

DERIVADOS DE BICICLETAS

The Spanish motor cycle industry is a flourishing one as there are indeed a whole host of manufacturers dotted around the country. Some are almost household names in Britain: Montesa, Bultaco and Ossa, for example. Others, though, are virtually unheard of. However, there is another marque which, although well known in Grand Prix racing, is only now starting to filter through on to British roads. That one is Derbi which is produced by the Nacional Motor factories situated near Barcelona. A famous name in its homeland, its production of mostly 50cc machines is one of the largest in Spain.

The motor cycle production of Nacional Motor SA did not start, in fact, until 1951, although the factory was operating many years earlier. The name Derbi does give a clue to the early days of production. Take the phrase Derivados de Bicicletas (derivations of bicycles) and you will see that Derbi comes from combining the first parts of each word; this is,

quite simply, how the Derbi motor cycles were born.

The factory opened initially in 1922, although at that time it could be more accurately described as a workshop. The place was set up by Simeon Rabasa Singla, in the village of Mollet, on the outskirts of Barcelona, for repairing and assembling bicycles. In fact, bicycles were available for hire from this first workshop. Soon, Simeon Rabasa moved into manufacturing by producing bicycle frames, which he did for many years, aided by his brothers.

The firm's first real contact with motor

cycles occurred when the Rabasa brothers were asked to build frames for some of the first Spanish motor cycles. This is a natural progression when it is remembered that the company had earned a high reputation for bicycle frames. Later, more motor cycle components were produced for other Spanish motor cycle manufacturers.

In 1944, the company was reformed as 'Bicicletas Rabasa', and business was increased. So came 1950, and Simeon Rabasa made the decision to produce motor cycles on a full-time basis. On 11 November of that year, the company



Above: high ground clearance, long travel suspension and wide, upswept handlebars give the Derbi Cross 50V4 dramatic good looks for a machine of only 49cc and ensure continued interest from the younger end of the market



became Nacional Motor SA, the title of which is retained today. Even at this time, however, it was still not 'Derbi'. The first motor cycles of 1951 were given the name SRS, the initials of the company founder Simeon Rabasa Singla. Initially of 49cc, 95, 98 and 250cc models were quickly added to the range. Then, in 1955, a 350cc twin was presented, together with a 125cc; by this time, the new name of Derbi was in use. All two-strokes, the early Derbis, although rarely seen outside Spain, were well up-to-date when compared with similar capacity machines produced in Italy and Germany at that time. The 98cc and 250cc models had plunger rear suspension, large 'swing' saddles, and a neat headlight enclosure, reminiscent of Jawa and Triumph machines. The 1955 350cc twin was more advanced: it had swinging arm rear suspension, and was better styled, with

steel pressings topped by a dual seat. The rear mudguard was hinged to ease wheel removal, and the front brake was of generous dimensions and incorporated cooling fins. The cylinder head was of unusual style, appearing almost completely round in its configuration.

So successful were these early Derbis, that army contracts went to the factory, and a 250cc military model went into production. This was based on the standard 250, but had twin upswept exhaust systems, a flat, round cylinder head, crashbars, and what appeared to be rather light spindly dampers fitted just forward and parallel to the front forks. The factory expanded with this success, and an interest was taken in the introduction of a wider range of smaller capacity machines which the man in the street was clamouring for at the time.

Development went on apace, and

Above left: works rider Rafael Olmedo on a 75cc Derbi during a 1976 motocross

Above: racing has long been an important activity for Derbi; this is Barry Smith on his way to victory in the 1968 50cc TT

concentrated primarily on the 50cc class, although a new 125cc touring model called the Especial came onto the scene in 1964. This was a more up-to-date model which eventually replaced the existing 125 that had been in production for quite a number of years.

New from Derbi in 1964 was the Gran Sport in both 50 and 75cc capacities. A sporty looking mount, it had its engine suspended underneath the main single round frame tube running from the swinging arm pivot to the steering head. Dropped bars and an air scoop on the



front brake set off those two little racers. Both with four gears and with the 50cc producing 6bhp and the 75cc 8.5, top speeds were claimed to be 56 and 63mph respectively. Making full use of its steel-pressing knowledge, Derbi introduced, in 1964, the 50cc GT with spine frame, full width 125mm diameter brakes, and a more sedate 3.5bhp at 5000rpm. The same power unit fitted the 'Junior' which was a conventional machine with a 'step-thru-frame'.

