

CYCLE ROAD TEST:

BMW 600cc R 60/5

The BMW engineers have yanked the R 60 out of its hiding place on the edge of motorcycling and planted it squarely in the middle of the action.

The success of the earlier R 60 model in this country has been one of the wonders of motorcycling because the machine was designed primarily to pull a sidecar, and not for solo riding. For that reason, the bike had a number of characteristics completely different from those of most other brands. But a certain type of rider latched on to the R 60 like glue; rode it without a sidecar; was absolutely enchanted with it; and only parted with it when it had 50,000 miles or so on its odometer and the time had come to get a newer R 60.

wanted a responsive bike. To get these features, he was willing to put up with vibration, and the need for a lot of maintenance. But the R 60 rider wanted—and got—just the opposite.

The old R 60 was the most unobtrusive, conservative motorcycle that you could buy. It wasn't pretty, but its lines were so clean and simple and functional that a lot of people really dug its looks. With its standard funereal-black paint job, the R 60 wasn't *quite* invisible on the highway, but it came mighty close. On any other brand

Dance would have had trouble manipulating the controls on the old R 60 for around-town riding, but everybody else should have been able to manage the job in their sleep. In fact, the bike actually penalized the use of dexterity and skill. It had a specially designed long travel twistgrip that you had to wind up like an alarm clock before it would reluctantly lift the carburetor slide to give you some forward motion. This feature, combined with the wide powerband of the engine (which came on at 2500 rpm and pulled up to 6000



PHOTOGRAPHY: JIM McGUIRE

The R 60 owner was about as dissimilar to the average rider as a man could be and still get transported on two wheels. The average motorcycle rider was not bashful about being noticed: he enjoyed riding a bright, shiny, distinctive-looking machine. He liked the feel of power: when he grabbed some throttle, he wanted things to happen in a hurry. And he wanted to *hear* that power. The average rider enjoyed being able to use his skills, balance, and coordination to wring the utmost in handling and performance from his machine—he

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of bike, you'd parade down the road; on an R 60, you'd *ooze*.

The exhaust sound was in keeping with the looks of the bike. While the average rider would be busting his butt to lay money on an irresponsible accessory manufacturer for a set of open (or openable) megaphones for his street bike, the R 60 rider took great pride in knowing that he could ease up alongside a pedestrian walking down the road without getting even a single backward glance.

Perhaps a person afflicted with St. Vitus

rpm), and the inertia of the flywheel (once you got it spinning, it would resist valiantly all efforts to make it stop), made it well-nigh impossible to stall out the old model R 60 at a traffic light. Nor did you have to mess with the gearbox very often: the bike was perfectly willing to lug along in the wrong gear in town while you thought about other things. Of course, if you *did* want to change up through the gears smartly, then you might have a few problems, because the gearbox simply wouldn't be hurried. Many massive pieces had to

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move around in there, and it took a while.

The BMW would go through the corners, and it seldom left cylinder heads behind, but the steering geometry of the Earlesfork models left some with the feeling that the machine was going to flop over on its side right there in the middle of the corner unless the rider fed it some more throttle. Could you, while riding the old R 60 on twisty mountain roads, have imagined yourself aboard a roadracer giving 'em hell at Daytona? You would have needed a strong imagination.

What the old R 60 did best was go from one side of the country to the other side and back, effortlessly. It was a comfortable machine: the rider could take long trips on it without getting jarred to pieces. Compared with other brands, the R 60 just did not vibrate. And the factory had built the machines carefully, using oversized parts, so the bikes didn't break very often, and they didn't need constant adjustment. All you had to do was put in some gas, climb aboard, and take off unobtrusively for the other side of the continent.

The R 60 stood apart from the mainstream of motorcycling, and so—often—did its rider. He placed little value upon the handling and performance characteristics sought with fervor by riders of other brands; he was unwilling to put up with the common flaws of motorcycles that other riders took for granted; above all, he relished being inconspicuous while other riders were noisy extroverts. Once an R 60 rider, *always* an R 60 rider.

Now, in 1970, everything is changed. The BMW engineers have yanked the R 60 out of its hiding place on the edge of motorcycling and planted it squarely in the middle of the action.

