

Performance

THE PARALLEL TWIN will always be associated with the British motorcycle industry. Indeed, some folk seem to think that a Triumph that isn't a parallel twin can't really be called a Triumph.

AJS and Matchless parallel twins are unique in two respects. Firstly they were made in London — the others hailed from the West Midlands — and secondly their crankshafts are supported in the centre by a third main bearing.

Our test machine is a 1957 600cc AJS Model 30 belonging to George Burrage. A toolmaker by training, he restored the bike last winter, doing all the work himself. Now with 41,000 miles on the clock — 2500 of that since the rebuild — the Ajay is as near as you can get to riding a brand-new model.

The virtually 'square' engine — the bore and stroke are 72 x 72.8mm — started easily with the ignition lever set at full advance. At

7.5:1 the compression ratio is moderate by modern standards but the engine still required a hefty kick.

The Model 30 is a tallish bike, and the surface of the deep, wide



ROAD TEST

AJAY'S UNDERVALUED TWIN

*Don't dismiss the AJS
Model 30 twin because
it's a 600 and not a 650*

Peter Dobson



AJAY'S undervalued twin

continued

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Setting off on wet roads for a morning in the Cotswolds it was hard to select first gear from cold without unpleasant scunchings. That apart, the clutch and gearbox are near perfect, for 1957 was the year that Associated Motor Cycles (makers of AJS, Matchless, Norton, James and Francis-Barnett machines) dropped Burman transmissions and went over to components of its own design and make. The clutch hub contains a rubber cush drive, and, apart from

Twinseat is 31.5in from the ground. So starting the Ajay on its centre stand is probably the best idea for a rider who is less than six feet tall. Once started, the single-carburettor twin immediately

settled down to a steady tickover. Setting off on wet roads for a morning in the Cotswolds it was hard to select first gear from cold without unpleasant scunchings. That apart, the clutch and gearbox are near perfect, for 1957 was the year that Associated Motor Cycles (makers of AJS, Matchless, Norton, James and Francis-Barnett machines) dropped Burman transmissions and went over to components of its own design and make. The clutch hub contains a rubber cush drive, and, apart from that initial crunch, the clutch takes up very sweetly. However, the pull could be lighter. The gearchange is delightful: positive and light.

AMC claimed 33bhp at 6800rpm and I wouldn't question that figure. Yet much more

important is the healthy power on tap from the moment you drop the clutch. I was changing into second gear at 20mph, third at 30, and snicking into top at 40mph. I know that factory testers took the 600cc AJS and Matchless twins up to 70mph in second gear, and it did no harm, but there isn't any point to that in normal use.

Passing through a busy market town, the Ajay trickled happily along in top at 20mph on full retard, and pulled away at 25mph or less on full advance. The exhaust note from the pattern silencers was loud enough to stop pedestrians from stepping mindlessly into the road.

Leaving town, the bike felt stable on greasy surfaces beneath overhanging branches, but I took it gently as we climbed through sweeping bends until, emerging from the trees, we were into open country.

Accelerating hard, the twin's performance was impressive, but at 50-55mph the AJS began a disconcerting weave; not too alarming, but sufficient to suggest a rear wheel puncture. I said what everybody says on such occasions and stopped to check. The Avon tyre was fully inflated, but as soon as I set off again the weave set in and I realised that the Model 30 is sensitive to strong sidewinds.