Derbi was already, by this time, active in 50cc Grand Prix racing and in motocross. Victories were coming Derbi's way, and it gained the 50cc World Championships in 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972.

During 1965, the factory introduced the 50cc Carreras Cliente production racer. Very conventional, with an air cooled 50cc motor, it had a compression ratio of 15 to 1, and a claimed output of

12bhp at 12,000rpm. A speed of around 95mph was guaranteed. Ironically, as Derbi was putting a really fast machine into production, sales of her machines in Spain dropped, the reason being new legislation by the Spanish Government restricting lightweight machines to 25mph, pegging weights and so on. The only solution was a complete re-think, so racing activities were stopped so that all available personnel were able to assist in the design and construction of new prototypes to overcome the legislative problems.

The results of this concentrated activity were ready in time for the 1966-7 season. The commuter, and in particular the ladies, were offered the Derbi 'Scotmatic', a machine which was really a combination of a scooter and a moped. Fully enclosed, including the chain, it had pedals and automatic transmission.

In fact, it was at the time, the only machine of its type made in Spain.

Moving up the scale a little to 75cc, Derbi presented a very attractive little off-road model called the 75 Trial. The tubular 'spine' frame had the 74cc two-stroke motor suspended below, but with a very high ground clearance. It was enclosed from the rear of the cylinder head to the top rear suspension unit pivot, and it was altogether a very smart looking machine. Its output was 7bhp at 6500rpm, on a compression ratio of 9 to 1. The gearbox had four ratios and electronic ignition, which was not very common at the time. This machine, incidentally, was produced not only for Spain, but also for the flourishing US market.

A new 125cc model, too, was produced for 1966, the 125 Super. The 54mm x 54mm unit-construction engine was only moderately tuned to give 7bhp at 5500 rpm, but it was a good touring machine. The rear chain was fully enclosed, and there was well styled steel enclosure at the rear of the engine. The weight of this model was 88kg, and the maximum speed was 63mph; it was also available with a dolphin type fairing if required. This was a success for Derbi and the bike remained in production for many years.

The 74cc Gran Sport was modified in 1967, but of more interest that year was the renewed activity of the Derbi racing department. A brand new 125cc V-twin racer was wheeled out; a two-stroke, naturally, it had the cylinder heads facing forwards. Indeed, it was as if the Derbi racing technicians had been anxious to make up for lost time spent with the 'bread and butter' models.

During 1968, the 50cc Scotmatic was changed, with much of the rear enclosure disappearing; the result was a more modern machine, which gave it a further boost in the lucrative 50cc class Spanish market.

Racing activity was continued in 1970, and Derbi succeeded in gaining both 50cc and 125cc World Championships. The 125cc twin was performing well up to expectations, with an output of 34bhp at 14,500rpm; it had two disc valves and six gears, plus, of course, electronic ignition. The weight was only 85kg and the top speed was 140mph. The 50cc model was, as the results proved, performing well, too. The single cylinder motor was producing 15.5bhp at 15,500rpm and, like the twin, had six speeds, but one rotary inlet valve. Weight was right down, at 60kg which aided the machine to attain its maximum of 118mph. The star rider of the time was, of course, the brilliant Angel Nieto.

A new 50cc model went into production during 1971, much in the same mould as some of the existing models, the Antorcho Olimpica Especial Extra. More time was spent by the racing department

and the factory in general in aiding the racing machine development, and now even more power was extracted from the 125 twin and the 50cc single. The 125 and 50cc were producing 37 and 17bhp and speeds of 145 and 120mph, respectively, which secured them many victories.

Apart from the continuing successes in competition, 1972 was an important year for everyone at Nacional Motor SA. The company had been in operation for fifty years, and now embraced three villages: Mollet, Martorellas, and San Fausto. The minute staff of 1922 was now increased to more than six hundred and, on 22 December, there was a big celebration. The foundation stone for another new factory was laid with Mr Andres Rabasa, son of the original founder and now in charge.

