

Chang Jiang at 500 miles

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As some of you will know, I have ridden, sold and supported Ural motorcycles through my company F2 Motorcycles Ltd for decades. We still support Ural owners with spares, service and technical advice, but we no longer supply new Urals.

However, we wish the new importers and dealers the very best.

After much negotiation, F2 Motorcycles Ltd, along with the European Distributor DIP of France, have managed to persuade Chang

Jiang to produce a left-hand sidecar version of their new water-cooled 650 EFI sidecar combination. This has been type approved to Euro 5 standard, and F2 Motorcycles Ltd have been appointed as the agent for the UK.

The very first example with VIN number ending 00001 was registered to myself in September 2021. I treated this, as I do all motorcycles, by starting with a very thorough preparation – checking, oiling, greasing and adjusting everything, leaving nothing to chance. This



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didn't turn up any horrors, but it did give me a few surprises. The complete outfit arrives with the sidecar attached so one might assume aligned correctly, but this is not the case – the alignment was way out, and so I now know that they are just put together for ease of crating. I also have to assume that many of the nuts and bolts are tightened with air tools, either that, or the workforce is made up almost entirely of world's strongest man competitors. Just about everything I undid was ridiculously tight, but I suppose this is better than bits falling off during the long voyage and road trip they undergo to get here. I do wonder if the guy who tensions the spokes at the Ural factory trained his opposite number in the Chang Jiang factory. I have never PDI-ed a Ural and found the spokes evenly tensioned, there are always 3 or 4 which are so loose they rattle and Chang Jiang are the same, 40 spokes, 35 or so nicely tensioned with 5 rattling about loose.

They had made no attempt to add balance weights, which is one up on Ural who add weights but always in the wrong place. It's no big deal and easily sorted as part of the PDI. Really I found very little else of note during the preparation. I have PDI'd a few now and they seem consistent. If I'm being critical, some of the finish could be better, but I have always felt the same about Urals and indeed Jawas. So, just as I have always done with the other marques, I treat the underside of the mudguards and give all the nooks and crannies a coat of ACF50 as part of the preparation.

The first few rides were a major culture shock for me. Decades of riding softly sprung, roly-poly lazy-engined Urals did not prepare me for the Chang Jiang experience. Like most people, I had assumed it would be pretty much the same but maybe with a little more top-end. However, there are no similarities at all between the two marques.

On the very first press of the start button, the lack of mechanical clatter reminds you that this is a modern water-cooled motor. The Bosch EFI seems to manage cold and hot starts equally well with no drama. The Chang Jiang sits low to the ground and has firm, some might even say hard suspension. Thankfully, the superb adjustable sprung saddle helps a lot with the overall comfort level, but this is most definitely a bike for use on the road rather than a go anywhere on/off road compromise. There is pretty much zero body roll in corners, and the low centre of gravity helps keep the sidecar on the ground during spirited riding. The steering is heavier than I'm used to, but this imparts a great deal of stability with no tendency to flap about, even on rough roads. A steering damper is fitted as standard, but in all honesty, it's not needed.

The gear-change is as you would expect from a modern motorcycle – slick, and thankfully with a heel and toe rocker, as my stupidly large size 13 boots have problems getting under the toe for up changes. The pattern is odd, neutral is at the bottom, so it's all up as in 0,1,2,3,4. This is to allow for the reverse. There is a lever on the handlebars that acts as a

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safety lock-out for reverse. Once this is moved out of the locked position, the reverse gear below neutral can be selected and the pattern becomes R,0,1,2,3,4. The dashboard contains a gear indicator and there is a reversing light, and a rather annoying reversing bleeper (which I have removed from my bike).

Chang Jiang along with Bosch seem to have done a decent job of optimising the mapping for sidecar use. This same engine is used by a number of manufacturers, and in some cases puts out well over 70hp, but Chang Jiang have done the right thing and detuned it to 54 hp with a very wide spread of usable torque peaking at 45 ft/lbs, (for comparison Ural claim 41 hp and 42 ft/lbs for their 2022 model). The Chang Jiang motor will pull smoothly in top gear from below 30 mph right up to the maximum speed. I have to say, as I enjoy a clean license I have not been able to verify the maximum speed on the road, but it easily exceeds the national speed limit in the UK, which is enough for me. It is certainly a higher revving motor than I'm used to and at first it

seems like it could do with higher gearing, but after a couple of hundred miles, to acclimatise, I have come to the conclusion that the gearing is about right. It just seems odd cruising at 50 mph and 5000 rpm where as the Ural at the same speed would be doing 4000 rpm. But at this speed the Chang Jiang still has another 4000 rpm to go, so it's hardly really trying.

I rode the Chang Jiang to an MZ rally in December. It gave me a chance to get a feel for the comfort after a few hours riding, and the cold. Wet weather was ideal for giving the electrical system a thorough water ingress test. It was comfortable for me, and the standard heated grips were a real plus on this trip. All the electrics worked, and all in all, it was a completely drama-free and thoroughly enjoyable ride. As the air temperature dropped it became clear just how good the Ural had been at heating my feet, so I have had to invest in heated insoles for winter riding on the Chang Jiang.

Naturally, many people have asked me which

is better, the Ural or the Chang Jiang. On the face of it this seems like a simple enough question, but the answer is really which is the better bike for you and your needs.

The Ural is primarily an off road vehicle of old design with some modern tech added to squeeze through emissions standards. It is slow, it wallows in corners, and has some reliability issues if used outside of its design brief (which is riding along unmade roads carrying a reasonable load at speeds below 55 mph with frequent maintenance). It has a torquey engine and without doubt has an old world charm, but the usable rev range is only 2,500 rpm (2,000 to 4,500). That said, it is comfortable, light to steer, great on badly surfaced roads and easy for the home mechanic to do basic routine servicing including valve clearance adjustment every 2,500 miles. Ural have chosen to do everything they can to make it difficult for the EFI system to be interrogated away from a dealer, although there are some clever owners who have come up with solutions.

The Chang Jiang is very much a road bike. It can maintain 65/70 mph all day if required,

and equally it can potter along at 30/40 mph in top gear. The engine is very flexible having a usable rev range of about 4,500 rpm (3,000 to 7,500). If you let the motor spin it is fairly quick, and certainly much quicker than the Ural. It corners without body roll or wallow and is more stable on smooth roads. That said it is heavier to steer and the ride is harsher on badly made roads. It is a complex motor, and while simple tasks like oil changes are easy enough for the home mechanic, more complex work such as valve clearance (at 30k plus miles) may be beyond home maintenance, although any dealer who has ever seen a Kawasaki 650 twin could manage this. The EFI, being made by Bosch, can be interrogated by any cheap OBD2 reader available from eBay for about £25.00.

I removed the rear seat from my bike to expose the substantial luggage rack, partly because I don't need the passenger seat, but mostly because I prefer the looks. Everything else has been left standard.



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