

Journey Abroad

On a 25 c.c.

F. M. M. STEINER Tells How He Travelled to Rome and Back With His Cyclemaster

HAVING some business to deal with in Rome, I decided to combine it with seeing something of people and places on the route. There is no better way of doing this than by using a vehicle which travels relatively slowly. So I used my 25 c.c. Cyclemaster-equipped bicycle.

The start of the trip, one rainy Sunday afternoon, was not encouraging, for I had not yet learnt to stow my baggage properly and wobbled merrily whenever I caught the wind. Meeting with extremely bad weather, I did not arrive in Dover with any too much time in hand.

The A.A. Port Officer threw just one glance at rider and mount, then said briefly that I had better buy a car! If I did not want to do that, I ought, at least, to get rid of half my luggage. I obediently took out some surplus clothes, "borrowed" a cardboard box from one of H.M. most obliging customs officers, and sent the stuff home to my brother, who must have been much puzzled to get a railway freight parcel, dispatched in Dover at midnight, without any explanation.

I landed at Dunkirk at dawn and took the main road south towards Switzerland. For the first two days the furies seemed to pick me out for persecution: in short, the weather was dreadful. The landscape in that part of industrial northern France is depressing at any time, and the pavé surfaces are so bad that even car drivers often slow down. The effect on a bicycle can be easily imagined and, sure enough, on the second day the shaking-up broke my luggage carrier stays. The poor fuel in one place not only fouled my plugs but—oh, horror!—raised the petrol consumption to something less than 200 m.p.g.

Crime Ceases at Six

Fortunately, the service one gets on the Continent is excellent. Every two-stroke owner will readily imagine my dismay at discovering I had lost my plug spanner—a tool specially designed to get at the one lonely plug in my baby engine. I noticed my loss when stopping at a cycle shop to buy one of those useful petroil containers that clip on the front fork. Leaving the mechanic to fix this accessory, I went off to buy a spanner at a nearby tool shop. When I came back, quite unsuccessful in my quest, I was presented with an improvised but perfectly serviceable spanner. The smiling mechanic had been so sure I would not get the right article that he had made one.

Almost my last stop before entering Switzerland was at the pretty old hill-town of Langres, where I decided to ask for cheap lodgings at the police station. Langres must be a happy place, with no criminals allowed out after office hours—the municipal police office had closed, since it had gone 6 p.m. I therefore found the local gendarmerie office where, after some hesitation, the officials regretted not being able to offer me hospitality in jail, but finally recommended some cheap but respectable lodgings over a public house.

The landlady let me a good room, took my mount into the bar parlour, but was sorry she had no food to serve; however, there was an excellent, small restaurant round the corner. As an afterthought, though, why didn't I buy some things for a snack supper and eat them in the bar? By that time it was after 8 p.m., but I found a grocery still open. I took my ham, cheese and fruit back to the bar parlour, where a table had been laid for me, bought a drink from my landlady, and had not only a cheap room, but also a meal for a quarter of what a hotel dinner would have cost me.

The Cyclemaster is not well known in France, so I attracted attention everywhere. Admittedly, my mount—a 1939 B.S.A. lady's cycle—looked a bit odd, since it was fitted with a GB plate and number plates, A.A. badge, front shock-absorbers, and a pile of luggage. In Besançon, a French priest commented on the lady's frame by saying that his cycle was *modèle ecclésiastique* and hence rather like a woman's cycle, but not quite. I gaped



The author on his much-travelled Cyclemaster competing in this year's A.C.U. Motor-assisted Cycle Demonstration Trial

a little before it sank in that the French clergy, who always cycle in their cassocks, need a special clerical model.

After crossing the Doubs at Besançon, I made for the Swiss border. As I climbed through the Jura mountains, I noted that the buildings, architecture, and even the population are different here from anywhere else in France. Even the dress of the mountain folk and the food are distinctive.

I had posted my heavy bag to the last French station before the border tunnel. When I arrived, the solitary railway official told me that my rucksack had arrived—even before I had dismounted. The reason for this dawned on me when I looked on the luggage rack and found my bag there quite by itself, probably the only piece of luggage sent in advance to have arrived for days and days.

By Lake Geneva I encountered the first bright sunshine of the whole trip, and one short afternoon took me from Vevey, by the lake, along the beautiful Rhone valley; I climbed steadily up the slope of the Alps, to the foot of the Simplon Pass. I should have liked to have tried my 25 c.c. on the crossing of the Alps; but as the pass was snowed up, I took local advice and crept through the tunnel in a local train.

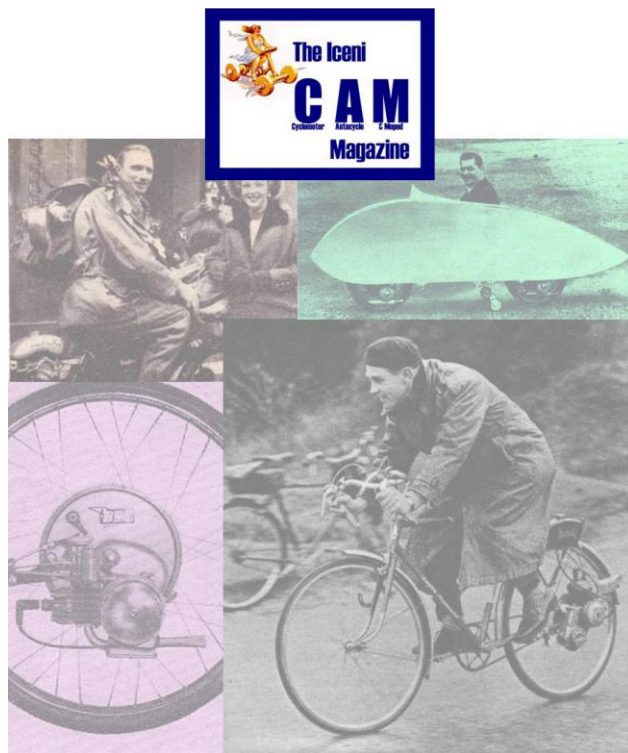
Who Was He?

On my last day in Italy, when cycling along the lovely shores of Lago Maggiore towards Switzerland, I realized I had never obtained the certificate which all foreigners should, in theory, take out. Anxious to do amends before reaching the border, I went in search of the Arm of the Law at Stresa. When I did find an officer of *carabinieri* (the Italian gendarmerie), I tried to explain with my five words of Italian that this was my last day in the country, anyway, and so forth. After watching me get completely stuck, the officer completed in almost perfect English what I had tried to say, and put matters right on the spot. He was not only most helpful but spoke such good English that I wondered whom he might be. It turned out that he was not a cunning spy, but had been attached to the British Military Police in Kenya as an interpreter after Italy joined the Allied side in 1943.

I learnt a lot on this trip—about people and places, and about my engine and how it works. I can now tell people what tools to take and what spares are useful; what luggage to carry and how to arrange it.

You cannot ask a baby engine to do what it was never meant to do, and a motorized bicycle is certainly not a full motor cycle; but a cycle that is, in effect, a motor vehicle and which gives you great mobility, is a major social development. One can travel from London to the Italian Riviera on three gallons of fuel.

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