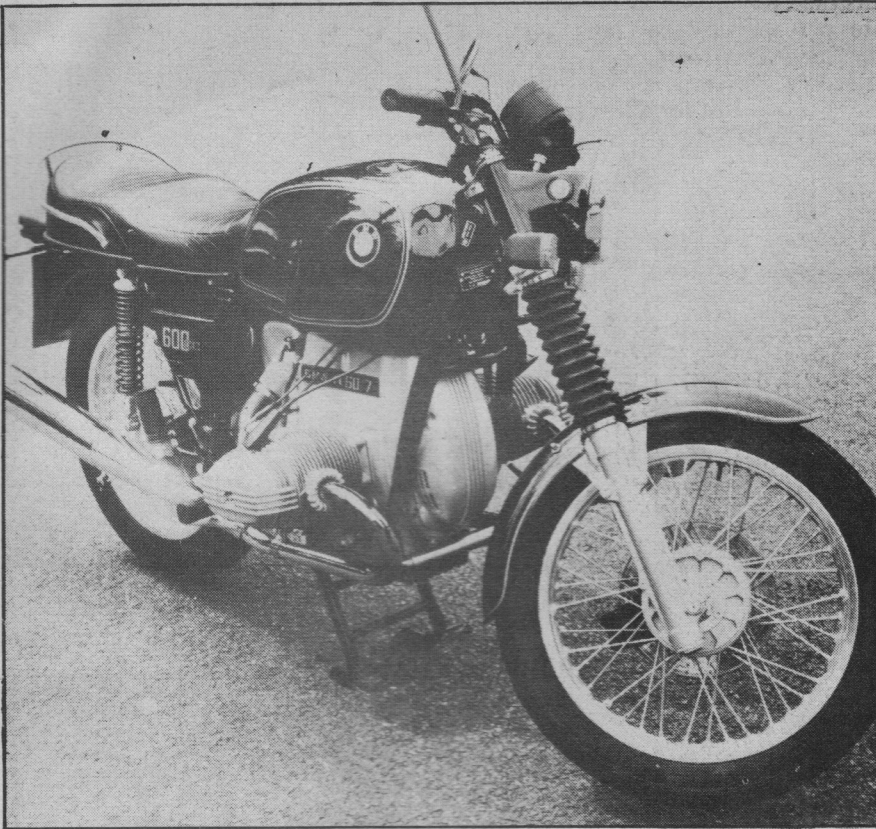
engine power handsomely.

As a result, handling is really first class and brings a smile to the rider's face when he sees a series of esses ahead. The bike can be flicked from side to side effortlessly, and in normal road use there is no fear of anything grounding. The softly sprung suspension is supremely comfortable, with almost 8 inches of travel up front and 5 inches at the rear, yet it does not detract from the bike's mountain road agility. Damping is excellent, and the three-way adjustable rear shock absorbers have an integral lever to permit fast

and easy spring pre-load changes.

Pillion passengers had nothing but praise for the ample seating accommodation. They found the seat itself very comfortable over long distances, and appreciated the chromed grab rail that graces the rear of the saddle. Both rider and pillion footrests are adjustable, a feature missing from all too many machines today. The riding position was comfortable for 300 mile trips, and double that distance in a day should be no problem.





The ability to sit in the saddle for hours on end is to no avail if you have to stop every hour for petrol, but BMW have this one covered too. The tank holds $5\frac{1}{4}$ gallons, including 0.9 gallons in reserve. Average fuel consumption was a consistent 51mpg with a best of 52mpg, which offers the rare opportunity to clock up 220 miles before switching to reserve, and the effective touring range is a very useful 250 miles on four-star. High-octane petrol is called for by the 9.2:1 compression ratio.

A 28Ah battery and a starter motor with an increased transmission ratio ensures first-time starting from cold, which is just as well considering the /7s have no kickstarter. It is available as an optional extra, as is a steering damper — although the latter is not really needed as straight-line stability is excellent at all speeds.

The choke lever is mounted beneath the fuel tank and needed to be fully closed for cold starts. The engine required part choke for the first couple of miles in the morning, being fairly cold-blooded.

