

Tour-Testing BMW R90S

A Rider staffer takes this machine 18,600 miles in two months to verify its reputation for trouble-free operation

Dick Blom

The BMW reputation for reliability is well known. In fact, this reliability is reputed to be valid at ridiculously high mileages.

While 20,000 miles is no real achievement for a BMW rider over a long period of time, it does tell a story about maintenance and reliability if proper records are kept.

For this test I converted an R90S to touring configuration and rode it 18,600 miles in two months. The bike was ridden 2200 miles in stock configuration and then equipped for 2-up touring for a 16,400-mile run. No engine or drive-train changes were made.

BMW's reputation for reliability appears to be well earned and accurate. In 18,600 miles there were no breakdowns. In fact, the only problems encountered were so minor they're almost not worth describing. The bolt, washer and spacer on the right side of the center stand came loose, but even then the bike showed good manners in doing it in a service station while stopped. It required about a minute to replace and tighten and did not loosen a second time. At about 6500 miles the taillight bulb burned out, and at 10,000 miles the tachometer bulb did the same. That's it! In 18,600 miles that was the total extent of failures of any kind.

I had the bike serviced at 5000-mile intervals, as specified in the owner's manual. First check is at 600 miles, with subsequent checks at 5000, 10,000, 15,000, etc. Every morning I would check oil level (it required a quart every 1500 to 2000 miles), tire pressure and lights, plus give the bike a general once-over.

The only other thing was to put in gas (premium only) as required. With the big 6.3-gallon gas tank, that was about every 200 miles. Fuel consumption was consistent with speeds and load. With light load (one person with some luggage) and speeds consistently between 50 to 75 mph, I got 40 to 50 mpg. With the same load but with speeds in the range of 80 to 95 mph, I got 42 to 44 mpg (unbelievably good). Two-up with full load of touring gear (at manufacturer's stated gross vehicle weight rating figure), and speeds consistently below 75 mph (50 to 75 normal), fuel consumption was 41 to 42 mpg. With the same load (two-up with gear) and speeds over 75 mph — up to 85 and 90 mph much of the time — the average was 37 to 39 mpg (again exceptionally good). At very high average speeds (90 to 100 mph), going two-up and with full touring load — 35 to 36 mpg (phenomenally good mileage figures for those speeds and load).

These mileage figures were obtained both with and without a frame-mounted fairing, except for the last two ranges, which were done with the Wixom frame-mounted fairing only. This fairing seemed to have little or no detrimental effect on fuel-consumption figures. If anything, it slightly helped when riding two-up with

touring gear.

High-speed figures were obtained in Quebec, Canada, where the normal highway speeds are very high. Posted speeds were 70 mph, but we repeatedly paced tractor-trailer rigs at 90-mph speeds, on level ground. On freeways, a fair amount of traffic was passing at speeds considerably greater.

Since I love to go fast, and my lady doesn't object too strenuously, in Quebec we let it go. A major share of my lady's lack of objection to high speeds can be attributed directly to this bike. It not only runs nicely at high speeds (90 to 100 mph), but seems to thrive on them. The engine sound, braking and suspension all feel right at higher speeds; 80 mph is about the point where everything seems to fall into its proper perspective. The engine is turning 5000-plus rpm and this is where it sounds and feels good again.

Between 4100 and 4700 or 4800 rpm there is a noticeable amount of vibration. "Vibration on a BMW?" you ask. Yes, both 900 models have this vibration around 4200 rpm. This particular bike had it pretty strong, especially at 4200 to 4300 rpm.

However, the vibration is *not* bad enough to make you ride at some other rpm. I toured hours on end right at the worst vibration point, simply because that produced the speed that I wanted to run. In fifth gear this is about 75 mph. If your normal cruising speed is below 70 mph, you most likely will not even be aware of this vibration.

