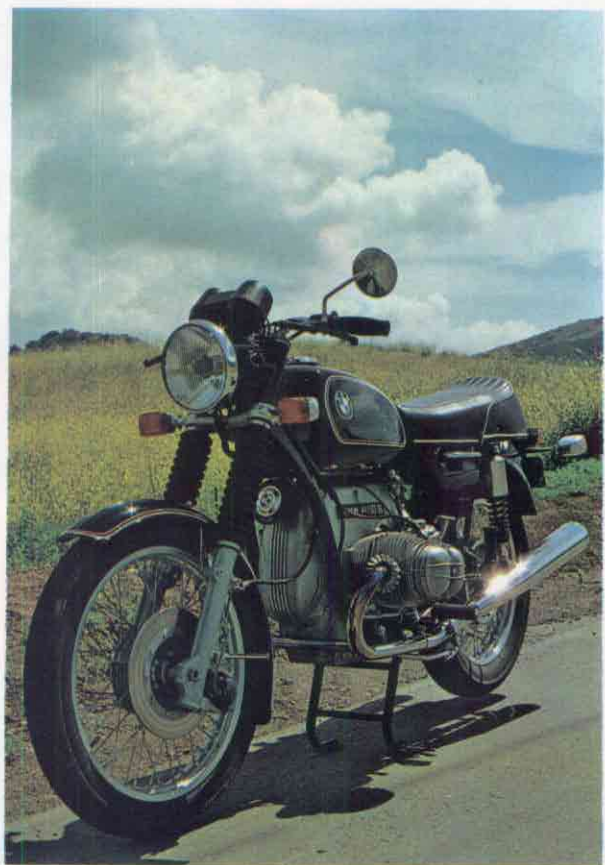


The Best Thing In Life
Costs \$3000

**Tour
Testing
the
BMW
R90/6**



The road is clean gray asphalt flicking into a series of turns and then running straight and smooth and then curving again along the contours of the coast.

Bright yellow line down the middle. Thick green groundcover grows to the road's border. Rolling fields to the right backed by sweeping rounded hills and to the left the ocean pounds against the shoreline under a clear blue sky.

The BMW is out where it belongs, running smooth, fast and quiet. Gas it and lean into a turn wind rushing by gas it and lean into a sweeping righthander, crank it for the straight with the wind buffeting you click up into fifth and the sound goes away and the bike disappears and there's just you in the wind . . . and it feels like flying.

The road takes a sharp curve ahead and you ease off because you can't keep going faster but you'd like to and so would the R90. The power seems inexhaustible so you play with it and the road in a long exhilarating morning of freedom.

The R90 runs like the proverbial Swiss watch, solid, smooth and fine. It defines what road riding is about.

The R90/6 isn't a pure tourer or a pure road racer but combines elements of both. It is a bike designed for the rider who wants to spend hours of enjoyment on the road and demands a blend of performance, handling, comfort and reliability.

It is a carefully thought out, meticulously executed motorcycle that has a sense of completeness to it. Its performance and handling offer possibilities beyond straight-ahead touring applications, while its comfort and reliability make it eminently fitted for long distances. Owners of older BMWs will wonder if the R90 is that much better; riders who have thought about getting into a BMW will wonder if it's worth the extra bucks. We feel that in both cases the answer is yes.

The BMW once stood alone as a quiet, clean, sophisticated machine whose competitors splattered oil and parts, made unnerving noise and required constant attention. In the last ten years the competition closed the gap by offering an array of well-designed mounts that were suited to the needs of the everyday rider. At that point, before the 900s came out of Bavaria, the BMW was a kind of compromise—touring comfort versus all-out performance. The R75 was underrated by many bikers in the fanfare of the new generation of superbikes. It handled better than most folks thought and you could ride it faster than a lot of the big inchers. But it didn't turn that many heads because it was deceptively quiet and a known factor.



But when it came to soul-satisfying blasting it out of the hole, you had to console yourself with the thought that it would cruise at 80 forever. The 900ccs make a difference—if you've got your act together you can take it against anybody. Or just take it out and unwind it.

Running it through the mountains brought the first surprise. The machine looks big and long, and it is, but pushing it through the roads that hug the sheer canyon walls, you find that the handling is very, very light. The R90 weighs in at 463 pounds, definitely lean and the lightest machine of its displacement. The flat cylinders keep the center of balance low which aids agility. You don't flick it from side to side and a nimble 350 might sneak inside you on tight corners but on sweepers and esses it all depends on you. Dragging head covers may be a problem for the likes of Duhamel and his road racing brethren but shouldn't trouble the amateur rider.

