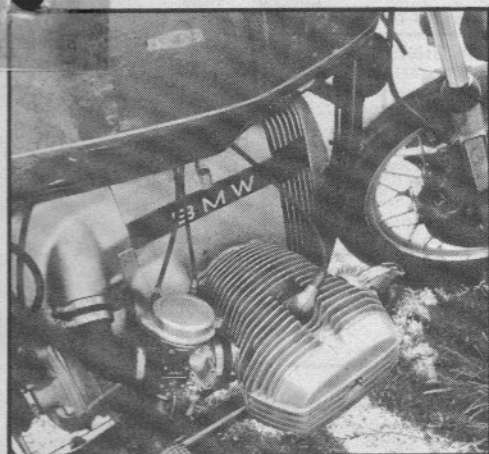


THE MIDDLEWEIGHT BOXER

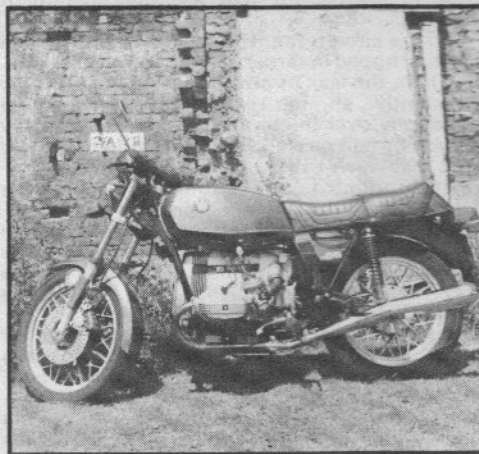
Going To The Bell With BMW's 650



You may wonder what excuse we'll offer for including a BMW in an issue devoted to the bottom rungs of biking.

The answer: none. Though we toyed with the idea of dubbing the R65 "The Poor Man's BMW", it didn't last. Excluding with honour the amazing and memorable rat bike drooling filth on cover and spread, there's not really any such thing as a cheap BMW.

The R65 is *cheaper*, though; less BMW for less money. At £2149, £200 cheaper than a R80, it is a money-saving choice: perhaps the difference between buying new or not.



There's another reason, too: more fundamental by far.

The R65 is substantially the most sporting BMW you can buy; and by extension the liveliest flat twin in the world. Not, I hasten to add, in any quantifiable aspects of performance. In top speed or standing-quarter contests, the R65 loses out. But it is rapid in response, has a free-revving engine, is firmly sprung and damped, steers and handles neatly, has excellent brakes, and the poise to use them to the full. In short, it combines solid and familiar BMW virtues with a downright naughty streak, and is an excep-

tionally enjoyable bike to ride. On paper, it might look dull: on the road, it's *fun*.

The BMW R65 is (fanfare off) *SuperSnipe's* first Long Term Test Bike. Nothing to do with boring 5000-mile Marathon Tests, though. More part of a subterfuginous plot to explore a few alternatives to replace the ageing Darmah as staff hack.

Now a R65 isn't an obvious choice, nor was it very popular. The demand from the outer office was for something a bit, you know, *bigger*. If a BM, then an R80 at least. And if that was too dear, a Yamaha 850, perhaps, or a Moto Guzzi. Yes, a Guzzi Le Mans.

I bulldozed ahead and got the R65 anyway, gambling on memories. I'd been bored by BMs once. Then I bought a 750, because there wasn't much else then. I was still bored, for a while. Then, over a period of months and miles, my respect and affection grew.

I reckoned the R65 would, in its different way, do the same thing . . . convert the unbelievers, make friends for itself.

It is now three months and four thousand miles later. Have the heathen been turned towards the true faith?

Well, yes and no. Certainly, the tide has turned. Attitudes have changed from, in Middlethumb's case, unconcealed loathing, via grudging respect, to enthusiastic appreciation. Strangely, for me, the opposite has happened. My initial ardour has been cooled, and my liking for the bike has been tempered with reservations.

The reason for this is simple: that aforementioned lack of top speed. The remedy is exciting. We'll go there now, the long way round.

