

MMM GOES ON PATROL THE IMZ-URAL PATROL

Viktor Wanchena

I feel like an extra out of the movie *The Great Escape*. I'm rolling along through wooded back roads keeping a close eye to the hills expecting Steve McQueen to come tearing through at any moment. The "civilians" on the street corner glaze intently as I motor through town. I'm sure they are wondering, "Is the military using sidecars again?" Through it all I am having a ball thanks to a rugged green machine, the Ural Patrol.

The Patrol is what you call a modern classic. That is a machine of classic design and construction but built to modern specs featuring modern safety and conveniences. Built in Russia on the edge of Siberia near the Ural Mountains in the town of Irbit, the Ural traces its lineage back to the German BMW R71. There are several versions of Ural story but the official party line is that the Ural motorcycle was born in 1939. You see, the Russians needed a motorcycle to mechanize their infantry and they were impressed by the rugged BMW motorcycles and sidecars used by the German army of the time. Being supremely practical and not wanting to waste needless time for research and development Russian engineers secretly bought 5 BMW R71 motorcycles through Swedish brokers. They carted them back to Russia, completely dismantled them and made exact copies of all the parts. The first M-72s as they were known were in production by 1941. They then set up shop in Moscow and began producing them for the military. When the Nazis invaded the Russians were fearful the factory would be in range of German bombers so the decision was made to move the factory to Irbit where the Ural has been produced ever since. The other version of the story is that design of the R71 was given to the USSR by the Germans as part of their mutual non-aggression pact. I personally like the first version better but either way the Ural has BMW lineage.

The Ural is built by IMZ (Irbit Motor Works) and imported to the US by Irbit Motor Works of America (IMWA). The factory, which is the only heavy weight motorcycle producer left in Russia, was bought from state control in 1998 by private investors and since that time their commitment to quality and improvements has gone up considerably. Patrol is one of six sidecar models offered by IMWA. They are all based on essentially the same chassis and motor with one exception. The most basic model is the Tourist; this best seller is sort of the workhorse of the lineup. Then there is the Troyka, which features conventional forks and luxury appointments. For those who want something even more vintage looking there is the Retro. It has a slightly longer plunger style chassis and plays heavily on its German lineage. Then there is the Patrol and Gear-Up models. Essentially the same bike with the difference being that while the Patrol looks like a military bike the Gear-Up is a military bike. They both have Ural's 2 wheel-drive system, but the Gear-Up receives a few extra goodies like a full



The Earles front end reduces steering effort.

camouflage paint job, available in woodland or desert schemes, a shovel strapped to the sidecar and a machine gun mount at the nose of the sidecar.

The overall design philosophy of the Ural and especially the Patrol is simple but effective. There is little in the way of high tech flummery on board the Patrol. Almost the entire bike can be repaired or adjusted on the roadside with the standard tool kit. The Patrol, in keeping with its military theme can be maintained by anyone with basic skills in any environment. Very little in the way of plastic is found on the Ural. Most components are steel or aluminum giving the Ural a very robust and solid feel.

The basis of the Patrol is the tried and true Ural platform. The frame of the motorcycle and sidecar are over built heavy walled steel tubing. No frilly trellis frame super alloy space casting, just solid steel. This is one of the Ural's best attributes. Because it's built from the ground up to be a sidecar rig it doesn't suffer from the usual weak spots. The robust frame means that the entire unit feels solid and planted. The running gear includes a leading link front end, or Earles fork, on the Patrol is supremely suited for sidecar duty. Being stronger than conventional forks, the leading link also is designed with a very small amount of trail. This gives it a lighter steering than conventional forks. The suspension is fair, with coil over shocks all the way around. All five shocks, two front, two rear and one sidecar, are all identical. They have a two-position adjustment for preload.

