



Picture the scene — you're on holiday with the family in the west country and it's been raining all week. The beach is clearly out, the poor visibility makes a sightseeing trip inland hardly worthwhile and you've done the local shops (both of them!). What do you do next to keep the family happy? It was in just such a situation that Dennis Butler noticed a sign pointing to a motor museum, so hoping that he might be able to show the children an Austin Big Seven like his father had in the Fifties, off they went.

It soon became apparent that this was not a normal museum — some of the exhibits had price tags on them while others were in store awaiting packing and shipment to the USA. What the enterprising Cornishman had done, was to charge the public to come into the transit camp. A few of the exhibits had yet to find a buyer, among them a 1938 model 26 AJS.

The 350 single was in original condition, even to the battle scars of a previous encounter: witness the minor damage to the front mudguard, headlamp rim, handlebars and petrol tank. One of the fork links had also been replaced, which explains why it does not match the finish of the others, so the machine had obviously been 'up the road' at some time. That might well explain why the recorded mileage was only 19,136.

As an AJS enthusiast (he also owns a 1922 Model B de-Luxe and a 1961 Model 31CSR), Dennis was soon talking business, raiding the holiday fund for a deposit and arranging for the machine to be collected. Then the family carried on traipsing around in the rain, but for one member at least, the sun was shining.

The familiar 69 x 93mm AMC engine is essentially the same as that used in AJS and Matchless machines from the mid-Thirties to the mid-Sixties. The Model

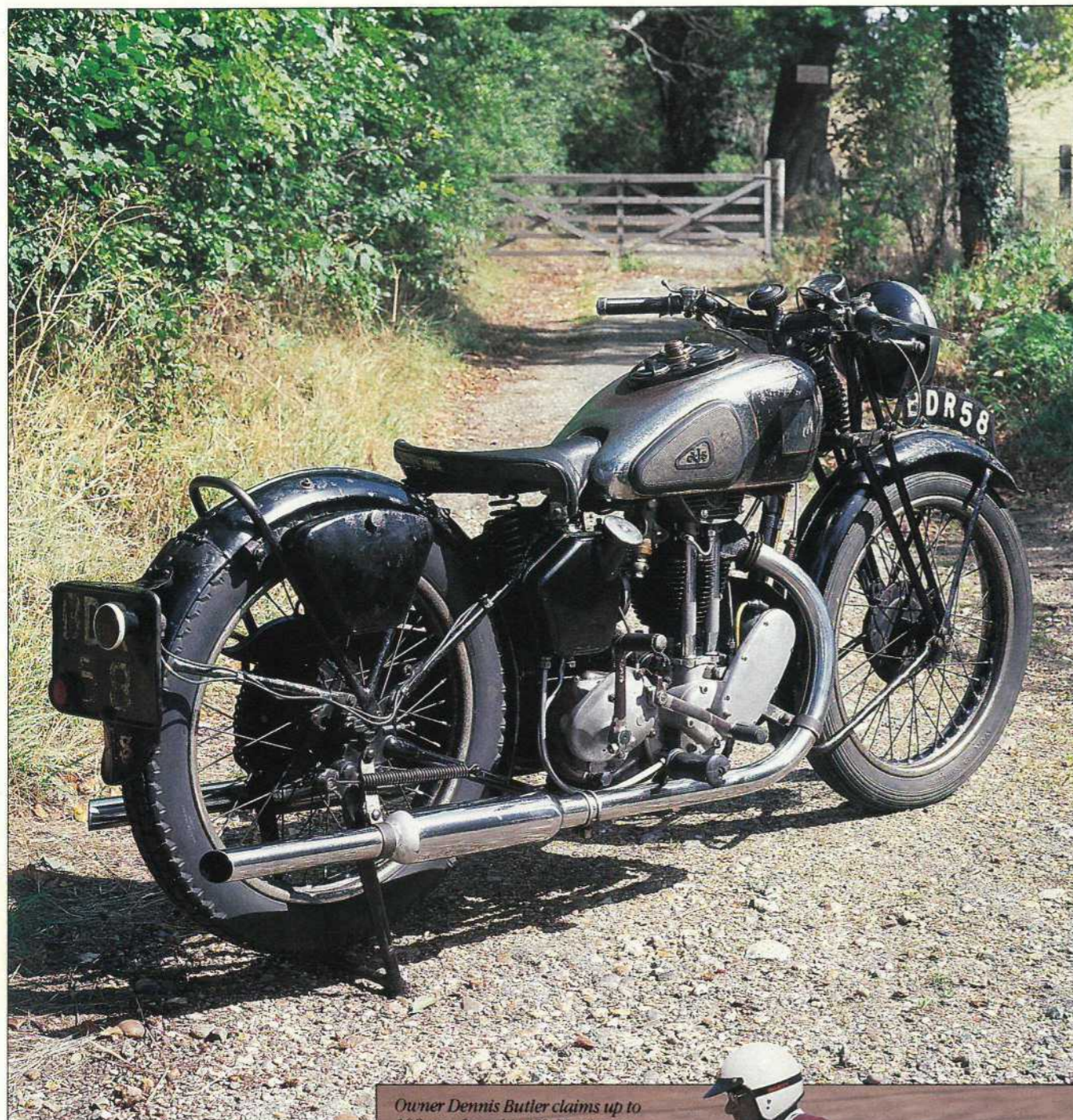


SEASIDE SOUVENIR

Dennis Butler bought a 1938 Model 26 AJS with his holiday money. Story: Mike Jackson. Photography: Martyn Barnwell.