The new factory under construction meant that production would be on the increase, but the normal machines were in need of change; they were still selling well but, to keep ahead of the opposition, they needed new additions. Once more, the Derbi factory withdrew from racing, just as it did in the mid 1960s, so that all the design personnel could devote their efforts to new commercial models. A batch of fifty 50cc Angel Nieto Replicas were produced for private riders for the 1973 season but, apart from these, work continued on the development of the production models.

The first of these to appear were the Coyote, Coyote Super and the Correcaminos. They were all 50cc models with two-stroke engines producing 2.7 bhp at 5700rpm, and were designed to fit in with the Spanish licensing laws which restricted the speed to 25mph. These were not fast machines by Derbi standards, but were ideal for the type of market which the factory was aiming at — what the new models lacked in speed, they made up for in good design and style. The frame was a development of the earlier models, of tubular construction, with the engine suspended underneath. The tank and seats were integral, and exhaust systems upswept and tucked away neatly under the seat units. Knobbly tyres were fitted, and the overall high appearance gave the bikes a real 'go anywhere' look. The Coyote models had tyres of 18 and 17in, while the Correcaminos had 15in ware. More variations followed, some with four gears and more power, and some with higher speeds. The Coyote SE 4V for instance produced 4.5bhp on introduction, and had a top speed of 45mph.

Derbi exhibited two new prototypes at the 1974 Barcelona Show: the 50cc GTS and the 125cc Competicion Cliente. The 50 GTS was a development of the Coyote machine but it fell more into the 'sports roadster' category. In fact, it went into production for 1975 as the GT-4V

and only slightly differed from its original prototype. The 125cc Competicion Cliente on the other hand was a pure racing 125, and was the main attraction on the Derbi stand at that exhibition.

Yet more new 50cc models came onto the scene in 1975, including some luxury tourers, which completed Derbi's range of up-to-date models.

That assumption was far from correct, however, for work was already well advanced on a new two-stroke twin of 187cc which would be for normal road use. Called the 2002 Grand Prix and introduced in the spring of 1975 it was a parallel twin, the cylinders were set with a forward inclination of 15°. Compression was 10 to 1, and the output a healthy 26bhp at 8000rpm. The gearbox contained six ratios and there were two carburettors. Another version, the SL was also offered, and this included 'extras' like double-disc front brakes, electric starter and gas dampers. This was an important advance for, although the early days of the Nacional Motor company had produced machines up to 350cc, the ensuing years had, overall, reflected a general reduction in capacity.

Although Derbi has always been associated with Grand Prix racing, its link with motocross must not be forgotten. In 1975, for instance, it won the 75cc Spanish Championship, and started to contest the 1976 75 and 125cc events with rider Rafael Olmedo; he was injured early in the season, thus spoiling his and Derbi's chances of good placings, however. In road racing, Benjamin Grau won the 250cc Spanish Championship, winning five events outright.

Work continued on the development of new machines for general production in 1977, including a replica of the 75cc motocross machine. This particular

