

VOYAGER: it's a grand tourer



The 20th century's most efficient personal transport system? Styling of the Voyager is agreeable, though of course "unconventional" in strict motorcycle terms.

Let me start where I should end, with conclusion, by telling you that the Voyager is a *very* impressive motorcycle. Not only that, it is also practical and therein lies its rare quality. We live in an age when the large capacity motorcycle has become an executive toy, an extension of image, a symbol of fantasy. The Voyager can be all these things if you wish — and you can use it for serious transport too!

Royce Creasey and pioneers like him have been trying to drag motorcycling towards the twenty first century for years and it has been uphill work. The climate, in terms of both weather and politics, does not favour motorcycling in this country. The motorcycle-buying public is conservative, whimsical and dwindling; formidable barriers to those who are trying to break new ground.

The technical details of Voyager have been analysed in these pages by Paul Blezzard and P.U.B. The production prototype has been slightly modified since then. The cooling system has been improved, attention to the GRP has reduced weight and altered the rear shape. The 'cooking' 850 Reliant motor is 'sharper' with a new cam, inlet manifold and experimental exhaust system. Perhaps of greatest importance, as far as I am concerned, steering stiction has been minimised.

Different concepts

The reason I consider this particularly significant is that a rider approaching Voyager for the first time is faced with so many different concepts that feelings of inadequacy are provoked and it is a psychological 'escape' to be ready to dislike it. Follow this with the early prototype's inclination to wander at low speeds and the potential buyer flees to the safe familiarity of the

conventional motorcycle he's always owned.

Those who *know* the Voyager are barely conscious of the phenomenon anyway but first impressions are of paramount importance in marketing terms. Consider for a moment the list of unfamiliar aspects: Unconventional appearance, car seating arrangement and position, vertical pistol grip controls, finger operated throttle.

Then sit on it and realise the strength of your legs cannot be utilised; you cannot 'prop' this vehicle with a locked-straight limb. You cannot 'boss it about'; instead it responds to sensitivity.

Overcoming prejudice

All these facts tend to throw (not literally!) the average motorcyclist, especially the experienced rider, somewhat set in his ways with, say twenty years in the saddle, who just happens to be one of the most likely buyers of Voyager, once prejudices are overcome. I notice that the young rider adapts much more easily to the machine's demands.

I have had the good fortune to try several 'fringe' machines. I rode the Flying Banana some years before Paul Blezzard turned it into a two-wheeled celebrity. I have tried a Gold Wing Phasar, a Difazio Gold Wing and very, very briefly a Tony Foale QL — so I had some idea what to expect. Nevertheless the first time I rode Voyager I was nervous of it. This time, without the steering stiction I was more relaxed.

First, I must confess I am predisposed to favour any two wheeler that eschews the telescopic fork which is, at best, a cheap mediocrity. The stability of hub-centre steering is outstanding; it is simply much, much better and one of my few motorcycling regrets is failing to purchase one of Difazio's converted Suzuki triples in the early seven-

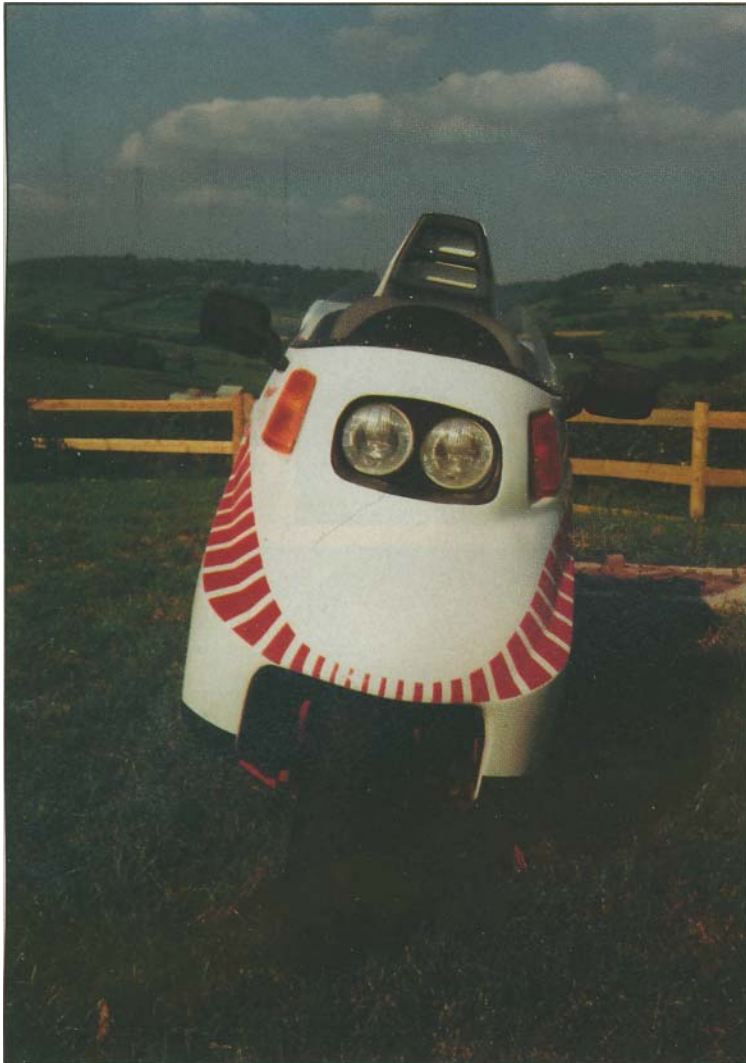
ties before my enthusiasm for a family emptied the coffers!

