

bike

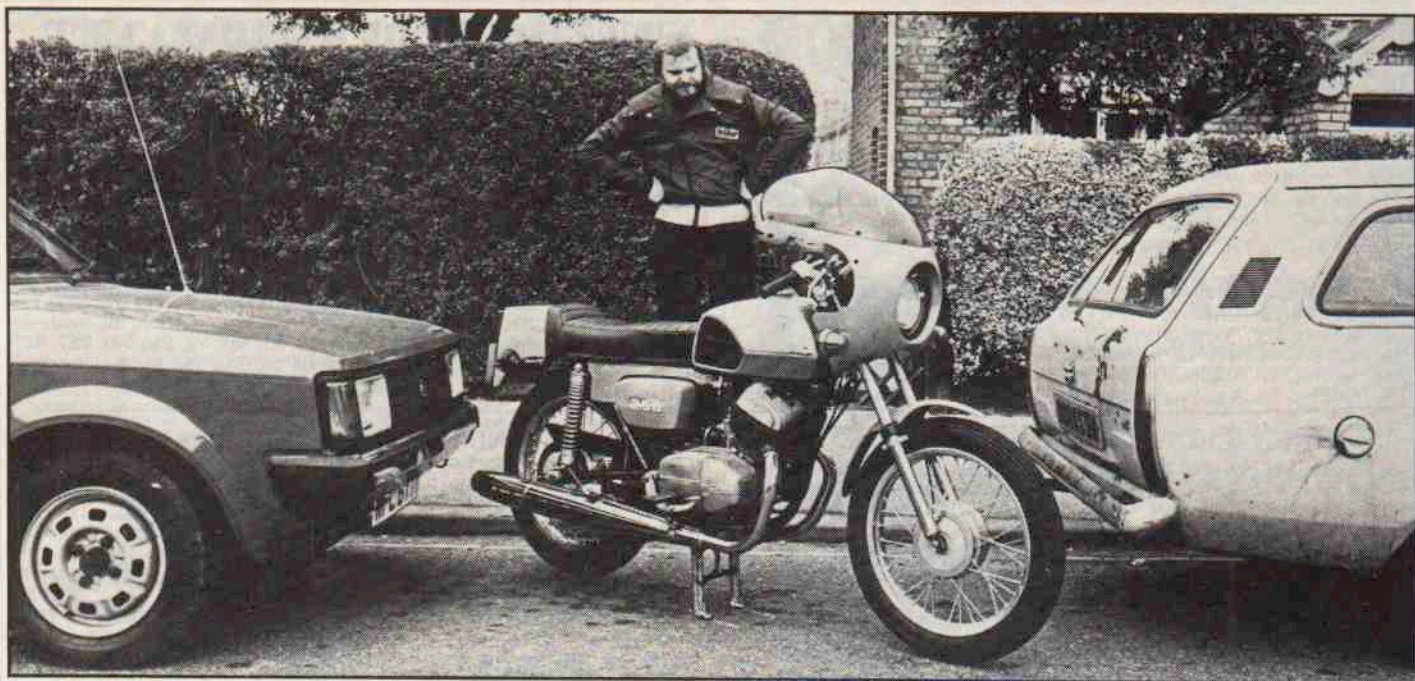
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STRANGE CUSTOM

Simon Grey on the British CZ importers' attempt to give their 250 twin a smooth image.

'Got your first test bike yet?'

'Er, yeah, want another pint?'

'What is it, that new Kawasaki?'

'Well... actually... look are you sure you aren't ready for another?'

You've got to admit, it's embarrassing. I mean, I was ready to approach the CZ250 Custom with an open mind, be absolutely fair and impartial. But people kept sniggering, making oblique references to tractors and one guy even woke me at some unearthly hour on a Sunday morning to show me the latest road test he could find. What is a man supposed to do? Ride it, I suppose.

In fact it is most unfair to liken the gearbox on the CZ to that of a tractor, as most agricultural machinery now sports servo-driven gears and doesn't require the sort of hefty kick-and-lift that the Czechs seem so taken with. But let's start from the beginning.

For years now CZ have been importing the same sort of no-frills, cheap motorcycles into this country and despite their faults, they have sold. This proves that the market is there for just such a bike, but now with the addition of a couple of frills they hope to move into the lucrative teenage 250 market.

On paper it looks like a good marketing move, but I wonder how many teenagers are going to be fooled, or attracted by a bolt-on handlebar fairing and a hardtail that could have been made out of cornflake packets for all the style it displays. To be fair, there have been some detail improvements on what is basically an ageing concept. The air filter box and carb connections came in for work and a bigger battery is fitted to help deal with round-town commuting. A re-styling job on the tank gives it chrome side panels but keeps the basic shape with knee cut-outs that jab you where they shouldn't. Also new is a prop stand which, like most things on the bike, needs a solid booting to get it into operation.

It is a sloppy fit and leaves the bike almost lying on its side anyway.

