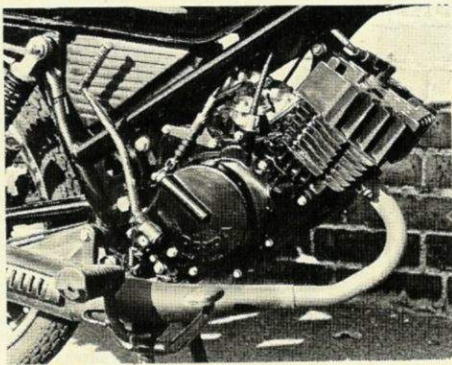


Above: A little agricultural? Jawa's ill-proportioned Mustang.
Left: Resplendent in black, that's Honda's tricky MB50 and the British (hooray) Kestrel KRM50.



Faired Fifties: Just Jokes Or Real Bikes?

Giant Test: Honda MB50 v Jawa Mustang v Kestrel KRM50
Tester Jim Lindsay. Photography Martyn Barnwell.



Honda MB5

ANYONE COULD BE FORGIVEN FOR thinking that the Honda MB5 is a wolf dressed up like one, nimble and quick. Wrong again though, this one is a slow old sheep through no fault of its own. In countries where 16-year-olds are not hampered by idiot legislation, the MB5 has a top speed of something in excess of 60mph which no doubt gives the chassis a chance to prove just how well it has been put together.

For the UK, however, the only way to check out the handling is to take T junctions flat in top. Anywhere where the road merely curves the MB is a sleep inducing experience thanks to the existence of a restrictor plate in the inlet tract which crops the top whack to a wimpish 33 point something mph. A great shame because in every other respect it's a lovely bike, far and away the best finished, best handling and prettiest looking of the three tested.

It's available in just two colours, red or black with swish gold lettering and pinstriping picking out the aesthetic highlight on the racer styled tank. Squatting down behind the dinky handlebar fairing, you'll find a neat pair of rectangular instruments and clear, clear dumbcluck lights for the main beam, turn and neutral functions.

Honda definitely realised that in the 16-er market the only customer grabber you can have working for you is either a ludicrously low price or superb styling. Not being into the cheap-skate end of the market, they opted for trick looks and have definitely been successful if the numbers of MB5s around are anything to go by. Small details like pillion footpegs — see how they're angled to run parallel with the bottom of the shocks to make them look like separate reservoir units.

The massive finning on the barrel, another styling trick to make the motor seem larger than it is, means that the bike needs to travel

at least a mile before it's warm enough to knock the choke off. Thereafter the restricted breathing makes its presence felt by the sluggishness of response when accelerating. Perambulating down the ¼-mile strip at MIRA I could peer at leisure at a Certain British V-Twin droning steadily round the high speed circuit passing me twice during the space of one run.

For some inexplicable reason Honda have seen fit to equip the MB5 with a contra-rotating balancer shaft to damp out high frequency vibes. Given the low mass of reciprocating components such refinement seems superfluous but I suppose it makes for some handy techno-babble in the advertising copy. Otherwise it's just technological overkill — now somebody write in and tell me I'm wrong, that small cube stroker singles can't possibly survive without balancer gizmos; I've got a hat here on my desk, all nicely buttered and ready to eat.

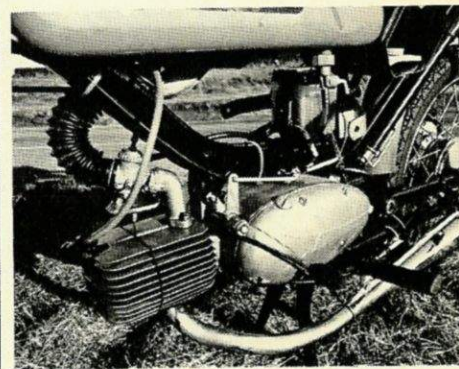
Storage space is restricted to the front section of the petrol tank dummy (the real tank and two-stroke oil reservoir live underneath it). 'You can't get many groceries in there, John,' said my next door neighbour as I lifted the cover off. Apart from the fact that I'm not called John, John, he was right but it provides adequate space for the toolkit.

