





40 YEARS OF BMW'S /5 SERIES FREEDOM AND RIDING PLEASURE

By Fred Jakobs Photos BMW AG, Getty Images

The launch of the /5 Series in 1969 marked a milestone in BMW's motorcycle history, not only because it was the first generation to be completely manufactured in the Berlin-Spandau BMW Plant, but also because it was the first motorcycle in fourteen years to feature a completely new design and construction. Moreover, it represented the rediscovery of the motorcycle in the Seventies like no other BMW model line.

From the middle of the 1950s, the market gave the motorcycle a hard time. Only a short time ago, it had been celebrated as the symbol of individual mobility and the economic boom in the 1950s, the so-called "Economic Miracle", and now it found itself in the grubby corner with poor people's vehicles. All over Europe, the number of registrations was slumping, and by the end of 1960 numerous popular brands had completely disappeared from the market altogether. BMW was affected by this slump as well, but was at least able to prevent a complete stop of its motorcycle production, thanks to a relatively high demand in America and a stable business with public authorities.

Even then, BMW remained true to its market strategy and continued to manufacture "quality on two wheels". The production of simple and small models, or even mopeds or autocycles, was out of the question. The BMW entry-level models with 250 cc one-cylinder engines were classified as upper-middle-class on the market. Both the top of the range model BMW R 68, featuring 600 cc displacement and an output of 35 hp, and its successors, R 69 and R 69S, boasted road performances only very few sports cars could achieve back then. Even then, BMW did not offer their customers simple and economic means of transportation, but rather dynamic driving machines on two wheels. Yet these motorcycles suffered one drawback: their price tags equalled those of many small cars – and in the times of the "Economic Miracle" a car, no matter how small or odd it was, embodied many people's dearest wish.

In the 1960s, production figures were still at rock bottom. There was not enough money for new developments, and the out-of-date models hardly attracted any new customers. The middle of the decade finally saw a light at the end of the tunnel. Overseas, especially in the USA, the interpretation of the role of the motorcycle had changed and promoted it from a means of transportation to a popular sport and leisure equipment.

When BMW started to develop a completely new motorcycle series in the middle of the 1960s, the engineers relied on this glimmer of hope. They customized the new models according to the new demands, even though this meant that they had to give up many a dearly-held habit. For example, sidecar compatibility, a feature that had characterized almost every model since 1923, was given up, so the new models were only designed for one person. For the first time the fenders were made of synthetic material. Also, the model range became more colourful: whereas BMW motorcycles for private customers had generally only been available in black, the /5 Series came in different colours. As well as black and "cream white", already used for the R 69S, the new models were also available in silver, blue, red, green, and curry.

BMW offered three engine variants. The top-of-the-range model, the R 75/5, featured 750 cc displacement and an output of 50 hp. The engine was built into a newly developed tubular double cradle frame. The rear wheel was guided in a swing-arm, and the front wheel suspension featured a telescopic fork, which replaced the pre-



← FAR LEFT This is how beautifully riding pleasure can be: a photo model in a provocative pose on the BMW R 75/5 in 1966.

← LEFT The colour palette of the /5 Series with chrome-plated tank, which was used from 1972.



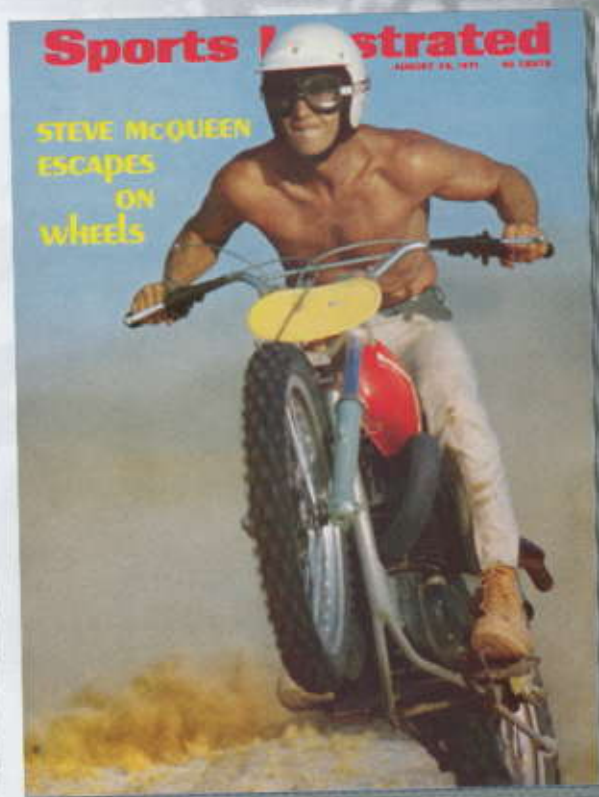
← LEFT Sporting drivers also looked great on the BMW /5.

