

AJS and MATCHLESS TWO-FIFTY SINGLES

“SIX-FIFTIES fear it, two-fifties envy it—and girls who find their boyfriends having a mechanical affair with it, hate it. This is the Sapphire, probably the most perfect machine ever to come into existence. How many other sports machines have shared durability with performance?”

This charming quotation comes from the pen of 18-year-old Chris Pritchard of Shrewsbury. Naturally, it is a little colourful; but it reflects the basic satisfaction many owners feel as they sit astride their AJS or Matchless two-fifties. They are, as Anthony Head says, good bikes, especially for learners, with only a few bad points. “AMC could certainly improve this bike to make it compete with the best of our foreign competitors.”

“A good, fast, cheap machine to run,” adds 17-year-old Edward Yarde, a farm worker of Taunton, Somerset.

Want to know more about the average rider of these bikes? Predictably, he is about 18 years. A couple of middle-age reporters bump the average up to 20, but that would be unrepresentative. By and large, the Ajay or Matchless is the first machine—and it tends to be a trifle elderly. 1961 is average vintage. Experience of the riders is about two years in each case and they have, together, covered nearly 700,000 miles on their machines.

All two-fifties built since they were introduced in 1958 were eligible. Model designations are 14 and 14CSR (sports) for AJS and G2 and G2CSR for Matchless.

Performance

“ACCELERATION is good, especially in second and third gears, although in my opinion bottom gear is too low. I have had the speedometer needle at 85 mph on several occasions. On open roads, I can usually maintain a cruising speed of 60 or 65 mph almost indefinitely.”

“My engine (with a 7.8 to 1 compression ratio) is very tractable.”

Those words come from 18-year-old Anthony Head of London—he runs a 1960 Model 14 AJS.

Adds CSR owner David Maddison of Grantham: “The engine has good staying power over long distances. Provided it is well buzzed it will tackle anything.”

Averaging readers’ claims shows that the sports models give about 85 mph while the standard models are only 5 mph slower.

The engine unit likes revs

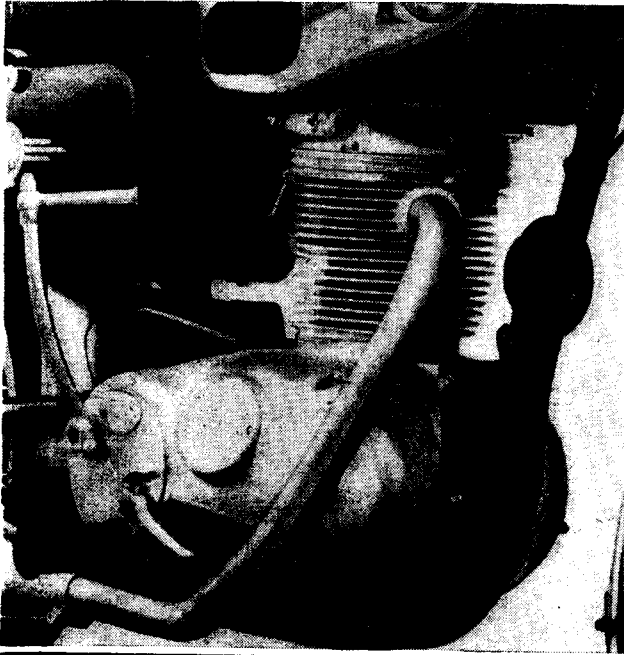
and it is necessary to keep it on the boil for best results.

Says Chris Ball of Wellington, Salop: “Cruise along at 55 mph and you’ll swear you’re still in third. Oh for a two-fifty Ajay with a five-speed box! This high-revving motor thrives on hard work; keep it spinning and there will be no complaints.”

Performance can be increased very easily, according to Barry Page, an interior decorator of Leigh-on-Sea: “The engine lends itself to modification readily. The valve timings are already good. With care the bike will show a clean pair of heels to almost any two-fifty.” He doesn’t say what modifications.

