

# *Lilac Electra -Fying!*

**It may look like a BMW, but it does everything very differently. From Japan, a new husky 500 cc wailer that's very unusual.**

**I**T has two horizontally-opposed cylinders, shaft drive, weighs over 400 lb and is black. What is it? A BMW? Right. But now, thanks to Sydney's Mahler Motors, it is also the R-92 Magnum Electra, a 500 cc machine from Japan's Lilac Motorcycle Corporation and Australia's newest bike import.

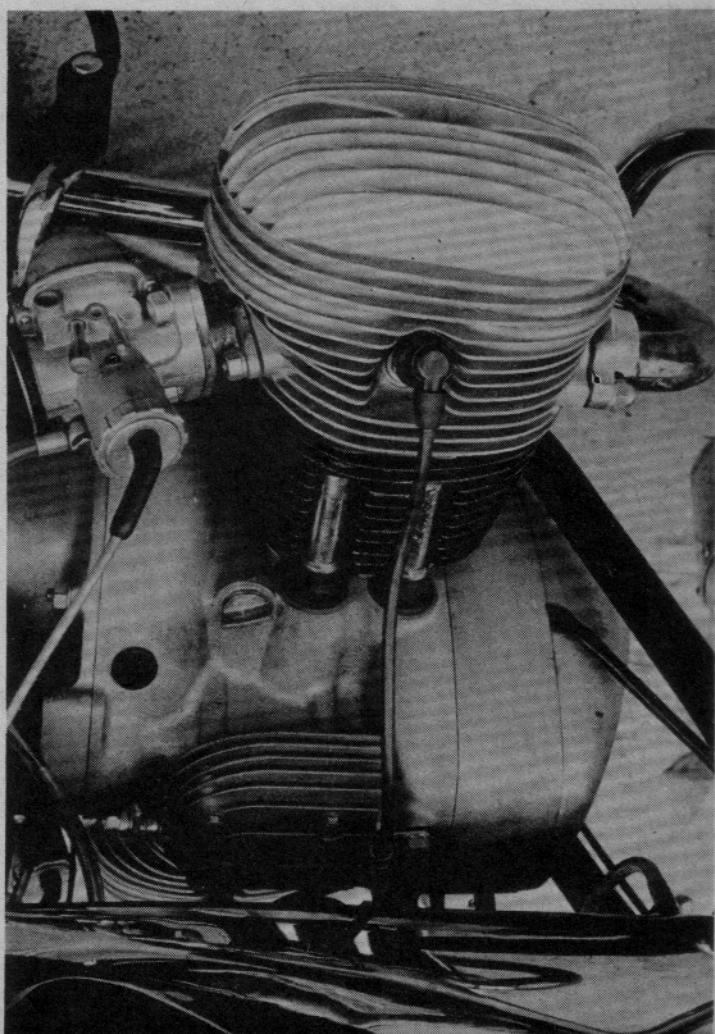
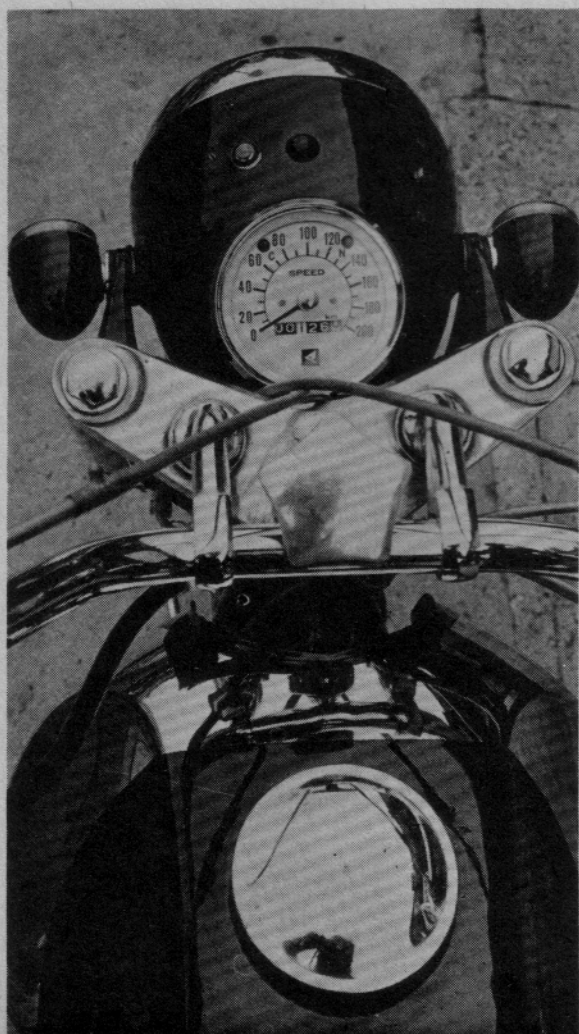
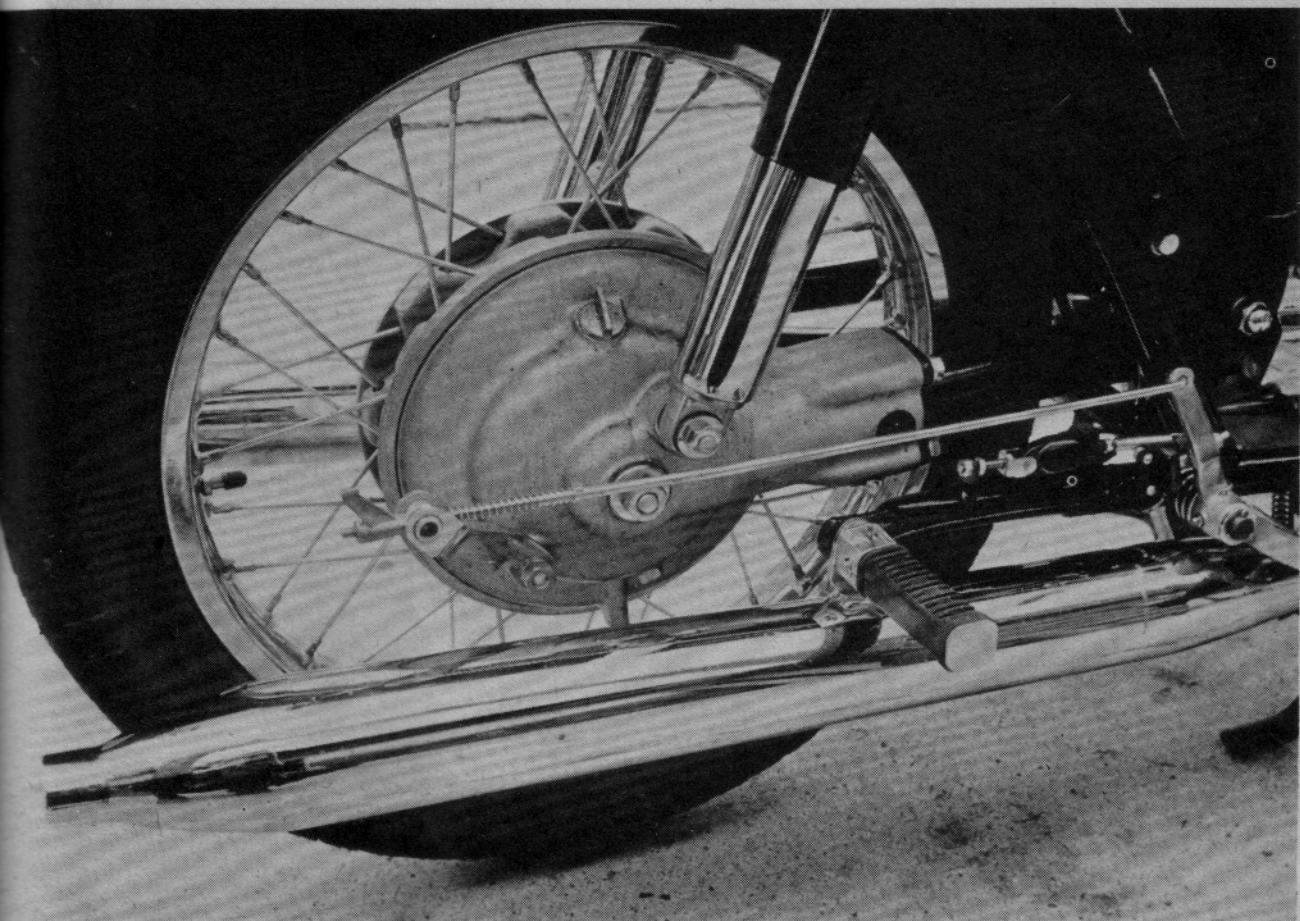
**TWO WHEELS** got a new Electra from Mahler's for a week of pictures and road tests — and an interesting week it was. First, we sat around the bike making sly remarks about how Lilac was cashing in on the prestige value of BMW by bringing out something very like the famous German machine. Then

we decided this was a rather prejudiced approach to a new machine and vowed not to make any direct comparisons. But this is difficult. Lilac obviously expects comparisons or they wouldn't have followed the classic lines as they did. Anyway, out of this mix-up and on to the bike! Come with us for an "electric" ride!

