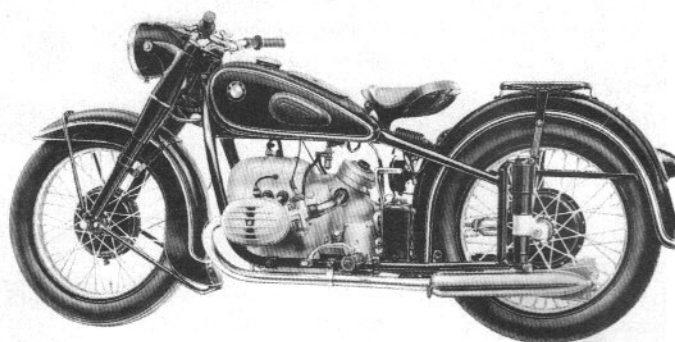
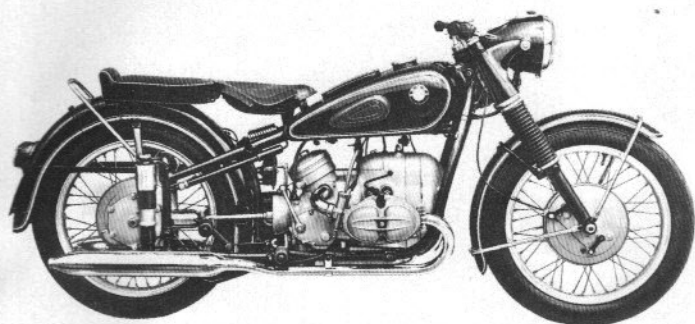




Above left: BMW factory picture of the R68, as offered in 1954.

Above right: From the 1950 Geneva Motor Show (its first appearance as a 'complete' machine) the R51/2.

Below: BMW specialist Bob Porecha has been involved with the Bavarian twins since 1961.



After the Second World War, the allies did not allow BMW to resume motorcycle production until 1948, and even then it was just the single cylinder R24, which was based on the prewar lightweight R23 machine.

In 1949, with the German economy gradually improving, BMW was allowed to resume production of twin cylinder machines, with the restrictions on engine capacity having been lifted. A twin-cylinder 500cc engine was shown at the Geneva show in March 1949, the completed machine appearing on the cover of German magazine *Das Motorrad* just before year's end.

The first 1000 machines (designated R51/2) went to the French police, before going on general sale in late 1950. Externally the 'new' bike looked much the same as 1938's R51, but on inspection the engine was quite different. The top end now had two piece valve covers from the military-issue R75 and the coil valve springs, inlet ports and carburettors were now angled upwards.

Chassis-wise, the frame used electrically welded oval tubes as before, but with two strengthening tubes and bracing added, while the telescopic forks had two-way damping via a new valve design.

Despite not being on sale in the UK, *The Motor Cycle* managed to get one for a road test and reported it had "a subtle blend of high performance and gentlemanly behaviour." It posted 88mph top speed and was generally oiltight and handled well, thanks to the low centre of gravity.

The R51/2 didn't last long though, despite selling reasonably well in Germany. In 1951 the R51/3 appeared, boasting a redesigned engine with narrower engine cases. This new engine layout would see service through until 1969.

Despite the modernity of its design, the R51/3 still only made 24bhp and was heavier than its forebear with much of the running gear the same as before, although the petrol tank capacity was slightly increased. The model was to be produced for three years, its run ending in 1954.

Produced alongside it to satisfy the sidecar brigade was the larger 600cc R67 (actually 594cc) which had 2bhp more for hauling the third wheel. BMW also provided a different rear-axle ratio for this purpose.

Power output was increased to 28bhp by the time the 1952 R67/2 model arrived. Its wheelbase was slightly longer, but many of the other dimensions

were the same. These models were the first to use the removable ignition key Bosch system located in the top of the headlamp, which lasted into the 1960s. There were a few other minor changes along its production life, such as another air filter cover change incorporating a 'choke' for cold starting.

It went on to become the R67/3, with production ceasing in 1956, and was the last twin to have plunger rear suspension. Billed as a 'budget' model, it was not that popular with the buying public, who were more taken with the R68 – many R67s ended up in police service, or with the likes of the ADAC (German AA).

When motorcycle production restarted in 1949, BMW produced 9400 units, and by 1951 this had risen to more than 25,000, while Germany had been readmitted to worldwide motorcycle sport. Three special R51/3s were prepared for the 1951 ISDT, complete with high level exhausts, for Meier, Zeller and Kraus to ride.

These machines begat the first R68, which was first shown in ISDT trim at the Frankfurt Show before going on to mirror the R67/2 in looks. In fact it was very much based on the 'cooking' model – it even shared the frame, with the sidecar lugs removed.

The engine had higher compression pistons, a hotter cam, larger valves and (26mm) carbs all contributing to it now producing 35bhp at 7000rpm, which enabled a true top speed of more than 100mph – the first production model from the factory to top the ton.