Starting

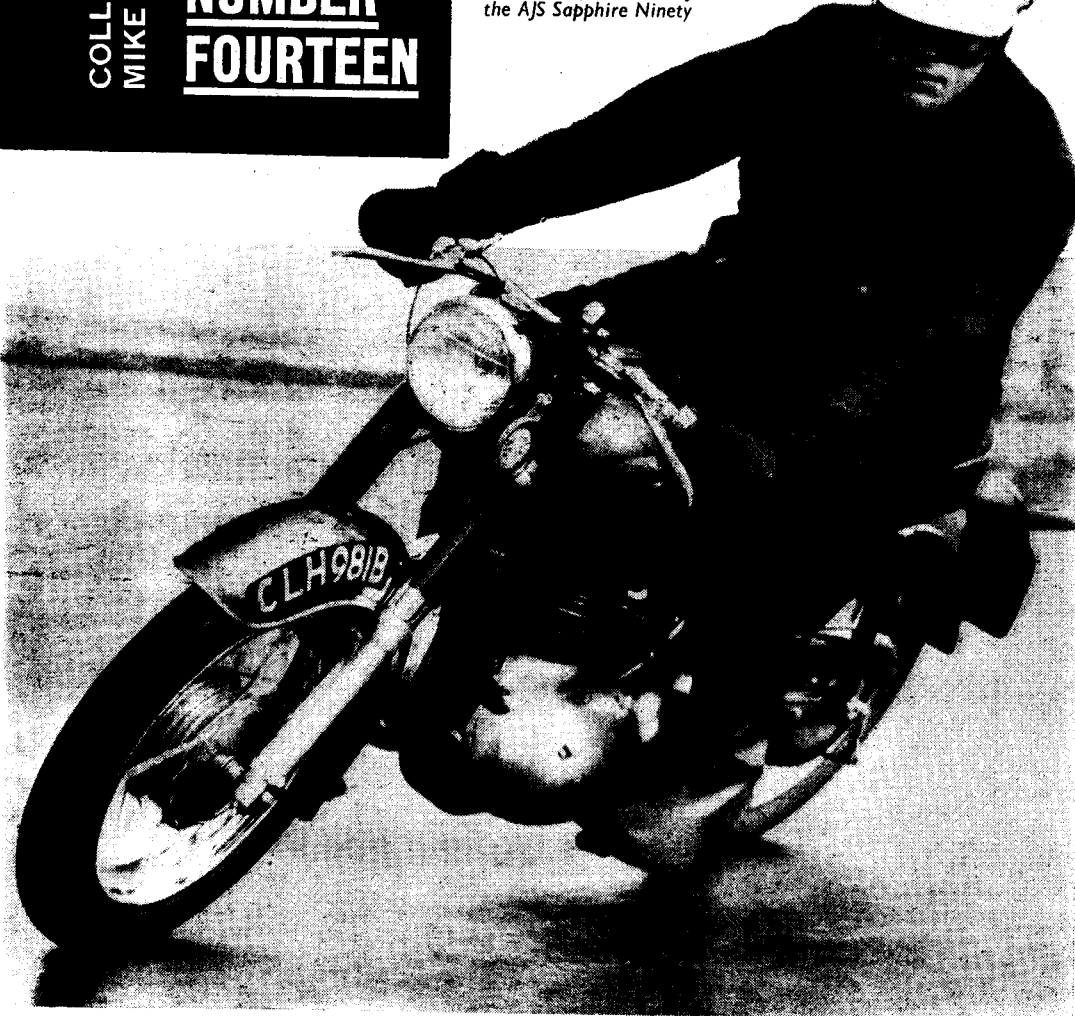
“STARTING couldn’t be better. Just free the clutch plates, switch on petrol and ignition and give one kick, and she fires immediately, even on really cold mornings.”



