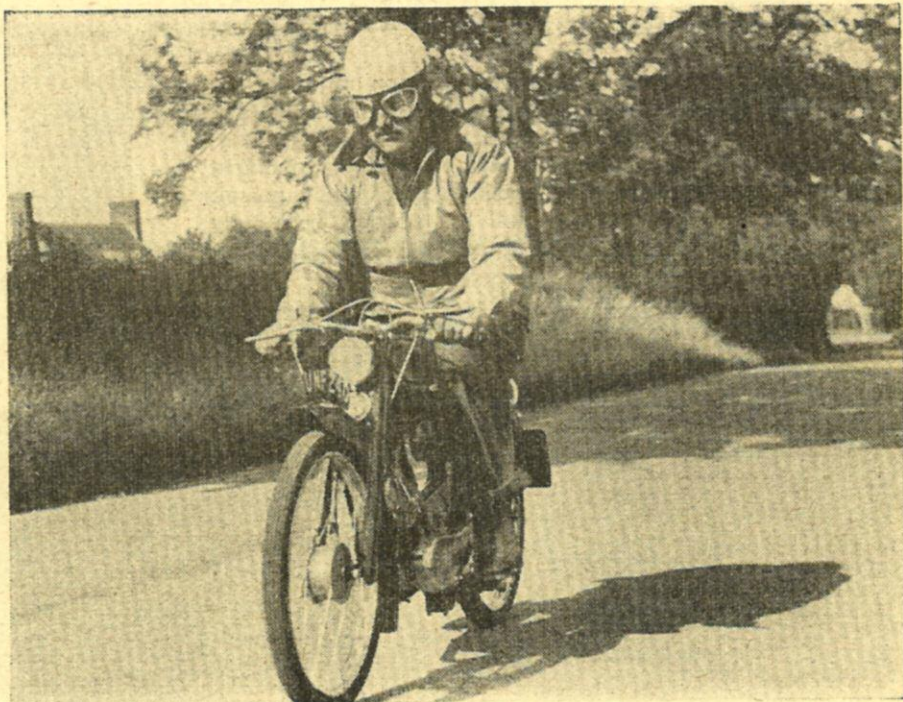


On the Dot! Our man purrs through a Hertfordshire lane, with over 200 miles motoring behind him, and a further hundred to complete.

THERE are people who still think of the moped as little more than a toy, fit perhaps for a five-mile run to work, or an occasional jaunt of ten or fifteen miles into the country-side, but quite unfitted for the sterner stuff which is long-distance riding. Nothing, of course, could be farther from the truth.

However, it's one thing to make assertions, another to uphold them, and though I could talk myself into a raging thirst, folk *would* come back with the rejoinder, "Ah, but *how far* can you go in a day on one of these contraptions?"

It happens to be a long time since I last had an outing to the North, and when "needed" on this point once too often I decided to put the matter to the test by selecting a Lancashire starting point and heading south to cover something like 300 miles in a day's ride, if I could. That decision once taken, the choice of machine became almost automatic, for did not the famous Dot



ON THE DOT—FOR 300 MILES!

*JOHN THORPE Tells the Story
of a 14-Hour Run on Britain's
Latest Moped*

concern operate in Manchester? And didn't they market a very quick and handsome little machine called the Dot-Vivi "Racer"? And wouldn't they lend me one if I asked politely? The answer in each case was "Yes."

My schedule had already been mapped out. A week-end at Longridge, near Preston, with a bit of running over the fells to accustom myself to the model. Then an early-Monday-morning start, over the Pennines to York, whence I would head for London, and home to Crawley Down, in Sussex. That made a mileage of exactly 300, and to add to the interest of the excursion I planned to follow the record route from G.P.O. York to G.P.O. London to find out how a moped would compare with Earnshaw's cycle time of 8 hr. 23 min. Alas for human plans, the Dot proved to be brand-new, with not a mile's running to its credit, and that was that. Even though I'm sometimes accused of being a hard task-master with my machinery I wasn't going to flog a brand-new engine in an attempt to keep to an over-tight schedule, though subsequent experience proved that the Dot would in fact have done the point-to-point trip comfortably in eight hours, or even less.

At precisely ten to six on a Monday morning which promised a fair, and all but windless, day I headed the Dot away from Longridge on the easterly run to Clitheroe, Skipton and York. Within four

miles a disaster was narrowly avoided. As I rounded a bend a hen shot out of a hedge and made a determined suicide bid under my front wheel. Evasive action converted the collision into a mere glancing blow, and Clara Cluck departed in high dudgeon, amidst a flurry of plumage, to seek liquidation elsewhere.

