



Carburettor view: two stops on the slide enforce gentle running in.

URAL ON TEST



Mike Nicks
aboard the
Russian
workhorse

TRENDINESS occasionally comes up with an embarrassed bump against something old, traditional, but perfectly adequate. This year modern motor cycling is stubbing its toes on a 650cc Russian machine selling at almost half the cost of some British big twins.

The Ural flat twin reaches peak rpm at only just over 5,000 rpm and its maximum speed is said to be no more than 85 mph.

But at £299 it will represent better value to some riders than more glamorous British big bikes costing between £500 and £600 after the recent wave of price increases.

MCN colleague Peter Hewdle and I recently rode the Ural. We found it to be a big, gentle, friendly machine with an appeal unlike any other new bike on the market.

The engine is so "soft" that, according to the rider's handbook, it will run on 72 octane petrol.

The compression ratio is a tame 7:1, the two carburettors have only 24-mm choke diameters, and the inlet and exhaust valves are identical in size.

Obviously, this is an engine designed for reliability and pulling power. Fred Wells, the London dealer who is importing Russian bikes, says that on a recent business trip to Moscow he saw a 650 Ural pulling a sidecar piled many feet high with a swaying load of hay and towing a trailer containing two pigs!

He also delights in reporting that the manufacturers claim that a single Ural will perform any farm job except one, ploughing. For that, you need two Urals working together.

The machine we rode was far from run in, so we were unable to test the makers' speed claims. But the engine was delightfully smooth, and it will lope smartly away from very low speeds in third and top gears.

This bottom end torque is the very feature that so many people miss on

REPORT BY MIKE NICKS

modern European and Japanese bikes.

Two stops on the carburettor slide prevent the rider from using more than quarter throttle for the first 250 miles, and half throttle for the next 250.

But even when the Ural is fully run-in, it obviously won't blow off, say, a Japanese 250 cc twin. With a maximum output of 34 bhp driving a weight of 437 lb., it can hardly be expected to compete with sports bikes.

The Ural's charm lies in smoothness, flexibility and comfort. The separate seats look ridiculously quaint, but they give a relaxed riding position and the passenger gets a view over the rider's head.

The tool kit is prodigious, containing spare piston rings, a tyre pressure gauge, a hand tyre pump, spare petrol pipes, a grease gun, two tyre levers, spark plugs and a feeler gauge. In addition to fairly standard items such as spanners, pliers, a puncture repair kit and a screwdriver.

Mounted on the left, the four-speed gearbox works through a one down, three up change pattern. A hand-operated lever on the right side of the gearbox is supposed to select neutral instantly, but it too

often found other gears.

The lever could be used for making hand changes. Another unusual feature is that the box contains a reverse gear, which is blanked off for solo use.

The brakes were far too weak to cope with high-speed British traffic, and the front unit was only of single-leading shoe design.

But the Ural cannot be dismissed as being entirely out of date; shaft drive is a real advantage that only a couple of luxury machines offer, even in 1971.

Prospective buyers will obviously want to know the availability of spares. Fred Wells promises that an excellent supply will be available.

In addition, a coach-load of Russian technicians should be visiting Britain in the summer to set up a service school for dealers offering the Ural, and mopeds and 125, 175 and 350 cc two-stroke machines that Wells is also importing from Russia.

He plans to import about 350 Urals this year, and a number of Russian-built single-seat sidecars selling at £95 each. The steel chairs will have a spare wheel and tonneau cover, but no hood or screen. A disadvantage is that they can be fitted only to the right hand side of the bikes.

With a sidecar, the Ural's claimed top speed drops to 62.5 mph.

At first sight the Ural seems a bargain. But £300 is still a hefty sum to pay for a 15-year-old design with staid performance.

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