Look at the photographs of the machine. The old unobtrusiveness is gone; the new R 60 is very definitely *there*, and it gets noticed, particularly when wearing white paint. Our first impression was one of shock. Several other riders reacted the same way. One said, "It looks like they shoved a VW engine into a motorcycle frame." Another rider studied the bike for a while and commented, "If the Jolly Green Giant picked up an R 69 by its wheels and squeezed from both ends, that's what you'd get."

The machine looks massive. It swallows up shorter riders, and it will look big beneath larger riders, too. The lines of the original R 60 have been intensified almost—but not quite—to grotesquerie. The motorcycle is unmistakably German, easily associated with pickelhauber helmets

and Teutonic castles, and the Kaiser's pre-WWI officers would have created the same effect in parades had they been mounted on the new R 60 as they did on their magnificent horses. This R 60 is a serious machine, not to be taken lightly.

From the side, the slabsided oversize gas tank jumps out and hits you in the eye. It is out of proportion; in their desire to give you 250 miles of riding between filling stations, the design engineers went overboard and designed the tank about three inches too deep.

The engine cases are larger and bulkier than before, and they extend up beneath the bottom of the tank; this strikes a jarring note to the rider who prefers to see airspace between the bottom of the tank and the top of the engine.

When you've gotten past the gas tank and the engine cases, your eye follows the well-proportioned and gracefully-upswept exhaust pipe and muffler. Then you notice



the painted fenders—a narrow sport fender up front and the deeply-valenced rear fender—with their tasteful pinstriping. All of the details, with the exception of the garish turn signals and hangers, are carefully done and understated. After a while, when the initial shock has worn off, you realize that the lines of this bike are even simpler than those of the previous R 60. As is often the case with simple but unusual designs, the looks of the bike grow on you, and before the end of the test we found ourselves wishing we owned it.

We climbed aboard the machine for the first time with a touch of apprehension. We were in for another shock. When you look at the bike from the saddle, it seems to change into a different motorcycle altogether. The gas tank is now perfectly proportioned; it seems long and slender and inviting. The layout of the handlebars, controls, instruments, and headlight is clean, businesslike, and elegant. From the saddle,

the R 60 still seems big, but it is no longer an intimidating machine.