COLLATED BY
MIKE EVANS

**RIDERS'
REPORT
NUMBER
FOURTEEN**

Above left: This is the AJS Model 14 in 1961 guise; a standard model, it is the fore-runner of today's potent CSR machines. Above: The 1966 AMC sports engine with swept-back exhaust pipe. Below: Peter Fraser samples a 1965 job—the AJS Sapphire Ninety



That is from the owner of a standard two-fifty AJS.

Confirms David Maddison: "Starting is very good. One tickle and one good prod is enough in all weathers—provided all settings are at the makers' recommendations."

Fuel Consumption

BOTH sports and standard models return an overall average of 78 mpg, according to our reporters.

These two-fifties are obviously economical little mounts capable of up to 100 mpg under sedate riding.

Handling

THE FEW reporters who complain of bad handling are very definitely outweighed by

the opinions of their colleagues.

"This is where the Model 14 comes into a class of its own," enthuses John Willson, 19, of Southampton.

"Hurl the bike round any bend, brake, accelerate and she won't stir a hair. With two-up she seems even happier—thanks, partly, to the adjustable rear-suspension units."

Braking

THE BRAKES come in for severe comments from many reporters, although there are, as ever, the enthusiastic ones.

Like Phillip Barton of Kettering who thinks his brakes are excellent. "No sign of fade when braking from high speed. At low speeds the front brake is a real stopper."

The majority are dissatisfied with the front brake—on standard machines. This is not surprising; from 1962 a much improved front brake and heavier fork were fitted to the sports models.

Constructive criticism comes from 48-year-old Walter Maddell, of Aintree, Liverpool: "After 3,000 miles from new on my 1958 Matchless, I decided that the front brake was not up to the standard of the machine.

"Since the factory considered that the 6in brake unit should be adequate, I set about improving it myself. I modified the shoe-plate mounting, to allow it to float, and relined with Ferodo MS3 linings.

"The immediate result was a fractured mudguard anchor because of the fork leg on the brake side flexing under braking load!

"The brake has always been adequate since, but I can never keep a decent front mudguard on the bike."

Transmission

OPINION is that, on the whole, this department is well up to scratch. Several have had trouble with clutch slip and have had difficulty remedying it. Also, nearly everyone has experienced a broken gear selector spring at some time or other.

Nevertheless, the gear box, in particular, receives praise aplenty for smoothness of operation and, basically, dependability.

"Gear selection is very smooth, but the pedal travel is a little long," reports Martyn

Jordan, 18, of Filey. "Juggling with the gears," he continues, "is one of the most enjoyable facets of motor cycling—and it is especially so with this machine."

Electrics

REPORTS on this subject are so conflicting—and temperatures run so high—that we must turn to the percentage figures for an accurate opinion. Lights, 57 per cent; horn, 8; other electrics, 52.

It would be unfair to average these three figures since the horn is obviously so bad that it tips the scales violently.

Nevertheless, the other two figures average to 54.5 per cent and certainly show the electrical system is not up to the mark.

Says David Maddison: "Very poor electrics. Bulbs blow regularly, the battery boils and the whole system invites water!"

Another opinion comes from 18-year-old Jonathan Fox of Edenbridge, Kent. "Electrics generally are unreliable and are not good enough for the standard of the machine. However, the actual lights are a different story—the headlamp allows comfortable speeds in the 60-mph region."

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE: AMC 248 cc (70 x 65mm) overhead valve single-cylinder. Double row roller big-end bearing; crankshaft supported in a ball and a roller bearing on the drive side and a plain bearing on the timing side. Light-alloy cylinder head, cast-iron cylinder barrel. Compression ratio, 9.5 to 1. Dry-sump lubrication; oil capacity, 2½ pints.

CARBURETTOR: Amal Monobloc, 1½ in choke; air slide operated by handlebar lever.

ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT: Coil ignition. Wipac 54-watt, ac generator mounted on drive-side crankshaft, charging Exide 11-amp-hour battery through rectifier.

Wipac 7in-diameter headlamp with pre-focus light unit and 30/24-watt main bulb.

