



The Pink Panther R90S and It's Siblings

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50 Years of BMW R90S bikes and three BMW “specials”

After the Second World War, the German motorcycle industry was plagued by market depression and severe manufacturing restrictions applied by the allies. Many German manufacturers did not survive, including Zündapp; Ardie; MZ; DKW and NSU.

By the early 1970s, BMW's motorcycle division was struggling financially, with its bikes seen as staid and old-fashioned. Bob Lutz, BMW's USA executive vice president of sales, and industrial designer Hans Muth were instrumental in creating a new, exciting image for BMW motorcycles. Muth was tasked with designing a bike that was both sporty and high-quality. He took his inspiration from the MV Agusta 750S but added a distinct BMW flair. His creation, the BMW R90S, became the flagship of the range.

The BMW R90S was the first BMW ‘sport’ motorcycle, emerging onto the market amongst other heady classics-to-be like the Laverda 1000 (later the Jota); Kawasaki Z1; Yamaha RD350 and MV Agusta 500-4. Powered by an 898cc, air-cooled boxer engine, bored out from the previous 745cc engine, producing a heady 67 BHP. It was produced from 1973 to 1976, designed to change BMW's image from staid and utilitarian to modern and sporty. It featured a distinctive bikini half-fairing, a unique paint option, and sporty sweeping fairing, tank, and tail section styling that inspired the sport-touring segment. The R90S also included a clock and voltmeter, a new 5-speed gearbox, and twin front disc brakes, differentiating it from other BMW models. The R90S is considered the first true sport-tourer, combining sporty performance with genuine long-distance capability. The model helped to shed BMW's staid conservative image and ushered in a high-quality and desirable motorcycle marque.

Racing Pedigree

Despite its high price, the R90S was a success, due in part to notable successes in the AMA Superbike Championship. In March of 1976, BMW Motorrad created a sensation.



A trio of orange R90S bikes raced at the Daytona International Speedway, for the first AMA Superbike race. The championship marked a significant shift from the almost fully standard rules of previous production classes with more liberal regulations, which allowed engine and chassis modifications.

1 – BMW Motorrad AMA Racing machine from 1973

In the first race, BMWs ridden by Gary Fisher, Reg Pridmore and a last-minute addition Steve McLaughlin finished first and second in a photo finish! The entire season was competitive, with Pridmore winning the title and his teammate, Steve McLaughlin, finishing as runner-up. The legend of the Daytona Orange R90S machines, and future direction of BMW Motorrad, was sealed, influencing other variants of 'stock' machines such as the R100RS and R80G/S.

17455 units were sold worldwide, all manufactured initially in "Smoke Black/silver" but, after its 1973 racing successes, from 1974 also in "Daytona Orange", the racing colours of the AMA race machines. – So, they were all smoke black or orange - or were they?

In the 50 years or so since, many other BMW bikes have mimicked the styling of the R90S, or owners have modified their bikes to replicate them. Additionally, many R90Ss have been 'modernised', with parts which became standard in later models, some also now sporting custom colour changes.

The Daytona orange paint scheme remains iconic.

A stunning case in point is the morphing of the 1970s R90S bike into one of BMWs latest retro machines; the 2025 R12S, based on the R12 9T range of bikes.



2 - BMR R12S from 2025 - Copyright BMW Motorrad



3 - Pink Panther machine at Shepperton Studios. © Colin Cadle

But now for something completely different

There are, however, three R90S machines which started life very differently.

The first was commissioned in 1976 by the BMW importers, a car and motorcycle concession which was effectively BMW UK, trading from, and as, Park Lane BMW, in Mayfair, with its bike workshops (Technical Centre) in Braintree.

The cash sale of two BMW cars to Julie Andrews and her husband Blake Edwards, (producer of the Pink Panther films), resulted in an invitation from Edwards for the salesman (Colin Cadle) to visit Shepperton Studios.

Seeking permission from his boss to attend, a senior manager, (Stan Beesley) granted permission for the visit to go ahead - on one condition – that he could go too!

At the studios, the pair from Park Lane learned that the script for the film in production, *The Pink Panther Strikes Again*, called for a main character, Jarvis, to ride a high-powered motorbike. Clearly with “product placement” in mind, BMW Park Lane managers quickly convened and decided to present the studios with a special BMW R90S for Jarvis. The Pink Panther machine, originally a Daytona Orange bike, was prepared by the company’s Technical Department (workshops) at Braintree. The coloured components were removed before the machine was assembled, and were sent to the BMW paint shop in Dover. Once assembled, the R90S emerged in a vibrant two-tone graded pink colour. It was presented to Blake Edwards but it is said that the production company ultimately found the colour ‘too obvious’ for the film. They decided to accept, in its stead, a replacement Daytona orange bike, the machine which can be seen in the film. Because of the studio’s decision not to use the pink machine in the film, the bike was retained by Park Lane BMW and became a demonstrator.

This special pink bike was eventually sold to a customer but was later bought back by the same BMW Park Lane mechanic who had first PDI’d, and subsequently serviced it - and the only person to have ever worked on it since. The two-owner-from-new bike is currently undergoing restoration, after spending several years in storage. During its life, it has been retro-fitted with a custom painted RS fairing and rocker box covers from later machines. It currently has about 30,000 miles on the clock.