Ride and handling are always a compromise, and BMW has struck a near-perfect one as far as I am concerned. The front dampening has been firmed up for '76, having the feel of a slightly stiffer spring. The new dampening rates offer a noticeable improvement in twisting road handling with little, if any, sacrifice in ride. There is a heavy-duty spring available specifically for use with a frame-mounted fairing. Although I didn't install one when the fairing was put on and felt no pressing need for it during testing, I will install one in the near future to check out the ride and handling differences it makes.

The rear suspension is great, both in terms of handling and ride, for solo riding. With touring gear *or* a passenger, it is fine for ride but just a little on the soft side for top handling. With a passenger *and* touring gear, it is too weak. The spring just doesn't have the capacity, and the shock is inadequate at these weights. At 7300 miles I switched to a set of Red Wing Model KM-S340 rebuildable shocks with 120-pound springs. These give much better ride control and handling with a passenger and touring gear, but solo riding is harsh. In about 2500 miles of use, the Red Wing shocks seemed to soften noticeably, allowing the rear suspension to bottom frequently.

The problem appears to be totally one of weight. Riding solo with empty sad-

dlebags and a 175-pound rider, there is only about 425 pounds on the rear wheel. Loaded, with a 125-pound passenger, plus about 50 pounds of gear in the saddlebags and on the luggage rack, weight goes to 600 pounds or so. While this wouldn't seem to be too drastic a change, it turns out to be an insurmountable difference for these springs and shocks.

Nearly all bikes have essentially the same problem. It is very noticeable on the BMW simply because the ride and handling are so good when the bike is lightly loaded. I plan to try a set of the new S & W air spring/shock units in hopes they will offer the latitude for decent handling and ride, solo as well as two-up with touring gear, with this particular bike.

The dual disc front brake is outstanding. It offers enormous stopping power that is progressive and completely controllable, right up to just short of skidding the front tire. Unfortunately, the front brake developed a shudder during moderate to heavy braking at about the 11,500-mile point. This was corrected by turning the discs at the 15,000-mile service, but the shudder returned within 1500 miles.

I like the master cylinder tucked down under the gas tank, out of sight. It not only gives a cleaner appearance but is less susceptible to vandalism.

One point about front disc brakes: after riding in the rain for some time without using the brake, on first application there is a momentary lack of braking. It is very disconcerting if not anticipated. The solution is simple: just put a little pressure on the front brake occasionally, when in the rain, to dry it out.

The rear drum is strong, up to a point. When riding solo, it is strong enough to lock up on dry pavement, if desired, but when the bike was loaded with touring gear and a passenger, it was not all that strong. I would have preferred a little more rear brake under those conditions.

As with the rear suspension, it is purely a case of weight. When the bike is loaded right up to the manufacturer's gawr (gross axle weight rating) of 619 pounds rear, the brake is somewhat overloaded. For all normal use, it's just fine, but in a panic situation, it felt slightly underbraked. I plan to install a rear disc brake setup on this bike, to see if it would correct this problem.

The clutch lever has a delightfully light pull. The '74 BMW's clutch lever was a real forearm builder — fine if you were looking for that, but if you were interested in changing gears, it could get tiresome. The 5-speed transmission is typically BMW — that is, solid shifting and a little noisy doing it. But it's a tremendous improvement over older (pre /6) models ... no real *clunk*. In fact, after it's broken in, it's possible to make almost silent shifts, especially above second gear. It does

SPECIFICATIONS BMW R90S

ENGINE

Displacement898cc
Type...2-cylinder, horizontally opposed
4-cycle w/overhead valves
HP.....NA
TorqueNA
Bore & stroke90mm x 70.6 mm
Compression ratio.....9.5:1
Carburetion2 38mm Dell'Ortos

CHASSIS

Gear ratios4.4, 2.86, 2.07,
1.67, 1.50:1; final drive, 1:3.0
Starting.....Electric only
Fuel capacity6.3 gal.
Average fuel consumption
@ 60 mph (light load).....49.2 mpg
TiresMetzler 3.25-H19 front;
392-lb. cap. @ 29 psi. Metzler
4.00-H18 rear;
595-lb. cap. @ 32 psi
Suspension.....Front telescoping
fork; rear swing arm w/coil
springs, oil damping shocks
BrakesFront, dual hydraulic disc;
rear, internal expanding w/leading
and trailing shoes

