
5 Things You Didn't Know About BMW Motorbikes

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We asked Simon de Burton to come up with five little-known facts about BMW motorbikes, and this is what he told us: from the technically interesting tidbit to the simply bizarre.



Hot stuff

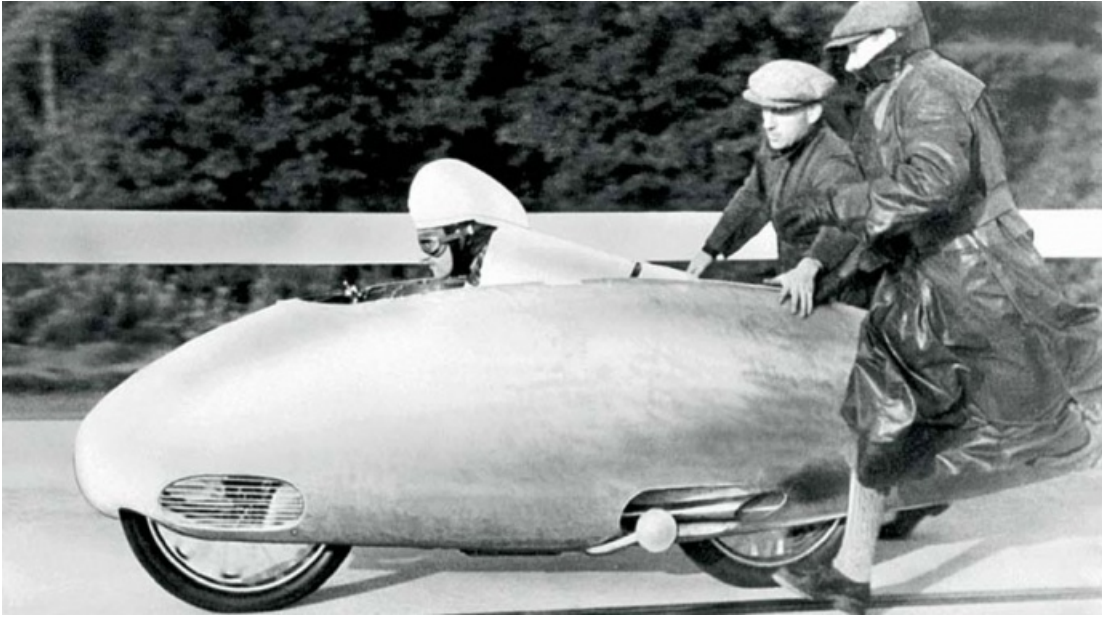
Although modern-day BMW bikes are available with a variety of engines ranging from the water-cooled, six-cylinder unit of the mighty K1600GT to the single-cylinder powerplant of the G650GS trail bike, it is the 'flat twin' configuration for which the marque is celebrated. The shaft-driven, horizontally opposed layout was originally conceived in 1922 by aeronautics engineer Max Friz - but few people know that one of the main reasons he went to work for the firm was because he was promised an office which benefited from a wood-burning stove.



Quite a Combination

Anyone who has watched *The Great Escape* will be familiar with the Wehrmacht R75 motorcycle combinations which appear in several scenes and which were issued to the German army in the early years of WWII - but, outside their enthusiast following, few people appreciate just how remarkable they were. Producing a mere 26bhp, the 750cc engines had a compression ratio of just 5.6:1, meaning they could run on fuel of the worst possible quality. They had eight forward and two reverse gears, a driven sidecar wheel with a locking differential, and all three wheels were interchangeable.

There were hand and foot warmers heated by exhaust gases - but the dry weight of the outfit was 420kg!



Streamlined

In the autumn of 1937, Ernst Henne rode his 500cc BMW 'kneeler' to a world solo motorcycle speed record of 173.67mph. As the name implies, the 'kneeler' was ridden in a kneeling position, with rider and machine fully enclosed in teardrop-shaped bodywork. The shape of the body was based on pre-War concepts of streamlining and actually made the bike inherently unstable at higher speeds. BMW went on to lead the way in motorcycle aerodynamics, famously with the introduction of the R100RS in 1976 - the first motorcycle to have a full fairing that was designed as an integral part of the machine.



Well Travelled

Between 1997 and 2002, Slovenian Benka Pulko established the world record for the longest solo motorcycle ride by a woman - both in terms of distance and duration - when she circumnavigated the globe on a BMW F650 single. She travelled a total of 111,856 miles (180,015km) through 75 countries. She also became the first woman to ride solo through Saudi Arabia and the first motorcyclist to ride in Antarctica.



Best Seller

BMW's R1200GS 'adventure sports' bike was recently announced as being the UK's best-selling motorcycle in the 'above 125cc' category for the third year in succession, with 1,742 sold in the country during 2012. Sales of GS models began to soar in 2004 after Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman used R1200GS 'Adventures' for their Long Way Round tour. They had wanted to use KTMs but the factory didn't want to get involved. The original GS 'big trail bike' was the R80 version, introduced in 1980 after a prototype model won the 1979 German Off-Road Championship.

Text: Simon de Burton

Photos: Getty Images

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