Above: Chrome tank and twin port engine identify this 350cc single as the de-Luxe model. Greater braking efficiency was claimed for the 1938 range, thanks to a longer footbrake pedal.

Right: Mike Jackson finds the little Ajay happiest around 50mph.

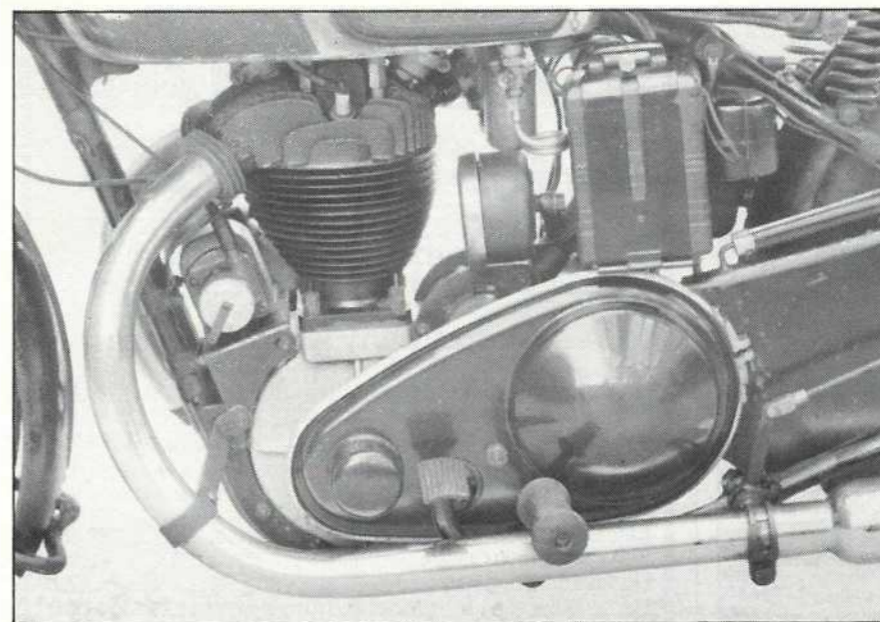
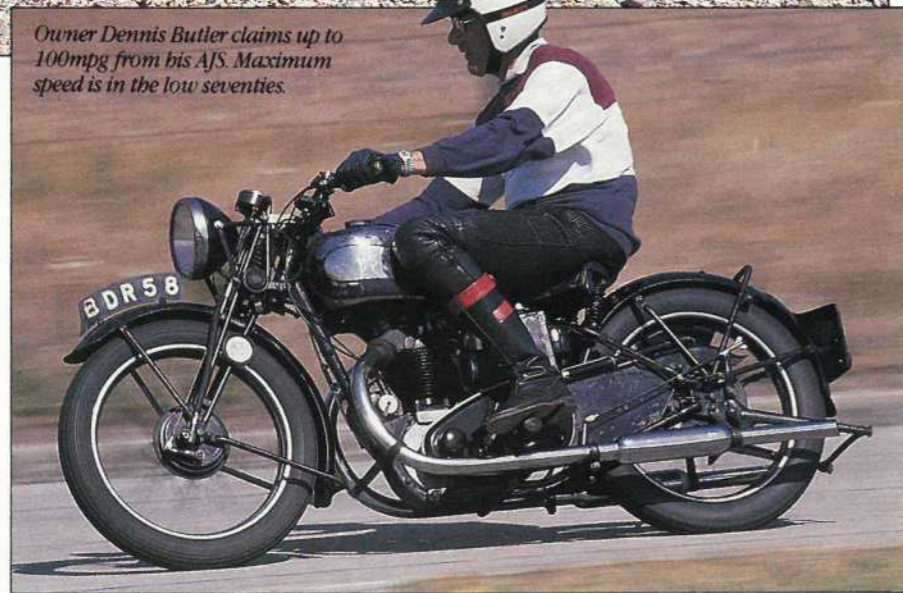


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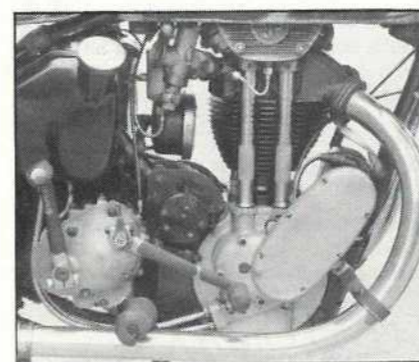
26 specification called for a twin port cylinder head and low level exhausts, although the high level pipes were a popular option. Those fitted to Dennis' machine are, with the obvious exception of the tyres, inner tubes and battery, the only major items that are not originals.

