

# Definitive moped

**sim.son** (sim'sun) *n.* light motorcycle, occ. restricted enduro – **to go for a simson** (*slang*) to enjoy oneself without breaking the law. **simpson** (archaic) *p* frequently taken out in late 20th century.

Words by Neil Millen

Restricting mopeds ought to have made them equal, but some are more equal than others at getting to 30mph quickly and staying there. The less clever designs whine and strain up the gearbox painfully slowly and struggle at half speed up hills. Simson's S51 Enduro isn't liquid cooled – it doesn't even have a reed valve – but it's better than most and the equal of any.

We were impressed when we tested the unrestricted S51B in October '81. Strong mid-range acceleration and a top speed nudging 50mph made it just what the East German factory claim it to be – a Light Motor Cycle. With the S51 Enduro restricted to 30mph we expected a moped. We were wrong. Strong mid-range acceleration and a top speed nudging 40mph (credibility in small-bike speedos permitting) made it hardly

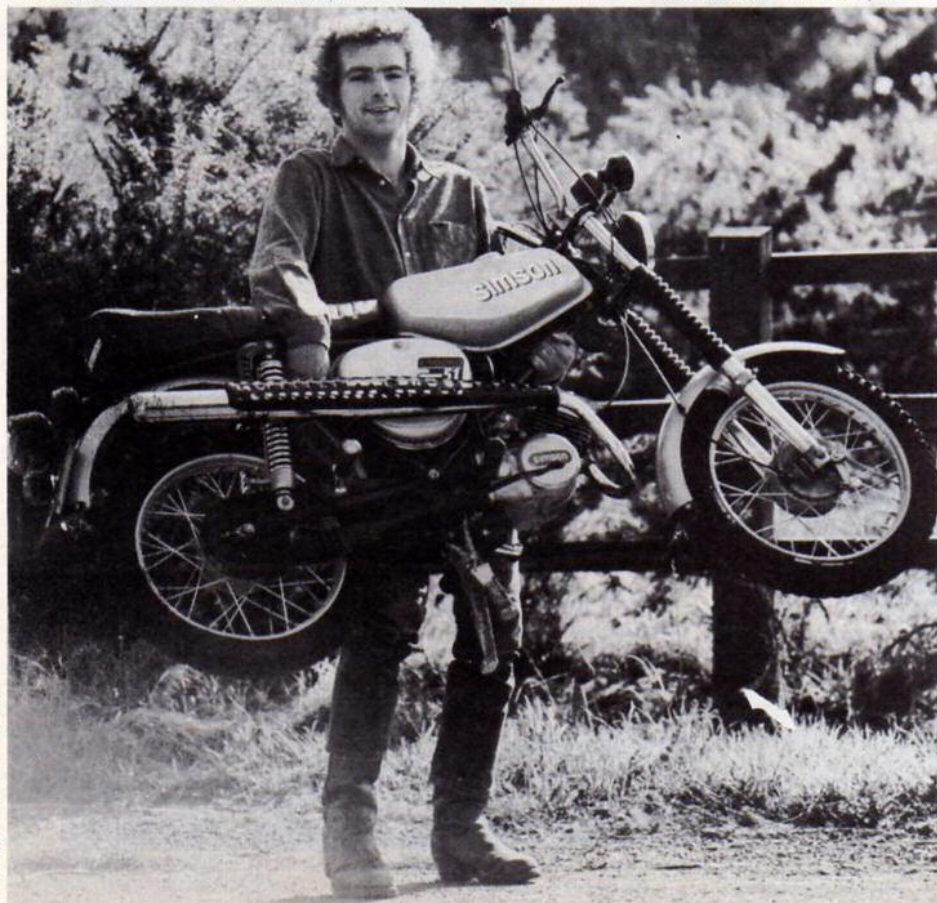
any less of a Light Motor Cycle. If anything we were more impressed.

Simson have knocked enough off the top end to come within the law, but not so's you'd notice. The long stroke motor never did rev to the dizzy heights of an oversquare Jap single, it didn't need to. At only 50cc it couldn't develop enough power to pull away without a bit of a buzz but, once pulling, the urge flowed freely. On other mopeds I was more used to wringing throttles for every rev they'd got, and hanging on until the last screaming moment before snatching at the next gear to get in while there was still enough road speed to catch the bottom of the power band and start wringing again. The Simson wastes its time at maximum revs because it has nothing more to give.

You can relax, change up early, and take the time to select the next gear positively to avoid the lurking false neutrals that are one of the bike's few faults. Riding two-up is



Tim 'ferret down a rabbit hole' Rumball attacked the gorse bushes (above) and survived to show the Simson who's boss (below).