After that I could ignore a weave or two and enjoy the ►

1957 Model 30 AJS

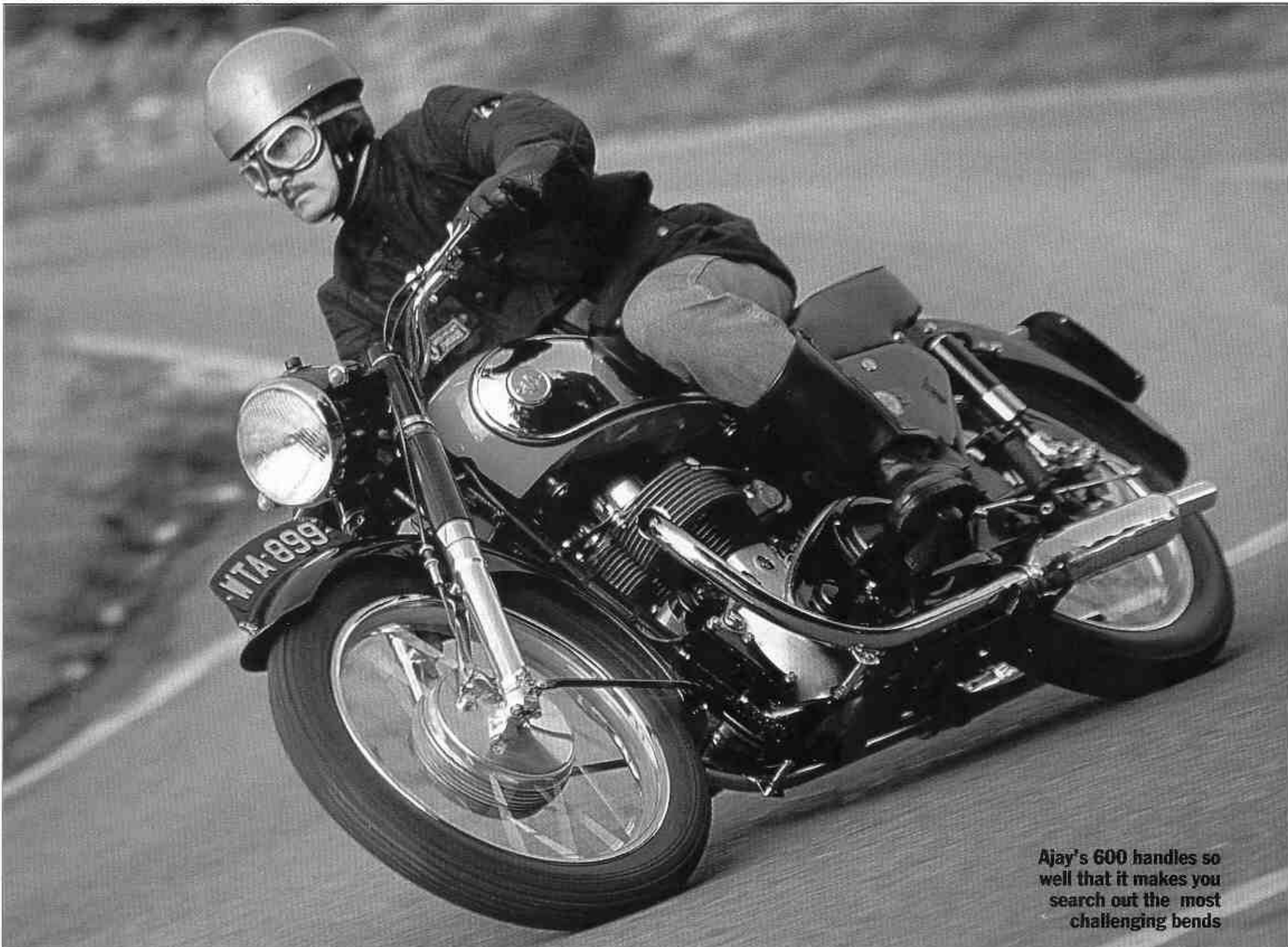
FOR	Good steering, handling, gearbox,
AGAINST	Poor riding position, loud exhaust,
WHAT'S IT WORTH?	£1200-£2500



Model 30 twin is a
tourer rather than a
sporting machine



■ 600cc AJS TWIN TEST



Ajay's 600 handles so well that it makes you search out the most challenging bends

AJAY'S undervalued twin

continued

views across rolling countryside. The Ajay is a tourer and I let it choose the pace. It's at its very best at just under an indicated 60mph with little vibration apparent. After that the shakes set in. Mild at first, they were tolerable at 70mph, and very little worse at 90-plus.

There is a school of thought that holds that the third main bearing makes vibration worse. There's certainly nothing soft about this engine. Mechanically it's quiet and doesn't slap or rattle, even though the original wire-wound pistons were discarded when the engine was rebuilt. The most noticeable mechanical noise is a rustle from the valve gear.

The steering and the handling are predictable and safe rather than superb.

The AJS falls somewhere in between a fairly comfortable tourer and a sporting thoroughbred. AMC were confident that they'd got it right — no steering damper is provided and I never felt the need of one.