The engine breathes through a type 276 Amal carburettor and the mixture is ignited by a manually-controlled Lucas magneto. In the AJS application the magneto is mounted in front of the engine whereas in the equivalent Matchless machines it is mounted behind the cylinder. In either case it is driven by chain from the exhaust camshaft. Improvements to the power unit for 1938 were the adoption of a 14mm sparking plug in

Owner Dennis Butler claims up to 100mpg from his AJS. Maximum speed is in the low seventies.



AMC primary chaincase is prone to leaking, but the magneto points are easily accessible.



Burman lightweight gearbox is more suited to a 250cc machine. Dynamo sits between rear engine plates.



Knurled pushrod tubes are secured by grub screws; this early Thirties valve gear is lubricated by grease gun.

place of the 18mm one, and minor changes to the dry sump lubrication system.

Protection for the primary drive is the traditional AMC pressed-steel chaincase, the type with the long rubber seal which illustrates perfectly the law that the efficiency of a seal is inversely proportional to its length. This casing also houses the dynamo chain, driven by a sprocket on the engine shaft and driving a dynamo buried deep in the engine-gearbox plates.

The secondary chain is protected by a deep chainguard (another 1938 improvement), which should be an object lesson to those present-day manufacturers who persist in using exposed chains for their final drives.

An unlikely feature of Dennis' machine, and also of two similar models he has come across, is the use of the Burman lightweight (HP) gearbox more suited to a 250cc machine. This differs from the catalogue specification, prompting speculation that AMC made a batch of machines using the lightweight box.

The gearbox is the worst feature of the AJS, discouraging winding-on in the intermediate ratios by jumping out of gear. Doubtless this is more a function of wear than a general trait, but equally such wear is more likely to occur in a lightweight box. Dennis describes its inside as looking like a food blender that has been filled-up and left switched on for a week. He would welcome offers of spares.

The tubular cradle frame is typical of the era and fitted with the manufacturer's own girder forks. These and the saddle springs were the only concessions to comfort deemed necessary at the time, but well positioned footrests and sensibly angled handlebars enable the worst of bumps to be ridden out.

Friction dampers are provided for both fork and steering movement, the steering damper being mainly ornamental whereas that for the fork is more of a necessity. The overall effect is to endow the machine with the reassuring hand-

ling qualities derived from an even weight distribution, a low centre of gravity and a low seating position.

Getting under way reveals a light clutch action, possibly made even lighter by the settling of the clutch springs as it had a slight tendency to slip. Unusually for a Burman gearbox, the pattern is one down and three up, changes being made slowly as the gaps between the ratios are relatively wide.

Brakes are well up to the performance, and are adequate even in modern traffic conditions. Although I rode the AJS in the dry, Dennis reports that the brakes are well waterproofed and keep their efficiency in the wet. Domed section mudguards protect both machine and rider from road filth. A hinged tail section of the rear mudguard makes wheel removal easy.

The AJS cruises comfortably at 50mph, but is happy at any speed between 30 and 55mph, above which it begins to feel a bit flustered. Maximum speed is in the low seventies, suggesting a power output of about 16bhp. Petrol consumption never falls below 70mpg and with care over 100mpg can be obtained.

Miscellaneous equipment includes a Smiths' 80mph speedometer driven from the front wheel, an electric horn and a tank-top instrument panel on which are mounted the ammeter, lighting switch and an inspection light which, when stowed, illuminates the ammeter. The speedometer, which the catalogue lists as an extra, was by 1938 a legal requirement. Other extras listed were a stoplight (now also a legal requirement); an eight-day clock, luggage carrier, pillion seat and footrests, and oversize tyres (3.50in section in place of 3.25).

Electrical demands are provided for, if not entirely satisfied, by the standard Lucas 6V, 30W dynamo with compensated voltage control charging an 11ah battery. The current situation (sorry about that!) is shown by the ammeter mounted on the tank panel. The beam from the 7in headlamp is lost in the quartz-halogen lights of today's traffic.

The handsome three gallon chromium-plated petrol tank does not have any reserve. A tyre pump is carried on the rear chainguard and the capacious toolbox has room for a full set of tools and a grease gun. There is the usual spring-up back stand and a front stand which doubles as the lower mudguard stay.

The machine is finished in traditional AJS black, tank panels and rim centres being picked out in black with gold lines. The quality of AMC's paintwork was second to none.

Taken all round, an attractive machine, both to look at and to ride. At 53 guineas it represented almost 20 times the average weekly wage in 1938, and you might just be able to afford one at the equivalent price today, if you dip into the holiday savings. It'll certainly be more fun than a wet week at the seaside.

