

ALTHOUGH the Japanese fifties have been on the British market for well over a twelve-month, the *Suzuki Sovereign* is the first that we have been able to get hold of for road-test. The *Sovereign* is actually a luxury motorcycle that has a 50 c.c. engine, and bears no relation to scooter or moped. It comes complete with electric starter, flashing indicators and full springing, but is offered at a surprisingly competitive price.

Apart from the luxury equipment, the lay-out of the bike is quite conventional, with air-cooled single-cylinder two-stroke engine suspended well clear of the pressed-steel frame's underside arch. Access to the cylinder head for servicing is only restricted by the two plastic legshields, fitted as standard.

The bore is 41 mm. and stroke 38 mm., and there is a 6.7 to 1 compression ratio. Starting is by electric starter or folding kick-start—both are provided on this model, but a kick-start-only model is available at £19 cheaper.

Wiring of the *Sovereign* is shown in detail in a diagram supplied with the handbook. The circuit includes a starter-dynamo, coil ignition and a 12-volt battery.

There are four gears, mounted in unit with the engine and operated by a rocking pedal and neutral is located below first gear, not between first and second. The clutch is a multiple disc type, running in oil, and primary drive is by gear, final drive by enclosed chain.

A feature of both wheels is the large, finned brake drums, housing the internal expanding brakes. Rear brake is operated by the right foot, and the

ROAD TEST REPORT

Suzuki Sovereign

M15D 50 c.c. motorcycle with electric starter, from Japan

front brake by the right handlebar lever. The wheels are 17-inches in diameter and carry 2½-inch tyres. Springing at the front is by leading link and at the rear by swinging arm, both suspension units controlled by shock absorbers.

Both the mudguards are deeply valanced and that at the front is made of flexible plastic. Two identical moulded compartments protrude from each side of the frame, under the dual seat, and these house the battery (right hand side) and the tool box (left hand side).

Despite the electric starter, the legshields, the flashing indicators, the two rear mirrors, the dual-seat and the rear carrier, the total weight of the *Sovereign* is only 133 lb.

In use

The first sight of the *Sovereign* is impressive. Built with clean lines and attractive colours, the bike is beautifully made and finished, and the standard equipment supplied adds to

the impression of this being something special.

A key-operated main switch in the tool box cover has four positions, operating ignition, lights plus ignition and parking lights only in succession. Switching to ignition from the off position turns on the neutral indicator light and charging light and supplies current to the horn and indicators. The third position turns on the headlights (a dip-switch is mounted on the handlebar) in addition, but the fourth position turns everything off except the parking light—in this position the key can be withdrawn. The same key operates the steering lock, so, without it, the machine would be completely useless.

Quick and easy starting, the handbook tells us, is ensured with the aid of a cold-start lever on the handlebar. On the test machine we found this unnecessary, even in the coldest weather, as the engine always fired immediately on touching the starter button. Similar response was obtained using the kick-starter, only really

SPECIFICATION

Engine:

Air cooled, 2 stroke, single cylinder 50 c.c. Bore, 41 mm., stroke, 38 mm., compression ratio, 6.7 to 1. Claimed output, 4.2 b.h.p. at 8,000 r.p.m.

Transmission:

4 speed foot-operated gear box, primary drive by gear, final by chain. Multiple disc clutch running in oil.

Electrics:

12v. system with battery, starter-dynamo, coil ignition, flashing indicators, main, dip, parking and brake lights.

Price:

£114 9s.

Suspension:

Leading link at front, swinging arm at rear, both with hydraulic dampers.

Wheels:

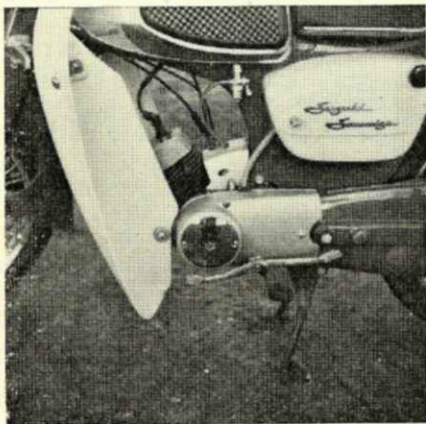
17 inch with 2½ inch tyres, large, finned brake drums and internal expanding brakes.

Dimensions and weight:

59.4 inches long, 23.6 inches wide, 35 inches high. Wheelbase 45 inches, ground clearance 4.7 inches. Weight, 133 lbs.

Importers:

Suzuki (G.B.) Ltd., Golden Hillock Rd., Birmingham 11.



needed if the battery is flat. One of our testers commented on the silent operation of the electric starter—there is no sound of the thing labouring away, you simply realise that the engine is running!