The bike didn't feel all that much slower two up but the added weight of a pillion taxed the suspension severely causing it to bottom out over even small bumps. Hardly a great criticism as very few MB5 owners are likely to tote people round on the back anyway. I must confess that the longest journey I did on the bike was a touch over ten miles and that, as far as I'm concerned, was too far at 33per.

What riding one of these bikes does give you is a new respect for the guys who cover incredible distances on them, like the pair I met in a cafe outside Oxford this summer who had just ridden all the way from Cornwall on their restricted Yamahas. Man, that's real endurance that'd have most people tearing their hair out in copious handfuls.

The standard of finish on the Honda is of the finest kind, if you can overlook the odd drop of pigeon shit in the welding. The black paint shines with a deep lustre, what little chrome there is looks more than equal to our climate while the black finish on the engine is satin smooth.

Maybe the only real criticism I'd make is of the front brake — there's far too much retardation available and while it may be all good fun for us lot to tear around stopping the bike with a ferocity that has the back wheel flying a couple or more feet in the air, a learner of nil experience could find the same act a touch catastrophic. That's styling for you again, all bikes must have disc brakes.



Jawa Mustang

JESUS MAN, THOSE CZECHOSLOVAKS HAVE some weird, weird ideas about the ideal products us decadent, capitalist Westerners are supposed to like. Jus' look at the Mustang will you and if you don't think it looks weird, you're dead or worse. As a styling exercise, the quasi-cafe look of the Mustang is equalled only by Triumph's Lowrider for missing of the point. Did you ever? No I didn't either. Let's talk about something else until your eyes have stopped hurting.

As the former owner of a Moskvich estate car, I am no great admirer of vehicles from the Soviet bloc countries when it comes to technical and styling finesse but they do plod on reliably for mile after mile. I covered about 6,000 miles in two months in that old car and it never let me down once. Not bad since it had 70,000 on the clock already by the time my dad threw it (gratis) in my direction. But it looked ugly as sin, went like a moped and handled like the worst mannered pig anyone could ever meet.

Well, the Mustang wobbles, looking at it makes your eyes wobble but it starts in all weather conditions first or second kick and it'll probably still be doing so in ten years from now with a minimum of maintenance. And the price, did you see the price? No, it's not a misprint, it really is that cheap.

Unlike Honda and Kestrel who have both opted for restricting the breathing on the inlet side of the engine, Jawa achieve the same effect by tuning (or should that be detuning?) the exhaust and a careful choice of sprocket sizes. They don't achieve quite the same effect because the Mustang crept furtively through the speed trap at 37.05mph which probably makes it the quickest 16-er money can buy.

The engine has other strange features. Cold starting is achieved by tickling the carb until fuel spills out and the kickstart lever has to be kicked forwards and down. The gearchange lever prolongs this back to front trend by sprouting out rearwards from just behind the horizontal cylinder barrel with a linkage pivoting around brackets on the top of the crankcase. Strange indeed, more so when you discover the three-speed box has a one up and two down shift pattern which is confusing at first.

As I said before, the motor performs with a stoical, Soviet reliability but it drinks more fuel than the other two bikes. Not that 95mpg is disastrously high. The Mustang on the move does not feel particularly smooth and the gearbox smacks and clacks when you shift. The exhaust also makes considerably more noise than either the Honda or the Kestrel. For all that, the engine definitely pulls harder



than the other two and even if standing ¼-mile times on 16-ers are purely academic, the Mustang was noticeably quicker than its two rivals.