The BMW R65 is your basic Berlin-built shaft-drive pushrod flat twin. It is in every respect a scaled-down version of the older and bigger (one is tempted to say full-size) BMs, only newer and smaller. The similarities run from the layout of the engine and its ancillaries, through the single-top-tube twin-cradle frame with its bolt-on rear sub-frame, and out the back through a driveshaft *mit* shock absorber concealed in the right swing-arm tube.

It is only in the smallest details that differences become apparent. Perhaps the most important is that the front suspension does not have the cushy long-travel leading axle forks: a minor point, but a significant sign as to the bike's different character.

There's no room for soggy forks on this bike. The front end knee-bends that hinder a big BM's balls-out cornering potential has gone with them. Sure, the R65 rides a bit more harshly. But it doesn't flinch from being stuffed hard into corners under fierce late braking: it will also change line convincingly and track accurately over bumps, forgiving rider error on the way. Taut is the word.

To those who argue that such cavalier riding is not only irresponsible (ahem) but also irrelevant, I exude pity; but also suggest that competence in these extremities of performance means that the bike has great reserves of safety when you're travelling slower. You may not *want* to brake deep and late, but brother you never know when you might have to.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We picked the bike up with six miles on the clock from the impressive new Bracknell HQ workshops of BMW GB. You could eat sauerkraut off the floors (but bring your own), or bake scones in their paint oven. That sort of stuff.

It was red, with gold pinstripes and a brown seat; the alloy was bright. It promised great things, but the engine was very tight and the bike felt a little uncomfortable. One thing only marred the breathy snuffle of a new BM's exhaust note: the crankcase breather going "cluck-cluck, cluck cluck, cluck," like a good layer with a location crisis (should be in the battery, geddit?). "It'll stop that noise as it frees up," came a voice from some blindingly white overalls; and indeed we all hoped it would quite soon.

Back at Croydon, we commenced with the first urgent modification: disconnect the indicator bleeper; a simple matter of slipping out a connector among the jumble within the screwed-together soft-plastic-padded

instrument binnacle. Then came a studiously careful running period . . . after all, we might be keeping this bike.

During this time, I began to have my first doubts. Keeping the revs below 4500 also leaves you well out of the power band, and the bike was sluggish. The tight engine was also rough, understandably, and ran on the hot side; but most ominous was the signs of onset of a bad vibration patch just beyond our rev limit of 4500rpm.

Six hundred miles and the first service passed rapidly, soon after which the idling speed was up to some 1400rpm as the motor loosened, contributing still further to hot running. It also required full choke for starting even in mild weather, and the revs would not die away instantly when the throttle was snapped shut. Too lean. Accordingly, when we re-set the idling and re-balanced the carburetors, we also raised the needle in the CV carb to its top notch: both simple jobs on the BMW. The engine started running cooler, and any increase in fuel consumption from the richer mixture was compensated for by the drop in fuel for idling.

Now we started gradually edging the revs up, aiming to be using just about 6000rpm at 1000 miles, and then increase the rev limits quite quickly until we'd be using full revs for short periods at 1500 miles. In the general way of things, we probably pushed on a little faster than that, for the engine was now freeing up nicely.

There was still that rough patch at about 4850rpm, which coincides exactly with a flat spot in the power curve. This makes it awkward to escape from the roughness, especially in the overdrive fifth gear. Since this all happens at about 80mph, right where you want to cruise, it's even more irritating. The technique is to drop to fourth, accelerate hard to around 90, then slot back into top. The R65 will then hold top unless a bad headwind or long incline intervenes, then it will drop back again, calling for another spurt in fourth.

I forced myself to accept this with a good grace. After all, I reasoned, when the motor loosens up more, it will pull top gear easier; furthermore, the rough patch should also become less noticeable with more miles. My own bike had been troubled by the same patch of trembles, but after the first 10000 miles they'd all but disappeared.