The motor is the newest form of the their 750cc power plant. The motor has received some upgrades in the past couple of years. The biggest change is the use of larger valves, which give the motor an output of 40 horsepower over the 36 claimed with the original 750. This oomph is really felt as the Patrol cruises easily at 60 mph, with throttle to spare. The boxer motor also received an updated electronic ignition and a much-awaited Nippon-Denso alternator. It seems the Russian spec 35 amp alternators have a less than stellar service record. The addition of the Denso alternator not only adds to Ural's reliability, it also demonstrates their willingness to look outside the motherland for high quality components. Other than being slightly cold-blooded at start up the Patrol ran like a top. Having lived with a

Ural for a while now, once frustrating long warm up period due to EPA mandated lean idle jetting is simply time I use to throw my gear on.

Power is sent to the rear via a 4-speed non-synchrom gearbox. The non-synchrom means no full power clutch-less shifts,



Ural's green machine, the Patrol.

photo by V Wanchena

instead deliberate gear changes are rewarded with solid clunks, but the rider must be mindful to match engine speed with road speed for smooth shifting. The transmissions on Urals are usually tight when delivered but loosen nicely over time and miles. The Ural features a real rarity in the motorcycle world, real reverse gear. The reverse gear is very fun and will extract you from most complicated situations with a flick of the lever. The Ural is the fastest bike I've ever ridden, in reverse. I like to challenge sport-bike riders to drag races, in reverse only to even the odds. The clutch is a dry twin

very well. The handlebars are standard tubular 1-inch and have a rather neutral bend, simple and effective. The speedo is marked in mile per hour but the odometer and trip meter are still in kilometers so a running mental conversion is necessary. It could really flummox the metrically impaired. The speedo is surrounded by the usual basic warning lights.

Passenger accommodations are quite pleasant as the sidecar has not only its own swingarm suspension but it also rides on rubber air bladders. Having ridden in the tub a few times I can say it is quite fun and very comfortable even for my 6' 8" frame. The area behind the passenger is a large trunk spacious enough to swallow a mountain of gear or several grocery bags.

The Patrol is the fourth different Ural variety I've ridden. I continue to love them as much as the first time I through a leg over one. The Ural is, without a doubt, the best value in the sidecar world. Those looking for a sidecar will not be disappointed by Ural. They are truly in a class by themselves. MMM

engaging the 2wd I sailed over them no fuss.

The Patrol really shines on the road less traveled and would make an excellent substitution for an ATV. I tried a couple of local trails and was very happy with its performance and that was with the factory street tires. If one were to add some DOT approved knobbies not much would slow the Patrol down. It's only off-road handicap is the low hanging mufflers, which can act like pontoons in deep snow or mud. The ground clearance is fantastic otherwise. Don't be fooled by its old-world simplicity, the Patrol would be wonderful for any hunting or sporting duty. Ride it to your duck blind with your retriever in the sidecar and decoys in the trunk. No need to stop at the trailhead and unload the ATV off the trailer, just motor into the woods.

The switchgear and controls on the Patrol are of Italian origin and work

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I have been called to the Principal's office. Some readers claim I am 'soft' on motorcycle reviews. They feel that I enjoy every machine I ride and only mention one or two minor gripes. If loving different motorcycles is a crime...All machines have their charms, and with today's bikes we are kids at the motcandy store.

I will admit, when I first reviewed a Ural with sidecar (*MMM #56*) I was skeptical. I felt it would be slow, sidecars are old fashioned, how could this possibly be 'bet-

ter" than a decent road bike, etc. I came away from that test filled with the possibilities that sidecar ownership creates: year-round riding, extended camping tours with enough gear to please a Bedouin and enough storage that I could ride to work (I carry a lot of equipment at my second job.)

Then came our summer adventure with the Lee Bruns-built Metallic Waste. (see article *MMM #71*) If you think travelling with two other riders and bikes is fun, try riding with two others in the same vehicle. *MMM* staff and wannabes put thousands of miles on Lee's highly modified CB 650-based combo, even competing, finishing and winning our class in Team Strange's 1,000-mile road rally.

