



Die BMW R 68: Das Traummotorrad von Alt und Jung.
The BMW R 68: the dream motorcycle for old and young.

details such as saddle and mudguards. The third version launched in the autumn of 1953 had been completely revised. Like the Boxer motorcycles, the R 25/3 was designed with full hub brakes and alloy wheel rims. The completely new telescopic fork and the modified tank were striking features. Although the engine only delivered 13 bhp – with many believing that this bike was underpowered – the R 25/3 still achieved a top speed of 120 km/h.

1954 was a record year for BMW, with nearly 30,000 motorcycles being manufactured and sold, although the company had to deal with a strike in the Bavarian metalworking industry. This action brought production in August to a halt for three and a half weeks and prevented production and sales figures from climbing even higher. This is all the more astonishing given that the overall market for motorcycles in Germany had been declining since 1952 and had again shrunk by around 25 percent during the course of 1954 compared with the previous year.

This collapse was due to the economic upturn in Germany – which became known as the Economic Miracle. For many Germans, the motorcycle was only a temporary solution in the transfer from the bicycle to the dream of owning their own automobile. The manufacturers reacted to

these aspirations with microcars, like the Messerschmitt cabin scooter, the Zündapp Janus and the Goggomobil from Glas. BMW also introduced a car like this to its range in 1955. When we look back, these automotive designs with very low-power engines seem rather quaint. But this kind of vehicle was just what the market wanted when they were launched in the mid-1950s. They were good value, kept the occupants dry and brought them to their destination in comfort.

Although automobile business at BMW was a beneficiary of this development, motorcycle sales continued to go down in subsequent years. This was hardly surprising, given that the Boxer models were more expensive than the popular microcars and only real biking enthusiasts remained true to the motorcycle. BMW wasn't the only company affected by this crisis in the motorcycle industry. Aside from numerous assembly companies, a number of famous German manufacturers like Adler, Ardie and Horex also disappeared from the market.

This situation also put an end to the project for a scooter in 1955. The first prototypes had already been produced by 1953 and the scooter was ready for mass production by the close of 1954. However,

the management could see the writing on the wall and recognized that the end was nigh as far as the boom in scooters was concerned. What's more, BMW wouldn't have had any key competitive advantage

1955: the motorcycle boom is over.

over other manufacturers operating in this segment. We may well regret this decision when looking at the extant examples of the "R 10" project today. However, from a commercial perspective, this decision to develop the Isetta "cabin scooter" instead of the conventional scooter was absolutely right.

The true extent of the negative development in the two-wheeler market couldn't have been predicted when BMW launched the two new models R 50 and R 69 at the beginning of 1955. The new models used the engines from the predecessors R 51/3 and R 68. The 500 cc power unit delivered 26 bhp in combination with the bigger carburetors from the 600 cc touring motorcycle. Gears were now only changed using a pedal and the auxiliary gearbox-mounted lever on the right-hand side was consigned to the history books. By contrast with the engine, the full swinging arm frame was a completely new design. The front swinging arm mounted on roller bearings was based on a development by the British engineer