The R60/7 weighs only 430lb dry; 474lb tanked up and ready to go. This relatively low weight, and its even distribution allied to good frame geometry, allows the bike to be trickled along feet-up with the speedometer needle on the zero stop. Its lightness eases the demands on

the brakes, which are well up to the task anyway. The single drilled steel disc up front is 10 inches in diameter and carries its caliper behind the left fork leg. The lever transmitted plenty of feel to the rider, and the brake itself was powerful and progressive — albeit noisy due to the 'singing' caused by the drilled holes. The rain held off for most of the test period, but in what little dampness we did have, the disc seemed to suffer from delayed action rather less than many of its contemporaries. The rear drum brake was more than a decoration, attractive casting though it is. It too was powerful but could be used without fear of locking the wheel.

The handlebar switches are among the best in the business, and the vertical indicator switch is much better this year for having a neat extension for easier thumbing. The housing and levers are finished in matt black to minimise glare, and the speedometer and revcounter feature non-glare glass. The speedo is commendably accurate, an indicated 60mph being virtually indistinguishable from an *actual* 60mph, but annoyingly, the revcounter dial was poorly lit at night. Warning lights between these instruments cover brake failure, neutral, generator, oil, and indicators.

The indicators are bright enough to be seen easily in sunlight, and the

tail and stop lights are ample. The 60/65W Bosch halogen headlight is one of the best around, throwing a good white pattern of light, although dipped beam gives too sharp a cut-off — great for oncoming drivers but not so brilliant for fast riding at night. And the horn is as good as you're ever likely to need.

Overall finish of the R60/7 is excellent. You can choose from three colours: metallic black, metallic blue, or metallic orange. The test model came in black which, up close in sunlight, is really more a metallic dark brown. BMW traditionalists tend to prefer the old white pinstripes, but the latest gold ones are not unattractive and the total effect is one of elegance and grace. Paint quality was above average, and the side panels and both mudguards are plastic for lightness and rust-free peace of mind.

The usual design details abound. The light alloy wheel rims are laced to the hubs with completely straight spokes to reduce the chance of breakage. The centre stand is easy to use and allows the bike to rest on either wheel for trouble-free removal; and both wheels are quickly detachable for good measure.

Our test machine came devoid of a tool kit, but the one you'll get with your BMW is a top-quality tool roll complete with puncture repair outfit and an air pump. In the absence of a tool kit, the accessible waterproof compartment beneath the saddle will hold small odds and ends. Also under the lockable saddle is a hook to take two helmets. Beneath the tool tray lies the battery, and nothing else — no sign of the mass of wiring common to most Oriental machines — so the battery is readily accessible for simple topping up.

This sanitary appearance applies to the whole bike. Clutter is conspicuous only by its absence. The cleanliness of line starts with the discreet styling of the tank and seat (the tank is the same as last year's R90S shape) and is reflected in the engine casings, which were never sullied by one smear of oil or grime. If allowed to get very dirty they can be murder to clean again, but if you keep them clean from the outset they can retain their as-new appeal. This is the only motorcycle I have ever washed without getting a spot of oil or grease on the sponge — one of the less obvious benefits of shaft drive, and a real boon for the spit and polish brigade.

General accessibility for maintenance is good. The tappets are easy to reach and adjust, the

points and major electrical components nestle under the front engine cover, and the mesh oil filter is beneath the engine. The carburettors are easy to reach, and the shaft drive needs an oil change only every 9300 miles. Service intervals of 5000 miles allow you to spend more time riding and less time fixing. Only the awkward positioning of the oil filler hole and dipstick was annoying, and that mattered little since oil consumption throughout the test was negligible.

The two things I did not like were the petrol cap and the side stand. The flush-mounted petrol cap is uglier than the simple chromed twist-on type, and although it had a keyhole it defied all attempts at being locked. The side stand is spring loaded to retract itself as soon as the bike is vertical, which, whilst you can never ride off with it down, it is also rather insecure on anything but level ground. These complaints are niggling and the important thing is the BMW's overall suitability as an everyday motorcycle.

Any bike that goes well, stops well, corners well, tours well, is truly comfortable and more than reasonably economical deserves better recognition than the R60/7 is currently receiving. There are some riders whose needs are such that a larger capacity is essential. If they cover huge mileages, two-up with luggage, then the extra power of a 750 or 1000 can make the going easier.

But there must be a hell of a lot of motorcyclists who want a reliable machine to take them to work each day. The R60/7 handles heavy traffic like a machine half its size, with its light steering and power in just the right places — low and mid-range. They want a bike to take them on camping weekends and perhaps to the Continent for two or three weeks' annual holiday. Unless you are a speed freak of the first order then the R60/7 delivers the goods.