DIMENSIONS

Overall length.....85.8"
Overall width.....29.1"
Overall height.....47.6"
Wheelbase.....57.7"
Weight.....Dry, 452 lbs.;
as tested, 494 lbs.
Gross vehicle weight
rating (gvwr).....881 lbs.
Gross axle weight
rating (gawr)Front, 396 lbs.;
rear, 619 lbs.
List price.....\$4000

require firm up or down pressure for shifting, and it is reluctant to shift at all when decelerating. In this case, the throttle must be blipped to relieve the pressure so the next gear, up or down, can be selected.

The bike was quick and reliable in starting, hot or cold. It has a good battery/starter combination. It also has good throttle response, which can be attributed to the Dell'Orto carbs with their accelerator pumps giving an extra shot of fuel when the throttle is cranked open. The throttle has the traditional BMW friction screw for setting the degree of throttle return spring action; the screw is big and easy to use while riding with gloves.

The rest of the hand controls — dimmer switch, horn and headlight on/off switch on the left, turn indicator switch, starter button and kill switch on the right — are all easy to use. They are in reasonably good positions and clearly marked. The only one that caused any problem was the turn indicators. Until I got used to it, if I looked at the switch, I had a problem telling which way was left

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Converting The R90S For Touring

The BMW R90S offers a unique and very desirable combination of high-speed, long-distance touring capabilities: reliability, good dealer network, ride, handling, low sound levels (both exhaust and mechanical), power and proper gearing, not to mention its weight-carrying capacity.

Nearly all of these characteristics are also true of the 90/6 model BMW, with the exception of the amount of power and, more importantly, the final drive gearing. The R90S has taller gearing, giving it better gas mileage (longer range) and lower rpm at high speeds. In fifth gear there is about a 700-rpm difference in engine speed to between the 90/6 and the R90S — not an overwhelming difference but enough to matter to the rider and passenger. For comparison, there is only a 700-rpm difference between fourth and fifth gears on both bikes. This means fourth gear in the S will be turning the engine at essentially the same speed as fifth gear in the 90/6, for any given road speed.

As delivered, the R90S is not really suited for 2-up touring — at least not up to typical US comfort standards. For this reason, I set out to enhance rider/passenger comfort without detracting from the successful design characteristics that make the bike so desirable.

Basically, the requirements are simple, mostly having to do with the rider's posture or position, plus wind and weather protection. The first change is to the handlebars, so that the rider will sit more upright. This is not a simple or an inexpensive change, mainly because to do it properly the handlebar-mounted switches must all be changed. This means about \$65 for a set of /6 handlebar switches. (I tried wherever possible to stick to BMW original equipment.)

A set of stock /6 bars was selected, as well as original equipment clutch and brake cables; the /6 ones fit nicely. Flanders cables were used for the throttle; they are fine if you get the newer, Teflon-lined type. Cost was a little over \$100 for parts. I had the conversion done at Irv Seaver Motorcycle in Santa Ana, Calif., where labor for the bar, switches and cable change was about \$25. I retained the stock S mirrors; they have a longer arm than the /6 mirrors.

Next came the task of selecting a fairing. Riding behind a fairing is cleaner, as the fairing gets bug-spattered, not the rider. Besides, a full day of facing into hurricane-force winds is not my idea of relaxed, comfortable touring. With a fairing, the lack of heavy wind pressure on the rider's helmeted head makes it easier to look around at traffic and/or scenery, making riding both safer and more enjoyable. One last

point; the fairing offers a place to mount a cigarette lighter, and the air is still enough for one to smoke.

Frame-mounted fairings were the only ones considered. They offer better protection, no steering input as with fork-mounted models, and the storage most have is desirable, especially for touring.

