

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SKILL

Tim Abbott finds out how the Gran Prix can improve riding technique

IT was unfortunate that during the whole time that the Kerry Capitano Gran Prix was with us, the Big Freeze was with us also. Nevertheless, I managed to get in so many enjoyable miles on this sporty mount that parting with it the other week came as a bit of a wrench.

As has been pointed out previously, this is not a utility machine—although it can be used as such. It is a mount intended to be *driven* as well as ridden and because it falls in the “motorcycle” rather than the “moped” class, a good rider will be able to get that little bit “extra” out of it.

What do I mean by “extra”?

Handling and Stability

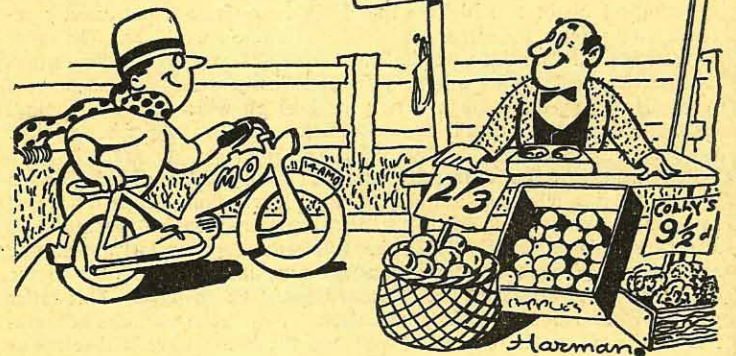
I soon discovered on my first longish trip (a return journey to Farleigh, Kent) what these “extras” were. They can be summed up in two words: handling and stability. In essence, the relationship between the rider and the Gran Prix is much closer than on the more conventional sit-up-and-beg machine. The racing saddle, quite apart from the stimulation of feeling “ton-up,” allowed me to slide right back, thus improving the weight distribution. Furthermore, stability is ensured through its low centre of gravity and relatively long wheelbase.

The handlebars are narrow and slightly downward sloping and I found that at a cruising speed of 30 m.p.h. and higher, they were virtually self-controlled. The steering automatically centred itself when the machine was restored to an upright position, thus eliminating the strain of constant course-correction.

All of which brings me to one of the most important manoeuvres—cornering.

Exhilarating

Beyond Croydon there are lots of exhilarating corners and I was delighted to find that I could “lean” the Gran Prix over almost to the limit of tyre adhesion and at higher speeds than I had hitherto regarded as safe. The fact that I could grip the fuel tank between my



knees, thus lending weight to the steerage, added to my feeling of security.

Gears, are of paramount importance in smooth cornering and should be used rigorously on all sharp bends. The best method is to change down to second before entering and then accelerate away. In this respect the Gran Prix is ideal both for cornering and traffic work since second-gear will function adequately at speeds as low as 8 m.p.h.

Not so ideal though is the position of the twist-grip gear change which has top-gear so far round the handlebar that constant changing, up or down was extremely tiring

Braking Technique

Because the Gran Prix responds to and may be ridden with a certain amount of dash (within the limits of safety), braking technique is more important than ever. I have seen a great many moped riders slap both brakes on, go into a skid and fall off, and then wonder why it happened. The best brake is the front, because when it is applied all the weight of machine and rider is thrown forward on to the front tyre, thus increasing its adhesion to the road. In an emergency the front brake should be applied fractionally before the rear so that most of the weight is still thrown forward. Avoid using the rear brake only; if you do the benefit of transfer of weight to the front is lost and the rear wheel tends to slide much more readily.

Those, then are the points about riding the Gran Prix, a machine upon which the owner can not only learn to ride well, but also raise the level of his or her driving to an art.

IN THE WET — a moped rider's week

Monday. Because of the warmer weather recently I have been wearing my “thornproof” riding suit—or rather the jacket only, when the rain permits. Automatic reaction with regard to the transport of the trousers was to attach them to the rear carrier with an Aerolastic until a much simpler method occurred to me. Now I merely fold the trousers up and strap the jacket belt round them. Not the most glamorous solution perhaps but then if I wanted glamour (of a very dubious sort) I would sell the moped, buy a 650 cc. motorcycle, plaster it with checkered tape, and travel everywhere in impractically tight leather jacket and jeans.

Tuesday. One contrasting feature between the attitudes of those who use two and those who use four wheels, is quickly visible at the average traffic hold-up. Waiting at the lights this morning I

glanced around noting the faces of the car drivers. Without exception they exhibited acute boredom, several of them turning in vain from side to side to seek a diversion. In comparison the various moped, scooter and motorcycle riders looked alert and “ready for the off.” This may sound like a rather biased observation but anybody who cares to check will see the truth in it.

Wednesday. For the first time for ages I ran out of fuel and had to switch on to reserve. I tried to do this without dismounting only to be reminded that this is a rather hazardous business and for several yards I wobbled dangerously while I fumbled beneath the tank. Surely this is a case for standardisation. Nobody wants to dismount to turn on reserve and quite a few mopeds have taps that are easily operated.

Thursday. Today I found a couple of moped applications for

a polythene bag. It was drizzling and I wanted to take some books to the library on my way to work. Naturally the bag ensured they were waterproof on the carrier. When I arrived at work I stuck the bag over the saddle. Although it rained all day it stopped just before going-home time, with the result that there was no necessity to wear waterproof trousers on the return journey. I was quickly off the mark as the bag relieved me of the necessity to wipe down the saddle before I sat on it.

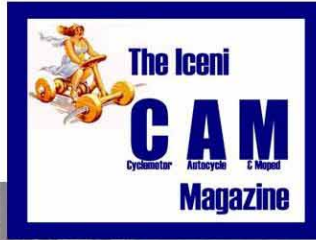
Friday. Was overtaken by a foreign moped equipped with winking indicators and was struck by what a boon they are for safe cornering. We both had the same right turn to make and while I still had my hand out, unable to change down properly, the other rider merely operated a switch with his thumb, changed down at the safest and most useful point on the

corner and was able to maintain good revs, which gave him a speedier departure than I could muster. Winkers might be regarded as luxury extras by many but I find it difficult to describe them as such, when they contribute so conclusively to rider safety.

Saturday. A long ride into the country necessitated a return after lighting-up time. I like riding enormously but my enthusiasm for it is somewhat diminished when I have to face car drivers on narrow unlit country lanes with my puny lighting. Often glaring nearly 100-watts-worth of light into my eyes they never bother to dip. Look to the nearside to avoid the dazzle is the official advice, but what about when there is a column of cars on the other side and the glare continues for minutes on end?

Sunday. A friend who found me picking the stones out of my tyre treads this morning, laughed at me for my caution. But it's all part of moped riding. Keep the costs (however little) down and the moped is a worthwhile vehicle. Let them soar and it defeats its own object.

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