

The Chang Jiang

Looking for a touring holiday with the dog or a farm shop trip to stock up on groceries? Mr Carrott find the outfit vegetable-friendly.

Sidecars have existed for nearly as long as motorcycles. In the past some motorcycle manufacturers would offer motorcycle combinations in their range but for the best part of 50 years there have been just two main options. Roll yer own i.e. buy a motorcycle and attach a sidecar DIY or pay someone to do it. Or you could buy ready-made, however this second option limited you to Soviet motorcycles, namely Ural or Dnepr. "What about Cossack?" I hear you cry. They were re-badged Ural and Dnepr. In more recent decades that choice has been limited to just Ural...until now.

Having discovered that the country's leading, and for many years only, Ural dealer was no longer an agent and had become the sole importer of the Chinese Chang Jiang combo, I decided I needed to take a look.

A bright January day saw me pootle off on my Royal Enfield on the 35-mile trip to the Fenland emporium of F2 Motorcycles. Not only was there a new Dynasty model being prepped for a customer, proprietor David Angel immediately offered me a test ride on his personal Pekin Express, but first some history.

The first Urals built in 1941 were based on pre-WW2 BMWs. In the 1950s Chang Jiang commenced manufacture of military motorcycles based on those Urals and after nearly 70 years of production, like a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy, the quality didn't quite match that of the original BMW...by a significant degree! That has now changed with a brand-new motorcycle and sidecar powered by a 650 parallel twin engine but styling still very much in the classic communist sidecar mould. Whilst the styling is classic, everything else is very modern, from the LED headlight through to the liquid cooled engine with Bosch fuel injection and USB ports in the sidecar. The rear light even has LED reversing lights built in. The bike comes with adjustable levers, spotlights, sidecar rack, spare wheel, tonneau cover, 12V outlet, and large tool kit. The Dynasty model has a few chrome touches compared to the slightly more ruggedly styled Pekin Express.

The 650 engine is from CF Moto who

have been producing motorcycles, quads and snowmobiles since around 1990 and also manufacture the LC8 engine for KTM.

The Bosch fuel injection is flawless, allowing the engine to pull from low revs with no snatch or jerkiness. With just 600 miles on the clock, even at the half throttle running in limit imposed by F2, the outfit pulled better than my 2008 Ural 750. It sat at an indicated 60mph with ease, again unlike my combo that's starting to get a bit busy in the engine department by then. With another 3000 rpm still on tap this combo will be able to cruise on the motorway with ease, again unlike a Ural, but you will need a screen at motorway speeds as the wide-barred upright riding position gives your neck and arms a workout. Despite the modernity of the engine the traditional looking brushed stainless-steel silencers emit a pleasingly classic doff doff.

'Pull a small lever on the left handlebar you can then tap one down on the gear lever into reverse'

There is a bit of a clunk into first with the heel and toe gear change. Unusually it is up all the way through the 4-speed box. Yes, just four speeds are sufficient. Change down all the way and you are into neutral, the handy gear indicator being very useful when you get used to it. Pull a small lever on the left handlebar

you can then tap one down on the gear lever into reverse; this being one of the biggest advantages ready-made combos have over roll-your-own options. A lever on the opposite side is the handbrake. There's a normal front brake lever but the foot brake is a marvellous affair that operates all three brakes together – front, rear, and sidecar. Whoever designed the balancing system on the hydraulics deserves an award because the bike tracks in a straight line when the brakes are applied. As many with a sidecar know, this is not a foregone conclusion. All wheels are interchangeable as is the spare on the boot which I refuse to call the trunk.

The steering is heavy compared to a Ural. This is due to the fact that it has telescopic forks unlike the Russian offering whose leading link forks give lighter steering. My preference would be for leading links but that said, once I got to grips with the Change the handling proved to be very good, with the steering self-centring without drama. The trick was not to clench the bars rigidly but let the machine do its own thing over the lousy Fenland roads that were my test track. You still need a good grip for cornering but with its low centre of gravity and firm KYB suspension the chair was not prone to unexpected lifting on left handers, a quirk of handling that all sidecar users are familiar with.

To the uninitiated, riding a combo can be an unnerving experience, primarily due to a lack of symmetry. Generally speaking accelerate and a combo steers left around the chair, shut off and it goes right as the weight of the chair wants to go around the bike, brake and it goes left or right depending how bad your brakes are set up. Not so with the CJ. It was very neutral, both under braking and accelerating, a benefit of having quite steeply angled telescopic forks, which is great for novice riders.

Having been on sale in France for over three years they have proved to be reliable bikes. Only time will tell how good the finish will fare but there's a smattering of A2 stainless steel fasteners here and there plus stainless exhausts. The paint looks every bit as good as the competition but it's not up to Japanese



Unconfirmed reports suggest that the Chang Jiang is capable of transporting more than 200 lbs of carrott

standards. Overall the finish is good but neglect will be your enemy, regular cleaning, and rust protection your friend.

It is inevitable that the CJ will be compared with the Ural and in many respects it is a better buy – it's cheaper, has better performance and better economy. Spares are significantly cheaper for the CJ too. The CJ is very much a highway bike. Yes one model has chunky tyres, protection bars on lights, and braced handlebars but it has the suspension set up and ground

clearance for the road.

A Ural is much more of an adventure bike, suited to the road, gravel tracks and off-road, particularly with the 2-wheel drive version now available. If you want a motorcycle and sidecar designed to function as a unit, the Chang Jiang deserves to be considered.

A new Ural with similar specification will set you back around £18,500. With the on the road price for a Chang Jiang of £14,850 you would be daft not to give it serious consideration.

Chang Jiang 650

Engine: 649cc DOHC

Gears: 4 speed + reverse

Tank: 20 Litres

Fuel Injection: Bosch EFI

Power: 41kw - 54bhp

Torque: 62 nm - 45 ft-lbs

Colours: Dynasty - Gloss Black

Gloss Grey - Pekin Express -

Desert Sand or Military Green

Price OTR: £14850