

## Ducati Touring Cont'd. . . .

### Helmet and Goggles

My helmet has earflaps which I lined with foam rubber so that wind and noise are sealed out. In Canada and beyond I needed those earflaps. The visor on the helmet was tweedy enough, but at speed it caught the wind; this led to a sore neck and a bad disposition. Surgery was performed on the visor at the first opportunity.

Windshield or no, goggles were a must. Those on the market have three common faults, I decided. Some provide an inflexible seal to the face, with the result that sand and dirt blast in and irritate your eyes. Many restrict your vision to the sides, being at once irritating and a safety hazard, I found an inexpensive rubber pair with good side visibility and a sponge-rubber airseal that seals well without excessive headband tightness. A glass lens would have saved some cursing, since I had to clean off the dust and bugs at least twice a day in the best weather and interminably when it rained. My plastic lens became badly scratched in the course of the trip; I should have had some plastic cleaner and polish along.

Crossing Canada I would frequently run into hills and heavy headwinds that would force me to drop down into third gear, good to about 65 mph, and drop my gas mileage from 70 to about 50mpg. The quarter-liter single-banger under me really earned its keep, and the well-spaced gearbox proved very useful. I was running with the fastest final gearing available for the machine. Standard gearing on most bikes is designed to give the best top speed over level ground with no wind blowing. The faster gearing let me take advantage of downgrades and tailwinds without putting the piston through the bottom of the gas tank. And when the hard pulling came, third gear would keep me up around 60 mph under all but most severe conditions.

A reluctance to help support the local governments through which I passed kept my speed within the limit for the most part. A close call when a car pulled onto the road in front of me in southern Saskatchewan taught me to run with the headlight on high beam even in daylight. If they know you are coming, I found, they usually keep out of the way.

### My Daily Check-Up

Nights were for sleeping and desert crossing, but before I started out each morning I made a point of checking a few maintenance items. I tightened and lubricated the chain, no matter how good it looked. (Fast running with a dry, loose chain artfully carves teeth off drive sprockets, and sprockets are not sold at the local feed store.) I pulled the plug and regapped it. High-performance engines running at high speeds seem to have an unusually healthy appetite for spark plugs, and a burned plug can make cold starting an unholy affair. I checked the oil and made sure everything was tight. There is nothing more exasperating than trying to find a vital part when the only thing you are sure of is the fact that you were going 60-mph when it came off. I diddled with the ignition timing only if it seemed to be getting out of adjustment (indicated by a power loss or rough running, or both). I always checked the valve adjustment at the specified intervals. Valves, like children are quietest when they are doing the greatest damage; a burned valve is a grim prospect.

I will never find a better ice-breaker than that two-wheeled horse. When I stopped for the night at a camping area, all sorts of people would wander

over to trade old wives' tales. I think that when you travel this unpretentious way, with motorcycle sleeping bag, you are apt to learn a lot more about people you meet. There is no artificial barrier—they are as curious about you as you are about them. I remember rolling into a park north of Lake Superior late one dismal afternoon, too tired to do anything but put up the shelter and crawl into the sleeping bag. You can imagine my response when out of the darkness came a grandmotherly woman with an invitation to join her family in their trailer for dinner. A weary body never enjoyed a meal more.

### Riding the Alaska Highway

My route took me north through Edmonton to Dawson Creek, starting point of the Alaska Highway. The highway was paved for about 100 miles north of Dawson Creek, and was in excellent condition except for a few places where mud slides had recently been cleared away. Almost without warning the dirt road started. Here come the fun, I thought, slightly bored with the smooth pavement behind me. The fun started, all right.

The road, for a dirt road, was good. Good, that is, when it was dry, hardpacked, gravel-free, and without holes. If any of these conditions are missing you have your hands full. The road generally consists of three car tracks—one in the middle and one on each side—with gravel between them. The middle track is usually the best for riding, except when there is something coming from the other direction. The middle track also has the most holes, but there is more room to get out of trouble. Curves are banked, some very steeply, so that when I was rounding them, slowly enough, I soon found myself in the inside ditch whether I wanted to be there or not.

The Alaska Highway's route was best summarized by a truck driver: "When the Army was building the road if the Cat would go up the hill, that's where the road went. If the Cat wouldn't go up the hill, they'd find some place where it would."

When it rained on the Alaska Highway the packed