The centre stand is not much better, needing yet another kick to make it retract, a hernia-inducing wrench to get the bike up on to it and half an inch sawn off to stop it grounding on left-handers.

Oh dear, this is starting to sound like a 'Let's knock CZ for the hell of it' type of article, but believe me I'm trying to be fair. It's just that the bike is riddled with annoying little faults that could be righted with a little time, thought and money.

Not so much annoying — more downright terrifying — is the spongy apology for braking dished up by a twin-leading-shoe front and sis rear set-up. It's an all-or-nothing deal that either has you rushing into roundabouts faster than planned or sets the Barum tyres skipping.

The motor is the same single carb, two-stroke twin that has powered CZ bikes in the past, but after developing a positive oiling system for their 175 and 350 machines the Czechs have kept the 250 in the dark ages with an oil-mixed-in-tank set-up. While the performance won't set the world alight the motor always started easily in the mornings after a damp night out.

A couple of prods on the kickstart, which ingeniously, if rather pointlessly, doubles as the gearlever, soon had it smoking into life. The haze all but disappeared after it had warmed up. It is this doubling up arrangement which is primarily the reason for such a long gearchange travel, requiring the foot to be lifted several inches off its rest to effect a very clunky engagement of cogs. A point to watch out for is the fact that any pressure on the gearshift disengages the clutch, which can cause some heart-stopping moments until you get used to it.

The switchgear is built into the handlebar

moulding for the levers, meaning that as soon as you get one set up just right, the other is invariably out of reach. This was particularly true of the up-down indicator switch which needed a second handful of throttle taken before it became useable. The wiring features heavy-duty connectors, but it all hangs off the frame in unsightly loops inside the fairing and the seat tail unit — which detaches completely — trails indicator wires that prevent you putting it down out of the way during maintenance.

Despite the test machine being only 57 miles old when picked up, rust was already rearing its ugly head. Brown stains were apparent round the exhausts on the barrels, on the unplated indicator stems and under the paint on the tank.

So, having unmercifully slagged the bike, what has it got in its favour? Well of course it is still one of the cheapest 250s on the road at £434 including VAT but equalled by, for example, MZ whose Supa 5 offering goes for £439.

The bike handled perfectly predictably even two up and the handlebar fairing was in no way adversely affected by side winds. New three-way adjustable shockers are fitted, but seemed to make little real difference and exhibited signs of coil binding even on their softest settings.

Despite its faults I quite enjoyed running the bike in a perverted sort of way. It took me to work happily each day and during the running-in period returned a miserly 75mpg. This dropped to nearer 50mpg as the miles clocked up and speed increased.

In rain the fairing provides protection up to chest height then bottles out. The minuscule front mudguard didn't let too much water fly around — just as well because there's a massive gap between the headlamp and the fairing. While we're on the subject, the headlamp was almost useless, the dip being very

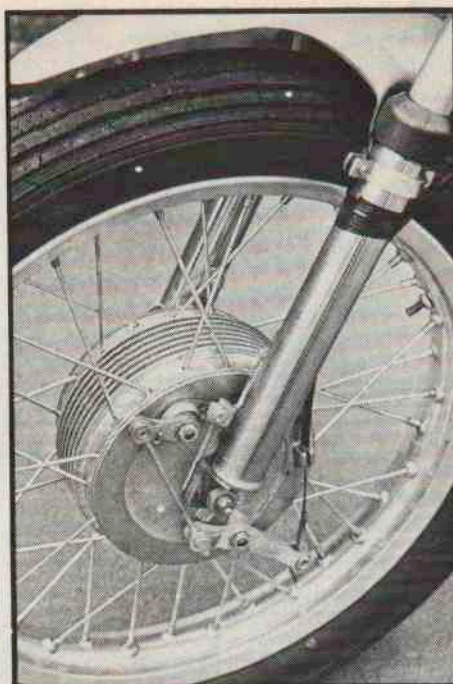
diffuse and main beam launching off into the stars. It is a Pal item and could do with being replaced with a Lucas unit like the rear light.

For someone who is just interested in a ride to work hack there is another reason, apart from the cheapness of the machine, for considering the CZ — special insurance rates. George Rue at Jawa-CZ in King's Lynn negotiated the rates through Trafalgar Insurance on the basis that they are safe bikes due to their lack of performance and good handling.

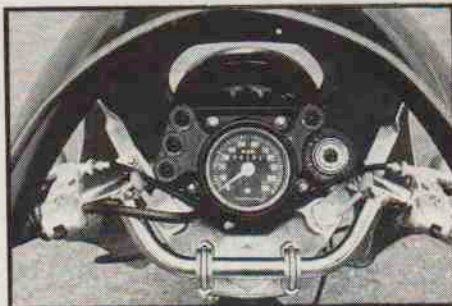
'We had a long talk and laid some insurance myths to rest,' said George. 'One of the myths was that the cost of parts was the main insurance problem but it's not, huge third party claims are the problem. But our parts are cheap.'