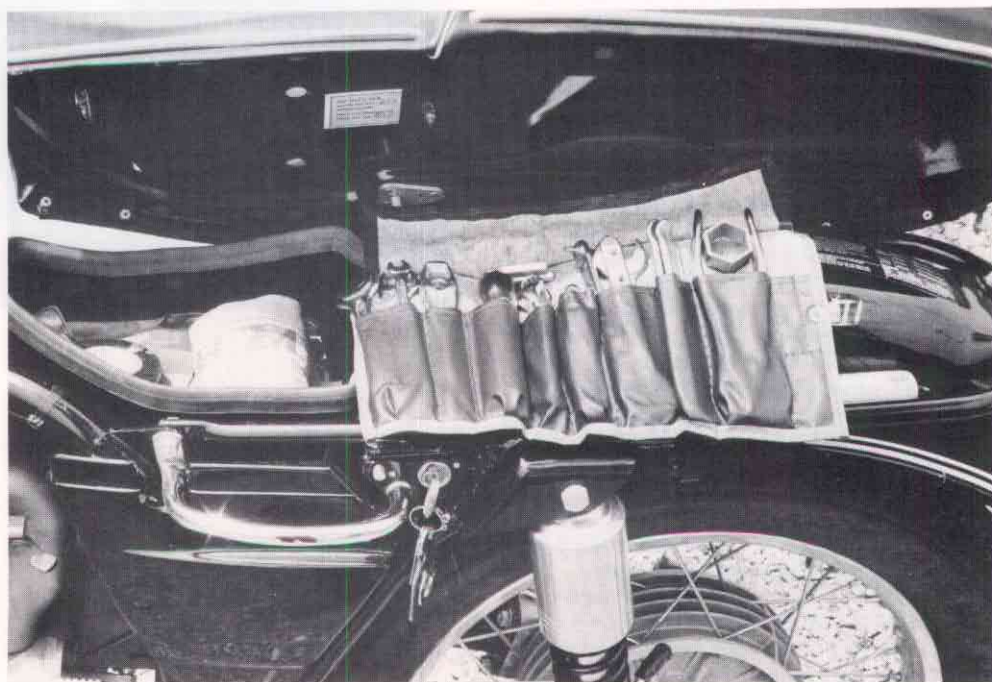
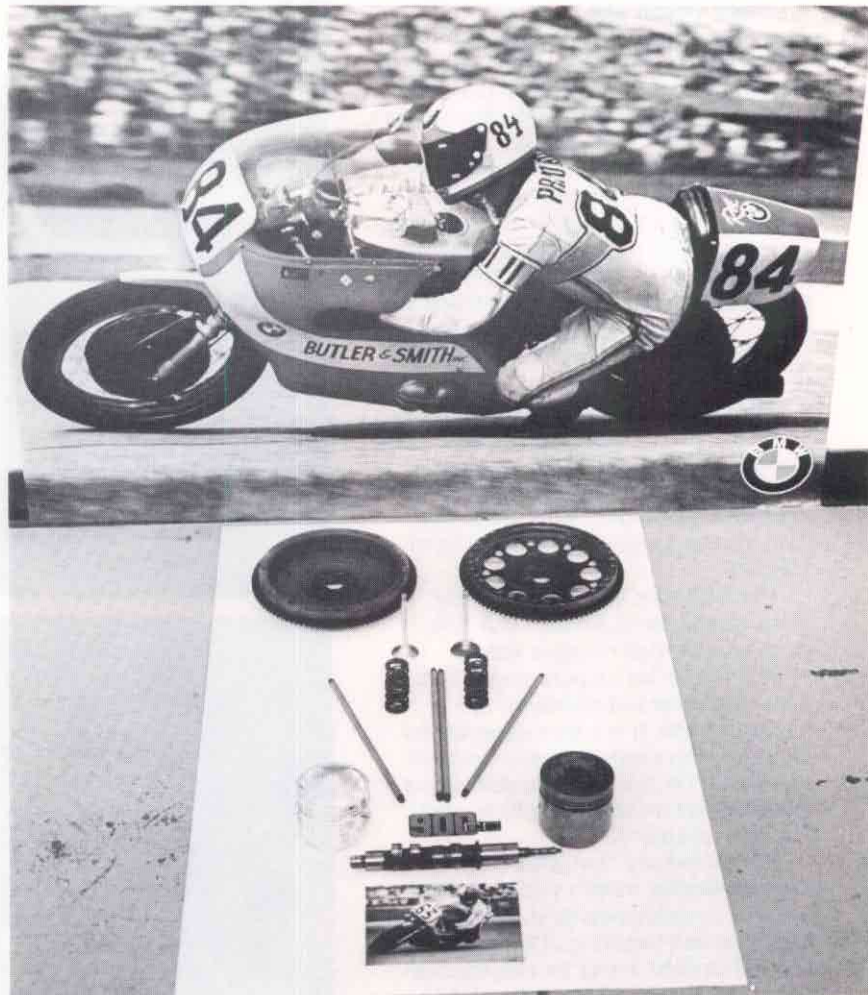
The second surprise was the power. After some weeks of tooling around during break-in, when you're ready to crank it past the 4000 rpm mark, you're in for some fun. You've got smooth delivery from 1500 rpm's on, and at four grand it really comes on. The new fifth gear helps to spread the torque throughout the powerband and a handful of throttle gives you what you want for passing or coming out of a corner in a hurry.