One other problem. The engine breather, "Cluck, cluck-cluckity-cluck, cluck cluck," every time you stopped. It seemed to disappear when the revs rose, though there were occasions when I fancied I heard a kind of howl among the wind noise in top gear; but perhaps that was me crying inwardly for another five

brake horsepower or something.

Apart from these, the bike was beginning to impose its restrained but strong Germanic personality, and win over some of its enemies. Even before we'd started using full revs, it was very quick through town. Not because of any dazzling acceleration, but mainly because of its poise, predictability and quick reflexes. It's also narrow (for a BM, particularly), and proved capable of carving through traffic in fuss-free silence (give or take a cluck), keeping with and even beating test bikes that looked, sounded and felt like they were much faster.

Despite its shrunken size, it also proved well up to the task of transporting two consenting male adults in perfectly adequate comfort, if not your actual spacious luxury. It has much better passenger space, for instance, than Moto Guzzi's well-padded Californian, though it is a relatively tiny seat on a small bike.

At the pumps, the petrol consumption figures reflected the ever-increasing use of the throttle as the engine became run in. Under any circumstances, it would do a reliable 48mpg, rising to 63 in really miserly use. Not good, not bad, just reasonable.

By 3500 miles we were using the revs to the full, and I reckoned the bike was ready for a test I'd been looking forward to. I decided to take it to the Isle of Man.

Again, not the obvious choice. Again, I was trading on memories. The previous year I'd taken a Kawasaki Z500, and been well pleased. The little Zwacker could cruise at 110mph there and back (that was absolutely flat out, mind you), and had proved a very useful tool on the island. It made up for its lack of out and out power with good roadholding, agility and excellent braking: and surprised a fair number of riders on bigger bikes, even on the fast stretches of the mountain road. More often I'd been glad of having a light and easily manipulated bike there than I'd been sad for want of a few extra horsepower, though that did happen.

I reckoned the BM would fill the same sort of niche.

I was wrong. Despite the extra engine capacity over the Zwacker, I frequently felt the want for more power. On the motorway on the way up, for instance, and almost every time I rode round the mighty Mountain track. Only in the wet or mist was I glad of the light BM's sure-footedness.

Don't take this judgement too harshly. The R65 could cruise comfortably at 95mph (though consumption suffered, dropping to an all-time low of 37mpg). It was only irritating that there was nothing left. Cruising speed is also pretty near top speed, and there's precious little in reserve for that last quarter-turn of throttle.

On the circuit, the R65 acquitted itself as well as I had hoped in terms of handling and braking. But here the lack of power was all too obvious: frequently on the exit from corners and especially over the mountain, I'd be frantically searching the gearbox and rev range for power that just wasn't there.

Again, don't take this to heart. Lapping the Isle of Man is a far cry from normal motorcycling: it's not that often in practice or in London that you need to call on those reserves of horsepower the R65 lacks. Still, it's nice to have 'em, and their absence nags away at the consciousness.

In all other respects, the BM was behaving like a sub-5000 mile bike should. With two important exceptions. One is still that god-awful clucking engine breather, which finds it impossible at idle to cope quietly with the big changes in crankcase volume (both pistons come inwards together), and clucks in a hideously embarrassing way.

The second problem started developing around 3500 miles, and has for various reasons not yet been identified or cured. It is the clutch: a dry-plate item that snatches severely from rest when it is hot: resulting all too often in humiliating leaps forward, the sudden loss of your passenger, or worse yet in stalling the engine. The reason is elusive. Each time, lubricating a fresh section of the linkage would ease the problem for a while, leading us to believe at first it was just a snagging cable or seizing linkage-pivot. Eventually, though, the

snatch was still there with the cable awash with Tri-Flon and fresh grease oozing for any relevant nipples. It's obviously within the casings that the problem lies, and other mechanical work, of which more in due course, has since intervened.

At first the gearbox was stiffish, and sometimes wouldn't return to the central position after up-changes. That's loosened up, and with the shock absorber taking the sting out of the directness of shaft-drive, quick and quiet changes are simple.