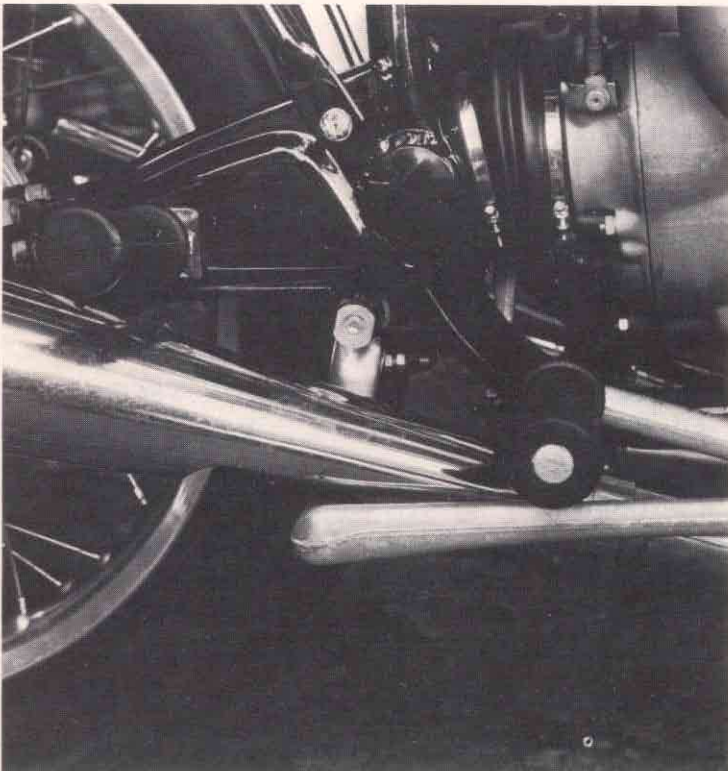
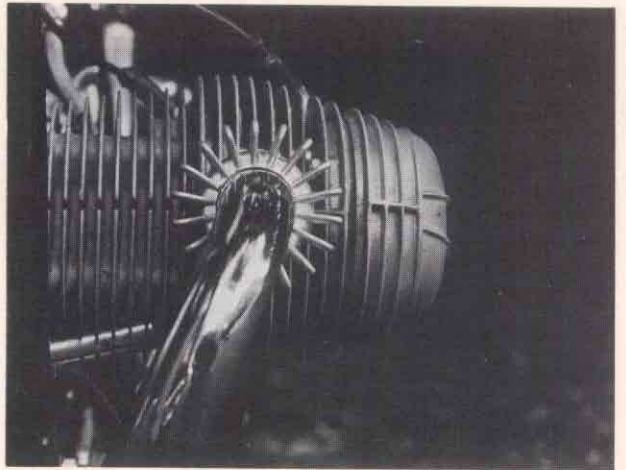
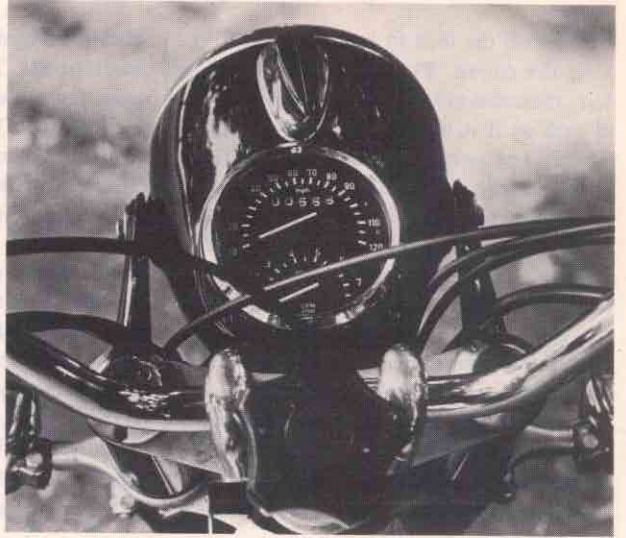
To start the engine, you simply tickle the carbs and then touch the starter-button near the right handlebar-grip. The clutch pull is easy, but the clutch on the test bike engaged very quickly, and we had to be careful when slipping it to get the wheels rolling. You do need to slip the clutch a bit, because the gearing is rather tall, and the engine doesn't really come to life below 4200 rpm. Gone is the variable-sensitivity twistgrip and gone is the low-rpm lugging ability of the engine. This new R 60 will not haul you unthinkingly around town like a Farmall tractor; you've got to pay attention to what you're doing.

Below 10 mph, the bike feels unstable; torque reactions generated when you rotate the twistgrip at those creeping speeds cause the bike to lean slightly to the right. Not enough to put you into the bushes: just enough to unsettle you slightly.

Above 10 mph, the bike stops playing games, and then it is all yours. We were so amazed at the responsiveness in handling that we spent 15 minutes riding along at 20 mph, throwing the machine over to the left and then the right and then the left. The bike heeled over and recovered exactly as we asked it to—far more readily than most other bikes its size. In fact, we began to wonder whether it would get squirrely at higher speeds.

If you wind the machine up tight in low gear and then shift into second, the shift lever says, "Click," the transmission says, "CLUNK," the rear wheel dances around while the flywheel makes up its mind how fast to spin, and WHAM! the bike tries to run out from under you. Not much like the old R 60, which delivered 32 hp; the new version churns out 46. The 1967 R 60 that we tested did the quarter mile in 16.2 seconds, going through the traps at 79 mph. The top speed was 88 mph. Our Technical Editor took the 1970 R 60 down the strip in 15.2 seconds, with a best speed of 85.38 mph. The top speed of this machine is around 97 mph.

The price you pay for this whopping increase in performance is a narrower powerband. You don't want to ride the bike with the engine turning less than 4200 rpm; below that speed, it takes the engine too long to get up a head of steam when you turn on the throttle. But above 4200, the machine is right with you. The engine seemed happiest when turning 6600, right at the redline. Even though the odometer had only 600 miles on it, everything felt free and easy and still eager, and an eye had to



The R 60 somehow manages to feel light and responsive, yet rock-steady, all at the same time. The machine goes where you aim it.

be kept on the tach to keep from overrevving the engine. The old R 60 would go long distances at 65-70 mph; the new model feels as if it would run all day long at 85-90. The only thing lacking is a five-speed gearbox; the machine works okay with four, but with the narrower powerband it could use a bit more overlap in the gearing, and a lower first gear.

