

Hookey to

TALE OF A DAY'S OUTING

can be made as regards appearance. Confucianism creeps in and you find yourself recalling all sorts of wisecracks about beauty being in the eye of the beholder. That rather stops you in mid-sentence!

The weather on Wednesday of last week was poor. An uncompromising curtain of fog cut visibility to a few yards; the air felt waterlogged; the road verge, buildings, trees and other vehicles—all were apparent as vague blurs, becoming more vague between goggle wipes. Of course, I could have raised the goggles and persevered without them. But that for me would have meant streaming eyes and a headache later. So I kept them on.

My route to the coast was based on planning forced on me in my youth when I rode very old machines. The dogma then was that you always travelled on the outward run so as not to break anything; the fast work would keep for the return trip. I have never been able to break myself of the habit. So quitting the Dorking pylons, I took the little-used, high-hedged Newdigate road and on to Capel and Horsham. (Those living in London's south-west should note that route well,



Above: Fog enshrouds the lower part of Box Hill, famous Surrey landmark encountered on the road south. Right: The Model 14 is given a breather below the turrets of Arundel Castle, rising Baskerville-Hall-like above the lingering mist

LEFT glove, left eyepiece; right glove, right eyepiece . . . visibility, I suppose, was not too bad, but my arms were being kept on the move. They brought one hand and then the other up to my goggles as regularly as if they belonged to a Guardsman doing arms drill. Why my goggles were proving so troublesome I couldn't imagine. Car windscreens, in the main, appeared to be keeping clean and the insides of my lenses were not steaming up. At that famous roundabout near Box Hill, I stopped, dried the goggles and applied anti-dim compound to the outside. For all the good that did, I might have saved myself the bother.

Strictly speaking, I should have been at the desk. But the *Practical Handbook* discussed in the preceding two pages of prose had kept my nose to the office grindstone for nearly a month. The back of the job, I reasoned, was well and truly broken. A niggling voice from the region of my boots urged that the index was still to be completed and time was getting short. I pretended not to hear. A two-fifty Model 14 A.J.S. was burning a hole in the garage doors and had been giving me hang-dog, when-are-we-going-for-a-dice looks every time I'd put my head round the corner. In the end, just a week ago yesterday, I gave the looks best and pointed the job at the south coast. There, the weather men foretold, I could expect "warm sunshine in the afternoon." They were dead right, which made my delicious feeling of playing hookey all the more delicious.

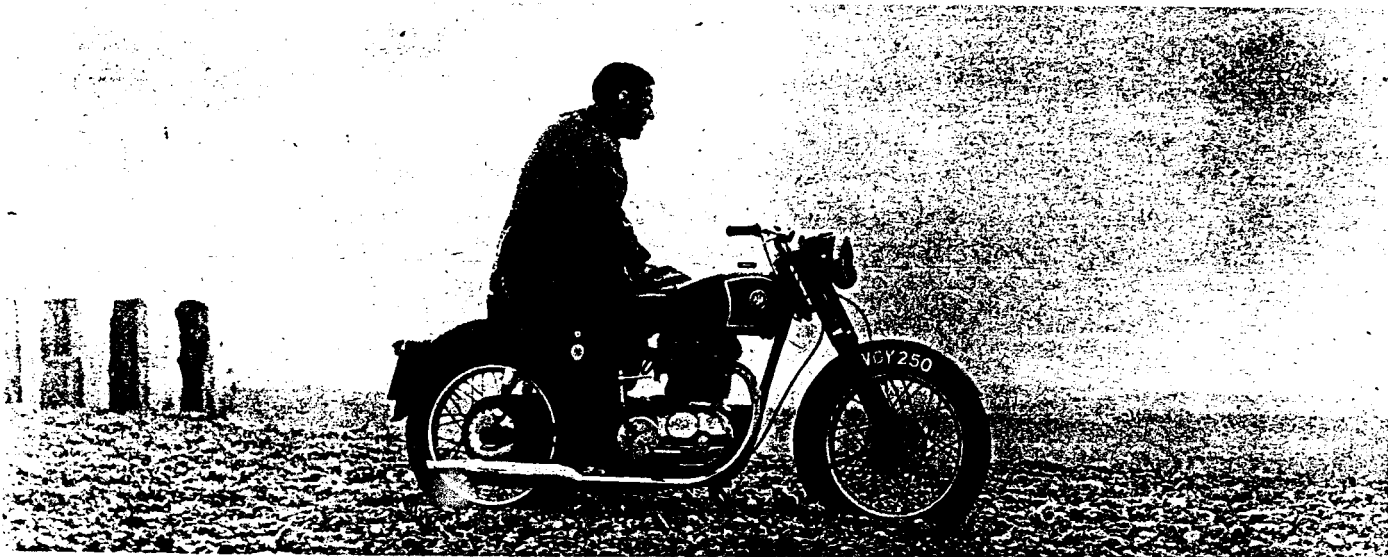
This A.J.S.: since its introduction in March last year, I have looked on it with mixed feelings. Technically the design is undoubtedly right out of the top drawer. But it has always seemed to me to be a modern machine in which the stylist had not gone far enough. But to pontificate over styling is perhaps presumptuous. You can take most design features and say of them, in the light of experience, I know this to be right or I know that to be wrong. But no such cut-and-dried statement



the Seaside

By GEORGE WILSON

THROUGH FOG TO SUNSHINE WITH A 248 c.c. MODEL 14 A.J.S.