TRANSMISSION: AMC four-speed gear box clamped to rear of engine. Gear ratios: bottom, 17.97; second, 11.68; third, 8.05; top, 6.51. Multi-plate clutch with bonded friction facings. Primary chain ¾ in duplex in cast-aluminium case. Rear chain ½ x 0.305in with guard over top run. Engine rpm at 30 mph in top gear, 2,800.

FUEL CAPACITY: 3½ gallons.

TYRES: 3.25 x 17in ribbed front; studded rear.

BRAKES: 6in-diameter, front and rear; finger adjusters.

SUSPENSION: AMC telescopic front fork with hydraulic damping. Pivoted rear fork controlled by Girling three-position, spring-and-hydraulic units.

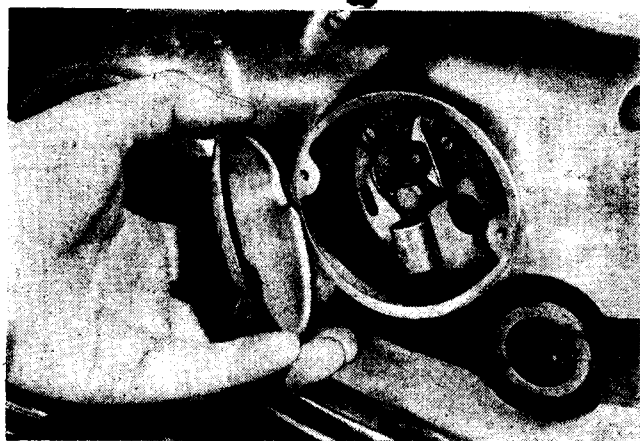
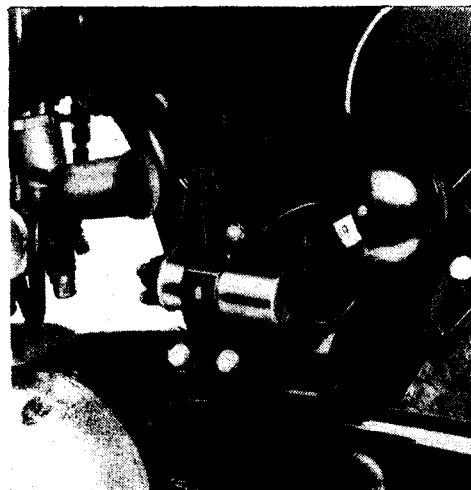
DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase, 53in. Ground clearance, 5½ in. Seat height, 30in. All unladen.

WEIGHT: 325 lb without fuel.

PRICE: £248 including British purchase tax.

ROAD TAX: £4 a year.

MAKERS: Matchless Motor Cycles, Ltd, Plumstead Road, London, SE18.



Left: Access to the contact breaker is excellent, say reporters. Top: Neat arrangement of horn and ignition coil behind the left-side panel; this is a 1961 standard version. Above: Tool roll and battery fit snugly behind the right-side panel of this 1965 model

Surprisingly, Chris Hall says: "The whole electrical system is first class. The main beam is good for 60 mph at night. But my horn is neither of use nor an ornament!"

Detail Finish

AVERAGE would be a fair estimation here. Says 21-year-old Michael Weaver, of Reading: "Paintwork is good all round. Chrome plating is of excellent quality as well, especially on the wheel rims."

While another reporter, Michael Leavesley, 19, of Nottingham, points out that the paintwork is prone to chipping, the majority of owners are satisfied.

However, many mention one detail defect—the stands. Listen to Colin Gascoyne, 17, of Southall: "The centre stand was really too narrow

to support the bike on other than a perfectly level road. For this reason I purchased a prop stand.

"It had excellent fittings but the stand itself was a joke. It bent into a semi-circle after about six weeks' use."

Walter Mardell reports that he has never had a really reliable speedometer. "They are reliable enough at lowish speeds, but when cruising the bike in the upper sixties, the needle tends to swing and the mileage recorder goes haywire. I have had about five speedo heads in six years."

Riding Comfort

RIDING position gets a mark of 83 per cent in the table. And there are certainly not more than a couple of owners dissatisfied on this score.