At the same time the bike doesn't leap away from you at the first touch of throttle. It is controllable and you can putt around the shopping center if you want to.

The suspension is ideal for touring and has been labeled soft for road work. Taking the bike over the same route we used daily on another bike brought the third surprise. The smoothness of the engine, plus the way forks and shocks absorb bumpy road made it easier to concentrate on the feel of your tires on the road. You're not fighting vibes or a jarring ride. The suspension amounts to eight inches of travel on the front forks and five inches on rear shocks, which have a manually adjustable setting for three kinds of riding; solo, loaded or two-up and loaded.

BMW's have been the standard of touring comfort and reliability for a lot of decades and suspension alone isn't the reason. The flat configuration allows pistons to counterbalance each other, producing a lack of vibration that other motorcycles have matched only recently, usually at the cost of increased weight. The added benefit of smoothness is lack of stress on engine components and mountings, which affects maintenance and reliability. It is easy to see why the von Marwitz crew was reluctant to scrap the proven horizontal design . . . all the more in the face of the news that Honda's new project X is reportedly a

Butler & Smith performance kit: stock flywheel and lightened version; stock and large intake valves; double-strength coil springs; titanium pushrods; polished cylinder head and stock model; sport cam.



flat four shaft drive . . . the sincerest form of flattery.

For a long while, the cruising ability of the BMWs was sufficient. But since long-distance touring was not the prime consideration in the booming American market, performance became the ticket. Hiding the 900s under an R75 nameplate, the engineers developed the concept over four years of R & D. During that time they added an inch and a half to the frame, put a disc stopper up front, put the instruments in two cans where they belonged, threw away the plug that served as a key, designed a smaller sport tank, changed the seat, beefed up stress points on the frame and in the engine, strengthened the clutch, bonded alloy cylinder finning with a new process, added a bigger battery and alternator, lightened components here and there, threw away some crowd-pleasing chrome and kept everything you loved about the old BMWs.

What the added cc's did not do was make the machine noisier or rougher on idle. The R90 has a unique sound when you turn it on . . . a whirring reminiscent of an airplane. Electric starter is standard and the kickstarter can be a bummer.

You're in a campsite on a cold spring morning, must be 30 degrees under the tall pines and the sound of the stream running by is all you hear. You climb out of a warm sleeping bag and grab a snort of apricot brandy but it's still cold. You feel breakfast is in order so you get the bike loaded up and start to fire it up, via kickstarter. The short throw of the kickstarter plus the bigger engine makes it a chore and you're in for quite a few minutes of jumping up and down. You're warmer than the engine at this point.