You could be excused for thinking that the front forks came off a D1 BSA Bantam. They look remarkably similar and the Jawa forks have even less travel which accounts for the wobbling caused by bump steering. The rougher the road, the more it deviates from the rider's chosen course but with a top speed of 37mph matters have little chance of getting out of hand. The rear suspension works a bit better and, if anything, that heightens the weirdness.

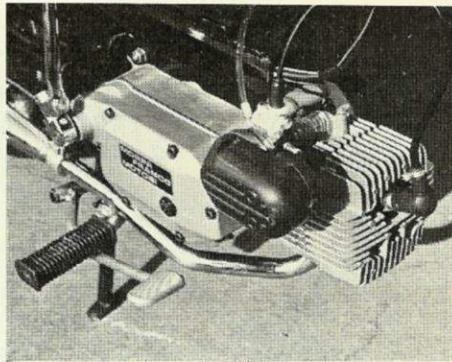
The frame looks mighty strange with the occasional piece of angle iron tucked away among the tubing and the appendages hung haphazardly around the place would have a Japanese stylist fumbling painfully for his Alka-Seltzer, or whatever it is that they use for brain faze over there. The deep, slabbed sides of the fuel tank actually start an inch or so below the nose of the seat.

The silver, metallflake fairing ain't too bad though but as a windbreak it's not effective. I'm not much bigger than the average 16-year-old (been saving himself — Ed) and I couldn't get any part of my body behind it without causing severe discomfort. Unfortunately, the good visual effect of the fairing is totally destroyed by the front mudguard mounted well off the front wheel, street scrambler style . . . ah well.

Braking front and rear is taken care of by single leading shoe drums which have no difficulty in rapidly calling a halt to the 132lb of moving Mustang although a small amount of fade is noticeable. My only complaint is of the rear brake pedal which is tucked in so close to the engine that it's difficult to locate with your right foot. An enterprising owner could no doubt correct that with some judicious levering.

Were it not for the fact that it has to penetrate the plastic window in the front of the fairing, the headlight would have probably been OK but as it is, night time riding is murky affair. When the steering is on full lock, the headlight is completely masked by the fairing but, unless you've just done something very stupid, you'll only be travelling extremely slowly on that sort of lock so perhaps it does not matter much.

So, it may be a stylist's nightmare, it may not have the swish, bird-pulling appeal of the MB5 but if you just want something cheap, cheerful, reliable and quicker than other restricted 50s, the Mustang is an attractive proposition. Of all the three bikes that I was blackmailed into testing (thanks Dave, I got the negatives back today) the Mustang made the most sense.



Kestrel KRM50

PEOPLE IN THE HABIT OF READING THE smalls in *Ride On* every month will remember that a few issues back we ran a short story on Kestrel Motorcycles of Southampton. They had done a pre-production costing exercise comparing the expense of building a 50cc bike entirely from British components with the cost of producing an identical machine in Taiwan. The British machine was as prohibitively expensive as the Taiwan version was ludicrously cheap.

Eventually, Kestrel decided to buy in most of the components from Italy as they felt there was a certain stigma attached to pieces made in Taiwan even though the products of that country generally have a good reputation among engineers. With their rigid import restrictions, Italy has a flourishing industry involved with the making of motorcycle components and, looking through an Edisport catalogue of bits and pieces, it's possible to pick out most of the parts that went to make up the Kestrel KRM50.

The bikes are assembled in Britain, however, and the high quality fibre glass bodywork that disguises an otherwise unattractive frame is made in Southampton.

The engine is a 49cc Motor Morini, not to be confused with the products of Moto Morini which is a quite different firm. It's a fairly basic, piston-ported two-stroke with a horizontal barrel and it drives through a rather fierce clutch to a four-speed gearbox. Restriction is achieved by a skinny inlet tract being fed by a puny carburettor. Unlike the MB5, lubrication is by petrol in the ratio of 25:1 and that can be a bit of a pain at filling-up time. The tank will not hold a full gallon and there is no measuring vessel provided. You have to supply your own and do all the maths to go with it and that's why my Yorkshire Puddings have had an oily tang for the last fortnight, must buy a new measuring jug.