Above: At Shoreham-by-Sea the sun shone and riding gear was discarded for a brief spell. Below: The model is heeled through a roundabout on the Chichester bypass; the handling was exemplary at high and low speeds

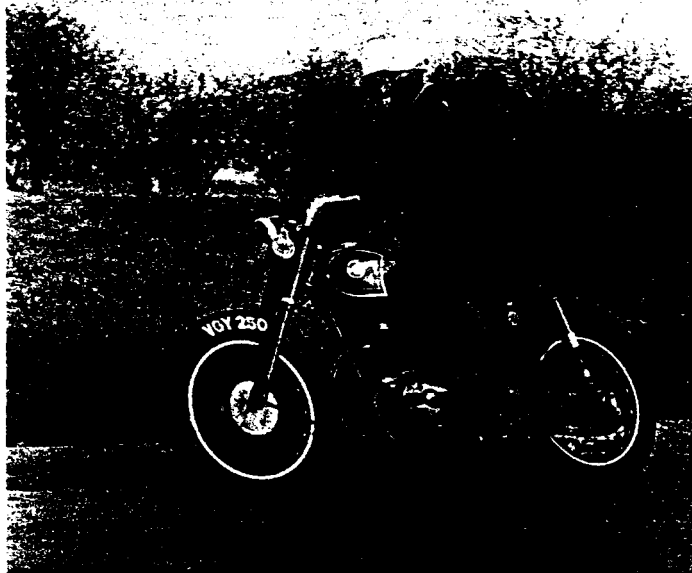
for, as I say, it is very quiet and it runs parallel to the main coast road on which so much traffic-crawling is done in summer.)

First impressions of the A.J.S. were good—very good. There was a fair bit of mud on the road. Here and there “works” were going on and on two occasions I rounded corners flanked with roadworks signs to find, just round the apex, the road virtually blocked. These factors, combined with the poor visibility, meant that on occasion things had to be done quickly. From all these minor adventures the Ajay emerged with full marks. Both brakes were good (and the back rather better than the front). They were smooth and my feeling is that even used muttwise they would never lock the wheels. Then, too, the navigation was magnificent. The back end twitched once or twice on mud but there was never any tendency for the machine to get out of hand. There is just the degree of heaviness in the steering that I want—not so much as to make riding hard work but enough to give that feeling of true positiveness; of letting one know precisely where the front wheel is and what it’s doing.

The suspension characteristics, too, play an important contributory rôle. The springs are softish and damping only moderately powerful. The result is that minor road irregularities are ironed out even at low speeds, yet at higher knots there is a very high standard of comfort and next to no pitching.

All the way to the coast the fog persisted in varying degree. Sometimes, briefly, I could read 50 m.p.h. on the speedometer, but for the most part I was groping at between 30 and 40 m.p.h. When I first reached the coast (approaching it from B2135 by way of Steyning and Bramber), it seemed that the weather prophets had let me down. Thin, wispy mist covered the area. Out to sea I could identify the foghorns of three or four vessels though I could see nothing.

A cup of tea was clearly indicated. I knew that would do the trick; and that satisfying break completed, the sun pierced through. Very soon afterwards Shoreham-by-Sea lay bathed in warmth. A beaming sun gleamed frankly from a bright blue sky.



THE MOTOR CYCLE,
26 FEBRUARY 1959

When the engine is viewed from the timing side the oblique mounting of the light-alloy cylinder head is clearly evident. Though the gear box appears to be in unit with the engine it is in fact a separate compartment. There are no external oil pipes. The engine cover in the right-hand picture conceals the clutch and primary drive and the Wipac alternator

The quiet, deserted little township yawned in summer-in-winter. Flavourless town life seemed a long way off.

The A.J.S. is the perfect beach-potterer. The oversquare (69.85 x 64.85 mm) engine is beautifully quiet mechanically—one hears but a muted hum—and far more quiet on the exhaust than I had expected when the trip began. There was no audible piston slap. There is powerful punch low down on the r.p.m. scale so that one can trickle in a highish gear. If you ever hear a Model 14 being ridden obtrusively in a town you can label the rider "mutt" right away.