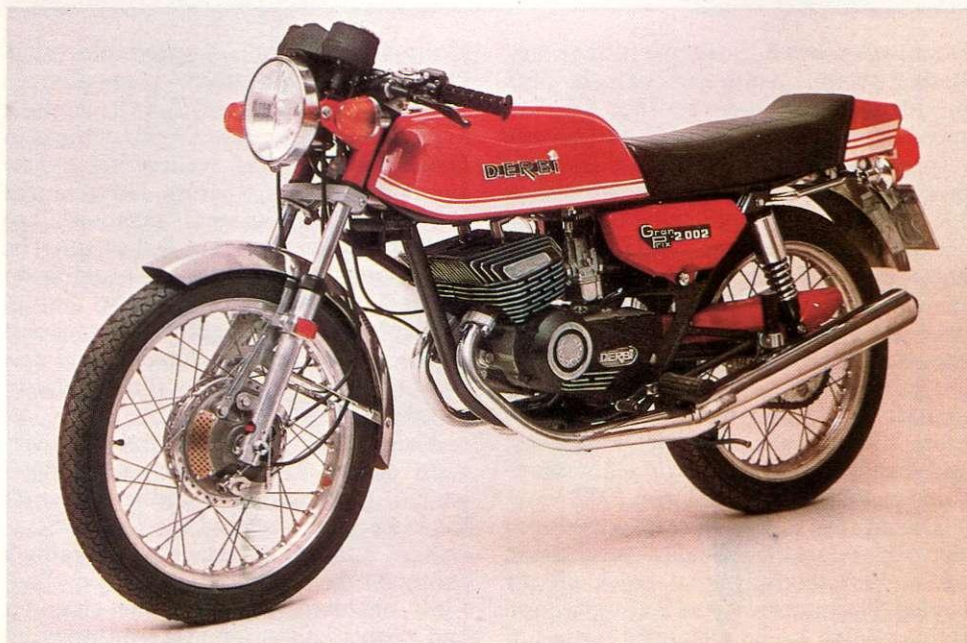
model is now in production, and it is an ultra-high performance motor cycle, boasting a 12.5 to 1 compression ratio, six gears and 15bhp at 11,000rpm; its weight is 70kg. Three other new introductions for 1977, supplementing the already strong range, are the 50cc Montreal, GTS4V and the Diablo. The former two are road machines, while the latter is a machine in trial style to suit the youngsters who want to emulate their idols on the much hotter models.

New 75 and 125cc motor cycles are planned to go into production later this year but, at the time of writing, are still in the development stages; a new automatic moped is also in preparation.

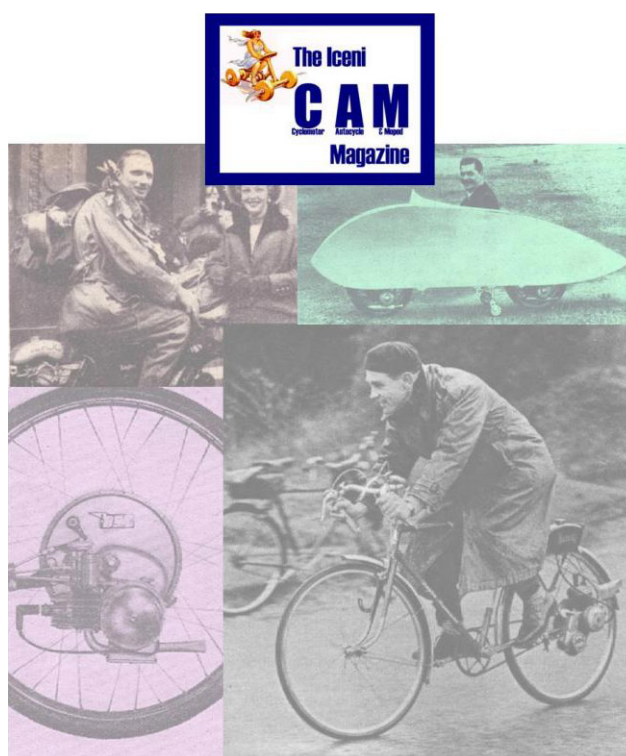
In sport, there has been a further expansion of activity, for a team of 125cc riders including riders Rafael Olmedo and Diosdado Stouvenakers have been entered for the 125cc World Moto Cross Championship. Olmedo will also contest the 250cc Spanish Championship. Naturally, road racing will not be neglected either, for Benjamin Grau will be again mounted on the 250cc Derbi.

Although Spain is not in the Common Market, Derbi now has a new plant in Perpignan, France, that will cater for selling machines to EEC countries. One of the models being assembled there is the 2002 twin. So, into the future goes Nacional Motor and Derbi. With even more new plants under construction, and a good range in production, the Rabasa family have indeed succeeded in steering the company safely through the past 55 years. DJ

Below: the sporty good looks of the 2002 Grand Prix are more than skin deep; its 187cc twin-cylinder engine gives 26bhp and endows the bike with lively performance



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