Once you get over the admittedly steep learning curve and can simply enjoy the ride, sidecars become an absolute hoot. On nice days your two-wheeled buddies will snicker and say, "Try to get to lunch before we leave" and "Uh, would you mind carrying my rain gear/spare gloves/telescope collection for me?" When they slow down due to a little rain or gravel, you simply dial in the throttle and pass them with a three-wheel power slides. What was that you were you saying about pokey old sidecars? Heh heh heh.

The major advantage is that you can carry stuff, lots of stuff. As an exercise, I repacked my sport-tourer with everything I carried on a recent 8-day trip to Idaho. I filled both hard saddlebags, my tankbag and a 46-l Givi topbox with clothes, extra gear, water bottles etc. I then transferred all of this gear to the Patrol and was able to cram it into the trunk behind the sidecar body. I hadn't



The 2 wheel-drive means the Patrol goes where it wants to.

for our finicky American market. The current generation 750cc motors feature with Keihin CVKs which mercifully replace the Soviet-era carbs.

Electrics are upgraded as well. The Patrol carries a larger battery. The Stalin-era generator is replaced with a 300w ND (Nippon Denso) alternator. Yes, the spark plug people. Urals now run a fifth-generation electronic ignition, smaller and claimed to be even more reliable.

Bars, levers and switchgear are Italian, and are on par with any current Euro bike. The single headlight is a 12v quartz-halogen unit. Best of all, the front drum has been replaced with a honking single-disc pinched by a truck-sized Brembo caliper.

The four-speed tranny of the Patrol remains a sore spot. The gears are straight-cut and always engage with a crunch. This isn't a bad motorcycle transmission, it just shows how refined current streetbike gearboxes are. Ratios are more than ample to launch the Patrol, riders and gear and carry the load at a comfortable 55mph. Solo riders can easily sustain 60+ mph on the freeway.

Like all Urals, the Patrol 'box contains a real reverse cog that easily backs a loaded sidecar uphill. A cruder starter motor reverse-assist is not sufficient, comrade. Reverse is easily engaged with a separate tractor-style shift located by your right boot. Simply find neutral with your left foot, rotate the lever, engage reverse and ease out the clutch.

The selectable sidecar drive is unique to the Patrol (and its curiously-named cousin, the Gear-Up.) There is a second jockey shift located on the rear final drive. 2WD is engaged by stopping, finding neutral and moving the lever. Select first gear and you are now powering two wheels. When we tried to engage/disengage the 2WD system we usually had to roll the outfit a foot or two until the gears meshed just right. It is hard to say whether this is something that would disappear with wear in, or is part of the Patrol's character.

I brought the Patrol to one of our proving grounds to test the 2WD function and it did not disappoint. The 750cc motor has enough power to spit gravel with both drive wheels. It was fun to aim the Patrol up steep hills, float over the crest and land with a happy thud. Extended rail crossings refused to upset the chassis.

There is enough suspension travel to absorb whatever you throw under it.

I also tried the off-road cornering techniques described in *Driving a Sidecar Outfit* (see pp. 19) Once you learn how to drift all three wheels in turns on loose surfaces, you may never go back to two wheels. Best of all was being able to loft all three wheels over short berms. The Patrol would land, absorb the bump and ask to do it again. In my mind I was Steve McQueen, the Rat Patrol and in the Afrika Korps all at once. Who needs combat role-playing games?



The Patrol has a spacious trunk.

photo by V Wanchena

After one escapade, I was unable to disengage the 2WD. I tried for several minutes and finally elected to drive home as is, in the rain. When in 2WD on wet pavement, the rig steers left. It took a conscious effort to stay straight. Two miles later, I stopped, selected neutral, and the lever easily disengaged the 2WD. I worked it several times, selected reverse, drove it around some more and the 2WD selector mechanism now worked flawlessly. *MMM* wonders if a piece of swarf worked its way through the final drive.