I considered size, shape, quality and looks in selecting a fairing. I wanted high quality in both the fairing and the mounting hardware, in keeping with the extremely high quality of the BMW. Size and shape were important, both from an air-flow as well as a styling viewpoint. I wanted as small a frontal area as possible, to minimize visual impact as well as to displace the least amount of air possible. I was also interested in a rather sharp rack to the windscreen because this seems to displace less air than the more vertical styles.

I selected the Wixom frame-mounted fairing because it met all of the above requirements. Its high quality is evident both in the hand-laid-up fiberglass of the fairing and the perfectly fitting, chromed hardware. Its sculptured look complements the sculptured styling of the seat and gas tank on the S model. To further integrate the styling with the bike, I had Damon's Custom Motorcycle Painting paint it smoke silver and stripe it in gold to exactly match the BMW paint job.

The Wixom has turned out to not only complement the styling of the R90S, but it also complements its performance. What the Wixom lacks in storage space and rider protection, it more than makes up for in rock-steady handling at all speeds, in still air or gusty crosswinds. The gas mileage figures obtained with this fairing mounted and while riding at high speeds speak for themselves: 37 to 39 mpg riding two-up with touring gear at speeds of 75 to 90 mph.

As far as rider protection goes, this fairing is only somewhat better than the best of the fork-mounted models. It has a noticeable updraft in the rider's face — not excessive, but enough to be aware of most of the time. In addition, I experienced some head buffeting behind this fairing. But wind protection gets better with this fairing as the speed goes up. At 90 mph any head buffeting had all but disappeared. Protection of the body and legs down to below the knees is good. Part of this can be attributed to the narrowness of the BMW riding position, where feet and knees are well tucked in, but also, this fairing extends down farther than most.

The storage space in the Wixom is entirely adequate. Things like a rain suit, extra gloves, cigarettes, down vest, etc., are easily accommodated. In fact, the space available is deceptive; it looks smaller than it actually is.

One important consideration for any fairing to be selected was that I would be able to retain the excellent BMW headlight. The Wixom allows this, but the adjustment for

the headlight is rather crude; this is being changed in later models. During installation of the fairing, a cigarette lighter was installed.

One other major comfort item to be selected was a different seat. The stock R90S seat is a little short, slightly thin and flat for 2-up comfort. Part of the problem was created by the change in rider position effected by the handlebar change. I selected one of Ez Berg's superbly comfortable seats — a model in black with silver inserts to match the bike's colors. These seats have a sculptured look that I felt fit right in with the sculpturing of the S tank and Wixom fairing.

One compromise was made in the in-

The BMW R90S in stock configuration with the exception of Krauser saddlebags (small photo) compared to the same bike converted for long-distance touring.

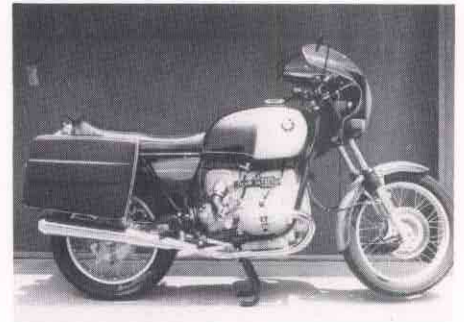


terest of looks: we retained the original seat base, including the small, distinctive storage cover at the back of the seat. This forced the seat to be slightly shorter than those on the /6 models, and comfort suffered for it. But the comfort loss is slight and I like the way it looks.

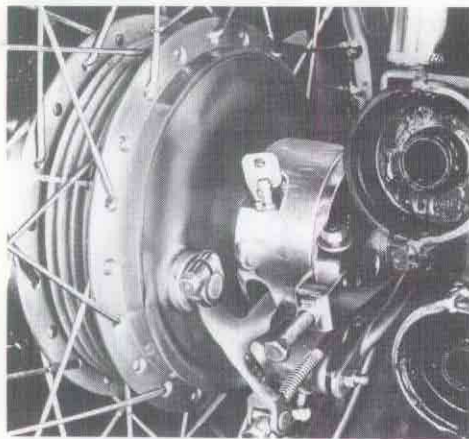
The Ez Berg seat is not only much more comfortable for rider as well as passenger but it also solves a major passenger complaint. During braking and acceleration the passenger tends to slide back and forth on the stock seat, inducing a feeling of insecurity. The Ez Berg seat eliminates all of that sliding.