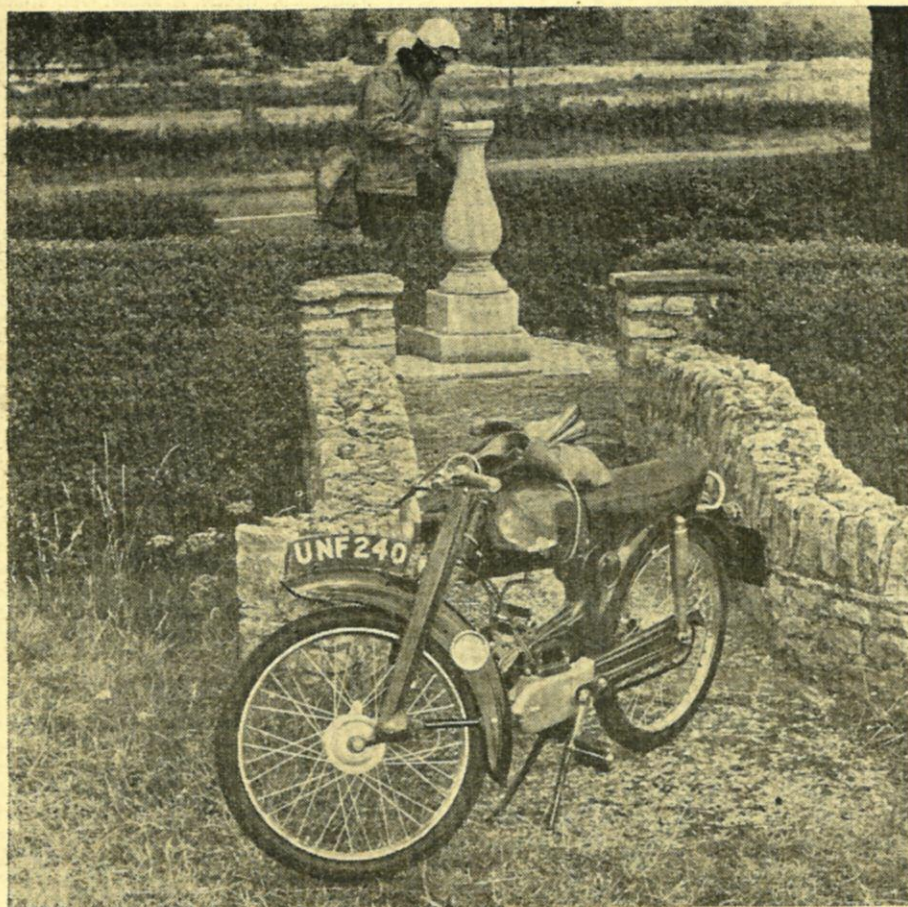
With the Dot purring along at a comfortable 30 m.p.h., and snug in my "Alaska" jacket, despite the early morning chill, I settled down to enjoy the scenery, which, once you have crossed into Yorkshire, is beautiful, with bright green fields flanked by low, dry-stone walls, and with the surrounding skyline broken by jagged rocks protruding from the hill-crests. Even a bout of sparking-plug trouble failed to upset either my equanimity or my schedule, and the 77 miles to York were covered in exactly 2 hr. 55 min. It was on this stretch, when the engine had covered little more than 75 miles and was still tight, that I was forced to pedal for the first and last time in a trip which embraced 11 counties—on a real snorter of an incline a few miles east of Clitheroe.

It was not until 9.50 a.m. that I set off for London from York, more than an hour having been lost through a

mixed-up arrangement with a photographer, and almost at once I lost myself, partly due to a perverse habit of trying to navigate by-roads by the sun, mainly to the inefficiency of the sign-post wallahs of the York County Council, whose outlook appears to be parochial at the widest interpretation, and who have a charming habit of placing "No Through Road" signs at the end, not the beginning, of highways to which they apply. As a result I had a very enjoyable run through the narrow lanes around York, and emerged an hour later at Tadcaster—only nine miles away, and off the route to Selby into the bargain!

Troubles never come alone. As if that wasn't a bad enough start, the German plug with which the Dot was equipped "whiskered" persistently. It was not until we reached Doncaster—only 34 miles' progress in two hours, though I had in fact covered something like 45 miles, thanks to my misadventure—that I was able to persuade the machine to run properly. The trouble was to be sought in the new engine—it was of necessity being driven too hard and was consequently overheated.

