

CYCLE WORLD

ROAD TEST

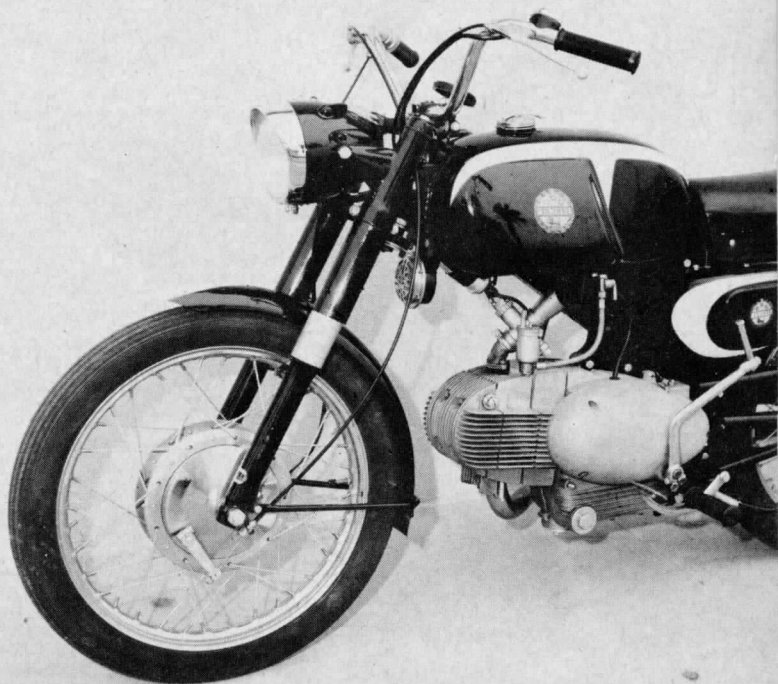


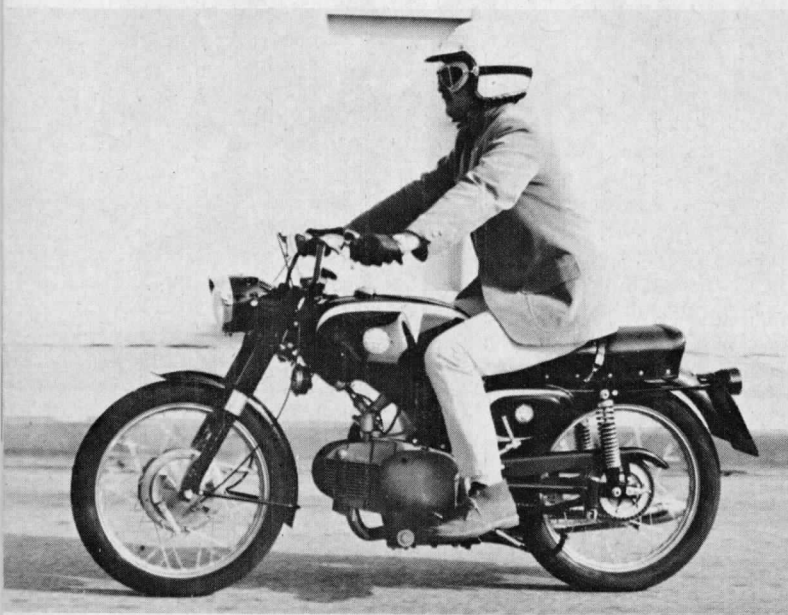
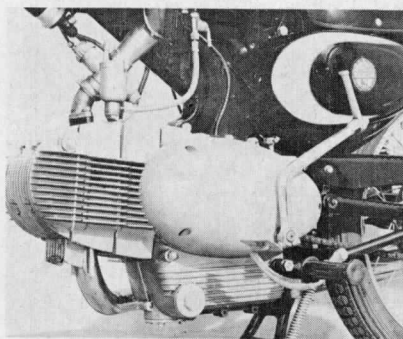
THE BROTHERS BENELLI started building motorcycles back in 1911, and it says something for the brothers, and the machines their company produces, that they were enthusiasts as well as business men. Indeed, it might be said with some accuracy that they have been enthusiasts first and businessmen second, for the Benelli company devotes funds and energy to racing all out of proportion to its size, and one of the brothers, Tonino, was killed while racing. Mimo Benelli is in charge of the racing department, and Giovanni is Director of Benelli. Various other family members fill most management positions, and it would seem that racing is very much in the blood of all.