Quiet running is an added bonus. Mechanical noise is minimal, with just the clicking of the tappets audible above the pleasant exhaust note. And there must come a time in every rider's life when he tires of adjusting rear chains and wiping the lubricant off the back end of the bike. At some time thoughts must turn to shaft drive, but until recently price must have put many people off this luxury. Today the Yamaha 750 is sure to clean up in the market with its low price and that leaves the BMW 600 vying with the Moto-Guzzis and the Honda Gold Wing in much the same price bracket. That

puts the £1899 price tag of the R60/7 into perspective, especially against the R60's more usual competitors, but the differential is narrowed if you keep the BM for a few years and accumulate the savings on petrol, oil and chains. If it's only the capacity that is putting you off, then think again. The 600 is such a finely balanced rider's machine that you would be well advised to arrange a test ride on the demonstrator before you dismiss it as 'too small' for the job. You might rediscover an aspect of motorcycling sadly missing from today's otherwise excellent bikes.

Specification R60/7.

ENGINE

Type: Air-cooled four-stroke flat twin of light alloy construction with pushrod-operated overhead valves.

Displacement: 599cc.

Bore x stroke: 73.5 x 70.6mm.

Compression ratio: 9.2:1.

Claimed bhp: 40 at 6400rpm.

Max. torque: 35.4ft-lb at 5000rpm.

Carburettors: Two Bing V53 slide-type 26mm units.

TRANSMISSION

Gearbox: Five-speed.

Gear ratios: 1st 4.40:1; 2nd 2.86:1; 3rd 2.09:1; 4th 1.67:1; 5th 1.50:1.

Clutch: Single-plate diaphragm, running dry.

Final drive: Shaft with universal joint and helical drive pick-up to bevel gears.

Final drive ratio: 1:3.36.

CHASSIS

Frame: Duplex full-cradle with conical base support members and bolted rear subframe.

Front fork travel: 7.87in.

Rear wheel travel: 4.92in.

Brakes: 10in. disc front; 7.87in drum rear.

Tyres: Metzeler 3.25 H19 front; 4.00 H18 rear.

ELECTRICS

Battery: 12V 28Ah.

Alternator: 280W.

Starter motor: 0.6hp.

Headlight: H4 60/65W.

DIMENSIONS

Length: 84in.

Width: 29in.

Wheelbase: 58in.

Ground clearance: 6in.

Handlebar width: 25in.

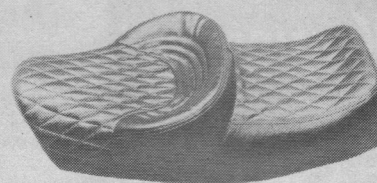
Seat height: 32in.

Weight: 430lb dry, 474lb wet.

Fuel capacity: 5 1/4 gallons.

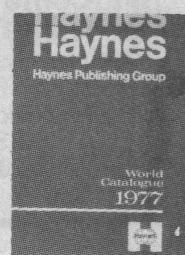
Price: £1899 inc VAT.

things



We've been using a custom seat for long journeys for almost two years now and can't imagine why they've not been imported earlier. Most original equipment seats are, at best, reasonable but to get real comfort, something like the one shown above is needed.

Interpart Sales of Denham, Buckinghamshire are importing custom seats for Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Kawasaki, BMW and Moto-Guzzi. Prices run from £65 up and if your local man hasn't got them yet, call Interpart on Denham 4070 and find out who has.



If you're a book buff, you might like to send off for a copy of Haynes' World Catalogue 1977. It's free and it lists all the titles Haynes and their offshoot Foulis are selling at this moment. The comprehensive list has all the car and motorcycle workshop manuals detailed, all the motoring and motorcycling hardbacks and also the lesser known aviation and sporting publications shown. A request to the Haynes Publishing Group, Sparkford, Yeovil, Somerset will have the catalogue on way to you.



Want to build a horse box? Or maybe a camper trailer — or perhaps a simple one or two bike trailer is what you need.

Mechanical Services, makers of Indespension units, are selling a 46 page booklet showing plans for a number of trailers and listing both new and secondhand parts required — the choice being yours as to which you might want. The whole aspect of trailing is covered, from trailer law and towing tips to a master parts list and prices. The cost is 60p post paid and the address to send to is:

Mechanical Services Ltd., Belmont Road, Bolton, Lancashire.