

The
1925
799cc
AJS
V-twin
Sidecar
Outfit



The Heath family

AJS

JUST as the Mini killed off the family sidecar outfit in the 1960's, so the arrival of the original Austin Seven sounded the death knell of de luxe family sidecar outfits of the early twenties. There were a score of different makes, mostly medium capacity twins, some produced in quantity by big makers, some made in penny numbers by small hopeful firms. On fine weekends throughout the summer they could be seen on the way to the seaside, loaded with families and the impedimenta of picnics. In the evening, wending their way home with fractious children and harassed parents, the cavalcades would often be halted by breakdowns or punctures. It was a scene which gradually faded as the cheap, family car took over.

One of the most popular outfits of this era was the 799 cc A.J.S. twin, powered by an engine which was essentially a double-up of the Wolverhampton firm's very nippy 350 cc sidevalve.

Mundane transport

In many ways it was typical of what the motorcycle industry regarded as the British Standard family outfit of the day. Not fast, for the family man was no road burner (Mum on the pillion saw to that), not notably economical because medium-powered sidevalve twins ran hot unless the mixture was on the rich side, not over-sophisticated because most owners did their own maintenance.

Most prime movers were fitted with a sidecar chassis designed for that particular machine, often made by the same manufacturer. Detachable interchangeable wheels with

provision for carrying a spare were standard on all the better outfits, including the A.J.S.

This particular example, owned by Vintage Club librarian Phil Heath is still used for the purpose for which it was intended — family transport — though these days the outings are confined to club activities. A family fun bike but hardly a first choice for serious family transport. Cruising speed is in the 35 — 40 mph range. Above that the rider's mechanical sympathies dictate the speed more than the capabilities of the engine. It could be pushed along at 50 mph but only a man so cruel or so deaf as to be oblivious to all that thrash and vibration would try it. One reason is the silence of the exhaust. At speed one simply cannot pick out the exhaust from the general mechanical hubbub of tappet click, piston rattle and chain hiss.

Clanks and clonks

The sound effect is like that of a combine harvester. Below 40 mph the noise level is acceptable. Above, it is tiresome.

You may wonder how even staid heads of household could tolerate such low-performance transport. The answer is the family car of the period could go no better, was easily outmanoeuvred and too costly to be considered by the average sidecar user.

A feature of the A.J.S. engine which appealed to the D.I.Y. family motorcyclist was accessibility of the valve gear. The cylinder heads were held down by bridge pieces pulled down by two nuts on bolts running up from the crankcase. That was novelty enough when everyone else had one piece head and barrels but on the A.J.S. the valve chest

DATA

Engine: 799 cc A.J.S. aircooled fourstroke V-twin. 74 x 93 mm bore and stroke. Side valves, detachable heads, light-alloy pistons, roller bigends.

Lubrication: Constant-loss by semi-automatic hand pump on tank top. (Mechanical pump offered in 1925 at 35 shillings (£1.75) extra.)

Ignition: Chain-driven magneto (or magdyno on de luxe model).

Carburation: Binks instrument.

Transmission: All-chain drive via A.J.S. 3-speed gearbox.

Frame: Diamond type. Brampton Biflex forks with both vertical and fore-and-aft movements, A.J.S. sidecar chassis.

Wheels: Beaded-edge rims with 80 x 700-mm tyres. All three wheels Q.D. and also interchangeable, leaving internal-

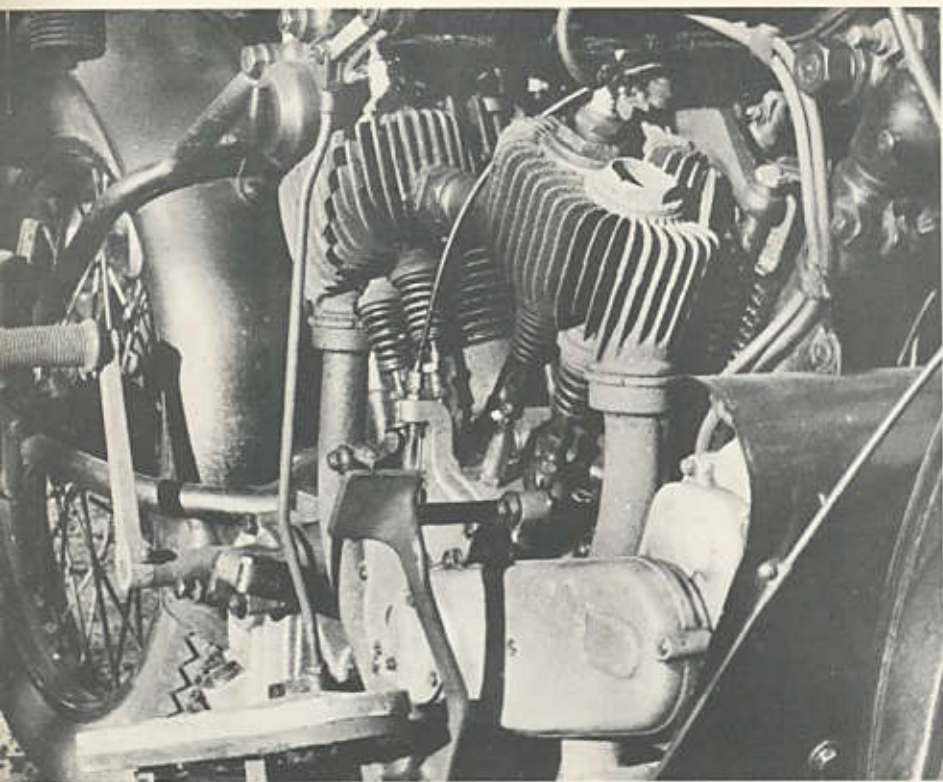
expanding brakes and chain in place.

Tanks: Combined fuel and oil tank between frame top tubes. Capacities about 2¼ gallons of petrol and two pints of oil.

Dimensions: Saddle height 32½ inches. Handlebar width 23 inches. Weight of motorcycle-only quoted at 336 pounds.

Original Finish: All black enamel, including handlebars. Tank lined and lettered in gold. Sidecar black with gold lining. A.J.S. catalogue of day states: "Our standard colour is black from which no deviation can be made."

Performance: On sidecar top gear of 5:1 about 50 to 55 mph. On 9:1 middle about 30 to 35 mph. On bottom of 16:1 about 15 mph. Petrol consumption (sidecar) 45 to 50 miles per Imperial gallon.



(Left) In typical vintage AJS manner the cylinder heads can be detached in a trice, complete with valves. (Above) The chair wheel interchanges with either on motorcycle. (Below) Brampton forks have fore and aft snubber springs

was part of the detachable head. Remove exhaust pipes and carburetter manifold, undo two nuts and the cylinder head complete with valves can be taken off for attention.

Weak part of the machine is the clutch and gear box, the clutch multi-plate but with a single spring prone to drag or slip or both, the gear box distinctly agricultural. It has a crash sliding pinion engagement of second gear, noisy and not too robust (Phil Heath broke a mainshaft when on a family trip to the Isle of Man but vintage friends unearthed a spare over there).

A pleasant enough machine for family touring vintage style. Easy steering and, surprising for the period, a pair of adequate brakes. Riding the 799 cc A.J.S. is a flashback to days when motorcycling was very much a family affair.



(Below) Full electrics feature a Lucas mag-dyno. (Right) The British standard sidecar of the late twenties, monstrous to look at and fearsome to ride in. Probably only driver Phil Heath gets savour of travelling the Ajay way