I rode away from Crickhowell in Gwent, where Speake Company Limited manufacture Creasey's Voyager, straight into heavy home from work traffic, which was unfortunate because it is in these conditions that the inability of this human's brain to cope with strange concepts becomes embarrassingly evident! I managed but I was inhibited. The Voyager is not wide but I could not negotiate the traffic with my usual aplomb and the sight of lorry tailboards *above* me was a little uncomfortable. This inhibition did not leave me throughout the test during which time I used the machine for work as well as joy-riding. My daily run, about twenty five miles, includes country lanes, A roads, motorway and two spots where the traffic is really dense; nose to tail, inching forward towards junctions and roundabouts. Sometimes it is necessary to virtually manhandle a bike between gaps. I couldn't do this on Voyager. I don't think anyone could; not even Royce Creasey, and I once followed him through Bristol while he road his Hi-techati. He gave a convincing demonstration of agility but the traffic, though heavy, was moving — rather different circumstances.

Very satisfying

Once free of the really tight blockages Voyager becomes very satisfying. The speed rises and does the same for the rider's confidence. It is idiosyncratic in that riding 'by the seat of the pants' becomes almost literal. I find this very difficult to explain. Imagine your brain being situated in your posterior (perhaps mine is!). This 'nether' intelligence 'thinks' the bike into a corner and lo! it lays down with a finality that is initially disconcerting but ultimately very effective. It is a feature, apparently, of

The ton appears at a relaxed 4,500 rpm



Nose of the Voyager has a slightly predatory look; penetration is better than with a smaller, unfaired motorcycle. Natural terrain is the open road, where high speeds can be maintained in great comfort.

long-wheelbase FFs to behave thus. The Banana and Phasar did the same, Difazio steered conventional bikes and the Foale QL do not, so I guess it is the wheelbase rather than the hub-centre which causes it. Maybe the low seat height exaggerates the symptom in the rider's mind?

Despite an implied contradiction of the foregoing there is a distinct sense of steering right to turn left and vice versa on the Voyager. This is particularly so when negotiating a bend which tightens so that the original lean-angle has to be increased. This is something we know happens on all motorcycles but we are rarely conscious of it. Understeer is evident also but all these comments are observations rather than criticisms; it simply does everything differently!

The comfort is outstanding. I could stretch out my legs fully, resting them against the foremost part of the fairing beyond the foot controls. The pistol grip 'handlebars' so alien to look at, become perfectly natural and the forefinger operated throttle is a positive advantage.

