

ZMW

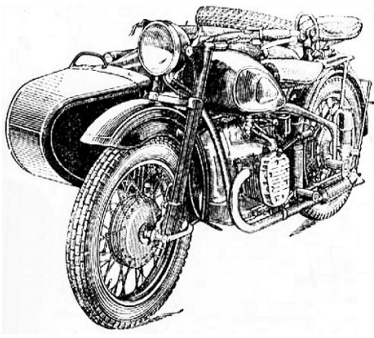
Zhang's Motor Works

www.cj750.net

B.M.W. R/75 Historical Information

It was September of 1939 when the Germans invaded Poland at the very beginning of World War II. Polish cavalry soldiers of 11 brigades rushed at German tank forces with lances about 3m long and sabers nearly 90cm in length overhead, and suffered a sad crushing defeat. This unbelievable story of valor hinted that the day of battle fought mainly by infantry and cavalry was over and mobility with fighting vehicles as the most important factor that would decide battle there after. The Treaty of Versailles concluded after Germany's defeat in World War I stipulated that the German Army should not consist of more than 100,000 officers and men nor possess even tanks or armored cars. Under these circumstances, the Reichswehr focused their attention to motorcycles (Krafrad or Krad) as a successor to cavalry orderly and bicycle orderly, and started to concentrate its energies upon production of cars, transport lorries and motorcycles for mechanization of fighting troops. Motorcycles among others were first used as the main body of mechanized troops since they had such advantages that they were relatively inexpensive and those developed for non-military use would be used as they were.

General Heinz Guderian, who was also called the father of German tank troops had vigorously promoted the mechanization of the German Army, looked back upon the summer of 1930 saying, "The third Prussian motorized battalion under my command consisted of four companies. The first company was of armored reconnaissance cars, the second was of armored cars, and the third was of armored cars with wooden dummy guns. On account of financial retrenchment and the limitation of the Treaty of Versailles, each of these armored cars was a sham one. Among my four companies, it was only the motorcycle company that had regular equipment and machine guns": Motorcycle units were not merely used for an orderly purpose. Just like tank troops in early years, they grew into the main body of ground troops in place of cavalry in 1934 to 1935. After the outbreak of the war, motorcycle units ran across all battlefields as elite fighting units. They always led the vanguard of mobile troops and fully displayed their superiority. About 1942, they were provided with the Schwimmwagen, armored cars and even tanks, and became the main body of reconnaissance battalions. In 1943, they further grew into an essential part of the tank grenadier divisions. In the latter half of the war, however, their leading place was gradually taken by half-track motorcycles (Kettenrad) which were better suited to bad roads.



ZMW

Zhang's Motor Works

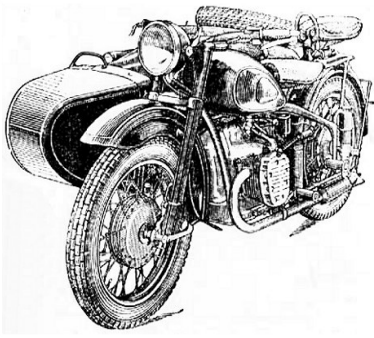
www.cj750.net

The German Army grouped motorcycles into three classes according to their displacement: small class... under 350 cc; middle class... 350cc-500cc, and large class... over 500cc. The large class contained motorcycles with the standard sidecar. Among quite a number of motorcycles of the German Army including the Zundapp, the NSU and DKW, those manufactured by BMW, Bavarian Motor Works, were the most widely used. Especially the R12 of 750 cc class with excellent acceleration and ability to carry heavy loads was appreciated by motorcycle soldiers. As warfare spread to Poland and France after the outbreak of World War II, a question arise if motorcycles were serviceable in actual fighting. On the Eastern Front, it was proven that they were unsatisfactory in durability. Motorcycles of the small class under 350 cc were rendered almost unusable in a few days' battle. The large class which was manufactured before the beginning of the war lasted only several weeks.

The country of Russia was too vast for motorcycles to run across. It was the BMW Model R75 with its sidecar having tough body and reverse gear that appeared at this point of time and displayed excellent ability. BMW's traditional 2-cylinder flat engine of 746cc had a maximum output of 26 hp and gave the 400 kg motorcycle with a sidecar a maximum speed of 95 km/h. Carrying a MG34 or sometimes even a trench mortar on its side car, the R75 served as the spearhead of attacks and showed activity. It was also used by the Waffen S.S. which guarded Hitler. A large number of the R75 were employed by the Afrika Korpes under the command of General Rommel and stood battles in severe, hot weather conditions, which raised its reputation further. The production of the BMW Model R75 was started in the autumn of 1940, and about 16,500 were sent to battlefields until the end of the war. The K-M72 motorcycle which is being used by the Russian Army is a slavish copy of the German R75 captured during the war.

Motorcycle Units

A tank division had motorcycle infantry units. Two or three motorcycle companies and a HQ company formed a motorcycle battalion. A motorcycle company had 18 motorcycles some of which were equipped with a sidecar. After the wars against Poland and France, however, the motorcycle infantrymen were incorporated into the Tank Grenadier and the Tank Reconnaissance Battalion. An average infantry division on the Eastern Front in the early stage of the war used 452 motorcycles including those with a sidecar, made up as follows: 17 (HQ company), 45 (reconnaissance unit), 32 (signal battalion), 141 (infantry regiment), 40 (artillery regiment), 45 (antitank gun battalion), 44 (engineer battalion) and 88 (supply unit).



ZMW

Zhang's Motor Works

www.cj750.net

An average infantry division in 1943 to 1944 came to use an increasing number of Kubelwagens and Kettenkrad which had excellent durability and various uses in place of motorcycles. Thus, the number of motorcycles it used was reduced to 168.

Motorcycles and their units played an unimaginably important role in German troops during World War II. Each of the motorcycle soldiers ran himself across muddy ground, snowy and frozen battlefields or the sands where he had no place to hide himself to carry orders, necessities or wounded soldiers. Motorcycle soldiers were unforgettable and reliable "comrades" for German officers and men.

Motorcycles and their sidecar which showed activity in Europe especially on the western front were painted field grey or panzer grey, while those used by the Afrika Korps were dark yellow. At the time there were no camouflaged motorcycles, but after 1943 German military vehicles came to be painted mainly in dark yellow and a small number of motorcycles wore camouflage painting, eg dark yellow spotted with red brown and dark green/ dark yellow with red brown only and uni-color colored camouflage of dark green.