Ignition is direct with no key. There's just a kill switch on the left handlebar though there is a steering lock to discourage thieves. The finish on the motor is good. Italian castings tend to be high quality and while it was a bitch to start from cold, it was reliable throughout the test. The choke is quite unusual. It's operated by a lever on the side of the carb which locks in the 'on' position. It is spring loaded and connected to the throttle cable so that when you wind the twistgrip right back the lever is released and springs to the 'off' position. At least it stops thrashing of a cold motor and having to bend down on the move to knock the choke off.

The most painful part of riding the Kestrel is starting it. A hefty swing on the pedal results in the instep of your right foot being mashed between the kickstart and the footpeg and, though the peg is adjustable, I didn't manage to find a position whereby I could start the bike without ravaging my foot. I elected to bump it most days which led to an amusing discovery. If you bump the bike backwards it will fire up and you then have four reverse speeds. Not much use but good fun all the same.

The Kestrel's springing is extremely harsh and on rough roads it's like being mounted on an ill-mannered brick — the only saving grace being the well-padded seat which manages to absorb some of the punishment. On smoother going it handles tolerably well but isn't as sure-footed as the MB5. Small bumps send it skittering off line too easily for my liking.

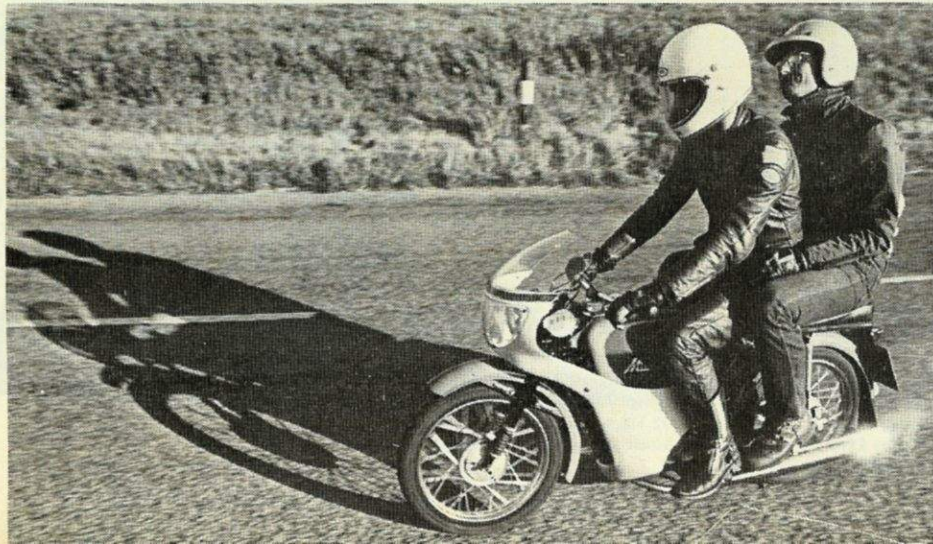
Ho hum, it's beginning to look as if I'm not about to get that powerboat ride the MD of Kestrel promised me because it's time to talk about brakes. The front brake has little effect on forward motion even when the lever is jammed right back against the handlebar. Fortunately the back brake worked well so I had to rely on that alone, having discovered that adjusting the front unit made no difference.

Lighting is direct from a six-volt generator and adequate for the performance of the bike. Only the indicators run from the battery and they flash so quickly that they look to be on all the time.

The bodywork is a genuine UK product and the standards of workmanship, styling and finish are all high. The top of the dummy tank comes away to reveal a goodly amount of storage space, enough for a bottle of two-stroke oil and some of whatever else you want to carry around with you (groceries in my case). The only letdown is the clips used to secure the cover which work loose and eventually lost their grip.

