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EXCLUSIVE **JAY
LENO**

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21 >



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HOLLYWOOD

THE K1500GT

A Modern- Day Ace





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According to Jay Leno, legendary host of *The Tonight Show* and motorcycle enthusiast, BMW's K1600GT is way ahead of its time, reminding him of another model in his collection, the 1924 Ace.

JAY LENO

is well known for two things: comedy and his garage. It's hard to tell which he loves more, wisecracking in front of a national TV audience or his stable of exotic cars and motorcycles that encompasses over 100,000 square feet of hangar space in Burbank, California. Clearly from his eclectic collection of machines he is keen for *anything* motorized. Leno's passion runs deeper than pure aesthetics. He likes to know what's behind the fairing or cowl, why it works and how. From his trademarked top-to-bottom denim attire, you can tell he's an average guy who likes to get his hands dirty. Well, not *that* average—he has the means to acquire just about anything he desires. When he wanted the new flagship BMW K1600GT, he got one. We sat down to discuss his thoughts on his latest BMW acquisition and motorcycles in general.

A self-proclaimed workaholic by choice, Leno takes only a few weeks off each year. He says he doesn't like to travel much. He likes *his* house, *his* bed, and *his* daily life. And, due to the daily live taping of *The Tonight Show*, he's tied geographically to the Los Angeles area. As he puts it, "I work every day. On the weekends, I fly to Vegas to perform standup. I've got to be in a 50- to 100-mile radius of this place. I'll go up to the Angeles Crest or the Rock Store. I'm not riding up to San Francisco, Las Vegas or even Yosemite. I have to be at work the next day, so I really can't go too far."

Fascinated by technology, Leno's hot for anything seen as ahead of its time. Stand-

ing in his garage admiring a 1924 Ace, he points out, “That went 132 miles per hour...in 1924, which is pretty quick for a bike even by today’s standards.” That’s why he had to have the K1600GT, even though its modern styling stands out almost awkwardly among his bevy of vintage and exotic motorcycles. “It’s a modern-day Ace, way ahead of its time. Years from now it will make more sense in my collection than it does right now,” he predicts.

Leno admits he adores old-school motorcycle design. As he puts it, he likes to “see through the machines. Motorcycles are like watches; you open the back and you can see all the things moving. Modern bikes, with all the fairings and covers, don’t interest me quite as much.” Though he’s quick to recognize the advantages new advancements have brought, Leno praises modern companies by saying, “Now motorcycles lead the way in technology in terms of engine capacity per liter. Nobody gets more power out of engines than motorcycle manufacturers, but these developments have been a long time coming... the fact that you now have ABS *and* traction control—they were unheard of back then. Most bike manufacturers were still using drum rear-brake technology as late as mid-’70s!”

Even though Jay knows the incredibly advanced mechanics and robust styling of the K1600GT leave little to modify, he’s willing to trade that for the exhilarating riding experience. “It’s like driving a Ferrari, or any big front-engine car—it’s fast, comfortable, and handles great. Most big touring bikes don’t really handle that well.” Smiling, he adds, “... and I can take my wife on it.” The bike’s prowess also impresses Leno, “It has incredible torque; it’s an amazing bike.” Leno jokingly compares his love of classics with the newest member of his fleet: “Most of my bikes are hard work. When you’re driving a ’31 Henderson, even a short distance, it’s like you’ve been on it forever even though you haven’t. It’s exhausting! I take the 1600GT; it’s effortless and the time just flies by.”

The late night comedian is excited by what he calls a “BMW Renaissance” that has taken place over the last few years. “I like what they’re doing right now. The S1000RR is one of the best bikes I’ve ever ridden. It is just incredible!” He claims that while riding that bike, “With the traction control, I could go down the road and power shift it, hold the throttle down, and I know the wheel will come up only this much (holding his fingers a

few inches apart) and won’t go any further. Well, when you’re 61 years old, that’s pretty good, knowing that you’re not going to flip this thing. I’m not going to go end-over-end on it. I know that it’s going to catch me if I go into a corner.” Handling and speed, he adds, are its most notable attributes. On one particular ride Leno remembers, “I was going down the freeway. I looked down at the odometer and said to myself, *I’m doing 122 miles per hour!* Then I started thinking, *oh it’s kilometers—it must be kilometers.* Nope, it wasn’t kilometers!”

Enthusiasts such as Leno recall the old days when BMWs were mechanically superior, but not necessarily as thrilling to ride as they are today, describing them as “a mature person’s motorcycle.” But however solidly grounded in a tradition of innovation and excellence, BMW continues to lead the charge with new advancements and styling. Nodding to this evolution, Leno adds, “Now you have that reliability factor with all the flash and pizzazz. It’s exciting to be at the Rock Store

and hear guys in their early 20s proudly talking up their BMWs. It makes me smile because that wouldn’t have happened 25 years ago.”

Leno is also very astute about what it takes to bring such great bikes to market. “The amount of R&D, and the innovation being put into the product is remarkable. The fact that they came out of nowhere with this six, a whole new engine design, is pretty amazing to me. When everybody’s downsizing they come out with

this monster! I like that they didn’t just assume the customer base is getting older and just keep catering to them. That’s what I really like about BMW: they commit to so many new products on such a massive scale.”

Jay Leno is the perfect host, excitedly showing us nearly every motorcycle, car, and oddity in his vast collection. And when we suggested a ride, he was the first one geared up and ready in the saddle of his K1600GT. Jay handled the sizable machine with ease, managing to burn up some twisties as we made our way along a canyon road. When it comes down to riding abilities, the comic is quick to point out, “I don’t consider myself a particularly good rider; I’m a safe rider. They say there are old riders and bold riders, but no old, bold riders.” He’s far from old, and isn’t afraid to goose the throttle either. It seems Mr. Leno has struck the perfect balance in his life: if he’s not tinkering with one of his toys, he’s out enjoying a ride on one. ▀

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Jay enjoying a canyon road on his K1600GT.



Jay among a "few" of his motorcycles housed in hangars.