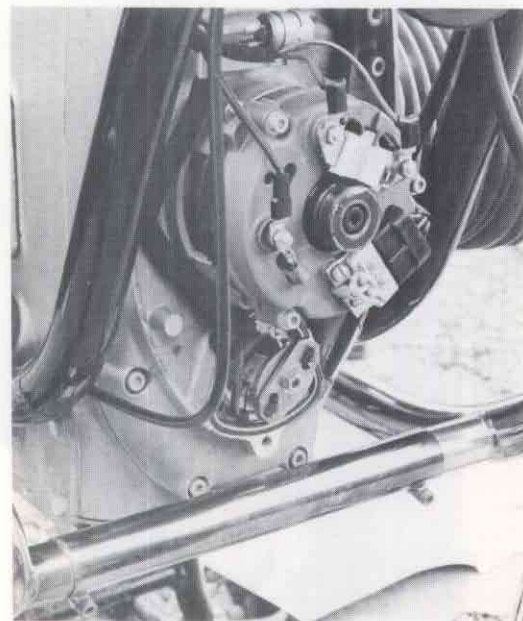
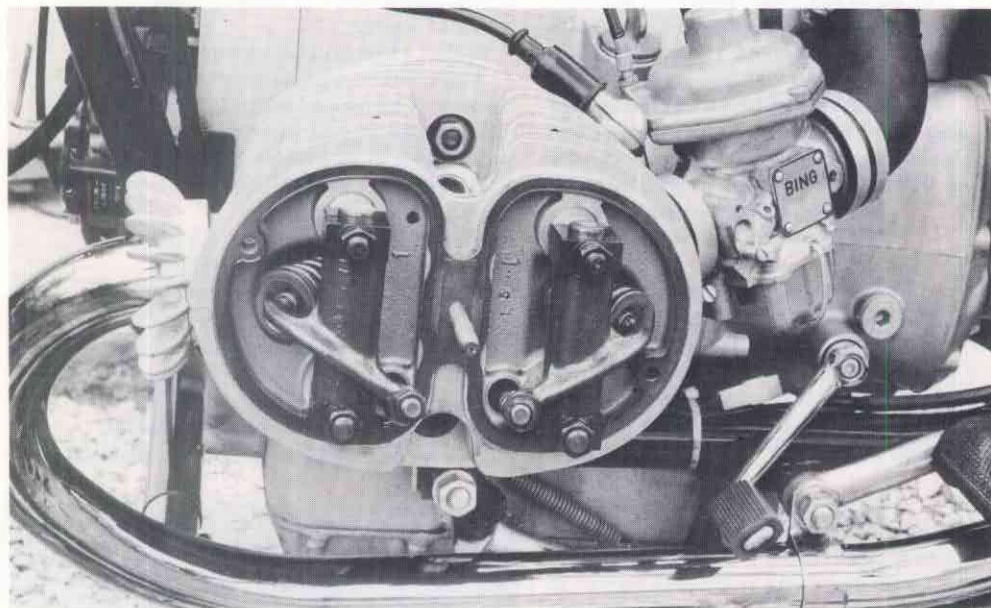
The larger battery means that this kind of exercise is definitely unlikely and the electric starter should be completely reliable. If the bike has run at all during the day even the kickstarter is a snap.

You wait while the bike warms up and the revs climb over 2000, bring back the manual choke and drop it in gear. The legendary clunk is now a clink and discernible mainly in lower gears. The higher the gear or the higher the speed at which you're shifting, the lighter it gets, so by the time you're kicking it up from third to fourth, it's reduced to a click, if you're listening.

A buzz is the only sound from the power plant and you're at 50 before you know it—keep your eye on the speedo or you'll be illegal before you realize you got there. You don't need fifth gear until you're at 65 and planning on more and when you get into it even the hum goes away.

For the touring rider a quiet bike is almost a must. Lots of motorcycles

please see page 86



Access for maintenance is easy; valves are reached by removing head covers (top) and alternator and points are accessible by removing engine cover between the downtubes (above).

The BMW offers a complete tool kit (left), which fits, along with patch kit and other spares, in a compartment under the lockable seat.

SPECIFICATIONS BMW R90/6

ENGINE

Displacement	898cc
Type	4-stroke, 2-cylinder
HP	67.5 @ 6700 rpm
Bore/Stroke	90mm/70.6mm
Torque ft.-lb.	52.8 @ 5500 rpm
RPM Redline	7000
Compression Ratio	9 to 1
Carburetion	Two 32mm Bing Constant Velocity

CHASSIS

Final Drive Ratio	3.09:1
Transmission	5-speed, ratios: 4.40:1, 2.86:1, 2.07:1, 1.67:1, 1.50:1
Starting	Kick & Electric
Fuel Capacity	4.8 gal., 5.8 gal. optional
Average Fuel Consumption @ 55 mph	50 mpg
Tires	3.25 H19 front 4.00 H18 rear
Suspension	Telescopic front forks; 3-way adjustable rear spring
Brakes	Front disc, rear single leading shoe 7.87" drum

DIMENSIONS

Overall Length	85.8"
Overall Width	29.1"
Saddle Height	31.9"
Wheelbase	57.7"
Weight	463 lbs.
List Price	\$2930

MONTGOMERY ST. RIDERS

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feel on guard and the whole atmosphere is very relaxed."

