

## 1936 990 cc Matchless Model X

In the last few years before the outbreak of the Second World War, Brough-Superior had switched from JAP power units, to employ instead the 990 cc Matchless vee-twin — side-valve for the Brough-Superior SS80, overhead-valve for the SS100. Yet the odd thing was that Matchless themselves offered a very pleasant vee-twin tourer, with precisely the same engine as supplied to Brough-Superior and just as well-equipped. It was just that George Brough charged £90 for his SS80, while Matchless, without all the ballyhoon and razzmatazz of Brough salesmanship, listed their Model X at only £69 15s!

In fact the Matchless factory had been noted for big vee-twins since before the First World War, originally with engines by MAG or JAP, but by the mid-thirties the Model X enjoyed a gently bovine engine designed and built on the Plumstead premises. It was 'designed for the big-twin enthusiast and, of course, with a special eye for heavy-duty sidecar work', to which end the 1936 version had been given more robust rear frame members.

However (as George Brough was aware), there were plenty of enthusiasts around who rather liked the idea of a big 'thousand', ridden solo, so at the end of the 1936 season the Model X was revamped and given the catalogue name of Sports Tourist, with a new shorter-wheelbase frame which put the machine on a par with a 500 cc single, as regards roadholding and steering.

The *Motor Cycle* road-tested the Model X in May 1937, and commented: 'As soon as the machine is on the move the rider forgets that he is astride a heavyweight machine. The Matchless could be ridden feet-up at speeds well below the register of the speedometer without any juggling with the handlebars. At slightly higher speeds the steering was comfortably light, but even when the machine was being cruised at over 60 mph it did not become so light as to necessitate use of the damper.'

The excellent roadholding of the Matchless probably accounted to some extent for the effortless way in which it could be cornered.

The big machine could be laid well over on fast corners without any sign of snaking or wandering. On wet roads the Matchless was perfectly stable. Wet tramlines caused the rider no tremors, and on none of the slippery surfaces encountered was a skid experienced. On particularly greasy surfaces the steering tended to become rather light, but this was more a feeling than a fact, for the model never showed any tendency to get out of control.

Performance of the 990 cc engine was described as 'delightful', and it would accelerate hard in top gear without any trace of snatch from as low as 20 mph. Not really a speedster — it would not be expected of a side-valve, anyway — it would clock up just over 80 mph, and reach 70 mph from a standing start in a quarter of a mile. Particular note was made of the prop-stand, which flew up immediately the bike was brought back to the vertical, a feature which is now compulsory on bikes sold in the USA.

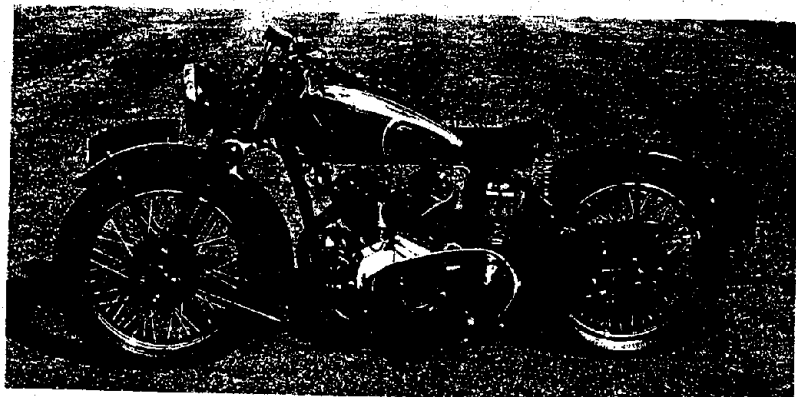
Understandably, the Model X did not feature in competition work, for that was not its *metier*. Instead, it was a highly comforting machine, with a quiet heartbeat and a gentle loping gait which ate up the miles effortlessly. As the 1937 tester put it, the bike 'comes into that aristocratic class of motorcycles that are riders' mounts'. Hear, hear to that!

### Specification

**Make** Matchless. **Model** Model X.

**Engine** 990 cc (85.5 x 85.5 mm bore and stroke) 50° side-valve vee-twin. **Tyres** 3.25 x .19 in front, 4.00 x .19 in rear, wired edge. **Frame** Brazed-tug duplex tubular cradle, unsprung at rear. **Front forks** Central spring girders. **Brakes** Drums, 8 in diameter front and rear. **Wheelbase** 57 in. **Weight** 435 lb.

**Manufacturer** Matchless Motor Cycles (Colliers) Ltd, 44/45 Plumstead Road, London SE18.



**Above** A symphony in black and chrome, the Model X represented Plumstead technology at its pre-war best. Power output could be described as 'gently bovine'.

**Right** A novel detail — the front brake operating cable is routed through one of the tubes of the girder front forks.

**Far right** A 990 cc unit with detachable cylinder heads, the big Matchless engine was also employed by Brough-Superior, and by Morgan.

**Below** Though most big side-valve twins were primarily for sidecar use, the Model X was designed specifically as a sporting solo.