OUR TEST VIEW

	AJS 14 (April 1961)	M'less G2CSR (Aug 1962)	AJS 14CSR (Feb 1965)
Highest One-Way Speed	77 mph	75 mph	83 mph
Mean Maximum Speed	75 mph	73 mph	82 mph
Standing Quarter-mile (speed)	69 mph	67 mph	70 mph
(time)	19.6s	19.6s	19.4s
Fuel Consumption (at 30 mph)	104 mpg	112 mpg	112 mpg
(at 40 mph)	102 mpg	88 mpg	84 mpg
(at 50 mph)	81 mpg	72 mpg	66 mpg
(at 60 mph)	64 mpg	64 mpg	58 mpg
Braking (from 30 mph to rest)	36ft	30ft	30ft

As Jonathan Fox says, comfort is a key point with the AMC two-fifties.

Reliability

THESE quarter-litre four strokes are not outstandingly reliable; but, on the other hand, they are not notoriously unreliable. In fact, many readers sing their praises in no uncertain manner.

"During the months from May to November last year my bike did 450 miles a week. It took me about an hour to cover the 37 miles to my job. I was late only three times; once when the contact breaker stuck, once with a puncture and once with a snapped control cable." Jonathan Fox speaking.

Another similar opinion comes from John Willson, a motor-cycle stores assistant: "In 16,000 miles the bike has never let me down. If oil changes are carried out regularly and the engine is treated with respect, no troubles will occur."

Nevertheless, several of the letters relate stories of woe and vicissitude. David Waldron, a toolmaker, age 22, of Cannock, Staffs, gives his views: "The bike was not as reliable as I had expected. In 18,000 miles I had four new spark plugs, two sets of points, three gear-pedal return springs, one kick-starter spring, one new piston at 5,000 miles and a new exhaust valve at 7,000 miles.

"The engine was rebored at 13,000 miles and new piston, big end, main bearings

and small end fitted. The big end started to rumble again at 18,000 miles so I sold the bike."

His machine was a Matchless G2 which he purchased new in May, 1961.

Offset David's experience with that of Walter Mardell. "My 1958 G2 gave me reliable, economical and fast transport until I took it off the road, in November, 1964, when it had covered all of 70,000 miles. It was still returning an mpg of about 80.

"My only major trouble was a broken crankpin at 20,000 miles—and the factory replaced it without charge."

It is hard to say why one owner should have endless trouble while another can be impressed by reliability.

John Willson probably puts his finger on the crux of the matter when he recommends regular oil changes. This is important with any four-stroke—and the AMC two-fifties are likely to benefit more than most as they are fitted with comparatively small oil tanks.

Too many people make light of oil changes. They can have only themselves to blame if a big end pegs out after 6,000 miles on the same oil! Some, I know, *never* change their oil.

This isn't to say, of course, that troubles can invariably be laid at the door of bad lubrication. There is little doubt that some of those who maintain their machines conscientiously have suffered considerable bad luck.