What started as a small group of men getting together to enjoy a common interest has become an important recreational outlet to a larger group of businessmen in California. But no matter how large the total membership of the Montgomery Street Motorcycle Club becomes, founding members claim the purpose of the club will remain unchanged.

"All our members love to ride, and they love the feeling of freedom motorcycling gives them. That's what the Montgomery Street Motorcycle Club is all about. To us motorcycling is an exciting sport. It's like soaring—the wind in your face, a hum in your ear. It's youth reborn—doing your own thing. And if Jonathan Livingston Seagull did it, why shouldn't we?" □ Susan O'Hara

BMW TOUR TEST from page 55

approach the BMW in smoothness but none in quiet. After tasting the heady wine of performance you may want to sample the joys of quiet. Quiet means you can see and hear what's going on around you. You can hear the approach of cars, you can hear the wind, you can hear yourself think. The BMW will spoil you and more than one tourer will tell you that riding with a buddy on a noisy bike can be an irritant. So you drop back and watch the hills and farmland unfold around you.

A long tour is a test of a motorcycle that calls for more than a single outstanding quality. Acceleration is judged in passing ability, performance is judged by continued running at speed, handling is judged by unforeseen road hazards or weather conditions, comfort is judged by long hours in the saddle.

Running north from the Los Angeles area took us through the rolling fields of the San Joaquin Valley, farmland and folded green hills dotted with occasional gnarled oaks... the air freshening and cool, the concerns of the job melting behind you as you're loose on the road, and running... glancing at occasional old woodframe houses out of yesteryear weathered by sun and time... and then past Morro Rock and out closer and closer to coastline until you've got the ocean beside you and a rocky shore, white beaches and soaring gulls.

The world around you is fresh and refreshes you with it and you're back with the smell of surf and wild mustard. The beat of the wind and the rolling rise and fall of the road renew you.

The bike is the ingredient that takes you there and the way it brings it all to you is part of what motorcycling and the R90 is all about.

The lack of noise means you don't get

tired as quickly on the road and you find that you spend more time in the saddle per day and per year. And you get where you're going invigorated, instead of ready for a hot bath.

Picking out a bike to put your hard-earned cash into is a lot of fun; what with comparing quarter-mile ET's, power curves, idiot lights, gas economy, not to mention looks and budget considerations. It's easy to see why a lot of people might never stop to wonder if a bike was quiet or if it makes a difference.

Convenience is another important factor if you plan on some long trips and BMW long led the field. Now a lot of makes and sizes of bike sport helmet locks, grab rails, idiot lights and disc brakes. But some touches on the R90/6 are worth noting. The disc brake fluid reservoir is tucked away on the frame under the tank, safe from harm (with a light that warns when the fluid is low); handlebar levers and instrument housing are matte black to eliminate reflection; speedo and odometer glass are nonglare; and the headlamp is better than ever.

Running down the long pass above Cachuma Lake in a black, black night on our shakedown trip, we found you can do your 55 mph safely with the high beam. It throws a wide pattern which helps on country roads and curves and the high beam will give your touring buddies fits if they're in front of you. The 60/55 watt quartz-iodine headlamp was noticeably brighter than the others on the road that night.

The R90 is fitted with Metzeler type H tires, rated for speeds in excess of 120 mph. The light alloy hub/rim design has straight-through spokes, which give added strength and require less adjustment. There's a single disc up front and drum rear brake, the latter now minus the hub cover, which allows you to see the brake linings, and is lighter and better looking.

The seat is one of the most comfortable available. Again a plus for the tourer. It starts in by tending to edge an average-sized rider forward towards the tank but after you've logged a couple of thousand miles you find it wears in and lowers a bit. We find that the seat sits a little tall on the frame and we'd like to see one that is flatter available for sport riding, and there is, on the S model. But we understand they are not interchangeable.

We've covered over 4100 miles on the slash 6, in daily use, in rain and good weather, over all kinds of road conditions. We ran into the following problems: a faulty battery (hence the experience with the kickstarter), and a leaky petcock, both replaced by warranty, and a carb malfunction that took a slight adjustment to the float level lever with a screwdriver, remedied in a couple of minutes.