One last item that partly falls in the category of comfort is the safety bars that are integrated into the mounting hardware of the Wixom fairing. These will be removed, simply because of their weight and wind hamper. While both weight and wind hamper are slight, I feel the bars detract from the overall theme of the bike. I put a set of highway pegs (aluminum) on the safety bars and used them a few times on

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product. The two items are comfortable to wear, quick and easy to put on and take off (the chaps are strapped around each leg and at the waist with elastic straps with Velcro fasteners at the ends; they go on and off in seconds), and they can be rolled or wadded up into small bundles and carried permanently in a corner of a saddlebag, ready to use. I guess I can safely say that this outfit made the difference between wishing I were already at my destination or being able to sit back, strokin' along and enjoying the ride. I enjoyed. I didn't go through the usual drill of watching mileage signs along the road and calculating the minutes to the next coffee shop.

The vest, which sells for \$49.95, comes in various sizes 36 through 48. The chaps (also \$49.95) are small, medium and large. In ordering a size, remember that they are designed to be worn over one or two other garments.

There are a couple of options available in the wiring harness. You can have a cord that plugs into a cigarette lighter instead of the battery hookup — no extra charge for that. You can order an optional 8-foot cord with the cigarette lighter plug for an extra \$3.98.

The color of the outfit is a metallic light bluish-gray, quite attractive.

(Manufacturer's address: Widder Enterprises, 3539 Calle La Quinta, San Clemente, Calif. 92672. For more information, circle Reader Service No. 239.) □

R90S from page 56

turn and which was right.

One feature included in the BMW dimmer switch that I especially like is the headlight flasher. This is a spring-loaded switch that can be pressed down, with or without the headlight on, to give instant high beam. Flashing this brilliant quartz-halogen headlight, on high beam, seems to really get the attention of auto drivers waiting to make a left turn or to pull out from a side street. I get waves and scowls, but at least they notice the bike is there.

The horn is ridiculously feeble. It's a shame BMW can't provide a decent horn for this bike.

Instrumentation includes a 140-mph speedometer and odometer with a resettable tripometer and a tachometer red-lined at 7300 rpm. There are lights for brake failure, neutral indicator, low generator charge light, low oil pressure and a single turn-indicator light.

In addition, the S has a voltmeter and clock mounted in the little cafe-racer-type fairing. I always felt the clock was a rather frivolous feature to include, but after using it for some time now, I wouldn't want to do without it. A wristwatch is of little value if covered by jacket and gloves. The clock is readable day or night and quite accurate.

This bike retains the controversial spring-loaded side stand. If you don't

want it to snap up when the pressure is removed, the change is an easy one. Evan Bell, the general manager at Irv Seaver Motorcycles, showed me this fix. With the bike on its center stand, loosen the nut on the engine mounting stud at the side stand mounting. Move the side stand down, then tighten the nut. That's it! This allows the spring perch mounting bracket to move enough to do away with the snap-up feature. The spring will still hold the side stand up when not in use.

The reason the bike has the spring-loaded side stand is so the rider will not ride off with the stand down, which would be easy to do because it's hidden by the cylinder. Warning: if you change it, don't forget it! Incidentally, the center stand is one of the easiest to use, for a bike of any size, but especially impressive for a 900cc model.

