

ON TWO WHEELS

THE sport of motorcycling has many adherents and a lot of them are in the AFP. Our publisher, Paul Lewer, spoke to a Welsh mechanic from the Rhondda Valley looking after German motor cycles in an Australian police garage.

It takes a good machine to win praise from the AFP's motor cycle mechanic in Canberra, Taffy Williams.

And it takes an even better one to vie with the 'best of British' for his affections.

But he says that the BMW's used by the Federal Police in Canberra are the best bikes he's seen.

The force is equipped with the police version of the BMW K100. A total of 47 of the big four cylinder machines were bought about two and a half years ago and about half the original fleet is left.

Between them, the motor cycles have done more than two million kilometres at very little mechanical cost.

'We've only had to replace three clutch-plates, two differentials and four gear-boxes,' Taffy said.

'The repairs were the result of the high speed pursuit work the bikes are used for; the average rider would not have such problems at all,' he added.

He pointed out that the police bikes were sold at auction after they'd covered 40,000 kilometres but it was generally reckoned that distance was the equivalent of at least 120,000 kilometres of ordinary road use.

Taffy said that the police riders were also extremely pleased with the BMW's and another 20 were on order.

'It's an excellent design and the handling is fantastic.

'It's very unusual to find a bike with so few faults. They're so good, I haven't had the chance to pull one engine down yet.'

Taffy, the Welsh wizard of the workshop in the AFP services establishment at Weston, has been riding since 1948 and working for the Federal Police in Canberra since 1980.

He and his family have been involved in all aspects of motorcycling — from racing, to selling, and repairing them.

A British bike enthusiast all his life, Taffy owns two of the famous Vincent 1,000 c.c. models and a 600 c.c. Scott water-cooled two stroke.



Taffy Williams

But he says the BMW has the goods: 'I have to say the German bike is better than the Vincent on a long trip.'

The police motor cycle mechanic was so impressed with the new design that he went to Germany and bought one — before the AFP chose the model for its fleet.

On the question of maintenance, Taffy says the police bikes are regularly serviced every 5,000 kilometres and that rear tyres last about 4,000 kilometres and front tyres 5,000 kilometres.

And he has a handling tip for riders. Taffy says the standard front fork oil of 5

S.A.E. is much too light and should be changed to 20 S.A.E. for summer riding and 15 S.A.E. for winter riding, for police use.

Taffy said civilian riders should use 15 S.A.E. for summer riding and 10 S.A.E. for winter riding.

He also said that manufacturers are very interested in how the AFP operates its motor cycle fleet.

'Pirelli, the big Italian tyre company, for example, says our fleet has been the biggest test ground it's got,' he said.

The Competition

Taffy told 'Platypus' the BMW's were a great improvement on the last Japanese motor cycles operated by the AFP in Canberra.

'We had the J-series big Kawasakis and found we were having to get the cylinders re-bored at between 8,000 and 15,000 kilometres,' he said.

'I think it was due to poor quality control with the piston rings. Private riders were getting the same problem and were having re-bores done at between 15,000 and 20,000 kilometres.

'The problem was made worse for us because often police motor cycles have to be used hard from cold and this is a particular difficulty with an air-cooled engine such as the Kawasaki had.

'The BMW engine, being water cooled, doesn't lose its head so quickly and water cooled engines can be built to closer tolerances than the air cooled variety.'

Tyre wear also had been extremely heavy on the Kawasakis, with rear tyres having to be replaced after 1,500 kilometres and front tyres at between 2,500 and 3,000 kilometres.

Taffy pointed out that the mechanical problems with the make appeared to have been restricted to the J-series Kawasakis.

'We had the Marks 1 and 2 and had no mechanical problems with them, but they were all bad handlers and took some time to set them up. The BMW is much better in that regard.'

And the British bike enthusiast doesn't even draw the line at the complexity that is clearly to be seen in all modern road-going machinery.

Machine control



A typical training scene

'It's legitimate complexity,' he says, 'items such as fuel injection and electronic ignition are all great advances.'

Riding Tips

The techniques of defensive riding form the core of the police motor cyclist training course at Sutton in Canberra.

The five week course stresses the need for the police motor cyclist to ride for the other person on the road.

'We build in a conditional reflex designed to make defensive riding second nature,' police motor cycle instructor, Senior Constable Matt Ellem said.

'So many accidents we see involving civilian motor cyclists are the result of basic mistakes. People who don't ride prepared to make allowances for motorists are looking for an accident.'

'Riders should never, for example, take it for granted that a motorist will give way or stop at an intersection.'

Senior Constable Ellem said the police rider training stressed the importance of observation and forward thinking so that the rider could anticipate problems.

He said braking skills were often a problem for civilian motorcyclists and police riders were taught how to stop their machines in a straight line from high speed without locking the brakes.

'Over-application, or grabbing the brakes, can cause skidding and a lack of braking function, particularly on wet or gravel roads,' he said.

Police rider training in Canberra also covers other matters of roadcraft such as how to take evasive manoeuvres, throttle control and cornering techniques.

Senior Constable Ellem said there was one myth he wanted to put to rest: 'We don't go looking for people who have never ridden before to train as police motorcyclists.'

'People with experience are fine but we do find that some with bad riding habits just don't want to adapt.'

Senior Constable Ellem said the preliminary part of the training course was designed in a way to allow students to find out for themselves whether they wanted to continue.

'Our BMW's are capable of quite high speeds and some people don't like to pull them up quickly from 80 kph or more,' he said.

'Some of the students also have an interesting time on the old large road bikes we use to teach riding techniques on wet roads, gravel and broken ground.'

Senior Constable Ellem said the AFP's defensive riding credo could be summed up in six words: 'Never assume a driver will stop'.