The deal is exclusive to Jawa-CZ owners and should you insure with them and then change marque the cover will not be extended the following year. Prices start at around £99 for a seventeen year old living in London and holding a full licence.

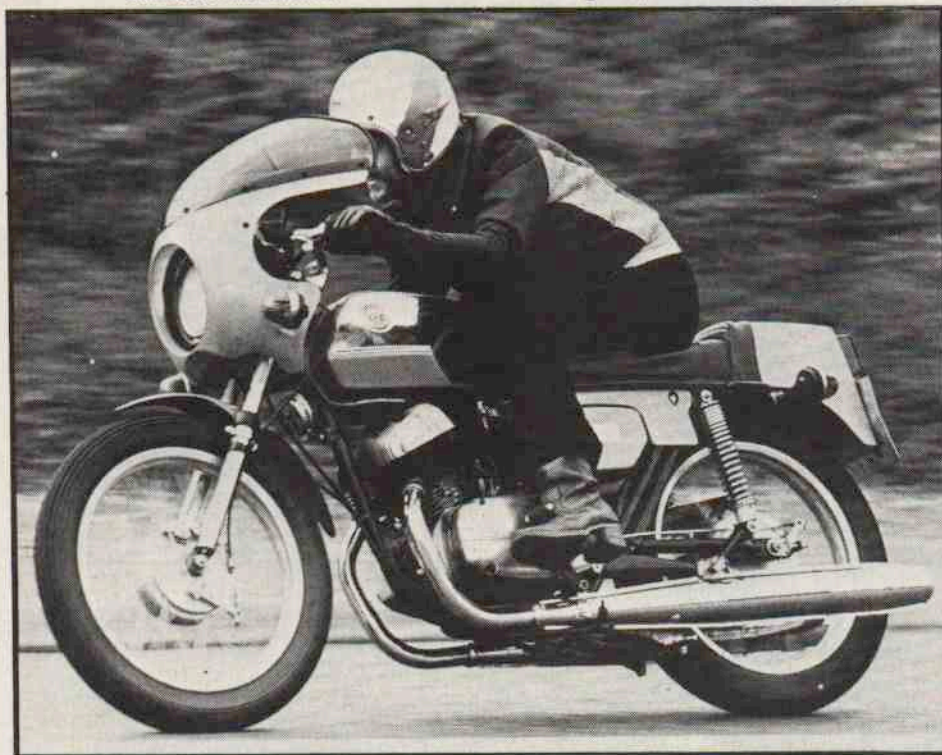
Right: twin leading shoe outfit features brake wear indicator and Ferodo AM4 linings but gives indifferent performance. Taped up cable is typical of messy CZ preparation and makes a mockery of the 'race' mudguard.



Jikov carb leaks petroil and has no choke, just a tickler. Regulator is now behind the side cover surmounted by that skimpy bit of cosmetic metalwork.

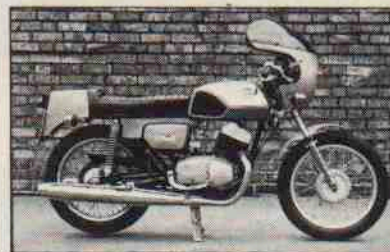


Smoked screen hides a multitude of sins, note the tortuous cable routes, gap round headlamp, inaccessible switchgear. Turn light is green, neutral light orange.



Photography Duncan Cubitt.

CHECKOUT



CZ 250 CUSTOM

Engine	2 cyl two stroke
Bore x stroke	52 x 58mm
Capacity	246cc
Compression ratio	9.3:1
Carburation	24mm jikov
Bhp @ rpm	13.6 @ 5,100
Max torque @ rpm	14ft/lb @ 5,100
Primary drive	Duplex chain
Clutch	Wet, multiplate
Gearbox	4 speed
Electrical system	6v alternator
Lighting	6v 35/35w headlamp

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	51.5in
Seat height	31in
Overall width	24.5in
Ground clearance	4.5in
Kerb weight	322lb
Fuel capacity	2.9gal
Trafficators	Yes
Electric starter	No
Trip milometer	No
Steering lock	Yes
Helmet lock	No
Headlight flasher	No
Others	Handlebar fairing, seat lock

CYCLE PARTS

Tyres	
(front)	3.25 x 18in Barum
(rear)	3.50 x 18in Barum
Brakes	
(front)	6in t/s drum
(rear)	6in s/s drum

PERFORMANCE

Top speed	
(prone)	72.99mph
(sitting up)	71.77mph
Standing 1/4 mile	18.72sec
Speedometer error	
at indicated 30mph	26.04mph
at indicated 60mph	53.47mph
Braking distance	
from 30mph	43ft
from 60mph	182ft
Fuel consumption	
overall	63mpg
ridden hard	52mpg
PRICE	£434 inc. VAT
Guarantee	6 months/6,000 miles
Supplied by	L. Stevens Ltd., 141-151 Goldhawk Rd, London, W12.