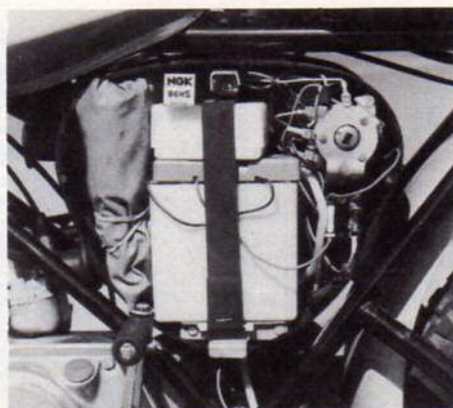
Photography by Andy Mills

much the same. A few more revs and a little more time are all it takes. There's no frustration in having to shut off for traffic and turns because speed can be regained quickly, often without having to change down. Having only four gears would be a drawback for a lesser bike; more than four would waste time and effort on the S51, restricted or not.

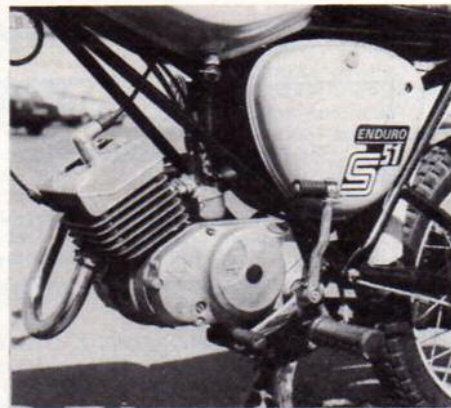
Simson restrict their little motor by adding an inch or two to the exhaust header. The silencer makes no attempt to blend into the contours of the bike so it pressed gently against the right legs of rider and passenger. But it didn't get in the way and a generous shield kept off the heat.

More annoying was the kickstart. Having it on the lefthand side was something I soon got used to, but having the folding pedal unfold every time I moved my leg for a gearchange was maddening. As was having to tuck away my toes to miss the footrest on the downswing. Starting the Simson took some practice. It rarely started first kick. Closing the handy bar-mounted choke control helped to prime the cylinder on the first couple of prods of the first start of the day, but leaving it closed any longer or using it at all on a warm engine caused much flooding and swearing.

There was also an unhealthy engine rattle until we changed from two to four-star petrol. Importers Wilf Green recommend at least three-star. The few pence extra was a small price to pay for the excellent 100mpg economy. Oil consumption was also low thanks to a lean 50:1 premix. The exhaust didn't smoke although the end of the silencer was always oily. Having to mix the fuel was an old-fashioned inconvenience but at least there was room to squeeze a 500ml 2T oil



'nawfull lot in there: Tools, spare plug'n' bulbs; ign switch and monster 12Ah battery.



Motor is slung from spine frame with extra tubes. Sidecovers double as frisbees.

bottle into the righthand side box, although it took patience to fumble with the screw fastening and badly fitting lid.

Storage space and detailed equipment are a Simson strong point. Behind the lockable lefthand side panel there's a high quality toolkit, a complete set of spare bulbs, and a puncture repair outfit. The ignition switch is also in the lefthand side box and takes a low-security, spade-shaped key. There's a barrel lock in the side of the steering head to discourage thieves.

As a trail bike the S51 Enduro is a maybe. Or maybe it's me, tricked into expecting motocross mimicry by the Japanese. Certainly the Simson has the power, the chunky trail tyres, and the ground clearance to spend happy hours bashing around off road. We did it, and enjoyed it, but wouldn't be happy about doing it too often. The metal mudguards and side panels aren't going to bounce back into shape like plastic ones, the rigidly mounted footrests and wipers are going to get bent or worse, and the engine cases dangle unprotected, waiting for the first big rock.

The factory have bolted on side tubes to stiffen the single-tube spine frame but the front forks are unaltered and we managed to twist them fairly easily. They twisted back into line just as easily but, again, how often? And although the rear springs have been uprated to cope with most things, the undamped front end slammed mercilessly against its hydraulic bump stops.

On or off the road the fork gaiters and mud flaps are good, practical features. The handsome cast-alloy centre stand could be useful when fixing a puncture. There's no side stand and, on a bike of this size, it wasn't missed. The rubber chain enclosure,

borrowed from the neighbouring MZ factory, ought to be compulsory on every bike without shaft drive – a godsend. But all these features are standard Simson, not exclusive Enduro. The painted steel rims on the test bike aren't standard – bikes in the shops have alloy rims.

