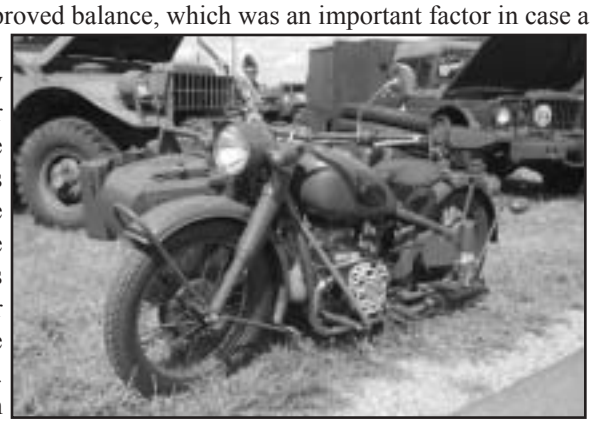
This military CJ isn't a Jeep — it's a cycle

By John Gunnell

According to the book U.S. Military Wheeled Vehicles (Crestline), the earliest use of military motorcycles took place around 1913 Motorcycles were ridden by dispatch soldiers who hated them because they took a physical toll on their riders. There were attempts to use them as machine gun mounts, but the lack of armor made the cycles great targets.

Eventually, the military found an administrative role for the motorcycle and it was used in escorting convoys, delivering messages and telegrams and transporting officers. The motorcycle was also well-suited to military police duties. Sidecar bikes were handy for transporting officers and also improved balance, which was an important factor in case a rider had to fire a weapon.



This Chinese-built CJ750 seen at the 2008 Iola Military Vehicle Show has a telescopic fork.

Due to factors like these, many military motorcycles are sidecar bikes. As they modernized, the armed forces of other nations often followed the lead of the United States military and the use of sidecar motorcycles was copied. Two Chinese sidecar motorcycles were seen at the 2008 Iola Military Vehicle Show. One was done in Khaki Green and the other was finished in Dark Gray. Upon close inspection, the bikes had no branding and few stampings. They had the look of a World War II era BMW, but the only markings on them were numbers.

These bikes were actually Chinese made Chang Jiang 750 military units. The Chang Jiang 750 (CJ750) sidecar motorcycle is a copy of the Russian M72. It is made in China. However, the history of the CJ750 dates back to Germany prior to World War II, when BMW was building the R71 — the last of its side-valve bikes. Even before the Nazi invaded Russia, the Soviets were making copies of the R71. The clones were called M71s. Later, they became M72s.

The BMW R71 motorcycle was never built in great numbers and it was not an official World War II era Wehrmacht bike. The military didn't feel that it was an outstanding military vehicle until the development of the M72 version, which had higher mudguards, dual clutch plates, frame reinforcements and a 4.62 final drive ratio. The M72 was truly the militarized version of the R71 civilan model.

The M stood for mototsikl. At this point, two plants built M72s, one in Moscow and one in Leningrad (St. Petersburg). The Moscow plant moved to Irbit and the Leningrad plant to Gorky (Nizhny Novogorod).

Russian production commenced in 1941, but due to the wartime chaos and difficulties in obtaining parts, no bikes were actually finished until 1942. All sidecar bodies and chassis were built in Gorky until 1956.

The Russians used their copy of the R71 very successfully during World War II. Following the German invasion of Russia, production was shifted from Moscow to Irbit (IMZ), a Russian city located in the Ural mountains. Thousands of the bikes were produced there both during and after World War II. Eventually. a second plant, in Kiev (KMZ), had to be opened to keep up with demand.

Various sources differ about when production of complete bikes began in Kiev. The first M72 assembly work done there was in 1951. After that, a greater portion of the M72 motorcycle was made there. In 1956, after the introduction of the M72-N model, both the bikes and sidecars were completely made in Kiev.

The finned cylinder head is on the side of the engine and crash bars protect the engine in the case of a tip over.

In 1957, the production of military versions of the motorcycle started in Kiev. The Gorky plant in Russia was closed and its tooling was sent to the Chinese. With technical support from the Soviet Union, production of the CJ750 commenced in Nanchang, This Chinese version of a Russian copy of a German bike entered partial production in 1957. The Chinese admit that it took them until 1961 to build the Chang Jiang 750.as a complete motorcycle.

The early CJ 750 was made by the Guo Ying Gan Jiang Ji Xie Chang factory and used many Russian M72 parts such as fenders, frames, wheels, ignition keys and switches.

There was little manufacturing consistency. Some Russian-made M72s were recalled CJ750s. These bikes were built with Russian engines and then converted over to Chinese engines.

The Russian engines can be identified by their smoother castings. Russian-made bikes have one-piece fenders that are attached with rivets. The Chinese-made front fenders are different in the fact that the fender brackets are held on with bolts and screws.

The side car on the Army Green bike had the same light, but it had only a single spare tire and no "ammo box" storage tin.

In September 1966, starting with the motorcycle having serial number 661802, all Chinese-built CJ750s got a new Type II engine with the dipstick on top of the engine. Due to a large inventory of parts at this time, the Type I engine remained in use on new bikes until 1971, although none of these engines were actually manufactured after 1966. Spare parts for the Type I engine were made until the 1970s. Starting in 1972, all CJ750s were built with Type II engines.

Bikes with Type I engines used the M72 gearbox. A new gearbox was introduced when the Type II engine arrived. A lot of bikes with Type I engines were converted to the Type II gearbox to make maintenance consistent, to simplify the availability of spare parts and for certain technical reasons.

By 1969, the CJ750 got some technical changes, mainly to the sidecar frame and switches. Starting in 1970, a Chinese-built tool box gas tank was seen. By the end of the 1970s, China started production of 30-hp overhead valve engines, but only a few of the early ones remain today.

At the end of the 1970s, the Chinese airplane manufacturer, Guo Ying Hong Du Ji Xie Chang took control of CJ750 production. Until this time, all CJ750s had Type I or Type II engines and six-volt electrical systems. In 1980, changes were made. A 20-hp Chinese-made overhead valve engine was used and 12-volt electrics were introduced.

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