Overall finish of the bike is good. The paint looks as if it has come to stay and so does the chrome. The forks that look like baby Marzocchis and the handlebar fairing add up to a neat styling package even if the Union Jack on the body is a bit debateable.

Y'know, just once it would be great to sit down at my typewriter and say a whole heap of good things about a new British motorcycling venture instead of the unfavourable report that you have just read. Unfortunately the Kestrel did not provide that opportunity and at £399, the same price as the Honda, it does not represent such a good deal. It is only fair to say that the bike lent to us was a pre-production prototype and some of the faults mentioned will be ironed out by the time the bike reached the showrooms. Let's hope so because it may lead to a new, British force in the small bike market.



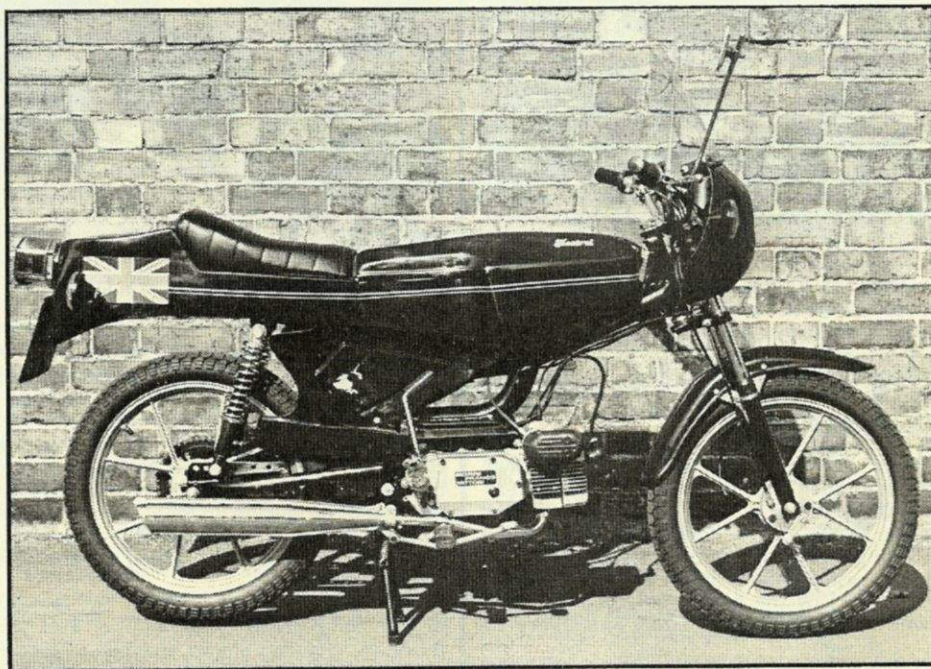
CONCLUSION

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THREE MORE different machines all aimed at the same market. The Honda represents the ultimate in technocraft mopeds with all the equipment found on larger bikes. Jawa's Mustang, despite attempts to dress up, is as basic as you can get which is reflected in a price tag £119 lower than the other two which will make it attractive for those who simply want to get through their moped year as cheaply as possible. The Kestrel is somewhat in limbo, awaiting the pre-production modifications which could turn it into a good machine. However good that is though, it's hard to see how it can become serious competition for the Honda which sells for exactly the same price.

The Honda's tag of £399 is a large amount of money to spend on a first bike especially as you're liable to dump it one or two times, but if you can meet the payments and really want to start flash it's the obvious choice and a good one at that. For those less worried about style and with less cash to throw around the Jawa is the obvious bet and it is quicker than the other pair. All you'll have to put up with is some wierdo styling.

Patriots will buy the Kestrel which may, in time, be OK although if faced with the choice (never!), I personally would send my £399 to Japan.