THE BMW /5 SERIES (1969 - 1973)

Model	BMW R 50/5	BMW R 60/5	BMW R 75/5
Displacement	498 cc	599 cc	745 cc
Power	32 hp at 6,400 rpm	40 hp at 6,400 rpm	50 hp at 6,200 rpm
Weight	205 kg	210 kg	210 kg
Top Speed	157 km/h	167 km/h	175 km/h
Price	DM 3,696	DM 3,996	DM 4,996
No. of units	7,865	22,721	38,370

→ RIGHT On the cover of "Sports Illustrated", Steve McQueen demonstrates the sporty and masculine side of riding a motorcycle...

↓ BELOW ...while the unknown bikini-beauty represents the sensual side.



vious leading link fork. Building on components tried and tested since 1923 – the boxer engine, the cardan shaft drive, and the tubular double cradle frame – BMW had managed to develop a modern motorcycle to meet the demands of the new times. The motorcycle no longer served as a means to get from A to B; people now rode it for the sake of the riding pleasure. It was virtually reinvented as sports and leisure equipment.

Featuring the actor Steve McQueen, stripped to the waist, cruising in the dunes on his Husqvarna 200, the cover page of "Sports Illustrated" in August 1971 epitomized this reinterpretation. In the same year, McQueen made his appearance, both as protagonist and producer, in "On any Sunday", a movie that many cinema enthusiasts consider the best film ever made about motorcycle racing. Just as "On any Sunday" symbolized the sporting aspect of the motorcycle, "Easy Rider" symbolized the freedom and the adventures of the new generation of motorcyclists. To the sound of "Born to be Wild", Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper embodied

the nonconformity of bikers in a world full of conventions and constraints.

This new image propelled the motorcycle market forwards enormously. At the end of 1960, numerous manufacturers brought powerful models with 750 cc displacement onto the market, thus meeting the needs of a growing clientele demanding maximum performance. After the launch of the BMW R 75/5 and the Honda CB 750, motorcycles suddenly attracted many younger fans again. Numerous celebrities, such as the Bavarian Minister-President Franz-Josef Strauß and the multi-millionaire Gunther Sachs, had their pictures taken on BMW machines, thereby promoting a new acceptance of the motorcycle in high society.

When sales figures rose again, BMW benefited from the boom. In 1970 the sales volume exceeded the amount of 10,000 units for the first time in fourteen years. With roughly 30,000 vehicles sold, BMW established a new sales record in 1977. The company's commitment to the motorcycle turned out to have been

the right decision; more than that, the /5 Series had been the right product at the right time. Even though its nominal performance ranked behind motorbikes like the Honda CB 750 with an output of 67 hp, the BMW R 75/5 revealed its strengths in comparative tests on the Nürburgring race track when it achieved better lap times thanks to the excellently tuned chassis.

A look at the sales figures shows that the /5 Series was the first to have a top-of-the-range model achieve the highest sales volume. Apart from the authorities, few private customers picked the 500 cc model R 50/5. This was clear evidence that riding pleasure had become the decisive factor in choosing which motorcycle to buy.

→ RIGHT From 1969, the /5 motorcycle series was manufactured in Berlin. Here a BMW R 75/5 is about to roll off the production line, 1972.



40 YEARS OF MOTORCYCLE PRODUCTION IN THE BMW PLANT IN BERLIN

The production start of the /5 Series exactly 40 years ago symbolized another new start for BMW as well: the transfer of all motorcycle production from the Munich Plant to Berlin-Spandau. BMW had taken over the plant in 1939 as an aircraft engine production plant when they merged with the Brandenburg Motor Works (Bramo). After World War II the plant was used to manufacture scythes and sickles, and later machine tools. From 1958, BMW motorcycle frames were man-

ufactured in Berlin. As of 1966, the final assembly of the motorcycles was also moved to Berlin. The complete components manufacture was then transferred to Spandau in May 1969. In June, the first motorbike of the /5 Series was assembled by hand. Mass production started in September; the same month saw 202 R 60/5 units rolling off the production line. Roughly 1.9 million BMW motorcycles have followed to this day.