

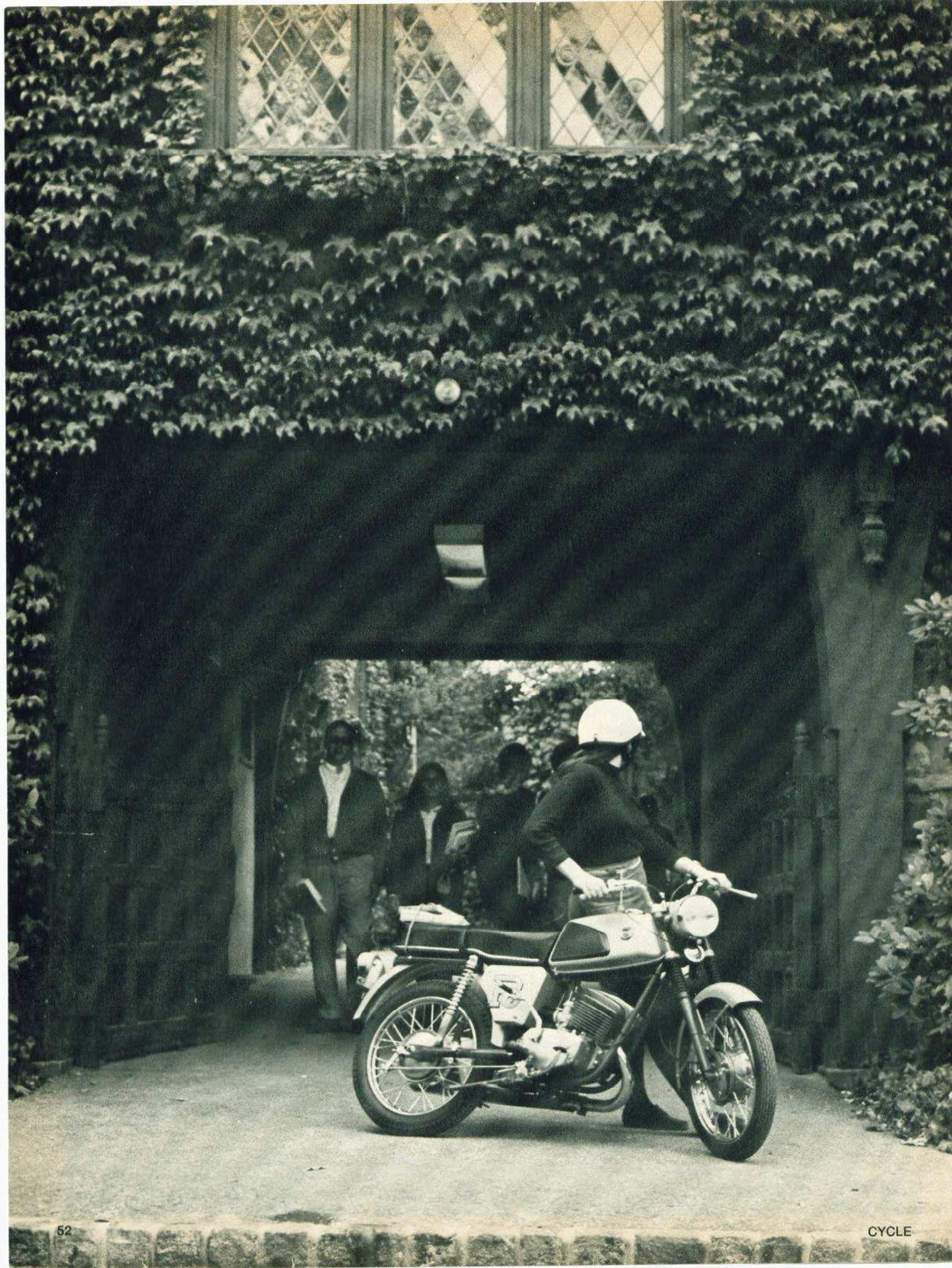
CYCLE ROAD TEST

SEARS 125

It ain't a racer, that's for sure. But it offers terrific transportation around the old campus, and there's nothing wrong with that.



PHOTOGRAPHY: EBERHARD LUTHEKE



PUCH 125 *Continued*

Everybody in this country may not shop at Sears, Roebuck & Co., the granddaddy of all the last, great mailorder houses, now moved also to shopping malls from sea to sea, but nearly everybody *uses* Sears. If you don't buy that replacement battery for your car at Sears, you will certainly have checked their price to get a feel for the market. For all kinds of usual and unusual items, Sears offers a better-than-average price break on middle-middle and upper-middle quality. And nearly every motorcyclist knows Sears' premium grade hand tools are truly premium grade. What most people don't know is that Sears is in the motorcycle business, has been for many years, and annually walks away with a consistent and comfortable chunk of the nation's market.

For most of those years, the ride that did it was Sear's "twingle", formerly branded Allstate, and manufactured by Steyr-Daimler-Puch of Austria. The twingle, so called because of its curious split-piston combustion principle, was one of the first-ever production two-strokes to come with automatic oil mixing. It was heavy, homely and underpowered, but earned an unparalleled reputation for durability. (You can still buy a dressed-up version of this quixotic device.) Not long ago, however, Sears turned to Puch, asking for something, lighter, less expensive and more modern in concept. They probably added that they weren't after a radically-tuned sports bike, but a practical utility mount that could be maintained by a neophyte. Puch was delighted, for they already had in limited production a 125cc trials bike that was winning prizes all over Europe, including gold medals at the ISDT.

