

PUTTING TEETH IN A BARRACUDA

Benelli's stylish five-speed 250 hasn't been quick enough for many owners. Here's an inexpensive go-fast kit to get you the ton.



Last August we took our first ride on the new five-speed Benelli Barracuda, one of the last and most popular of the 250 pushrod singles. We found the bike well-styled and, because of its low weight and low center of gravity, easy to handle. But despite its beautiful five-speed transmission, the Barracuda just would not go. It started easily, idled well, and moved off as effortlessly and as vibration-free as only a single can. It just didn't move very fast. The engine featured a tiny 24mm Dellorto carburetor, and cam timing was set for a very broad and conservative power spread, handy for avoiding a lot of shifting, but deadly if you like to use those five speeds to keep the little thumper on the boil.

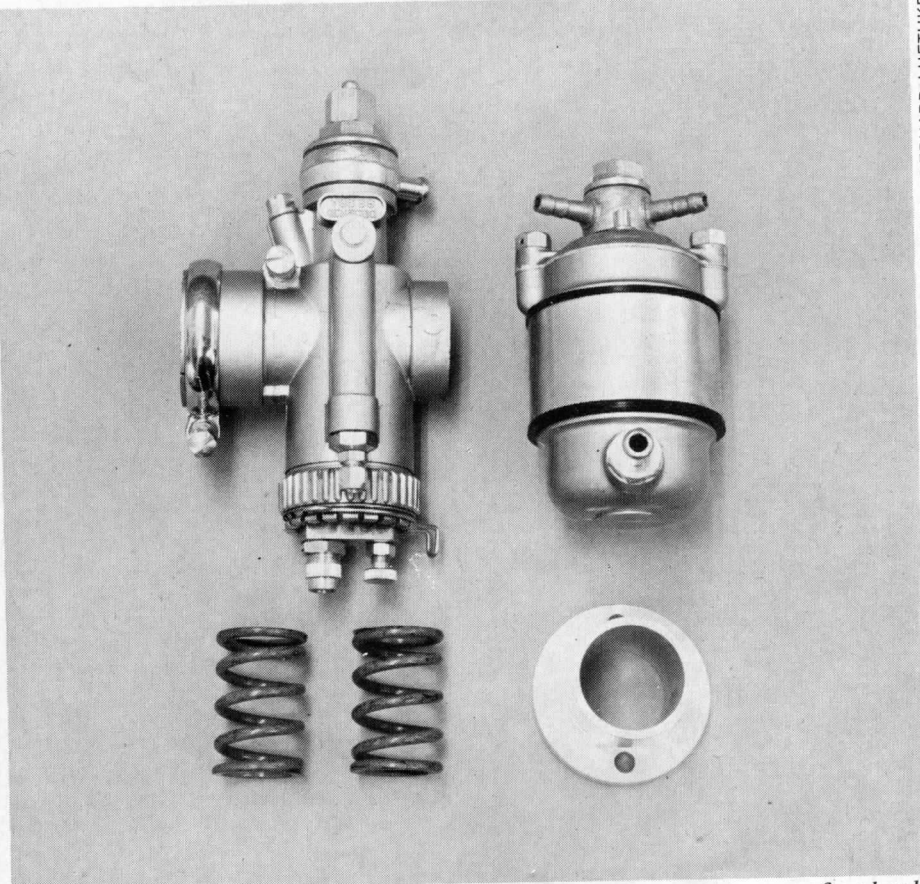
All of which we said in plain enough terms, which naturally did little to dissuade Benelli fanciers and even encouraged those buyers who wanted a simple, robust utility mount.

Those of you who bought (or bit) and who may want to add a little spice to your Latin ride, can now take hope. Joe Rotigni, brilliant service manager and race-bike builder at Cosmopolitan Motors, importers of the Benelli line, has up and designed a bolt-on performance kit that really does the job. For \$93 you get a 30mm carburetor and inlet manifold, a new, peakier camshaft, and a set of high-rpm valve springs. Installation is easy because the camshaft can be installed by removing the sidecovers alone

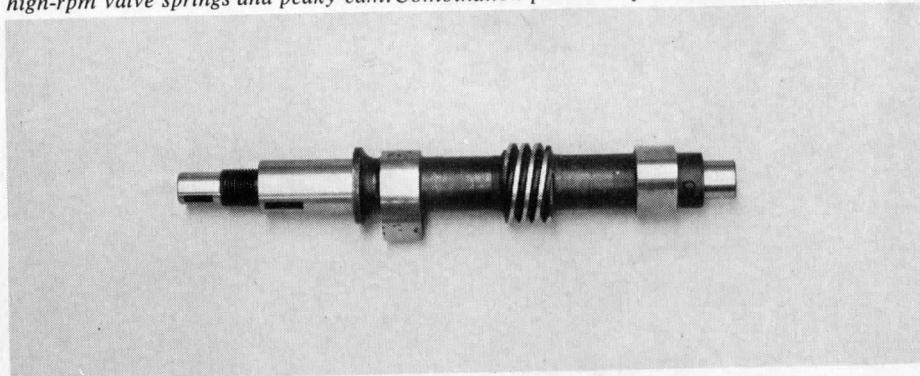
—without splitting the crankcases.

The only metalwork necessary involves beveling out the throat of the inlet tract to 30mm. Cam installation is a slide-through operation after you remove both side covers and an end plate on the left-hand side. Before you replace the head, you must remember to remove the aluminum head gasket that is fitted to the machine and substitute a thin paper gasket that comes with the kit. This will jack the compression ratio from 8.5 to one up to 9.2 to one. Put in the new valve-springs, bolt her up, and you're ready to ride. Joe Rotigni recommends that you leave this work to your dealer unless you have the experience, and tools to tackle it alone.

BARRACUDA



Barracuda go-fast kit includes a 30mm carb with manifold adaptor and remote float bowl, high-rpm valve springs and peaky cam. Combination provides optimum use of five-speed box.



What happens on the road makes the story worthwhile. Your Benelli 250 will still fire right up and will still idle comfortably without the lumpiness common to radical cam tuning. But turn up the wick and the Benelli moves right out. Not with a great scream of tire or a wheelie every time you shift—the Benelli just steps out with the manner of a four-stroke single—gradually, but gaining speed fast. The engine doesn't scream either, but thumps along ever more quickly as the machine gains momentum. If you're used to a high-rpm two stroke, you don't think you're going anywhere. But a glance at the speedometer may rattle you considerably.

We tested the Benelli on some de-

serted airport roads, which provided a series of short straightaways, absolutely flat, with sharp corners at each end. None was quite long enough to get a fair quarter-mile, but screwing it on out of a turn would yield an indicated 90 before you had to shut down for the next turn. The Benelli's brakes are taxed heavily at these speeds, but handling is good and it takes to corners quite steadily. We would guess that this tuned version of the Benelli will turn a quarter in the fifteens in the mid-80s, which is on a par with the quicker of its competitors in the 250cc class. Since it was still accelerating at 90, we would guess an honest 100 mph out of this machine.

All of which has been accomplished

with little harm to the Benelli's good manners. It will still thump along quite happily in traffic and you've always got a next-lower gear for accelerating or passing. Joe Rotigni, who built the Benelli 250 that won last year's Novice race at Daytona and who set up the 250cc E/fuel dragster that recently won at Atco dragway with a 12.98 quarter at 94.94 mph, has cut enough cams and run enough dyno tests in his backroom development shop to find a cheap and workable combination for the street rider who wants a few more teeth in his Barracuda. The kit is available now from your Benelli dealer and costs less than \$100. When you've learned to handle 24 bhp, take the move to thirty. ©