The Patrol is beautifully finished in high-gloss olive enamel Ural calls Military Green. While its glitzier cousin, the Tourist, is all chrome and polished alloy, the Patrol is more subdued. Most of the brightwork is painted a contrasting gloss black leaving only the valve covers and the odd bit of trim polished. The overall effect is tough yet unimposing.

The Patrol comes with two rubber tractor-style solo seats. These are a 100% concession to style and simply suck. The seat pans rest on a rubber suspension block secured to the frame by three bolts. When underway, the entire seat assembly squirmed and bobbed. Further, my lower back was pressed into the mounting hardware of the passenger seat. Worst of all, the shape and rubber surface greatly inhibit your ability to slide your body to the inside of turns.

Seats are not adjustable relative to the frame although there is a fulcrum adjustment that permits some change in springiness. I would immediately ditch these and mount a bench seat, look for someone to rebuild the drivers seat or replace the passenger seat with the optional rear fender rack. Your mileage may vary.

The other drawback to the Patrol is its range. In 1WD riding solo at a gentle throttle we'd average about 200 km before hitting reserve. This translates to approximately 30 mpg, with a maximum range of 150 miles on the Patrol's stock 19 liter (5.0 gal) tank. The Patrol does come with a "Fluid Canister" clamped to the sidecar body in a secure bracket, but it is not officially a Jerry can. We guess that Ural would have to sell 38,000 of

these accessories before they paid off DOT approval. The importer dodges this bullet by placing a "Not for fuel or water" sticker on the canister. Wink-wink.

If you live in the Metro and its surrounding sprawl, *MMM* feels that the traction potential of 2WD is offset by the slightly higher center-of-gravity. Think Idiot in a SUV rollover hazard. If you live outstate; hunt or fish; or want the coolest ATV *bar none*, the Patrol is your Ural. Thanks to St. Croix Harley-Davidson in New Richmond, WI for their help in this review. St Croix H-D is an authorized Ural agent.

Das:
•Further refinements to 750cc motor.
•Selectable 2WD permits anywhere riding.
•Select.
•Butch khaki-green color.

Nyets:
•Fuel range of the Patrol could be doubled.
•2WD option raises sidecar COG.
•Sucky rubber solo seat(s)

Wife's First Reaction: "I thought his (Publisher's) Ural was black."

Selected Competition: Ural Tourist, Ural Retro, Ural Troika, Ural Gearup. Urals are still in a league of their own. MMM

SPECIFICATIONS 2004 Ural Patrol Model #IMZ-8.1037	
MSRP:	\$9,695
Warranty:	2 year / unlimited miles
Engine:	4-stroke two-cylinder, air-cooled, opposed twin
Bore x Stroke:	78.0 x 78.0mm
Displacement:	745cc
Compression Ratio:	8.6:1
Cooling:	Air
Induction:	Keihin L-22-AA carbs
Lubrication:	Wet Sump
Valves:	2-valves / cyl
Ignition:	Ural Type-V
Claimed HP:	40 bhp @5600 rpm
Claimed torque:	38 ft-lbs @4000 rpm
Clutch:	Dry double disc
Transmission:	4-forward, 1-reverse
Final drive:	Shaft
Frame:	Steel tube
Front tire:	Russian 4.00X19 in
Front brakes:	Brembo disc
Front suspension:	w/ 2-piston caliper
	Leading link
	fork w/ twin shocks
	adj. for preload
Rear tire:	Russian 4.00X19 in
Rear brake:	IMZ SLS drum
Rear suspension:	Twin shocks
	adj. for preload
Sidecar tire:	Russian 4.00X19 in
Sidecar brake:	IMZ SLS drum
Sidecar suspension:	single shock
	adj. for preload
	car-to-chassis air bladders
Length	2,580mm
Width:	1,700mm
Ground Clearance:	125mm/4.9 in
Seat height:	785mm/30.9 in
Fuel capacity:	19 l/5.0 gal
Claimed dry weight:	335 kg/739 lbs
Color:	Military green
Special feature:	selectable sidecar drive shaft