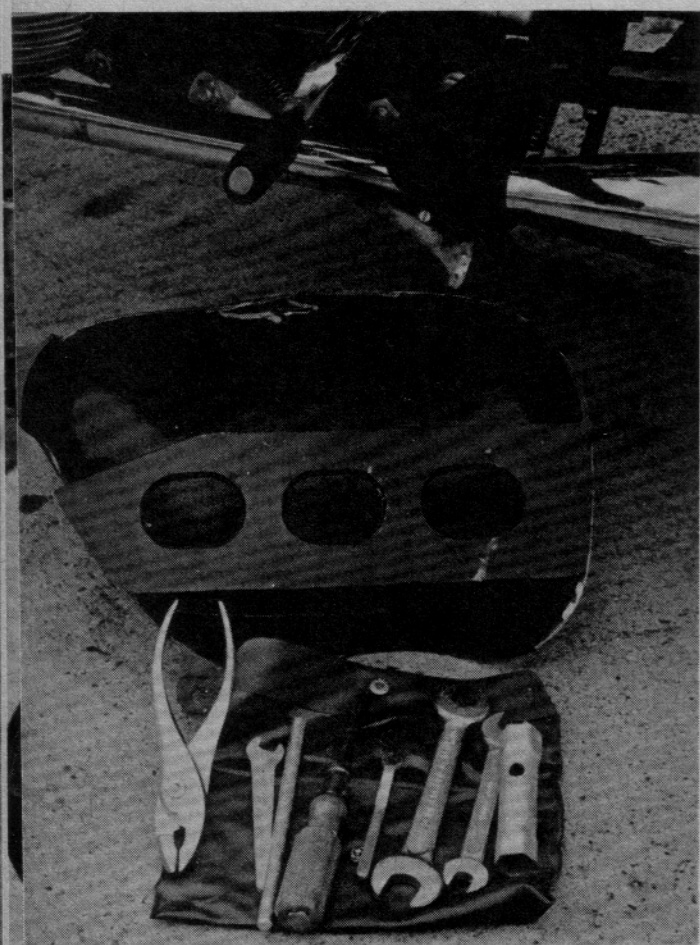
The R-92 is impressive in appearance. Big, stylish, trim and sleek, it generally follows the current trend of excellently-finished paintwork and lots of chrome plating. The chromed front fender seemed of especially good quality. Some of the polished alloy, notably the fork yoke, seemed less resistant and showed some pitting. The 3½ gallon tank is highly sculptured and gives the machine a decided flair.

The controls are sturdy and well weather-proofed. Dip-switch, horn button and blinker control switch









are all positioned for the left thumb. Perhaps one of these operations could be switched to the other side for operation by the right thumb, useless on the present model, but this is a minor point. The blinkers, which come as standard equipment, might be considered too small and not bright enough but, again, this gets into the area of personal taste.

On our test model the speedo registered in kilometres; future Electras on the Australian market will be fitted with mph clocks. The speedo face has a green neutral and red generator warning light. The latter is a welcome item as many recent bikes have omitted this handy item. The headlight cowl has a red high beam indicator and an orange dome that lights — so help me — when you're in third gear. This can hardly be called a necessity but does add a touch of color, especially at night. It will probably start a customising trend where blokes will add a blue light for first gear, pink for second, and purple for fourth, making acceleration a psychedelic experience.

The starter key fits into a lock on the cowl as well. The fork lock requires another key, which seems a bad practice to us. There is no reason why one key shouldn't do both jobs. Probably the greatest single advantage of the Electra is its electric starter. This is of the car type which engages a geared ring on the flywheel and differs from the usual dynastart or centrifugal clutch methods. Much of the advantage of an electric starter has been lost, however, by the unfortunate positioning of the starter button. It is mounted on the handlebars a good 6 ins. in from the right hand grip. As all of us who have stalled in traffic well know, that's when you want the button handy! Most buyers will undoubtedly extend the wires and move the button closer to the grip. Future models will probably place it closer as well.

The kick starter is in an identical position to that of a BMW. It worked well on our machine, feeling crisp and positive. On our test bike it banged into the tool kit cover on its upward spring return but other showroom models had clearance. The Japanese tyres are of good construction and hold the road well. The front tyre has very wide ribs which give better control in dirt than the conventional narrow-ribbed type.

The brakes on the Electra were spongy and, when applied sharply and suddenly, failed to give the quick "stopability" needed at times. The front anchor would definitely be improved by installing a twin leading shoe arrangement. In short, Lilac needs some redesigning around the axles.