In Germany, the R68 cost DM3950, around DM1000 more than the R51/3. In the UK the R68's price was never quoted in any advertising, as it was so expensive. The concessionaires certainly didn't want to put off prospective purchasers before they had seen or ridden it!

It was probably this price factor which meant just 1452 R68s were sold during its three year production run to 1954, and it is now one of the rarer BMW machines, and consequently highly collectable. ●

"The R68 price, never quoted in UK adverts, was so expensive."

One man who knows the history (and the rarity) of the early BMW twins intimately is Bob Porecha, the owner of the R68 tested here. Regarded by many as the 'Guru' of the early models, Bob has been working on BMWs for 45 years.

Originally hailing from Bombay (now Mumbai), Bob founded his own business in the UK in 1961, dealing in BMWs. Later, due to being a regular visitor to Slocombes of Neasden, which had taken on the brand, Bob was asked by Bill Slocombe to set up the stores operation for the twins.

Thanks to Bob's detailed knowledge of BMWs and their parts, coupled with an ability to think around a problem, the dealership soon became the place to visit for BMW owners. When Bill died and his family took over, Bob left to continue on his own once again.

After a spell just down the road from his former employers, he moved to his current location in Sydenham, close to his home, which has become the 'go to' place for those interested in the older models (Bob's cut-off date is 1990) worldwide. When the original owner of the R68 said he wanted to get rid of the old BMW in the barn, Bob was his first port of call.

Bob has known this example from the time its owner was an enthusiastic sidecar pilot in the 1960s and 70s and had no hesitation buying it, despite having to pay a hefty price considering the state it was in.

"I have other sporting BMWs and this sort of completed the set," he said, as he pulled the protective covers off some beautifully restored machines. "I was going to turn this into something of a cafe racer using some Rennsport parts I have sitting around, but maybe I will just leave it as it is," he continued, in response to my dismayed howls about destroying the BMW's originality.

Those with an eye for detail will note that an R68 should have the narrow front mudguard, and that the single-sided front brake should be a full-width alloy unit to cope with the extra power. The fork shrouds too are from an early model as the later versions ended up with rubber gaiters – actually, the truth is the BMW is an 67/2, with an R68 engine fitted. This was fitted to give more power for hauling a sidecar which was originally fitted to it.

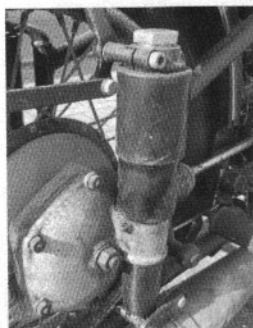
The silencers are an old pair of R50 silencers Bob had, as the originals were too far gone. Likewise, he had to do away with the manual advance/retard lever that should



Above: Telescopic forks were another BMW innovation dating back some years; ironically, they moved away from 'teles' in favour of Earles-type forks in 1956.

Below: Rear springing and shaft drive were BMW features dating back to the 1930s.

Bottom: What the R68 was based upon, the 'cooking' R67/2. This is the one Ian Kerr rode.



be on the top of the left switchgear, and it has a Georg Meier dual seat. Given the similarities between the R67/2 and the R68, it is not worth being too picky about the motorcycle, as the motor is without doubt an R68, complete with high compression pistons etc; so essentially this is an R68.

Despite the rough looks, all Bob did was clean the carbs and points, put new plugs and a battery on, and it started. Apart from the obvious oil changes, Bob has done little else since, save ride it.

When I leaned on the side mounted kick-start, the bike just purred into life at the first attempt. It soon settled down to an even tickover, with almost no engine noise. Bob told me the engine is one of the quietest he has ever come across, and he has no intention to look inside. "It is a great engine and will easily cruise at motorway speeds without any problem," he assured me.



Above: Ian Kerr revels in the sophisticated BMW riding experience.

And he was right. The 'R68' had a surprisingly brisk rate of acceleration and it felt unstressed at the higher legal limits. Such was the set-up, it would also trickle through traffic and around country lanes.

On the handling front, the silencers severely restrict ground clearance and limit cornering, despite the well balanced and neutral feel. The suspension too gives a 'firm' ride, which fits in with comments made in the period press road tests.

Having ridden the R68, I was keen to see whether the sportier machine was worth the money compared with the 'cooking' R67, so I managed to ride a standard-engined R67/2 of a similar age to compare. This too had been a one owner machine for most of its life; the second owner rescuing it in the same way Bob had.

Most of the bike sported original paintwork, a few items had been tidied up and a new front wheel rim laced on, but in the main it was the same as it was the day it left the factory. In this case, it had a single seat with a separate pillion and the full width front brake, but otherwise it was difficult to tell the difference between them with a quick look.

Though it was still easy to manage, on the open road the R67 was not as quick on the uptake and it felt like it was working a little harder than the R68. Both bikes were a delight, were oiltight, and started first kick. They showed that despite the high prices, purchasers were getting a good deal. Given the choice, I would plump for the R68 engine's extra power, but I would certainly be happy with the R67/2.

End