

MAXIMUM VISION



Victory's Vision isn't for wallflowers. Heading to the old Eastern Bloc proved that, as **KEN WOOTTON** quickly discovered...



New meets old in the back streets of Chemnitz, in the old DDR.

I've never ridden a bike that has attracted so much attention. Period. That holds true on Australian roads, but it is amplified 100-fold when those roads are in Europe's old Eastern Bloc.

I may well have been an alien from outer space given the rubber-necking the Victory Vision attracted in the old Commie countries of Poland, Czech and the former East Germany (DDR).

Fuel stops became a social encounter rather than a mechanical necessity, stopping at traffic lights attracted a massive crowd of onlookers, and cars I'd overtaken sped up to return the favour for a second look.

It worked in reverse too, and Porsches and AMG Benzs and BMW M6s that sped past me on the autobahns at 230km/h-plus would suddenly slow, quite often with a passenger hanging out the window with a camera, so that I could motor back past at the Vision's comfortable cruising speed of 180km/h.

Elderly women in Prague wanted to sit in the saddle, cute teenage girls in Krakow wanted their photo taken, and the owners of small family hotels near the DDR border wanted to adopt me.



Poland awaits – once the speed limits have been memorised!



Attracting onlookers in Krakow, Poland.



Schloss Augustusburg, near the DDR/ Czech border. These days the castle houses a magnificent motorcycle museum.

Helping that curious and sometimes bizarre behaviour was the fact that Victory has yet to officially enter the European market, the American marque having some homologation issues to address before fighting the likes of BMW Motorrad on home turf.

My Vision came via the factory-owned UK distributor, where Victory motorcycles are available via special import due to the less stringent UK homologation requirements. But while the Vision may be becoming a more familiar sight on UK roads, I may as

well have been piloting a flying saucer on the Continent.

The Vision's looks are part futuristic, part retro-American '50s, and the quality of finish is amazing. Without external hinges or fastenings apparent, the whole look is one of smoothness and flowing lines. The Vision is an amazing-looking motorcycle.

When I first saw the Vision in photographs I'll readily admit I thought it was ugly. When I saw it for the first time at the 2008 Melbourne Expo I thought it looked a lot better

in the flesh, but the jury was still out – although at \$35,995 (plus ORC) it seemed to offer plenty of bike for the bucks. Now having ridden it and lived with it for four weeks and 7500km, I reckon it's absolutely stunning. No wonder UK weekly *MCN* awarded it its Best Tourer award.

There's no escaping the fact that the Victory Vision is a big bike – a very big bike. Both in physical presence on the road and mass. Add a rider and pillion, 23lt of fuel and additional luggage and all-up mass is 600kg-plus.



Domazlice in the Czech Republic. Those cobblestones can be treacherous when it rains. And even in the dry...



A dying breed, but a few Trabants still exist in the old Eastern Bloc. This one in Osweicim, Poland.



Air temperature, track temperature, and a full grid for the Polish GP.



But while that may be hefty, it's not overly daunting.

The Vision was surprisingly capable over a wide range of European roads, from billiard-table smooth German autobahns to the somewhat challenging backroads in Poland, where a never-ending line of potholes seem to be joined together by a never-ending line of hotmix patches.

Trust me, Polish backroads make Aussie country roads seem smooth.

The main roads are fine, as they are throughout the Eastern Bloc, but

where's the adventure in that? Getting off the beaten track and meeting the locals is what travelling means to me, and I came away from this latest trip with some great memories.

The Vision was partly responsible for that, as I couldn't help but meet the locals. They wanted to talk, even if my grasp of Polish or Czech is as good as my grasp of Swahili. Zilch. However, where there's a will there's a way and communication is usually achievable with some effort on both sides.

I just wish my effort had been a little

more enthusiastic when it came to ordering sustenance.

Pickled whole ox tongue (*Eingelegte Rindzunge* in the local lingo) for dinner or minced raw pork for breakfast is not my normal fare. Guess it's just part of the rich tapestry of travels in faraway places...

Speaking of travels, getting from A to B via the autobahn, autoroute, autostrada or motorway systems across Europe is a breeze on the Vision. The electronic cruise control was a boon in this sort of highway use,



Krakow, Poland – one of Europe's most beautiful cities. And without the teeming tourists of Prague.



No other production motorcycle looks like the Vision. It's a head-turner!

TECH TALK

In addition to its obvious visual differentiation, the Vision varies from other models in the Victory line-up in both engine and chassis.

The Vision shares the same eight-valve, SOHC, air/oil-cooled, 50-degree configuration of its cruiser cousins, but capacity is upped from 1634cc to 1731cc (106ci) via 6mm more stroke.

Revised cam profiles in the Vision's larger-capacity fuel-injected powerplant help deliver peak torque of 148Nm (109ft-lb) at 3250rpm, with maximum power of 69kW (94hp) at 4500rpm.

Hydraulic lifters assist in minimising maintenance costs, with 45mm throttle bodies and a six-speed gearbox rounding out the package.