A little detuning and some minor redesigning produced the new Sears 125, which we, even before receiving it, affectionately called "the puke". (Actually, "Puch" is pronounced in Austria more like "Pook".) In true mailorder fashion, the new bike arrived by truck, all boxed up with a

handy list of how-to-put-together instructions. The tools were your usual crumbly little-bike assortment and we quickly resorted to our shop tools. Unpacking and assembly were easy, taking less than an hour. If you had never seen a motorcycle in your life, the job might be confusing. Instructions like "Fix clutch control cable to the clutch lever", are followed by comments like, "Adjusting the clutch see page 3-6." A newcomer would have to painfully wade back and forth through the combined owner's manual, shop manual and parts list several times before he was done. A good way to get familiar with your new bike we suppose.

The completed machine is very light, with a simple design and clean lines. It has a comfortable seat, well placed controls and a "sunburst" cylinderhead that looks more appropriate to a 250. The frame is garden-hoe red and the paneling a metallic-gray enamel. We were pleasantly surprised to find a bright, sealed-beam headlight up front and a big tail-light behind. Part of that redesigning involved converting the trials winner to pure street trim, a choice that we feel was unfortunate. The trials bike is quite happy on pavement, yet has the off-road capability that so many American buyers want in a lightweight. Sears tells us it may soon introduce a trail kit including larger sprockets, upswept exhaust, and a bash plate. In any case, the street set-up is ideal for the short-run utility, commuter, and about-town (or campus) riding that most owners will undoubtedly give this bike.

The core of the little Sears 125 is its engine gearbox-unit, a simple yet robust package. Nothing unusual in concept: piston-port aspiration; needle-bearing small end; roller and ball bearings at the big end, the mains and the transmission shafts; geared primary; and four speeds in the box. All have been carefully thought out and well executed. We liked, for example, the design by which the main bearings turn in

(Continued on page 73)



SEARS 125

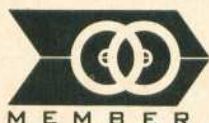
Price About \$350
Tire, front 2.50 in. x 17 in.
rear 3.00 in. x 17 in.
Brakes, front 6.3 in. x 1.4 in.
rear 6.3 in. x 1.4 in.
Brake swept area 55.4 sq. in.
Specific brake loading 6.73 lb/sq. in.
Engine type ... Piston-port two-stroke
single
Bore and stroke ... 2.16 in. x 2.05 in.,
55mm x 52mm
Piston displacement 7.53 cu. in.,
123.5cc
Compression ratio 10.5:1
Carburetion 26mm, Bing

Air filtration Paper element
Ignition Energy transfer
Bhp @ rpm 12 @ 7000
Mph/1000 rpm, top gear 9.07
Fuel capacity 2.64 gal.
Lighting Alternator, 60 watts
Battery None
Gear ratios, overall (1) 24.64 (2) 14.24
(3) 9.42 (4) 7.55
Wheelbase 48.4 in.
Seat height 27.5 in.
Ground clearance 7.6 in.
Curb weight 198 lb.
Instruments ... Speedometer, odometer
Top speed 64 mph

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PUCH 125 *Continued*

and rear suspension felt fine, with enough travel at each end. With two up, however, the rear suspension is overloaded and it can not be adjusted. We did like the fact that these rear suspension units are rebuildable and should last forever with only an occasional change of seals.

Brakes front and rear appear to be identical single-cam units. We are so used to twin-cam brakes at the front on high performance middleweights that we were sure these would prove inadequate. We were wrong. The brake shoes are quite wide, the hubs of 6.3-in diameter and there is plenty of stopping power. You can make the front wheel howl and you can lock up the rear with little difficulty. Together the brakes proved well proportioned to the size, weight and performance of the machine.

We did find fault with the electrics, however, not because they didn't work and work well but because we don't like direct lighting, batteryless systems. A compact little flywheel magneto-alternator made by Bosch provides the impulse for an energy-transfer (external step-up coil) spark. It also provides direct a-c current to the headlight, tail-light and stoplight. There is actually a small third coil to feed the stoplight so that braking won't cut down headlight and tail-light intensity. It is a very efficient system and at any crank speed above 2000 there is plenty of light. But at idle the lights sort of peter out and when the engine stops they go out altogether. Kind of dangerous, we feel, and possibly illegal in a few states before long. If you're sitting at a stoplight at night, your lights hardly show and the consequences of engine stalling are worse. No fun to get scooped up from behind by some light-watching truck-driver.

Riding the little Sears provided us all with some good times and it surprised us all. With a short wheelbase, small (17-inch) wheels and its low weight, the bike was incredibly nimble and maneuverable. You get a very airy feeling as you scream down hills at 60 with such a little bike under you. Yet when you haul on the anchors, it stops. Clutch action is very smooth, shifting positive. You find yourself looking for the twistiest, most articulated roads possible, just to see how hard you can push the little devil. In a straight line you change up at 20 mph, 35 mph and 50 mph. Actually you just rev it until the power sort of drops, then change up. It never really sounds unhappy and we doubt if you'd break the engine from over reving. Top speed sitting up was in the upper fifties and you could get 65 or so on the tank.

Obviously the Sears 125 is not a highway cruiser. It is what it was meant to be: practical and fun, durable and easy to maintain. You have to mix your own fuel and oil for the tank on this one, but starting is easy, mileage good, and the initial cost of \$350 a real bargain. Just about the time you get that engine bedded in, Sears may bring out the trail kit. Then you'd *really* be in business.

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