4. *Pink Panther machine under restoration*

The pink machine was closely followed by a blue and a green example; the story of which follows.

“I am green and it'll do fine. It's beautiful, and I think it's what I want to be” (*Kermit the frog*)

The Green R90S had a similar genesis, albeit not sparked by anything quite as exotic as a film star or Pink Panther film. Not being enamoured by the available R90S colours, the wife of a new machine’s purchaser apparently encouraged her husband to commission Park Lane BMW to recolour their new bike to match her green leathers. Buoyed by their experience with the Pink Panther machine, BMW Park Lane again sent the coloured components of a stock R90S to BMW paint shop in Dover and they were sprayed a BMW green colour, with silver shading and pale green pin-striping. The colour which appears on the original DVLA ‘Declaration for first registration’, on 1st August 1976, was “Taiga”, a contemporary BMW car colour. The DVLA database has since been amended to “green”, as DVLA only works with a list of standard colours.


 Department of the Environment

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Application for a Licence for a New Motor Vehicle and Declaration for Registration

V55/1

Important in your own interests, before completing this form, please read the booklet Notes on Completion of Vehicle Registration Forms obtainable from vehicle licensing offices and main Post Offices. This booklet explains which questions have to be answered for which class of vehicle. Please complete the form in black ball-point pen and in BLOCK LETTERS.

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------|----------|-------------------|---|----|----------------------|
| 1 Registration Mark | OYN 650R | 2 | Official Use Only | M | 3 | <p>7/5/23456 - 1</p> |
| 2 Taxation Class | Bicycle | | 1 | 7 | 4 | |
| 3 Period of Licence Applied for | 12 MONTHS | | 12 | | 5 | |
| 4 Duty Payable £ | 16 0 0 | 6 | | | | |
| 5 Make | BMW | | MO | | 9 | |
| 6 Model | R90/S | | | | 11 | |
| 7 Type of Body/Vehicle | Motor cycle | | 18 | | 13 | |
| 8 Wheelplan | 2 wheels | | A | | 15 | |
| 9 Colour(s) | Taiga | | H | | 17 | |
| 10 Hackney Class Only Seating Capacity (exclusive of Driver) | | | | | 19 | |
| 11 Date from which Licence is to run | Day Month Year | 01 8 767 | | | 8 | Official Use Only |
| 12 Type of Fuel | Petrol | | | | 10 | |
| 13 Chassis/Frame No. | 4092532 | | | | 12 | |
| 14 Engine Number | 4092532 | | | | 14 | |
| 15 Cylinder Capacity (in ccs) | 899 | | | | 16 | |
| 16 Gross Weight | Tons cwt lbs kg | | | | 18 | |
| 17 Unladen Weight | Tons cwt lbs kg | | | | 20 | |

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|-------|---|---|
| 110 | 111 | 112 |
| 15101 | Original Dealer (Name and Town) BMW Distributors London Limited 56 Park Lane London W1 | Code 15101 Selling Dealer (Name and Town) BMW Distributors London Ltd 56 Park Lane London W1 |

5 - Original DVLA declaration of First Registration showing colour as Taiga (later amended to Green)

The original owner sold the machine three years later, in 1979, having accumulated about 13,000 miles. It then passed through two other owners over 13 years, before being laid up with issues in about 1991, with 29,000 miles on the clock. It remained in storage, partly disassembled, until sold in 2001 for repair.



5 - Green R90S before restoration

reluctantly, sold it to the current owner in 2025.

'Kermit', as it has now been affectionately nicknamed, has therefore been ridden just 3,000 miles in the 34 years since 1991. As of 2025 it has now covered just 33,000 miles from new.

The new purchaser was unable to afford the costs of the restoration for a further 10 years, so it lay dormant in a garage until the respected R90S builder Keith Shaw was persuaded, and commissioned, to restore it in 2011. Many thousands of pounds were spent on a total restoration, carried out over 12 months, including a faithful reproduction of the 'Taiga green' paintwork by Dream Machine.

In the subsequent 10 years, the owner sadly found himself increasingly unable to ride it without pain and finally, and very

It clocked up the last 800 miles in October 2025, at the acclaimed Colombres Rally in Northern Spain, and run exclusively for classic (pre-1988) motorcycles by Moto Club Indianos. Apparently Kermit's second visit to the rally.



A touch of the Blues

The blue machine is sadly no more, having been written off in an incident whilst being ridden by its original owner. There are no known images of it. The current owner of the pink machine, (and also corroborated by the former foreman at Park Lane's Technical Centre) can attest to the demise of the blue R90S. The post-crash insurance assessment of it was done at Park Lane BMW. It was said to be in a terrible state and clearly never suitable to be put back on the road. The story of the crash is known but the circumstances are not appropriate for publication.

The Pink Panther Rides again?

So, contrary to common belief, not every BMW R90S started life as Smoke Grey or Daytona Orange. There were three 'specials' produced by Park Lane BMW in 1976, two of which are still going strong – or will be when the restoration of the pink machine is complete. We hope that the Pink Panther will truly strike again very soon, and be united (or perhaps reunited?) with Kermit.