Unlike the traditional steel-tube frame found in the Victory cruisers, the Vision scores a frame that comprises a pair of aluminium castings bolted together.

Victory claims the set-up to be 25 per cent lighter than the frame used on the Vegas with less parts to boot – 31 on the Vision versus 64 on the Vegas.

Tip-over protection is included in the frame design, meaning a topple-over in a carpark should result in minimal damage as the bike won't go fully belly-up. Mind you, lifting the 365kg behemoth upright could prove a challenge.

The Vision engine is solidly-mounted from the larger of the two frame castings, which also holds the 43mm Marzocchi fork and houses the intake duct for the airbox.

Although solidly mounted, the counter-balanced engine transmits minimal vibes through the chassis, with rubber-mounted swept-back handlebars removing any left-over tingles.

Top speed on an unrestricted autobahn is over 200km/h.



making the 'transport' section fuss-free and relaxing. Add in a quality sound system, adjustable screen, comfy seat and heaps of legroom and the Vision is a very capable long-distance hauler.

The legroom surprised me, as I find some touring bikes leave me wedged in position and unable to stretch. Comfy saddles may be one thing, but it's nice to stretch occasionally. So it is with the Vision. Even with the low 673mm seat height, there's a lot of room via the footboards for varying leg positions. Top marks.

Top marks also to the adjustable screen, which suited my 187cm torso perfectly. In the lowest position I could see over the screen with minimal buffeting, while in the high position I could see through it with no annoying top edge to affect my vision (pardon the pun!).

That trip computer was one of the Vision's gadgets that helped pass the time on the boring, straight bits. So too did the sound system, which was radio only on the testbike. It's possible to add a CD stacker from the vast

Victory accessory range, plus there's provision for an owner to plug in their own MP3 player in the left glove compartment. The one on the right hides the fuel cap, which fills both forward-mounted fuel 'pods'.

Throw in heated grips, individually heated rider and pillion seats and easily-operated panniers and topbox and the Vision Tour Premium seemingly has it all in the pampering stakes.

Victory UK had fitted the test Vision with a GPS unit, but truth be

JUST DO IT

Are you a motorcycle tragic? Do you live and breathe motorcycles, enjoy any elite level of motorcycle competition, want to see iconic motorcycles up close and personal, and enjoy riding motorcycles on some of the best bike roads on the planet?

If the answer is yes, then there's one place you need to head – Europe. I do so every year – and I have the Amex statements to prove it.

Each year I'm drawn back, like a moth to a light globe. And each year there's been something new to discover, another motorcycle memory to savour, another experience to recount to friends.

It's not that hard to do, as it's never been easier to travel – something I've tried to convey to a mate who constantly accuses me of being a lucky bastard.

"I wish I could go to a MotoGP in Europe," my mate whinged. "I've always wanted to attend a World Speedway GP too."

There's no luck involved. The internet has made travel easier than ever, with flights, accommodation, event tickets, rental bikes/cars and route planning all just one tap on the keyboard away.

My Qantas economy flight from Melbourne to London Heathrow in June last year cost just \$700 one way – booked on the internet. My British Airways two-hour connecting flight from Heathrow to Barcelona, also booked online, added \$225. And that meant I was trackside to see The Doctor pull off his amazing last-corner, last-lap pass on bitter rival, albeit teammate, Jorge Lorenzo. What a race.

There are cheaper airlines than the above if you travel light, but sometimes luggage limits can spring nasty surprises, especially if you're carrying bike-riding gear. I prefer to play safe.

My accommodation in Barcelona across MotoGP weekend cost me Euro 41.30 (A\$59) a night in an Ibis hotel 25 minutes from the

circuit – again, booked via the internet through the Accor Hotels website.

"I'd love to visit some of those bike museums you go to," whinged my mate.

Simple. Google a couple of names and you'll be surprised with what appears. I found museums for Morbidelli, DKW, NSU, Jawa and Ducati in a quick session on the laptop. I even visited the old Trabant factory – now a major museum – in Zwickau, in the former East Germany, to satisfy my fascination with the quirky little two-stroke car of the old DDR.

While flights and rental cars are the easier option for those short on time and with the necessary disposable income, travelling Europe by motorcycle is the preferred option.

There are three ways to sort your own wheels. Motorcycle rental companies abound, but this can prove pricey for extended periods on the Continent.

Shipping your own bike to Europe via a specialist company such as Get Routed is another option, with insurance and paperwork handled on your behalf.

Buying a bike while abroad is another option, although you'll usually require an address in the country of purchase so as to arrange insurance, etc. If you're lucky you may be able to crunch a buy-back arrangement with the dealer once you're ready to head home.

Some of my best memories are of finding small hotels in little villages, where there is little if any English spoken. Travelling by motorcycle breaks down any barriers, and a little effort with some of the local lingo will bring a smile and a helping hand.

My advice to my whinging mate is to stop talking about it and do it.

Life's too short to have regrets.



Hotel Galicja in Osweicim – a KW favourite.



It's open slather in France!



Roadside sklep – a great way to meet the locals.



Mine's bigger than yours! Vision versus Trabi.