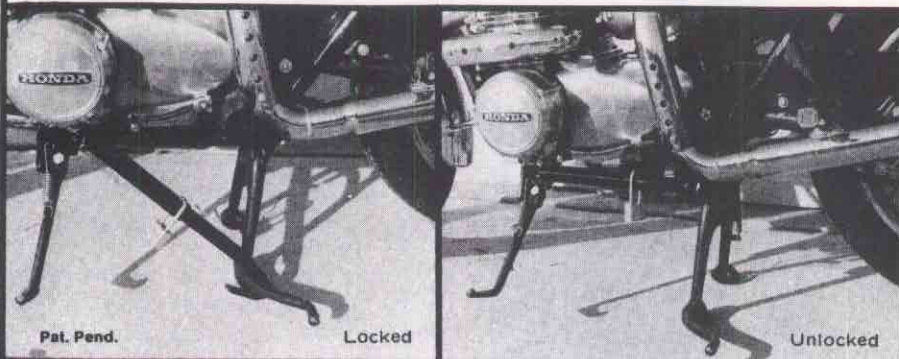
Probably the single most striking feature of this bike is its styling, with its cafe-racer-style fairing and short, European bars. The tank, seat and paint job carry out this same styling theme. There is even a small storage compartment under the light metal tail section of the seat. There is no getting around the fact that a lot of people find this bike very attractive, and I'm one of them. In stock form, it looks fast and businesslike, but with style. I noticed, repeatedly, that even nonriding people would stop and examine the bike rather closely.

So it does get attention, but is it practical? I found it surprisingly comfortable to ride. The riding position is especially suited to getting the most out of the bike on 2-lane, curving roads. The rider sits slightly bent forward, with hands, feet and knees tucked in close to the bike. For a bike in this size-class, the narrow separation of the knees and feet is unusual and very comfortable. Another feature that adds to rider comfort is the exhaust sound level. At idle, low speeds and legal freeway speeds, it is almost inaudible. During hard acceleration and at very high speeds, it is audible but pleasant . . . never blatant or intrusive.

Around town, the riding position can become a little tiring on the arms, if done for any length of time at slow speeds. The position is best when the rider is actively operating the bike. Here the light weight, very strong engine and powerful brakes all combine with the riding position to make the bike a delight to operate. The bars are not as short or low as they first appear, and from 60 mph on up, the wind pressure takes up any pressure on the arms, so the position is comfortable for the rider. (It's a different story for the passenger, especially if she is used to having the rider sit up straight or is accustomed to riding behind a frame-mounted fairing.)

The stock seat is another problem area for 2-up riding; it is just a tad short for real comfort. It is also flatter and not as comfortable as the /6 seat for long-distance

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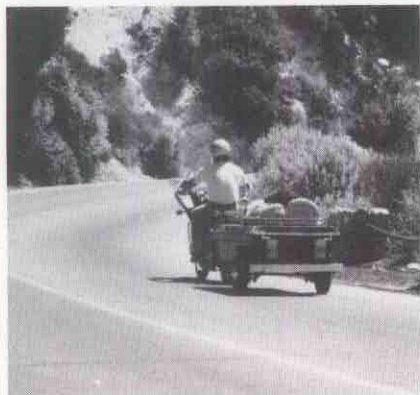
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touring.

The bike came equipped with Metzler tires — 3.25-H19 front and 4.00-H18 rear. They are a good compromise tire, offering good handling with reasonable wear characteristics, although the front tread pattern did tend to be upset by rain grooves. I got 7000 miles out of the rear tire, changing it with 2/32-inch of tread left. The front had another 7000 to 10,000 miles of tread left when I changed it for a Conti RB-2 replacement. I was going to put on a new Conti K112 rear tire and since the tires are billed as having been designed to work together, it seemed only fair to try both front and rear at the same time.

I especially like the RB-2 front tire. It seems to make the bike more responsive — actually *eager* to corner — and its grab for braking is superior to that of other tires I have used. The rear tire is also very good. I put on the oversized 5.10-H18, which fits just fine. With its 660-pound load capacity, it is particularly suitable for carrying a passenger and touring gear. It performed well for cornering and braking, with a single exception. At low speeds, when accelerating while leaning over, such as making a turn just as you start up, it would feel a little squiggly.

The tire held up for 7000 miles of very

hard riding, all two-up and loaded with touring gear. Many of those miles were at very high speeds, which are hard on tires, especially rear ones. For more conservative use, I would expect considerably higher mileage from this tire, in the range of 10,000 to 12,000.