The interest in racing makes its mark on Benelli products. Design is clean and uncluttered, and the Benelli motorcycle has that feel of race-bred machinery. The bike revs freely, and has tremendous brakes and handling. Models brought into this country have high, wide tourist-type handlebars, but in its native Italy, the Benelli is sold with racing-style "clip-on" bars, and these are more in keeping with the bike's character. It also has the typically Italian, and typically road-racey, oversize fuel tank — complete with knee-notches.

For any lover of fine machinery, the engine will be an almost irresistible sales feature. It is, even for those who do not know much about engines, a delight to the eye. From the side, the engine/transmission package has a teardrop form, with the single cylinder extended almost straight forward. Cooling fins, on the head and cylinder, follow the teardrop form, and this theme is repeated at the unit's side covers. The "cases" are of cast aluminum, and polished, while the head and cylinder are in the as-cast condition. We should mention that the castings are absolutely beautiful (to anyone who digs castings).

BENELLI 200 SPRITE



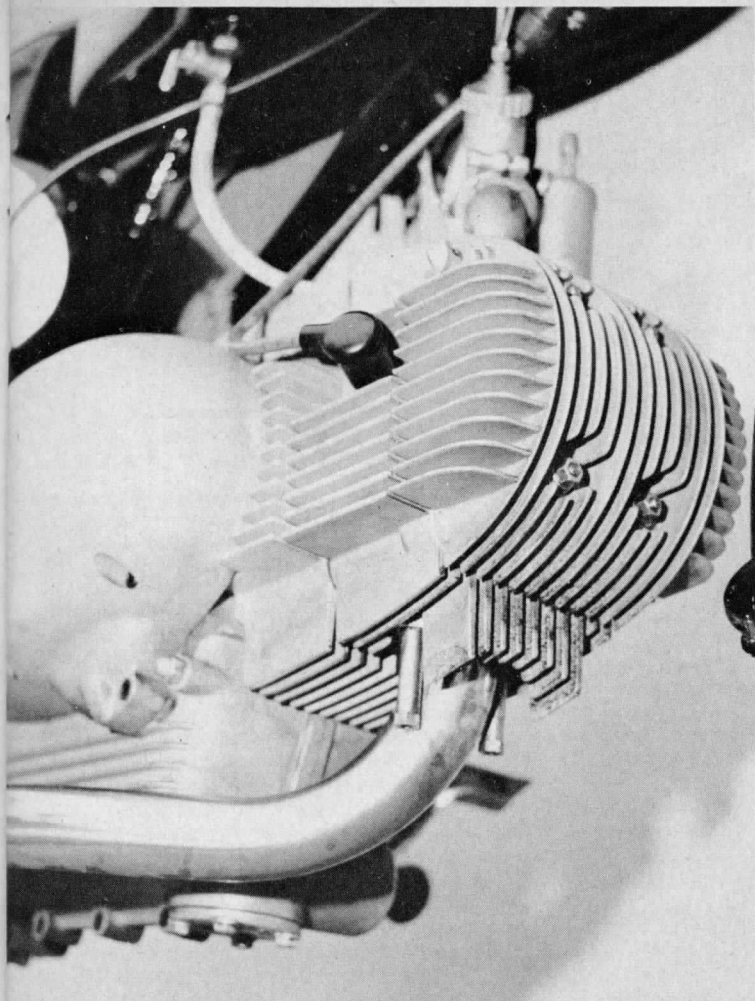


Inside that unusual exterior, you will find a lot of finely-made, and absolutely orthodox pieces. The crank is pressed together, with ball-bearings at the main journals and caged rollers in the rod's big-end. The camshaft is in the crankcase, and rather long pushrods make the necessary connection with the rockers and valves. However, despite the long pushrods, this is a relatively high-speed engine, and the breathing is good enough to give it quite a respectable power output. Unless you would call a gear primary drive unusual, there is nothing to catch one's attention inside the engine except that every part is so obviously first-rate in both material and workmanship — and it is all very, very light.