The suspension is good, but tight. With its telescopic front forks, the R-92 handles well on bitumen but tends to bounce around a bit on any rough surface. Though a heavyweight in poundage, the bike feels much lighter. While this is a decided advantage in city driving, the feeling of weight is missed when on the open road. When cornering sharply to the left, the side stand scrapes. This is probably the fault of the stand and not the suspension but, whatever the cause, it's bloody annoying.

The engine is very impressive. Turning out 38 bhp at 7000 rpm and with a 9.6 to 1 compression ratio, it is a real mover. Much of the similarity with a BMW ends when accelerating away from a stop light. While the engine does not really feel at home until about 3000 rpm, the pulling power below this is still remarkable. This would allow much driving in traffic to be done in third gear alone if necessary. The engine is great on the open road. The horizontally-opposed cylinders give vibration-free running and the instant

surge of torque irons out the hills. The potent compression ratio also gives good engine braking. Cooling is more than adequate with the deeply finned barrels and heads.

The gearbox is four speed, all changes down with neutral at the top — a good arrangement, in our opinion. As the bike had only 24 miles on the clock when we received it, some stiffness in the gearbox may be excusable. But an awful lot of pressure was needed to force the lever down into each gear. This action was usually accompanied by a loud clunk unless the slow-change method was applied by easing the lever into the neutral position between each gear. Gear ratios are well placed and take good advantage of the wide power band. They provide quick, smooth acceleration and overlap for a margin of power when needed. While there is the usual valve gear noise, the exhaust note is amazingly quiet for a 500 cc bike. It doesn't whisper like a BMW but is still so low in decibels that no-one should be annoyed.

A look at the smaller items reveals that the horn is loud, loud, LOUD!, the head and tail lights bright, the handlebars and foot-pegs well placed. The shift lever is adjustable to suit the rider's foot. The side stand is placed for easy reach by the toe, a feature most appreciated when dismounting in a hurry. Lengthening it might do away with its tendency to scrape and would also stop the bike's tendency to roll off it when parked on any slight downhill grade. The centre stand is strong; the bike lifted easily on to it by the handle placed by the seat.

The seat itself is slightly too narrow for our taste and definitely too firm for enjoyable touring over any great distance. The tool box cover is attractive from the outside but has a latticed back that would admit dust and moisture, not good for tools or anything else carried there. The items included in the tool kit are barely adequate for roadside repairs and their quality is not high.

One badly-placed item is the rear brake actuating rod which runs outside the drive shaft and over the level of the rear foot peg. It just invites some careless pillion rider to stamp on it and lock up the rear brake. Another unfortunate placement is the gearbox oil plug which is accessible only by removing the battery. The clutch lever takes some strength but

## SPECIFICATIONS

**ROAD TEST BIKE SUPPLIED BY:** Mahler Motors, 464 Pitt Street, Sydney.

**PRICE:** \$925.

**ENGINE:** Two-cylinder four-stroke.

**CAPACITY:** 493 cc.

**BORE/STROKE:** 68mm/68mm.

**COMPRESSION RATIO:** 9.6 to 1.

**OUTPUT:** 38 bhp at 7000 rpm.

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 7 ft.

**OVERALL WIDTH:** 2 ft 5.7 ins.

**OVERALL HEIGHT:** 3 ft 6.9 ins.

**WHEELBASE:** 55.2 ins.

**GROUND CLEARANCE:** 5.1 ins.

**WEIGHT:** 414 lb.

**IGNITION SYSTEM:** Battery.

**CARBURETTOR:** Mikuni VM28.

**FUEL TANK CAPACITY:** 3.3 gallons.

**CLUTCH:** Single dry plate.

**TRANSMISSION:** Four-speed constant-mesh, foot control.

**RATIOS:** 1st 4.29, second 2.78, third 2.09, fourth 1.59.

**TYRE SIZE:** Front 3.25-18, rear 3.50-18.

when that clutch engages, it engages! It's like driving a bike with a hair trigger; not my preference, but nevertheless a feature that many will like.

There should be quite a market for the Magnum Electra in Australia. The price is very competitive and the machine will definitely appeal to those riders who have shunned large bikes because of their heavy feel in city driving. Suddenly they are offered a big bike that feels like a lightweight and goes like a bomb. Unfortunately on the 100th mile of our test after accelerating out of first gear, the gearbox packed up when we hit second. Mr Mahler held off delivery of these first Magnums until he could get a shipment of parts simultaneously so the new owner who does have trouble should not have to wait for replacements to arrive.

So the Lilac Magnum Electra R-92 has made its debut in Australia. If you're considering a big bike, put it on your list. It could be what you've been waiting for.

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