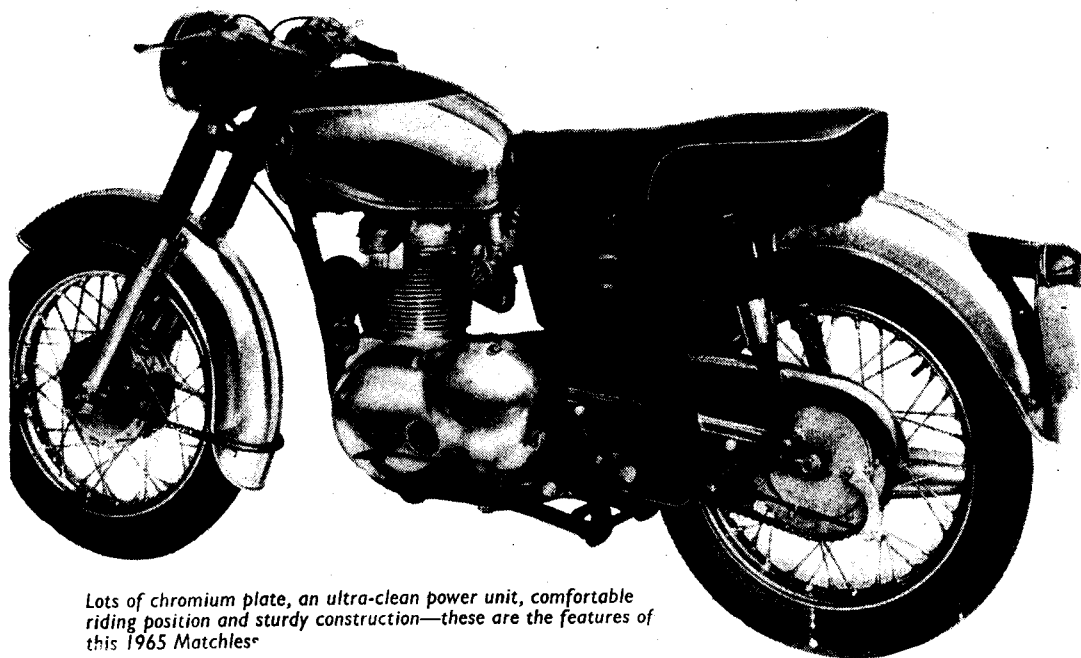
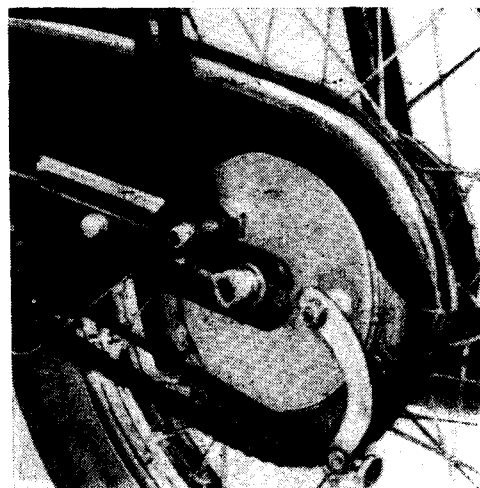
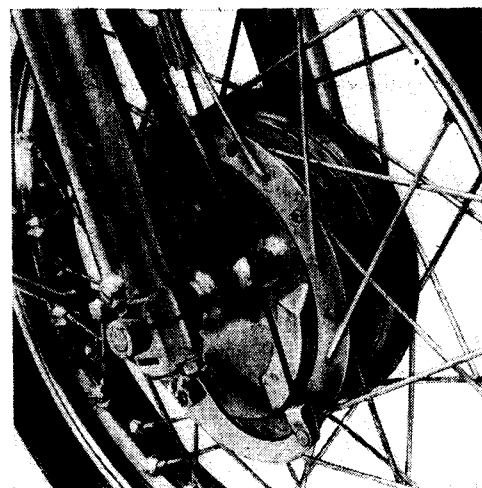
Service

THE spares situation from the factory—and, consequently, from dealers—is poor. You need only look at the extremely bad figures in the table. Respectively 44 and 43 per cent for factory and dealer spares is hardly a creditable situation.

The alarming fact is that it is probably easier to obtain over-the-counter spares for some foreign machines than it is for these two-fifties, from Britain's second-largest manufacturer.

"The factory doesn't seem to exist as far as spares and service is concerned. I had to wait three months for the return of a big-end assembly,

Below left: This front brake fitted to current models is an improvement on the criticized pre-1962 type. Below right: Rear-brake layout of a 1965 model. In spite of improvements, however, both brakes receive a lowish mark in the table.



Lots of chromium plate, an ultra-clean power unit, comfortable riding position and sturdy construction—these are the features of this 1965 Matchless

despite repeated letters." From Chris Gilbert, 19, of Plymouth.

Confirms David Maddison: "Factory service and interest is a negative quantity. I am still waiting for a spares list ordered three years ago."