The engine hangs under a backbone-type frame, which is welded up from sheet-steel pressings. It could be lighter, although not by much, but it does tie into the engine/transmission package very neatly and it leaves everything exposed for easy service.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to say anything very enlightening about motorcycle suspension systems, as all of them have fallen into the same pattern: telescopic forks front, swing arm rear. The only thing that distinguishes one from the other is results. In the Benelli, someone has done all of the right things, because it handles perfectly — or at least as near perfectly as anyone can tell. If the bike would do 100 mph, then some 100 mph-cornering faults might appear. Within its speed range, which does not extend much beyond 70 mph, it will do almost anything asked of it without a quiver.

Having somewhat oversized aluminum-drum brakes, the Benelli is very well endowed with stopping power. Also, the brakes are free of "grab" or shudder. The rear brake assembly incorporates a rubber-wedge shock ab-



sorber in its hub — to smooth any drive roughness (which makes the rider feel better about things and helps to extend chain life).

The Benelli is blessed with one of the best transmissions of any mass-produced motorcycle. The ratios are staged to give a minimum drop in engine speed after each gear change, and the shifting mechanism works to perfection. First gear is a trifle "tall," which makes the bike a bit sluggish in getting underway, but once you get moving it is truly a delight. Third gear is very useful, giving about 65 mph, and while the engine doesn't produce enough power to pull maximum revs in top gear, the low overall drive ratio does make for comparatively strain-free cruising. In top gear, you can feel reasonably confident about cruising "flat-out," because you will not be able to pull enough revs to do any damage. Actually, what the Benelli needs is a semi-racing fairing and clip-on bars, which would give a none-too-comfortable riding position for long distances, but would lower the overall drag enough to give a better top speed. Indeed, we feel that the lower bars, as fitted in Italy, would be of some assistance in this regard.

What we would really like would be for the makers to retain the clip-on bars for the American market, and abandon the Italian seat — which is too narrow and hard for American backsides. We would also like to see the engine opened up to a full 250cc. In its present form, the Benelli is a moderately good performer, but it performs well mostly due to the close-ratio gears — which keeps the engine within the speed range where it is most effective. More displacement would give the engine more torque, and you could get the performance without quite so much gear-stirring. •

BENELLI 200 SPRITE SPECIFICATIONS

List Price	\$479
Frame Type.....	pressed-steel backbone
Suspension, front	telescopic forks
Suspension, rear	swing arm
Tire size, front	2.75-18
Tire size, rear	3.00-18
Engine type	horiz. single, ohv
Bore & stroke	2.62 x 2.24
Displacement, cu. in.	12.1
Displacement, cu. cent.	198
Compression ratio	8.8:1
Bhp @ rpm	20 @ 8000
Carburetion	22mm (.866") Dellorto
Ignition	flywheel magneto (external coil)
Fuel capacity, gal.	4.0
Oil capacity, pts.	4.0
Oil System	wet sump
Starting system	kick, folding crank

POWER TRANSMISSION

Clutch Type	multi-disc, wet plate
Primary drive	helical gear
Final drive	single-row chain
Gear ratio, overall:1	
4th	7.2
3rd	8.6
2nd	10.9
1st	18.0

DIMENSIONS, INCHES

Wheelbase	53.5
Saddle height	30.2
Saddle width	8.5
Foot-peg height	9.6
Ground clearance	5.7
Curb weight, lbs.	228

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION

0-60 mph, in seconds	13.0
Standing 1/4 mile	19.0
Speed Reached	67