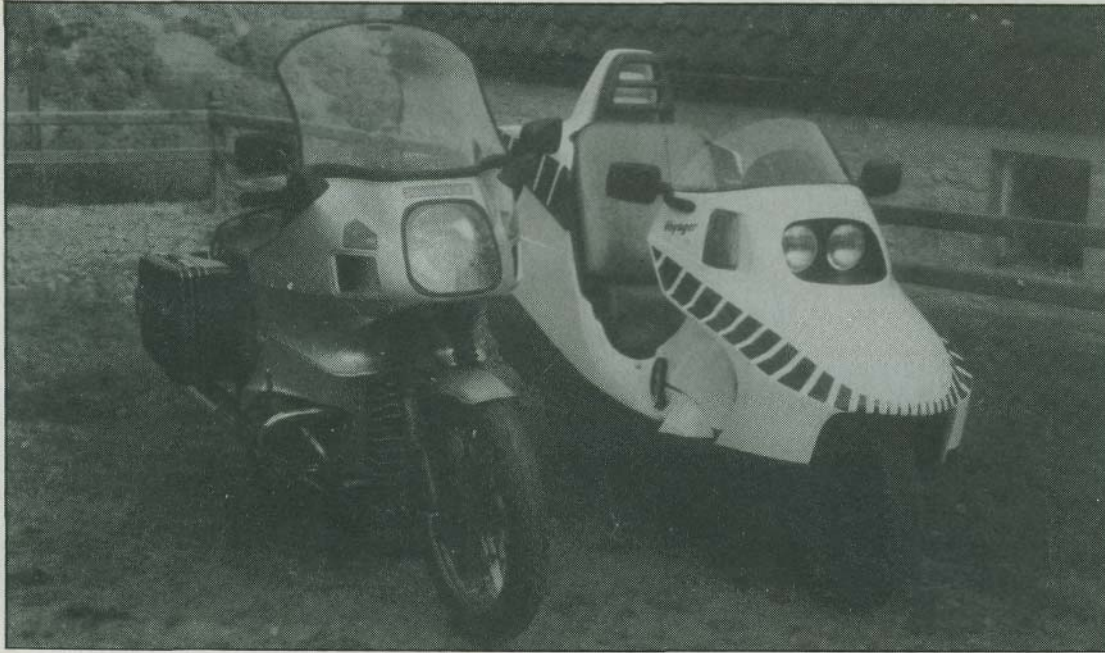
A battle-weary prototype can be expected to show its scars, I suppose, and fleeting vibrations manifest themselves through the heels of the boots but you could cover many hundreds of miles on this machine without fatigue; at least you could if it wasn't for the petrol stops. The tank is too small at under three gallons and not quite 50 mpg from this well-used Reliant motor. A bigger tank is promised on production machines.

The ton appears at a relaxed 4500 rpm. It would be even better with another 3 — 4 inches on the screen which is too low for a rider of six foot. The Voyager is good for an everyday top speed of 105-110 mph; anything more requires patience or favourable conditions.

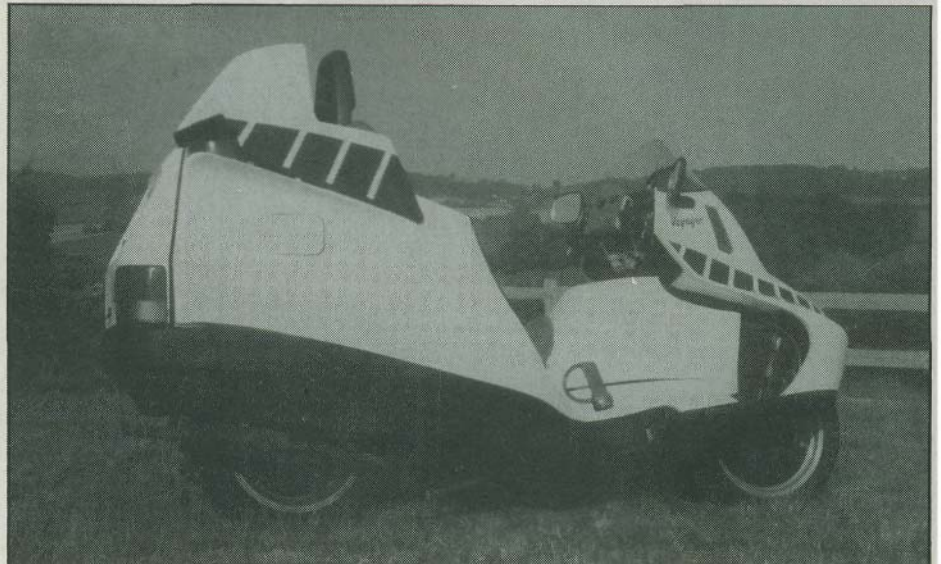
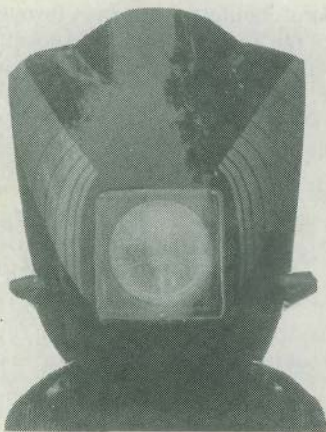
All controls are just where they should be. The car-type stalk on the left operates indicators, dipswitch, flasher and horn. A



THE VOYAGER



Left: In 1977, the fairing-equipped BMW struck a new note; now it appears, beside the Voyager, as a relic from the past.



starter button is within reach of the left thumb. The choke, used only briefly, is on the right. I noticed at Crickhowell that another model under assembly sported conventional bars and twistgrip. It struck me that the only possible advantage is the ease with which proprietary heated grips can be fitted for winter riding. I am unsure even of that for the production Voyager will have heating ducts one of which vents towards the hands. Small points like this make it clear that the Voyager was designed by a very experienced, high mileage, practical but idealistic motorcyclist rather than a production team with one eye on fashion and another on budgets. Take the stands as another example. The lifting handle equipped centre stand is *so* sensible and can be operated from the saddle (yes, I know Rudge and Vincent did it years ago!). Similarly a flick of the left foot positions the prop. Indeed it is much simpler to use the stands *before* rising out of the bike and to retract them *after* climbing in. Both stands hold the

machine securely.

