



Here it is, suitably labelled, the steam-driven Corgi that prompted Scooter Girl's quest for the unusual

“Curiouser and curiouser!” said Scooter Girl

by MARY STUART

INDIVIDUALISTS are hard to find in these mass-production days. Exhibitionists and cranks abound, of course—and of these I am wary. But the true individual I am with all the way.

That is why I set off for Somerset one fine summer's day (yes, we had one) a few weeks ago. And a funny day it turned out to be, with me intending to drive a steam-propelled scooter—and finishing up pedalling a penny-farthing. Well, not even a penny-farthing, strictly speaking, but like enough all the

same, with a wee wheel at the back and one like the Big Wheel at Blackpool in front, and surprisingly called an “ordinary”.

However, to leave the old bone-shakers and return to the steam-driven scooter (a Corgi, in fact) . . . This belongs to Mr. Cyril Smith of Brent Knoll, some 30 miles south-east of Bath. And, as I say, it was not my appreciation of the Mendip Hills which drove me that day in his direction. I wanted to meet this man and his paraffin-fuelled, steam-driven machine.

Having lost my way in the Mendip Hills, suffered sparking plug trouble at the top of the Cheddar Gorge and been obliged to free-wheel all the way down in a sudden, blinding rainstorm, the prospect of the Corgi somehow lost its appeal. But I needn't have worried. For the sun soon came through, the plug was changed and my spirits brightened by a tour of the famous Caves (sans scooter) before I arrived at Brent Knoll to find Mr. Smith in the early evening, tinkering with his Corgi and surrounded by “ordinaries”.

Chugged cheerfully

Indeed, it was the sight of one of these bicycles propped by the gateway which brought me back to his cottage post-haste after speeding madly past in the search for bed and breakfast.

I whizzed back, parked the scooter—and there, in the garden, was the Corgi throbbing heatedly on its stand, flames spurting merrily from the burner, and looking for all the world like an Emmet masterpiece. Urged on by the ministrations of Mr. Smith, whose head floated, like a cherubim's, upon a cloud of smoke, it cheerfully chugged away, its fuel in a converted tea-urn (I believe), its water in a watering can (for sure). A weirdie of the scooter world—but one that worked withal. A small triumph of industry and ingenuity.

Lovingly engrossed in the workings of his brain-child, Mr. Smith ignored me awhile as I stood watching what appeared to my non-technical mind as an invention of truly unique proportions. Thus must the layman have marvelled at Stephenson's “Rocket”.

“And who,” asked Mr. S., abruptly twisting and switching off the thunder, “are you?”

I explained—and immediately we became friends (“love me, love my Corgi”) as he settled down to extol its virtues. Artist, model-maker, founder of Brent Knoll “Ordinary” Club, his zeal for the

steam-baby was enormously infectious. It was only a rough model, he said; but he hoped later to incorporate the unit into a scooter chassis with all the attendant refinements. (I was glad to hear this—the bare saddle bones looked rather menacing.) Such a machine, he averred, could be built economically by any steam enthusiast with parts acquired from such sources as army surplus stores.

Eventually I had worked my way to the 20,000-dollar question, and out it came: Suitably attired as I was in old slacks, could I not try it out?

But I was doomed to disappointment. It was unregistered; it had, indeed, been to various meetings (steam traction) and ridden along the road, but now this was strictly *verboten*. Nevertheless he applauded my courage (“I think you girls are wonderful, tearing around the country with so many mad motorists about . . .”) and, as consolation prize, I was hoisted atop a

The dog takes it all lying down when this hard-worked Capri does the rounds. The bird just gets a cold shoulder!



A power-lift company popped batteries and motor into an old frame to produce a quiet factory run-about. Top speed is ten miles per hour at 30 miles per charging, and it takes 8 hours to charge up!



fast-wheeled “ordinary” and despatched along the road feeling like a pea on the moon. It’s not so bad, really, travelling with your head in space—it’s just the getting-up and the coming-down!

And that’s how I finished up struggling with an extraordinary “ordinary” instead of riding an “ancient and modern”—if you see what I mean. Yet a day well spent, I decided, as I left with distinct impressions of the “good old days” and a bagful of Mr. Smith’s delicious juicy apples.

One for sale

Soon after seeing this unusual scooter I came across another one. Offered for sale in the personal columns of a ‘quality’ Sunday newspaper (‘quality’, mark you; none of your inferior stuff for us) was a “unique prototype scooter with hydrostatic transmission—collector’s piece”. Further enquiries revealed the owner to be a mechanical engineer, Mr. E. R. Payne of Northfield, Birmingham, who claimed that the machine was probably the only privately-owned one of its kind in existence. An appealing feature of this one was that there was very little *external* difference from standard.

Now “hydrostatic transmission” probably conveys as much to you as it did to me—which is precisely

nothing. But earlier this year I saw a National Engineering Laboratory report in the press to the effect that “British car and commercial vehicle manufacturers may shortly adopt a revolutionary system that needs neither gears nor clutch”—working on the *hydrostatic* principle.

Strange to think that they may have been pipped at the post by a scooter man!

Finally my third rare character hove into view—all within a fortnight—one evening near the Old Kent Road. What looked like a circus on two wheels turned out to be Mr. H. J. R. Eggleton of Camberwell Gate, a poodlet-trimmer by trade, carrying a stuffed poodle on the back of his scooter and a bird (feathered) on his shoulder.

Oh, the bird was alive all right. This was Blackie, a six-year-old pet myna, who revels in these cautious constitutional around the block. Mr. Eggleton has a busy time between his birds and beasts. But he has a spare shoulder for another pet myna—when it’s old enough to ride the scooter . . .

Ah, well, life’s full of surprises in the scootering world.

**‘Scooter Girl’
gets a new look
-see our Show Number**

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