Incidentally, the front Conti is hardly affected by rain grooves; I have to look down at the road to tell for sure if I am on them.

The weight capacities for this bike are generous, both front and rear. Gross axle weight rating (gawr) for the front is 396 pounds and rear, 619 pounds, but the total gwvr (gross vehicle weight rating) for the bike is only 881 pounds, according to the plate attached to the front of the frame. This limitation only becomes a problem for 2-up, long-distance touring. Even then, much will depend on the weight of the rider and passenger.

Our tour was not marred by any repair costs; the only costs have been tires, gas, oil and servicing. The servicing is not cheap, but I found it consistently good across the country. (For routine maintenance, a little planning and a phone call ahead is in order to be sure of getting it done when and where you want.)

The actual costs break down as follows:

Purchase price + tags and tax	
Dealer: Irv Seaver Motorcycles, Santa Ana, Calif.	\$4000.00
600-mile service (oil and filter).	
Dealer: Irv Seaver Motorcycles, Santa Ana., Calif.	8.00
Major service done at 5000 miles.	
Dealer: Motorcycles, Inc., Atlanta, Ga. (This dealer made it a condition of their performing any maintenance on the bike that a major [10,000-mile, more expensive] service be done.)	110.99
Minor service done at 10,000 miles.	
Dealer: Corsetti Cycle, Ambridge, Penna.	23.01
New rear tire, K112 Conti 5.10-H18	
(Conti 3.25-H19 front tire sells for \$37.38).	
Dealer: Rebel International, Clearwater, Fla.	51.95
New heavy-duty Conti tube	7.75
Gas	160.14
2 quarts 20-50 oil	2.50
Total operating costs for 10,000 miles	\$364.34

This total, of course, does not include insurance. Operating costs could be reduced by 'doing your own maintenance, which would be facilitated by the excellent owner's manual provided with the bike. The bike comes equipped with a very good set of tools, a tire pump and a tube-patching kit.

Aside from the styling, the actual differences between this bike and the /6 models, especially the 90/6, are subtle. The major external differences, aside from the fairing, bars, tank and seat, are the dual front disc brakes and the carburetors. Internally, the differences are very slight — higher compression ratio and a rev limit 300 rpm higher than the 90/6. One major internal difference is the final drive ratio, which is 3.2 to 1 on the 90/6 as imported by Butler and Smith for

the US and 3 to 1 on the S. This doesn't appear to be a great difference. In lower gears, it's hardly noticeable, but in the top gears it is an enormous difference. For all practical purposes fourth gear in the S is identical to fifth gear in the 90/6.

Consequently, the performance of the two bikes is noticeably different. The 90/6 will have more punch at lower engine speeds in any given gear, simply because it is geared lower, but the S, in effect, has an overdrive in fifth gear. This doesn't mean the S lacks potent acceleration. The difference shows up another way: increased use of the gear box is required on the S. When we were riding two-up with touring gear, the S had to be dropped down a gear or two for real passing punch.

Example: 2-lane road, 50 mph behind

Rider

a string of three or four cars, turning 2800 rpm in fifth, limited opening for passing coming up. Drop down to fourth; rpm goes to 3300. Drop down to third; rpm is now 4200. Clear to pass. Swing out as you crank on the throttle; bike jumps ahead . . . 85 mph and 7000 rpm come quickly in third. Shift to fourth . . . 100 mph at 6500 rpm. Swing back into right lane, ease off throttle, shift to fifth and drop back down to 75 mph and 4400 rpm.

The whole pass took a little over 10 seconds, but there was no loud roaring of exhaust, no lurching from sharp changes in the rate of acceleration . . . just a deep, pleasantly audible exhaust note, with turbine-smooth power applied to the road. The speed could have just as easily been left at the 100 mph at 5800 rpm in fifth on this bike, since it runs at those speeds so comfortably. *In no way am I advocating these kinds of speeds on US roads.* I am simply evaluating this motorcycle and pointing out its capabilities. One of those capabilities is to run comfortably and economically at very high speeds.