Parking the Voyager demands forethought because it really is not easy to wheel it around; one is forced to waddle astride it in unseemly fashion. Passing schoolgirls find it amusing — which brings me to another point.

The first time I rode Voyager a visitor was discussing the relative 'pose' value of the Voyager and his Harley. I find it a bit distasteful actually. Anyway the Voyager stops people in their tracks; no doubt about it! Lorries veer as their drivers lean out of the windows, boys cluster round it, switch on the lights, drip coke from cans on the GRP and are so busy muttering 'wicked' 'crucial' and 'megga' (transatlantic equivalents of 'wizard' and 'How topping', that they forget to ask how fast it will go or how much it costs! Doesn't it make you sick that we have to import from America even our slang — have we no national identity left at all?

All this adulation makes the rider very tense. Best not to mention the Reliant engine

under these circumstances; admirers consider that to be depressingly ordinary. In fact it is a magnificent stroke of common sense. The engine is well tried and tested, cheap and easy to maintain and it is married to one of the strongest transmissions available. It is not a particularly quiet unit, though the bodywork muffles OHV rattle. The loudest noise at low speeds in top is transmission whine. This is a feature of some but not all Guzzis. I owned a Spada which whined and a T3 which did not. High speeds eliminate all but wind noise and that is similar to a fully faired conventional bike. A California III rear wheel is used sporting a steel disc, not the cast iron, pad wearing fitting of earlier Guzzis. The brakes are very good, pinning down the machine with no drama. Remember there are no forks to plunge so the rear brake is more than just a steadier.

What I would very much like to try is a Voyager equipped with Guzzi's automatic transmission. I see no point in gearchanging

on this otherwise futuristic creation, particularly as the Guzzi change is a mite ponderous with the long linkage demanded by the Voyager's configuration. It is similar to the heel and toe levers fitted to the California and Har-leys; positive but unsophisticated. The Voyager is unfashionably one up (or back) and four down (forward). The 850 car engine has a fairly flat torque curve so gearchanging is not critical unless one is in a hurry. However, acceleration from below 2000 rpm in top is sedate.

I daresay every motorcyclist has stretches of road which he knows intimately and along which he compares every machine which comes his way. I'm not going to pretend I tried any scratching. I was not prepared to risk Voyager shaped holes in hedges — and the hedges loom much larger in the Voyager. I retain the feeling that I first acquired on the Banana that the one disadvantage of the full FF seating arrangement is that the rider cannot see over hedges or indeed over the cars in front so overtaking strategies have to be modified; a case of hanging well back and using plenty of road to weigh up the manoeuvre. A series of ripples on one of my more searching routes made me wonder if Hagon/Girlings are perhaps too basic; multi-rate konis might cure the touch of rear-end wallow I noticed. The machine tries to regain its upright position under duress but, as you might expect, there is not a hint of flexure or twist; none of that nasty sensation sometimes experienced on a conventional motorcycle when one wonders if it is ever going to straighten out! It doesn't make any difference if the 'boot' is empty or full of bags, flasks, cameras, tools and all the other bits and pieces that a sudden acquisition of undreamt of storage space tempts one to take along for the ride. No wobbly panniers, no 'bungees', just open the lid and throw it all in — splendid! There is a lid the other end too! A simple catch releases the front part of the fairing which hinges up to expose for maintenance the front wheel and suspension. It is equally simple to lift off the central part of the enclosure for access to the engine and lower side panels unclip to reach gearbox level plug, clutch cable, gear linkage and so on. The piece de resistance must be the way in which the uppermost portion of the rear fairing slides rearwards. The seatback then follows suit and a pillion seat becomes available. Alas I had not time to try it. The proposition of sitting in my wife's lap appealed but if my passenger was a big, hairy man I'm not so sure!

I spent a good deal of my time with the Voyager exploring the local lanes and its steering characteristics. Though it is more than competent I don't think such terrain is quite the Voyager's forte. It is not for pottering about, it is a grand tourer at its best on main roads with sweeping curves. It almost makes motorway cruising a pleasure and I never expected to say that of anything! The snug security of the cockpit and the aerodynamics minimise fatigue without reducing awareness or safety consciousness. I see it as a superior alternative to the giant Japanese flagships; a trans-continental express of unprecedented efficiency.

As I said at the beginning, it is a very impressive motorcycle.

ROGER WOODS