Showing to what lengths we'll go for a touring test, we took the bike out on a wet day and unloaded. Picture a cloudy

day, heading for the dentist's office while putting more miles on the bike... a small town busy with traffic as the rain starts, the sound of cars humming by on wet roads and you're late, with a thousand things on your mind, heading down Bundy Drive and towards the intersection and uh oh, that car's hanging that turn in front of you... get on the brakes and it's slliiiiide city! I do a roll and so does the BMW behind me and I'm up and running for the bike. Turn it off, pick it up and get out of the traffic, and some dude is honking on his horn because I'm interrupting his schedule.

A tall, skinny guy on a bicycle pulls up, looks at me and says, "Do you need medical attention?" "Well no, but I could use an umbrella and a cigar." And a chick pauses in her car and says, "Do you need some help?" "No," I say, chagrined and annoyed and wondering if I've really banged up this bike. "Are you sure?" she says again, really meaning it. "Yeah, thanks," and thanks for asking that second time, whoever you are, it did make me feel better.

Well, it all goes to prove if you do enough things wrong, you too can lay down a bike. Using too much rear brake, using too much speed in town and not watching out for that intersection nonsense—put 'em all together, they spell trouble.

Damage to the R90 seems slight, considering that kind of treatment. Busted taillight, scraped exhaust pipe and head cover, a bent-up handlebar and oil from the breather tube fouling up the electric starter. The exhaust pipe and head cover don't need replacing, the handlebars were almost salvaged. You may not judge a bike by how it responds to foul play but strong components come in handy.

A closer look at the slash 6 will show why the pricetag may be higher than for some other makes; quality materials, ditto the craftsmanship and detail work, and some engineering touches that you'll probably never see, just appreciate on the road.

If your leisure time is valuable you'll also appreciate the fact that tinkering isn't necessary. BMW maintenance is minimal and access to the valves, timing electrics and battery is easy. Removing front or rear wheel is a snap and the balanced centerstand means you can do it in the middle of nowhere. The tool kit isn't filled with toys and there is room for some extras or a mini camera in its compartment under the lockable seat. The owner's manual gives instructions you can actually work from in a thorough Teutonic manner. And, with a shaft drive, there's the obvious benefit of no chain lube, no chain replacement, or adjustment.

Low maintenance is a major part of the economy factor and gas mileage is another part. Running the R90 hard for a lot of miles, followed by some stop and go in small towns we averaged 44.9 miles

per gallon with the machine still under the 2000-mile mark. After break-in you should get 50 mpg on the open road at 55 or so. You can go with the 4.8 sport tank or pick the optional 5.8 tourer, which gives you well over 250-300 miles cruising range and the reserve on the sport tank is nearly 20 miles, which we proved on a gas-less Sunday. You can also get hold of a super-large touring tank, a monster steel number from Karl Heinrich or one from Ernst Hoske in Germany. The S fairing will be available eventually and there are a wide variety of touring fairings of all kinds designed for the BMW by US accessories makers.

Oil consumption is good, we're guessing at about a quart per 1500 miles. It takes only two quarts to fill the reservoir. Oil is circulated by the Eaton trochoid pump at a rate of 370 gallons per hour at 6000 rpm. If you're a nut on cooling you can install a 3-gallon pan which drops temperature 18 degrees.

Two-up riding can radically alter a bike's performance and here the 900ccs seem ideal for touring; acceleration doesn't seem affected at all and handling feels the same—nice for passing on long grades or quick maneuvers.

We said the R90 offered more than pure touring; how much of a roadburner can it be? It looks like the competition for the Z-1. US distributors Butler & Smith have a performance package that will liven up your monster even more. Flow the heads and substitute big carbs (Mikuni, dell'Orto) and you're ready for a lightened flywheel that cuts weight from 8.5 to 6.3 pounds; titanium pushrods that are lighter and stronger than stock steel and don't expand with heat; high compression pistons at 10.8:1 compared with 9.5:1 for the S, 9:1 for the slash 6; double coil valve springs; larger intake valves, 44mm versus 42mm, and a hotter cam that will let you run your mill up to 8500 rpms prolonged and bursts of 9000. Drop 'em in and blow 'em off.

We've done touring, weekend road riding and commuting on the R90. We're not specialists and neither is this bike. It blends the characteristics for all three into one very considerable package of road riding pleasure. □ Bob Mendel



ummer, 1974



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