Jim Lindsay

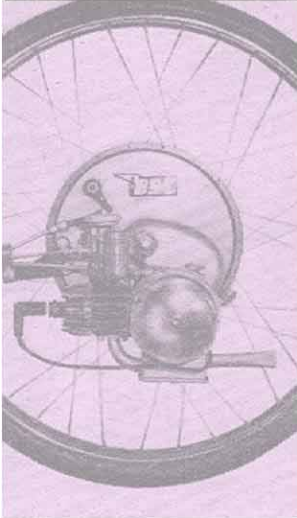
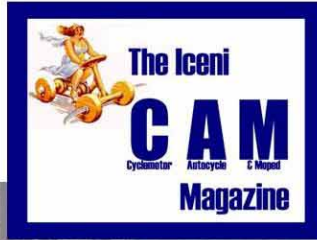


Below: 'Saw the Union Jack, old chap, had to stop for a peek. It's British, you say, jolly good show!'

| | HONDA MB5 | JAWA MUSTANG | KESTREL KRM50 SPORTS |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Engine | two-stroke 1 cyl | two-stroke 1 cyl | two-stroke 1 cyl |
| Bore x stroke | 37.5 x 41.4mm | 38 x 44mm | 40.4 x 39mm |
| Capacity | 49cc | 49.9cc | 49.9cc |
| Compression ratio | 6.4:1 | 9.5:1 | 7.5:1 |
| Carburation | | 17mm Jicof | |
| Bhp @ rpm | 2.5 @ 6000 | 4 @ 6000 | |
| Max torque @ rpm | 2.9ft/lb @ 4500 | n/a | |
| Primary drive | Gear | Chain | Chain |
| Clutch | Multiplate, wet | Multiplate, wet | Multiplate, wet |
| Gearbox | 5 speed | 3 speed | 4 speed |
| Electrical system | 5v rah battery, alternator, electronic ignition | 6v 4ah battery, flywheel magneto ignition | 6v 4ah battery, alternator, flywheel magneto ignition |
| Headlamp | 25/25w tungsten | 25/25w tungsten | 25/25w |
| DIMENSIONS | | | |
| Wheelbase | 48in | 47in | 47in |
| Seat height | 29½in | 27in | 29in |
| Overall width | 25¼in | 23in | 27in |
| Ground clearance | 6¼in | 4½in | 5in |
| Weight (with 1gal fuel) | 179lb | 132lb | 108lb |
| Fuel capacity | 1.9gal | 1.3gal | 0.6gal |
| EQUIPMENT | | | |
| Indicators | Yes | No | Yes |
| Electric start | No | No | No |
| Trip odometer | No | No | No |
| Steering lock | Yes | No | Yes |
| Helmet lock | Yes | No | No |
| Headlamp flasher | Yes | No | No |
| Others | Twin mirrors, cast wheels | Tyre pump | Twin mirrors, cast wheels |
| CYCLE PARTS | | | |
| Tyres | | | |
| front | 2.50 x 18in Yokohama | 2.50 x 16in Barum | 2.25 x 16in Michelin |
| rear | 2.50 x 18in Yokohama | 2.75 x 16in Barum | 2.25 x 16in Michelin |
| Brakes | | | |
| front | 2 x 9in disc | 2 x 5in drum | |
| rear | 5in drum | 5in drum | |
| PERFORMANCE | | | |
| Top speed | 33.2mph | 37.05mph | 31.51mph |
| Standing ¼ mile | 33.23secs/33.2mph | 30.02sec/37.05mph | 33.28sec/31.51mph |
| Speedometer error at indicated 30mph | 27.57mph | 25.09mph | 28.16mph |
| Fuel consumption | 108mpg | 95mpg | |
| PRICE | | | |
| Guarantee | £399 | £280 | £399 |
| Supplied by | 12 months/unlimited mileage | 6 months/6000 miles | 6 months/4000 miles |
| 54 bike | Honda UK, Power Road, Chiswick, London W4 | Jawa/CZ, Bergen Way, Kings Lynn, Norfolk | Kestrel Motorcycles, 132 High Street, Southampton |



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