For solo touring, the bike is ready to go as it comes off the showroom floor. For 2-up touring in comfort, I feel some changes are required — changes of fairing, bars and seat (see sidebar accompanying this story). These conversions are practical (except for the expense), since most of the basic appeal of the bike is retained in making it suitable for 2-up touring in comfort.

This bike is unique in its high-speed, long-distance touring capabilities — offering comfort, reliability and safety that I believe exceed that of any other bike presently available on the US market, without sacrificing its suitability for other uses. Its size and weight make it completely acceptable for commuting, sport or around-town riding as well.

(Manufacturers' addresses: BMW, Butler & Smith Inc., PO Box H, Norwood, N.J. 07648, or circle Reader Service No. 241 for more information; Conti Rubber Products Inc., Carteret, N.J. 07008, or circle Reader Service No. 243. □)

KRW from page 62

for the street and touring rider. The helmets are offered in several different styles of both full coverage and standard helmets in almost any color and design anyone could want — even some to match the stock colors of the newer cycles. Several price ranges are offered.

Naturally KRW helmets meet all state and federal safety requirements and are approved for use in any state.

Whether or not you wear a helmet is your business, but if a good safety helmet is on your list of needed gear, KRW has to be considered worthy of your hard-earned bucks.

(Manufacturer's name and address:

Trabaca Products of California, 3170 Airway Ave., Costa Mesa, Calif. 92626, or for more information, circle Reader Service No. 225.) □ Jim Shirley

BLUE RIDGE from page 61

Hondas and that the grass was as green on one side of the road as the other, it bounded back into the foliage from which it had emerged.

Back at the campsite I got a fire going, broke out some grub and settled down for the night.

Big, billowy clouds played tag with the sun the following morning as they drifted lazily in the sky and as I cycled leisurely along the drive. Much of the road is tree-lined, with carefully-trimmed grassy shoulders and embankments. Curves are almost continuous — some very tight, though adequately banked.

The view is restricted by heavy foliage along much of the road, but numerous overlooks offer vistas of quiet, natural beauty as range after range of mountains, with age-rounded peaks, are engulfed in the ever-present bluish haze. There is a feeling of limitless space.

Before leaving the park, I filled my tank at one of the four service stations in the park. In addition to the campgrounds, facilities include lodges and motels, picnic areas and comfort stations, restaurants and visitor centers. Complete facilities are available in the park from mid-April to early November.

I left Shenandoah and swooped down into Rockfish Gap. The road broadened out and had already begun to climb the mountain ridge ahead as I flashed past the sign that marked the beginning of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

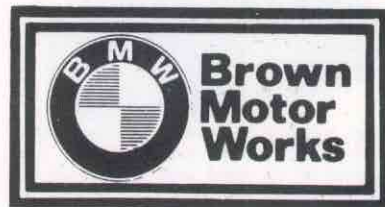
The speed limit on Skyline Drive is 35 mph, while the maximum limit is 45 mph on the parkway, with lower limits in some areas. Both have two lanes with well-maintained blacktop surfaces. Though narrow by today's standards, their widths seem ideal for cycles.

The parkway cuts a wider swath across the mountainous countryside, with broader, grass-covered shoulders. The foliage alongside is not as dense or encompassing. Across the high plateaus and through the broader valleys, the curves sweep in graceful arcs and gentle esses. With a feeling of freedom, I ran them faster.

But as the road dipped across mountain passes, the curves tightened up until it felt as if I were riding a coiled spring. As I rode the ridges, the views into the adjacent valleys were dramatic. Or as the road clung to a mountainside, ahead I could see it spiral up the side of a ridge.

At the Humpback Rocks Visitor Center (Mile 5) I stopped to pick up some literature. Glancing at the sky, I saw it was overcast. I mounted my steed and sallied forth to take on a bout of dismal weather. Down the parkway about 10 miles, I

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