As you charge along the highways, you can glance at the handlebar mirror and see everything behind you; there's not a bit of quiver. The magnificent saddle will shiver just a bit at 3500 rpm, and aside from that, it just doesn't want to know about vibrations. The handlebar grips (which are hard and uncomfortable) transmit just enough

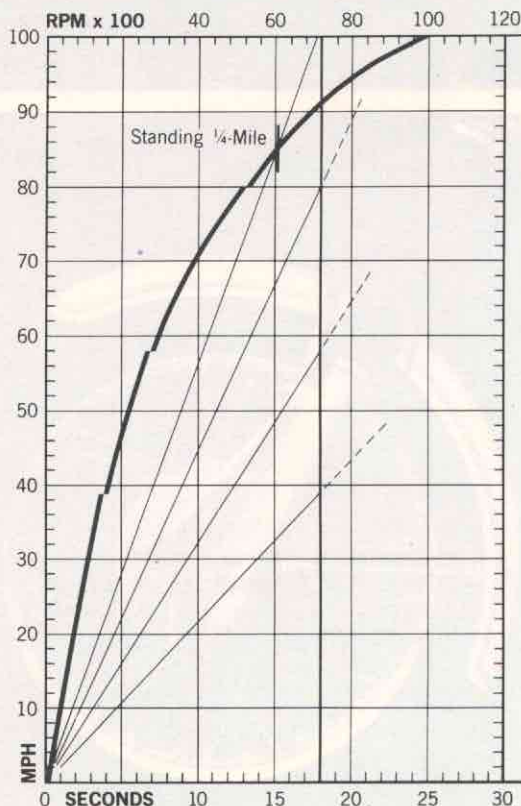
vibration so you can feel it, and that's not much at all. The gas tank shakes a bit more, but not enough to generate knee discomfort. The footpeg rubbers, which are large and seemingly luxurious, must be made out of the wrong materials, because more vibration can be felt through them than from any other source. Although the Japanese have done some good work in the last few years to get the vibes out of their bikes, the R 60 still has the edge.

We need not have worried about the bike's being squirrely at high speeds. The faster it went, the more controllable the machine felt. With the mechanical steering-damper unscrewed, the R 60 somehow manages to feel light and responsive, yet

rock-steady, all at the same time. You flick it over in a corner, and it's all there, solid and stable. If you want to make small corrections to your line through the corner, just shift your weight a small amount, or turn the bars a touch, and the machine goes where you aim it.

Something was wrong with the suspension. The front forks are advertised as having 8½ inches of travel. While stopped, I could pull the front brake and work the forks up and down and get about five inches of travel; nothing felt as if it were binding. On the road, the bike would eat up small bumps without even bothering to let you know about them. Hitting a medi-

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BMW R 60/5 600cc STREET

Price, suggested retail	East Coast, POE \$1548
Tire, front	3.25 in. x 19 in., Continental Rib
rear	4.00 in. x 18 in., Universal
Brake, front	7.8 in. x 1.2 in.
rear	7.8 in. x 1.2 in.
Brake drum swept area	58.8 sq. in.
Specific brake loading	9.7 lb/sq. in., at test weight
Engine type	Horizontal opposed four-stroke twin
Bore and stroke	2.89 in. x 2.78 in., 73.5mm x 70.6mm
Piston displacement	36.6 cu. in., 599cc
Compression ratio	9:1
Carburetion	(2) 26mm Bing
Ignition	Battery and coil
Bhp @ rpm	46 @ 6600
Mph/1000 rpm, top gear	15.6
Fuel capacity	6¼ gal.
Lighting	12v, 180 watts
Battery	12v, 15ah
Gear ratios, overall	(1) 13.1 (2) 8.7 (3) 6.3 (4) 5.0
Wheelbase	54.6 in.
Seat height	32 in., with rider
Ground clearance	6½ in., with rider
Curb weight	438 lbs., with ½-tank of gas
Test weight	573 lbs., with rider
Instruments	Speedometer, tachometer, odometer
0-60 mph	6.9 seconds
Standing start ¼ mile	15.20 seconds, 85.38 mph
Top speed	97 mph