I lounged, perhaps, longer than I should, so that I hurried on my westward route to Arundel, family seat of the Duke of Norfolk, and so along the high-speed Chichester bypass to Portsmouth. If the A.J.S. had impressed earlier it did so to even greater extent then. The compression ratio is 7.8 to 1 and on the ordinary premium-grade fuel I was using there was no pinking when the grip was twisted hard. No official claims are made as regards power output, though I have heard mention of 18 b.h.p. It would appear to be all of that.

Inspired by an empty stretch of the Chichester bypass I tucked in a bit and held 70 m.p.h. With me sitting up (and I was wearing just about as much as I could get on) the Model 14 would get in the sixties quickly and was not being overdriven at that. Power delivery could not have been more smooth. There was no vibration. The lower three gears are well chosen and combined with the engine punch provide the sort of off-the-mark acceleration that makes Ford Consul drivers give up. The overall ratios are 20.12, 12.75, 8.96 and 6.89 to 1. Gear-pedal movement is just right; light without being over-light and with a range of movement that permits upward or downward changes to be made merely by the rider pivoting his foot about the right rest.

By one o'clock the sun was really doing its stuff. The temperature rocketed and I was able to lower the scarf off my chin. My hookey was really paying off. Affection for the A.J.S. grew with every mile. The last two-fifty I owned was a 1936 New Imperial—a beautiful little job for which I still harbour a deep affection. But where it was fragile the A.J.S. is robust. Maybe you could overdrive a Model 14. I just couldn't.

Between Arundel and Portsmouth the route is punctuated with built-up areas so that the bursts of full-chat were brief, giving the model time to recover its breath, as it were, between spells of fast going. We would see what would happen on A3, the main road back to London, with its long straights, sweeping, high-speed swerves and very little need for let-up.

The answer is that nothing happened. There was no wind. I never adopted any position more unorthodox than what Vic Willoughby calls my I.S.D.T. crouch. The road was dry. There was very little traffic. The 64 miles were reeled off in an hour and 20 minutes, an average speed of 47 m.p.h. Speed limits were observed throughout—and I'm much too long in the tooth to ride in any way that may court disaster. In other words, pretty well anyone could have done it, and many would have

lowered that time by five minutes and some even by ten.

The standard of comfort provided by the suspension is, as I have said, high throughout. I liked the relationship between the seat and handlebar and, at speeds in the forties, that between the seat and the footrests. The riding position is truly "Viney" or "Manns." But batting in the fifties and lower sixties I would have preferred the rests an inch or so farther back, so that my legs could have relieved my arms of some of the load imposed by the increased wind pressure.

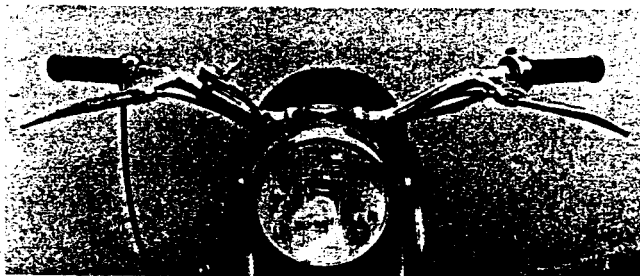
My early impression of the brakes was confirmed. Both are a treat to use. The rear-brake pedal could be felt moving underfoot with up and down movement of the rear wheel, but that never once worried me a jot. All the controls were light and smooth in operation—right in the A.J.S. tradition.

At the end of the day I had clocked 166 miles. I drew in at my local garage where I had filled up in the morning and looked interestedly at the gauge as the fuel went in: two gallons as near as might be—an average consumption of about 80 m.p.g. But I believe the feature that impressed me most was the utter cleanliness of the engine and gear-box side covers. They were free from oil in all respects and not much mud-dappled either—so that deep-section front mudguard really does its stuff as a mudguard should.

A famous designer, discussing motor-cycle trends a few years ago, prophesied that the machine of the future would be a lightweight. Not a lightweight in the utility sense, but a small-capacity model with a performance that would satisfy most of us. My experience with the A.J.S. bears this out. Low weight spells good steering and roadholding and a high standard of braking, and zipping acceleration from a relatively modest power output. My first new machine after the war was a single-cylinder five-hundred A.J.S. with which I all but wore a weekend groove between London and my home town in Fife. The two-fifty is very nearly that model's equal in terms of performance and it is superior by far in terms of comfort and roadholding.

By the way, should you be a Model 14 owner, you will be interested to know that the job I rode was fitted with a prototype prop stand soon to be made available. Mine was incomplete—less an extension to make it easily operable—but it promises well. Certainly it held the machine securely on all but one very steep camber in Arundel.

P.S. Don't worry overmuch about the index to the "Practical Handbook." We burned a gallon or two of midnight oil and, as you will find, when you receive the book with our special Spring Number and Buyers' Guide next week, it will all be there—all seven pages of it. Whew!



Neat handlebar assembly: the front-brake and clutch levers are welded to the bar and conveniently positioned for ease of operation; they lie below the horizontal plane of the grips by just the right amount