The finish has held up perfectly without any special attention: just washing and polishing makes it look like a new bike. The rev counter face, however, has got some odd white fungus growing round the warning lights, and is also loose within its mounting.

Now we come to the interesting part: the remedy for the faults. Which can be isolated simply: a lack of spare power. For despite its good handling and brakes, the R65 in no way measures up to its Japanese rivals with the same size engines. Furthermore, though free-revving and apparently enthusiastic, the engine produces nothing like the power the frame and running gear are capable of sustaining.

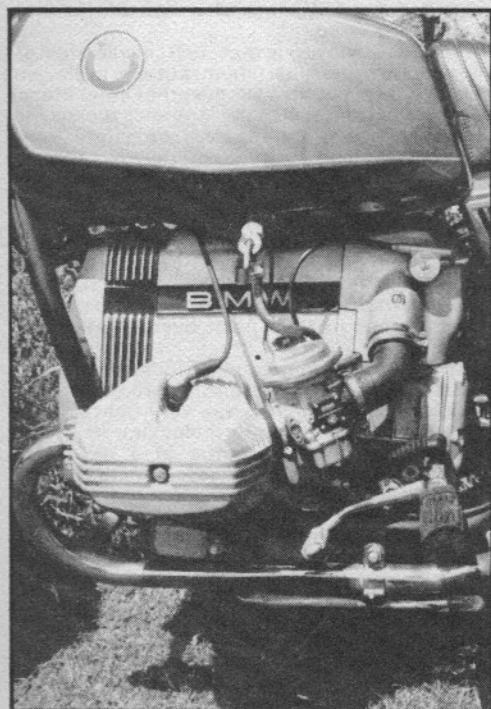
It must be pointed out there are perhaps one or two horsepower waiting to come as the engine frees up more: 5000 miles is very little on a BM, and we haven't even got that yet.

But I came to reckon that another five would be the minimum required to fulfil the potential of what is almost a very exciting and rapid bike. Furthermore, the ponies should be quite readily available without much modification, just by easing the breathing of the heavily silenced flat-twin. Let it draw in more mixture, then let it dispose of more through free-flowing exhausts.

But all this is another story. True, we have been in search of more power. True, we have found it. With the help of BMW GB themselves and of big London dealers Gus Kuhn, the R65 has already needed the back axle ratio to be upped. It is now a fast bike, and there's more to come.

You'll have to wait for the details, though. For it's become Project BMW, and we'll spill all the beans as soon as we like. If we can tear ourselves away from the quickest R65 in town.

MS



BMW R65

£2149

PERFORMANCE

Maximum Speed — 109mph
Standing Quarter Mile — 14.5sec
Fuel Consumption — Hard Riding — 39mpg
Cruising — 54mpg
Best Full-Tank Range — 261 miles

ENGINE

Type — air-cooled ohv horizontally opposed twin
Displacement — 645cc
Power — 45bhp at 7250rpm
Torque — 36.9 ft/lb at 5500rpm
Bore & Stroke — 82mm x 61.5mm
Compression Ratio — 9.2:1
Induction — two 32mm CV carburetors
Exhaust — two-into-two with balance pipe
Oil System — wet sump, gear oil separate
Ignition — battery and mechanical points

TRANSMISSION

Clutch — single-plate dry
Primary Drive — direct
Final Drive — shaft and bevel gear
Gears — five-speed constant mesh

CHASSIS

Frame — duplex cradle, single top tube
Front suspension — hydraulically damped telescopic
Rear suspension — swing-arm and three-way spring-shocks
Wheelbase — 54.75in
Dry weight — 452lb
Fuel capacity — 4.84gall including reserve
Brakes — twin perforated discs front, SIS drums rear

INSTRUMENTS

120mph speedo with trip; 8000rpm rev counter red-lined at 7,500 rpm; warning lights for brake fluid, over-revving, indicators, generator, oil pressure, neutral and main beam; indicator bleeper

EQUIPMENT

12V 16A/h battery, 280W alternator, H4 headlamp

Test bike supplied by BMW (GB) Ltd, Ellesfield Avenue, Bracknell, Berks