Outside the walls of Birkenau/Auschwitz Concentration Camp in southern Poland. A visit is a sombre experience.



known I hardly used it. The highway network is well sign-posted across Europe, and I actually enjoyed finding places to stay that weren't planned in advance – like the little family-run hotel near Schloss Augustusburg in DDR, or Hotel Galicja in Oscweicim (Auschwitz) in Poland, or Park Hotel in Cham near the Czech border.

While the autobahns allowed rock-steady 200km/h speeds, the Vision is not too shabby in the dynamic stakes either. Those somewhat challenging backroads proved that a 365kg motorcycle can still be hustled along at a fair clip if need be, and that a relaxed pace can be just as enjoyable as a nose-down, bum-up, pucker ride on the latest crotch-rocket.

Ground clearance is quite impressive given the bike's design brief and dimensions, and I had no wallowy moments through the faster corners to get the heart rate racing. It's easy to see why Pommy bike tabloid *MCN* rates the Vision so highly.

Braking requires greater use of the right pedal than the right lever for best effect, the linked brakes doing a top job of hauling the behemoth down.

VICTORY DOWNUNDER

Following a teaser glimpse of the marque at 2008's Ulysses AGM in Townsville, Victory officially launched its line-up into the local market at the November 2008 Australian Motorcycle Expo in Melbourne, with Victory Motorcycles (US) Vice President Mark Blackwell making the trip from the company's US headquarters, in Medina (Minnesota), for the occasion.

With Australia the second-largest cruiser market outside North America, Blackwell is bullish about the brand's future Downunder.

"The Australian cruiser market is bigger than Germany's and runs second only to Japan," says Blackwell.

"Victory as a brand may have only been around for 10 years, but parent company Polaris is a US\$2b company and we're

committed to doing things properly."

That desire to do things properly can be seen via the first Victory showroom to open in Australia, the factory-owned flagship store in Melbourne's CBD motorcycle mecca at 544-554 Elizabeth Street (below).

"We made the decision to enter the Australian market back in February 2008 – prior to the world financial downturn – and to do it with factory-owned signature showrooms in the major markets," says Australian Sales Manager, Peter Harvey.

Victory currently has franchised dealerships in Brisbane, Newcastle and Mackay, with Victory's factory-owned Sydney store due to open later this year.

Watch this space...



The injected 1731cc V-twin has oodles of grunt, with an indicated 100km/h registering just 2400rpm on the tacho. The six-speed gearbox is in some ways overkill, with sixth an overdrive to assist with commendable fuel consumption figures.

Around town the trip computer registered 17.5km/l, with an overall average of 20km/l. Exercising the right wrist on the autobahns saw 15km/l on the digital display, that display emitting a blue glow at night.

The Vision's cockpit is impressive, with the big tiller-like 'bars' sweeping back to the rider and the fairing and console mounted further forward than on other bikes. It makes for a spacious view – bit like a captain in charge of a Supertanker! Or in the case of the Eastern Bloc, an alien spaceship.

It was an absolutely marvellous trip through my favourite part of Europe – and through countries often overlooked by Aussies heading overseas. The Eastern Bloc prices are far cheaper, the people are friendly, and the countries are steeped in history.

This latest experience was made all the more enjoyable by the Victory Vision, a bike aimed squarely at the likes of Harley-Davidson's Electra Glide, Honda's GoldWing and BMW's K 1200 LT. If you enjoy meeting the locals, then there's only one choice.

The *Eingelegte Rindzunge* is an optional extra... ■

Below: Meeting the DDR locals is part of the joy of travel. Language is obviously no barrier to stupidity.



SPEX

VICTORY VISION TOUR PREMIUM

ENGINE

Type: 1731cc, eight-valve, air/oil-cooled, SOHC, four-stroke, 50-degree V-twin
Bore x stroke: 101 x 102mm
Compression ratio: 9.4:1
Fuel system: Fuel injection

TRANSMISSION

Type: Six-speed
Final drive: Belt

CHASSIS

Frame type: Fabricated aluminium
Front suspension: 43mm conventional Marzocchi fork, non-adjustable
Rear suspension: Monoshock, adjustable for preload
Front brakes: Twin 300mm discs with four-piston calipers
Rear brake: Single 300mm disc with twin-piston caliper

DIMENSIONS

Dry weight: 365kg
Seat height: 673mm
Fuel capacity: 22.7 litres
Fuel consumption: 20km/l

PERFORMANCE

Max power: 69kW (94hp) at 4500rpm
Max torque: 148Nm (109ft-lb) at 3250rpm

OTHER STUFF

Testbike supplied by: Victory Motorcycles UK
Warranty: 24 months/unlimited kilometres
Colours: Solid black, Solid Midnight Cherry, Solid Blue Ice, Ocean Blue/Sandstone Metallic or Cherry/Sandstone Metallic
Price: \$35,995* (more for two-tone colour options)

*Manufacturer's price excluding dealer and statutory costs

THUMBS UP

- > Superb comfort
- > Quality finish
- > Constant attention

THUMBS DOWN

- > No reverse gear
- > Constant attention