The ride is comfortable; best on fast well-surfaced roads when bike and rider zoom along in level flight while the wheels go up and down. At low speeds on poor surfaces the front fork transmits some road shocks to the rider. The rear suspension is less obtrusive, though it's rather on the hard side even with the Girling units on the softest setting.

There is ample steering lock, and feet-up, full-lock, turns are easy. The rear brake lever is nicely placed beneath the rider's foot which helps. The 7in brakes are good; the front one very good indeed. The rear one showed no tendency to lock the wheel — reassuring on slippery roads.

On the debit side I found the handlebar a bit too flat and the footrests slightly too far forward. The tank is wide, but couldn't be described as an aid to natural childbirth, while the top edges of the knee grips pressed into my knees.

Equipment

NOT everybody likes the three-main bearing engine on the grounds of harshness, but lubrication of the big-end shells through the centre plain main bearing is more efficient than an end-fed crank. The engine of the test bike didn't

leak, other than the faintest weep around the bottom of the drive side barrel. That was surprising as the separate cast-iron barrels are deeply sunk into the crankcase.

The pressed-steel primary chaincase did drip oil, but not a lot. By comparison with most examples it isn't bad. A new retaining band, a new sealing ring, and meticulous assembly help.

The mudguards are both effective. They are not so deeply valanced as those of later models but work well. The roads were filthy when I started out, and while the front down tube and engine mounting did attract a little mud, the crankcase and exhaust pipes stayed quite clean.

By contemporary standards the centre stand was reasonably well designed although it's not an ergonomic triumph and requires a fair amount of effort. The side stand is much better. Swinging outwards from a mounting lug welded to the frame, it is accessible and doesn't lean the Ajay over at a crazy angle.

The full-width hubs are polished alloy, fore and aft, with straight spokes and adjustable tapered roller bearings. The rear wheel is quickly detachable with five large rubber-sleeved driving dowels transmitting power to the brake drum and integral



sprocket. George built both wheels himself using the original Dunlop rims. 'They took roughly 20 minutes each. I was surprised it was so easy,' he says.

The 120mph Smiths speedo — top speed was slightly less than 100mph — is in the separate 7in diameter headlamp which also holds the ammeter and is flanked by twin parking lights. The bike is often used at night and the headlight beam was very poor until George fitted a JG solid-state unit from Dave Lindsley to convert the electrical system to 12 volts.

The owner also sprayed the Model 30 with Belco cellulose Alguemarine Blau, a Volkswagen car colour recommended by the AJS and Matchless Owners Club as being as near as you can get to the original AMC mid-blue. 'I saw 12 different shades of blue at the Jampot Rally and if it's wrong it's still nice' George says.

History

MADE for three years only, from 1956 until the end of 1958, the Model 30 Springtwin and its Matchless G11 clone were meant to counter competition from Norton's 600cc Model 99, an AMC group product that had appeared in 1955. Both London-made models were replaced by 650cc twins.

The Model 30/G11 engines were identical and simply a stretched version of designer Phil Walker's original 500cc unit. This had powered the AJS Model 20 Springtwin and Matchless G9 Super Clubman from 1951 to 1962. It was also

the basis of the Matchless G45 racer.

The Model 30 had a touring image while the G11 was supposed to be a sports machine. Yet badges and colouring apart, the only difference was the megaphone-type silencers fitted to the Matchless.


Never a best seller, the 600cc AJS lacked the exciting styling of contemporary Triumph twins, although its steering and the handling were infinitely better. Nor could it match the neat good looks of the BSA A7s and A10s. Its chassis was no match for Norton's featherbed.

AMC had underestimated the selling power of bigger engines. The 650cc Triumph Thunderbird appeared in 1949 and Small Heath's Golden Flash in 1950. AMC did market CS and CSR super-sport versions of the Model 30 and G11, but the 600s never stood a chance against slightly larger-capacity models capable of speeds beyond the magic ton.

In terms of usable performance the advantage of the extra cubic centimetres was more notional than real. Yet to prospective buyers they were crucial.

Conclusion

THE MODEL 30's comfortable cruising speed is similar to that of other British parallel twins. Beyond 60mph all of them vibrate to some degree, the bigger and more powerful engines worst of all.