Back on the highway we had few complaints. Steering was light and precise and, although the weak damping at the rear and total lack of damping at the front gave a rather rough ride, handling was secure even when the front wheel got skittish in particularly bumpy corners. The Pneumant trail tyres surprised us all by behaving much like anyone else's trail tyres, which puts them in a much grippier category than Pneumant road tyres. Just as well because the high-level exhaust system left a lot more scope for scratching than the ground-hugging version S51B.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise was the two-up handling. Not only was there plenty of room on the seat for two adults, with the passenger's weight far enough forward not to upset the stability or steering, but a quick flick of the MZ-type pre-load handles raised the rear suspension's ride height away from the bump stops. The seat was comfortable, the pillion footrests were mounted on the main frame, and despite the lack of a fashionable balancer mechanism there was no noticeable vibration. Even the two big mirrors stayed clear. You could seriously consider touring on a Simson, albeit at 30mph.

Inadequate electrics are a curse on most sixteen moped but the S51 Enduro is blessed with an excellent six-volt system. The 25/25W headlight is bright with good penetration on main beam and just about enough when dipped. Although it runs direct from its own coil in the generator the headlight didn't dim much as the revs dropped. You could surely run a milk float on the massive 12Ah battery so it's not surprising that the rear light, brake light, and indicators were bright and reliable, although

the latter flickered more than winked.

There was plenty of power left over for a constant, clear horn and parking lights. The handlebar switches were well designed, well made, and even included a headlamp flasher. My only moans were that the tiny main beam warning light in the speedometer was hopelessly dim and it was easy to forget to switch the out-of-sight ignition key to the lights on position.

Brakes are fast becoming a moped speciality. Some of the Jap models with hydraulically operated discs delight in standing on their noses in passable imitation of someone hitting a brick wall. Not so the Simson. Most of the effort put in at the front brake lever seemed to be absorbed by the flimsy cable (which was running out of adjustment after only 370 miles) and the bit that got through didn't do a lot. I wouldn't want to have to rely on the Simson's brakes when the ballast in the car in front decides to go back for a packet of Omo without warning. The rear brake was good but not enough on its own. Maybe a better quality cable would help.

At £363 including taxes and delivery the Simson S51 Enduro costs about £50 more than the street-styled S51B. Both models are available with or without moped-making exhaust systems for the same prices. With Honda's MB/MT50 at about £345 and the Suzuki and Kawasaki sixteeners around £400 the Simsons can't hide their rough edges behind the usual East European price tags. On the S51 Enduro the rough edges are few and it's probably the best looking bike yet to come out of The Bloc. Even so, only an optimist could fail to see the huge flash and technology gap.

But there are still very good reasons for buying a Simson. The motor makes the most of what the law allows, I would guess that spares are relatively cheap and easy to get, and nothing can touch it for carrying a passenger. Anyone out there passed their moped test? ■

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### ENGINE

Type: Air-cooled, piston ported, twostroke single.  
Bore x stroke: 38 x 44mm. Displacement: 50cc. Compression ratio: 9.5:1. Carburettor: 16mm slide type. Lubrication: 50:1 premix.  
Max bhp & torque: Restricted output not available.

### TRANSMISSION

Overall gear ratios: 1st 32.46, 2nd 18.00, 3rd 13.28, 4th (top) 11.44:1. Clutch: Wet, multiplate, diaphragm type. Final drive: Chain.

### FRAME and FORKS

Frame: Single-tube spine with bolt-on, wraparound stiffening tubes. Front suspension: Telescopic forks with coil springs. Rear suspension: Swinging fork with twin coil spring, oil damped shock absorbers. Two pre-load settings. Front travel: 5.1in at spring. Rear travel: 3.3in at spring. Trail length: 5.8in.

### WHEELS and BRAKES

Front tyre: 2.75-16 Pneumant trail. Rear tyre: 2.75-16 Pneumant trail. Front brake: SLS drum, 4.9 in dia. Rear brake: SLS drum, 4.9 in dia.

### ELECTRICS

Ignition: Contact breaker and coil. Battery: 6V, 12Ah. Generator: Ignition coil plus 46W max combined output lights and charging coils. Headlight: 25/25W. Tail/stop lamp: 5/21W. Indicators: 21W. Warning light: High beam, 1.2W.

### DIMENSIONS

Seat height: 30.3in. Length: 74.4in. Width: 38.2in. Height: 46.5in. Wheelbase: 47.2in. Ground clearance: 6.7in. Dry weight: 173lb. Fuel tank: 2.1 gal inc 0.3 gal reserve.



# Motorcycling

NOVEMBER 1982 No. 85



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