Throttle response is immediate, and the engine runs free of transmission noise and with a relatively quiet exhaust note. If there is a heavy rider aboard or the bike is standing on an uphill slope, some clutch slipping is required even with first gear for a smooth get-away. But once the *Sovereign* starts to move and the engine can rev., there is plenty of power available. We found this reaction from the engine in all the gears—you have to engage the right gear at the right time to achieve maximum pulling power. As there are four well-chosen gears to use, this is no problem and it was quite a delight to engage a higher gear a little too soon and then feel the surge of power as the revs increased.

Third gear will take the bike up to well over 30 m.p.h., and the maximum

speed we reached in top was 44 m.p.h. The claimed top speed of 50 m.p.h. was, we felt, wishful thinking on level roads. As the engine is built for high speed running (maximum output is achieved at 8,000 r.p.m.) it was quite happy being held at full throttle for long periods, even in the lower gears.

Some riders may find the downward change gear operation a trifle awkward—it is a down kick with the heel on the rear arm of a rocking pedal. As this pedal is directly under the rider, his leg is folded well back anyway and a downward movement of the heel cannot be slick without easing back in the seat or up on the footrests. There is no pedal adjustment.

Easy to hold

Despite the very low weight, the *Sovereign* has the feel of a full-sized motorbike when being ridden—there's no suggestion that it could be a moped without pedals. The knee-grip tank, comfortable dualseat and well-placed handlebars help the rider feel part of the machine, and the manoeuvrability

is accordingly easier. Unfortunately the narrow tyres do not afford the grip on corners of a bigger machine, so its motorcycle abilities are cut a little short there. Bigger tyres would mean more unsprung weight, a drawback on such a light bike.

The brakes could not be faulted, and any tendency to skid sideways on a crash stop could be easily corrected due to the lightness of the bike. For even the longest ride, the suspension was just right, being fairly soft and very comfortable. Speed on bad surfaces had to be kept down, though, because of a tendency to bounce.

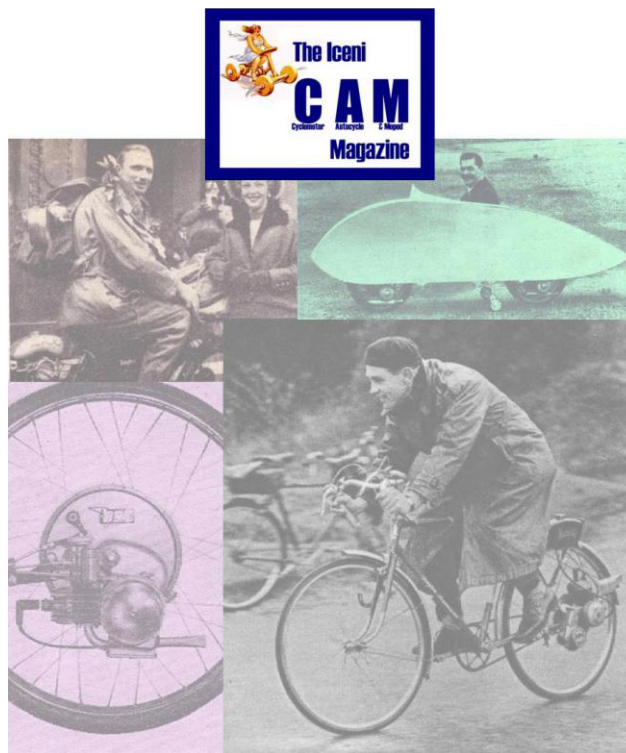
With a 12-volt battery, there were few fears about the electrics. Even with headlamps and wipers on, there was power enough to operate the starter repeatedly. The lights, headlamps and wipers, were very bright indeed, and easily operated by thumb switches on the left and right handlebars. This sort of lighting is such a vast improvement on current 50 c.c. lights that it is almost worth buying the *Sovereign* for this alone! We had our doubts about the wisdom of having the main switch so low on the side of the bike, as it was a long stretch and might prove dangerous when riding suddenly out of well-lit roads into the dark.

A small rear carrier, as shown in the photo, was supplied with the test machine, but this has proved unsuitable and a bigger, sturdier version is now supplied as standard, with fixing points at the top of the telescopic springs—watch for this if you buy a new model. Also, there were no mirrors supplied on the test machine, but these are standard.

Almost perfection

This, then, was our first official test of one of the revolutionary Japanese machines. To be honest, the makers have almost reached perfection and the few faults we could find were comparatively minor compared with the hundred and one good points. There is enough power in the 50 c.c. engine to cover the needs of most work-and-weekends riders, and the legshields offer fair protection. The *Sovereign* looks good and has the extras that make it something to show-off against more mundane machines—but the price is comparable with that of most other 50 c.c. motorcycles. So it is not only a good looker and a good runner, but a bargain as well.

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