Having cleared the biggest traffic jam I've seen for years, and with the machine at last giving of its best, I settled in for some steady motoring. So well did the Dot respond that Newark—72 miles from York by the direct route, 83 by Thorpe's

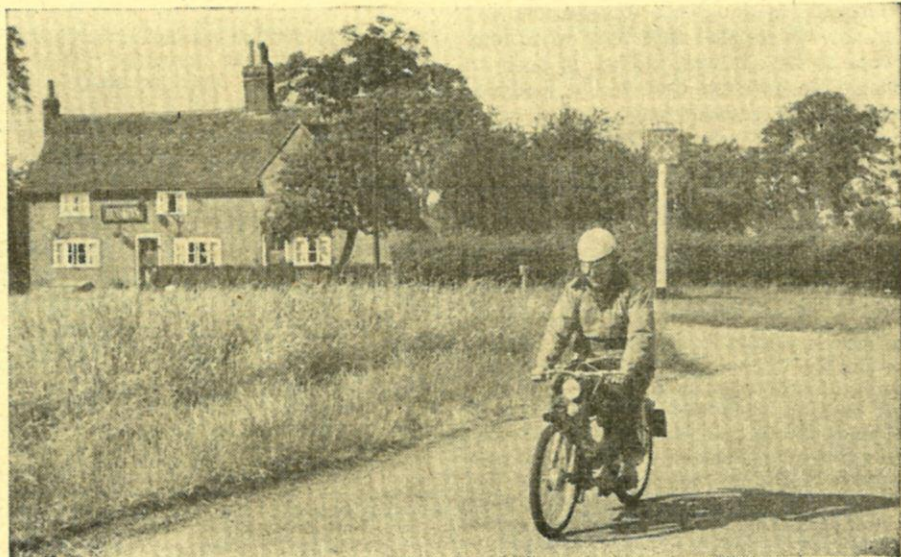


devious back-double!—was reached in exactly three hours, giving a running average of 28 m.p.h. That was creditable enough, but even more so was the Dot's time from Tadcaster, where I had picked up the road after going astray, for those 66 miles had been covered in two hours with an engine not fully run in!

By now, I had covered 160 miles since leaving Longridge, yet I was still fresh and enjoying the ride. Several things accounted for this—the excellence of the machine's handling and suspension, the responsive engine, and the long dual seat, which enabled me to vary my riding position from time to time, and thus avoid saddle-soreness.

A twenty-minute halt for sandwiches and a glass of excellent ale (who would pass the Trent without a stop for *that*?) also gave me a chance to check the machine and the fuel. And that's where I got a shock, for I discovered that a welding blow-hole in one of the tank seams had opened up, and that fuel was seeping away, though so far as I could judge the machine was none the less returning a consumption of more than 100 m.p.g. To avoid being caught with an empty tank, however, I had now to stop more frequently for fuel—and to

A stop for a time-check at the Bidlake Memorial (above) provided a setting for a picture of a new-style cyclist paying homage to one of the great names of cycling. (Below). No time to stop! Thorpe and the Dot sweep by a quiet country inn as evening draws on.



make matters worse the plug trouble recurred. I soon put a stop to that—at Stamford I fitted a British plug, a Lodge HN. In the remaining 120 miles home there was no further protest from that department. *Verbum sap!*

By the time 200 miles had been covered I was beginning to feel the strain, and as I tired I eased off the speed. Even so, the Dot passed the Bidlake Memorial at Girtford six hours after leaving York, which proved that London could have been reached easily in eight hours, especially if no detour had been made. But how I admire the chap who pedalled down this soul-destroying road in less than 8½ hours . . .!

The remaining 70 miles were over the quiet roads through Hitchin, Wheatthampstead, St. Albans, Watford, Wembley and East Sheen to Richmond Park, and thence by way of Worcester Park to Reigate and home. This was merciful, for with the 300-mark coming up I was unquestionably losing the "edge" from my concentration—make a mental note here that the ideal prelude to a long moped ride is *not* to sit up till 11.15 p.m. watching a TV play!—and in heavy traffic I would have had to reduce speed.

At 7.40 p.m.—13 hours and 50 minutes after starting—I reached home. The distance covered was 315 miles, giving an overall average speed of slightly more than 22½ m.p.h., and a running average of 25½ m.p.h., coupled with a fuel consumption of roughly 110 m.p.g., despite a leaking tank. Apart from the easily rectified plug trouble, nothing had gone amiss on a machine whose engine was run-in only at the *end* of an arduous but very enjoyable journey. Give me a schedule like that at any time and I'd guarantee to keep to it—*on the Dot!*