AMC's 600cc twins are honest, unpretentious, well made and finished, comfortable, durable, reliable, and cheap to run 

Second opinion

NEVER considered buying an AMC parallel twin in the 1960s. Especially after I rode a friend's 500cc Matchless. The G9 was smooth, comfortable and slow.

So this 600cc AJS came as quite a surprise. It sounded rorty enough to be a racer and handled so well that I left a three-foot scar in the road surface of a corner.

A magnificently torquey engine is matched by powerful brakes, making the Model 30 safe in modern traffic conditions. The ride proved to be far more comfortable than the standard set by contemporary Triumph or Norton twins.

A big drawback to riding this AJS hard is cruel vibration, but that's true of any large-capacity parallel twin and quite a few of the smaller ones.

So if you've always dismissed AMC's parallel twins as dull, think again. I didn't know what I'd been missing. Don't make the same mistake.

Peter Watson

Value for money



Reliability



Parts back-up



Specifications

1957 Model 30 AJS

ENGINE

Type: ohv parallel twin

Bore x stroke: 72 x 72.8mm

Capacity: 593cc

Compression ratio: 7.5:1

Carburation: 1 1/2in Amal Monobloc

Output: 33bhp @ 6800rpm

Electrical: Lucas magneto and dynamo, JG unit, 12v battery

TRANSMISSION

Clutch: Primary drive: single-row chain

Gearbox: 4-speed

CYCLE PARTS

Frame: tubular, full cradle, single downtube

Suspension (front): telescopic fork (rear): swinging arm with twin Girling units

Tyres: (front): 3.25 x 19in Avon SM (rear): 3.50 x 19in Avon SM

Brakes: 7in (178mm) sis drums

Wheelbase: 55in (1397mm)

Seat height: 31.5in (800mm)

Ground clearance: 5.5in (140mm)

Dry weight: 396lb (179.6kg)

Fuel capacity: 3.75 gallons (17 litres)

Oil capacity: 4 pints (2.3 litres)