However, in the main, David's criticism of lack of interest is unfounded. There is always a genuine willingness to help down at Plumstead. But it is regrettable that they are unable to combine this with an ability to make spares 100 per cent available.

It is only fair to mention, however, that many of reporters' views are based on experiences of a year or more ago.

According to the factory, the spares position is much improved recently.

Accessibility

REASONABLY good, report readers. Everything is easy to find and attend to.

One or two have a moan about the necessity of removing the tank in order to change throttle cables. But access to the contact breaker and rocker gear is good.

Overall View

"**THE** machine is very good for a learner or someone who just wants to potter to work. But for a more serious motor cyclist like myself it is ruined by small design faults which could easily have been rectified by the makers.

"For long distances, adjustable handlebars and controls would make an incredible difference. However, this particular fault has at last been attended to."

That quotation is from Chris Gilbert. And it is fairly representative of the opinions of all reporters.

Confirmation comes from 19-year-old machinist Barry Heywood, of Coventry: "One of the best two-fifties on the market. You get what you expect for your money. And now that they have fitted new forks and brakes and given it a face lift, the Matchless Sports is better than ever. If I was going back to a quarter-litre job, I would have another CSR any day."

"The acceleration, braking and road holding will match any British two-fifty. It must be the most beautiful motor cycle in the world." Ian

Spooner of Chesterfield speaking.

Postscript is added by Michael Weaver: "A good little bike—nothing elaborate or fancy."

There you have it. The AJS and Matchless two-fifties are fast, comfortable and fun to ride. Unless you happen to be very unlucky, they are also reliable.

The only noticeable cloud in the sky is factory spares and service. Judging from the overwhelming condemnation by reporters—and by a similar result when we reported on AMC big twins—there is considerable room for improvement down at the Woolwich works.



Below: "As good as most" is the verdict on the standard tool kit supplied with the AMC two-fifties. Above: David Waldron's 1961 standard Matchless on which he covered 18,000 miles



ON THE LIST

TWO exciting machines to think about now. Next on the list is Triumph's Thunderbird—all unit-construction models are eligible. Then we will cover Yamaha YDS2 and YDS3 two-fifty sportsters.

Since relatively few of these Japanese machines have been sold we would like every owner, if possible, to make an effort to send in a report.

If you cannot write at length, send a postcard and we will return a questionnaire for completion. All correspondence to Riders' Reports, Motor Cycle, Dorset House, Stamford Street, London, SE1.

NEXT WEEK

COPING WITH FLATS:
JOHN EBBRELL TELLS YOU HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR TYRES AND HOW TO REPAIR PUNCTURES

Victory Trial: Full Report and Exclusive Pictures of this Battle of the Giants

SERVICE TIPS ON FRANCIS-BARNETT AND JAMES ONE-FIFTIES

Road Test: Jawa 249 cc Two-stroke SOUTHERN TV SCRAMBLE

Motor Cycle On Thursday

PERCENTAGE VOTE

■ After sending in their reports, readers were asked to complete a questionnaire in which they answered specific questions according to the formula good, middling or poor.

In calculating these figures we have allowed two points for good and one point for middling. Poor got nothing.

The marks below are given as percentages of the total possible marks.

Acceleration	77	Accessibility	65	Workmanship	70
Flexibility	78	Handling	87	Quality of Finish	73
Smoothness	73	Front Suspension	75	Lighting	57
Starting	88	Rear Suspension	80	Horn	8
Oil Tightness	74	Smoothness of		Other Electrics	52
Reliability	74	Controls	74	Tool Kit	60
Clutch	74	Riding Position	83	Spares from Manufacturer	44
Gear Box	83	Brakes	61	Spares from Dealer	43
Delivery Tune	80	Mudguarding	82		

OVERALL MARK: 72 per cent.

GOOD BUY? 81 per cent said yes.

WOULD YOU BUY ANOTHER AJS OR MATCHLESS?
75 per cent said yes.