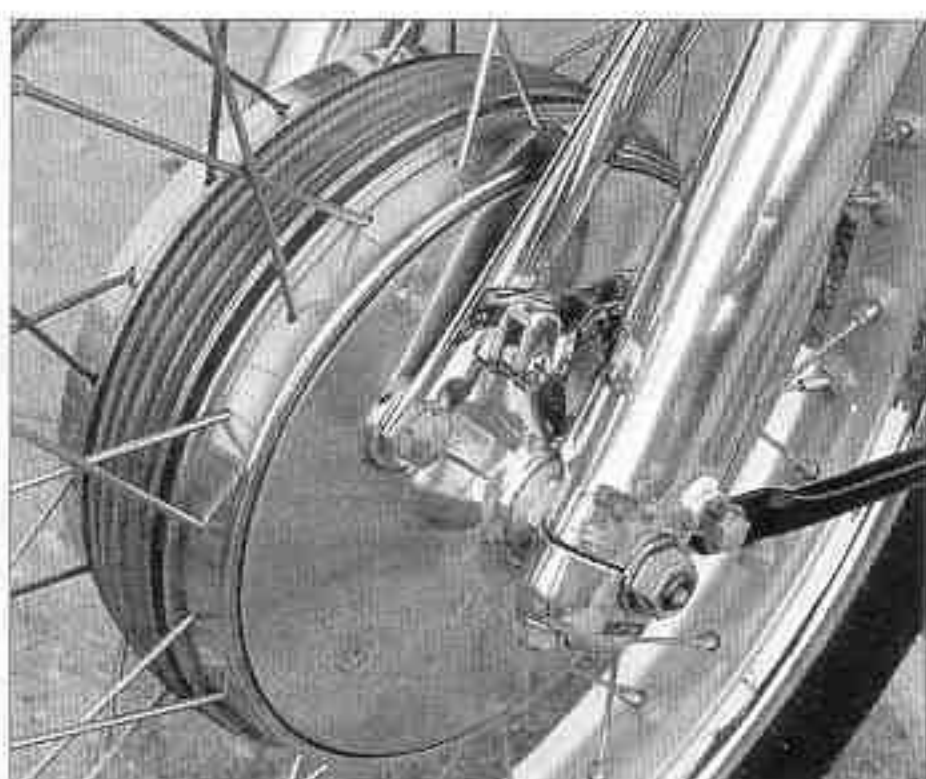
PERFORMANCE

Top speed: 98mph

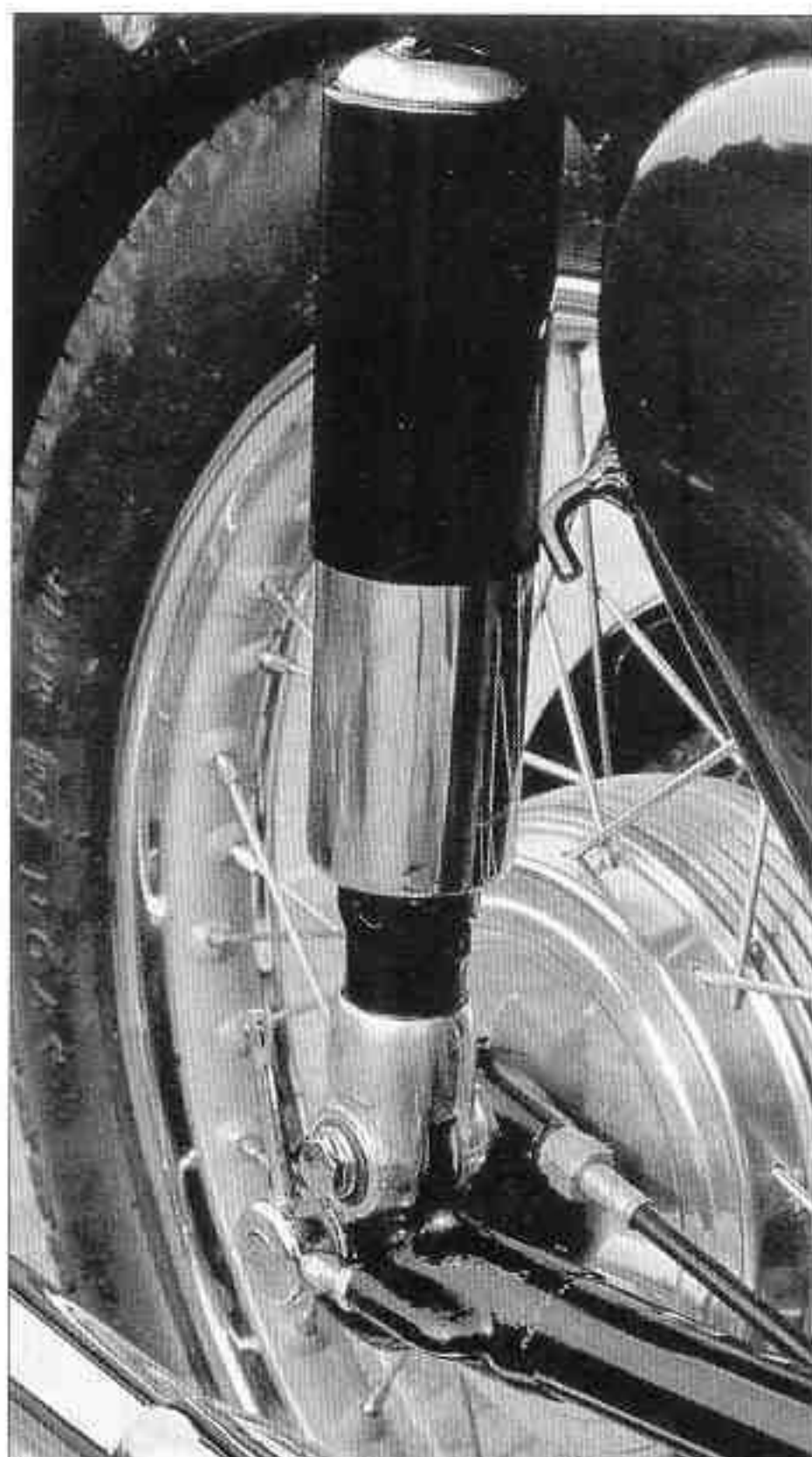
Fuel consumption: 55mpg



Twin parking lights add that Flash Gordon touch to the Model 30's headlamp assembly



Full-width hub brakes work well and mean that the big twin is safe in today's traffic



Girling suspension units are equipped with AMC's own clevis-end lower mounts