



THE
MOBYLETTE
MINOR
AS A

**TRAFFIC
TOOL**

It scores high marks
in the race to beat
the jams

SINCE nearly my non-leisure mileage on mopeds is almost entirely urban, I am deeply concerned with the behaviour of road test vehicles in widely varying traffic conditions. In many ways I can sum up the average efficiency of a machine on one journey between my flat and the office by noting its ability to penetrate certain sections of the route which I know to be tricky.

Moped owners living in rural areas or near towns where traffic problems have not yet become acute (assuming that there are such towns in the British Isles) may think that I am over-dramatising when I use such phrases as "penetrate certain sections of the route" but I am sure that anyone who regularly rides in London or other big and crowded cities will wearily support me. Getting from A to B is no longer simply a matter of looking at the "A to Z Guide," working out a rough estimate of the time it will take and then just simply getting on and riding away. To relieve congestion in the centre of London (I will use London for my illustrations but there are other cities where the problems are equally intense—Newcastle and Glasgow spring to mind as obvious examples) complex one-way systems have been introduced and fore-knowledge is especially important if one does not wish to court disaster by changing lanes at the last moment. On the other hand disaster may be forced upon one by the actions of a motorist who is unfamiliar with the terrain and who is attempting the dangerous act described in the preceding sentence.

Other Hazards

The one-way systems set the background, but there are other hazards. The motorist who knows his way around too well is one. An inexplicable manoeuvre in some perfectly straightforward section of road may serve such a motorist well 200 or 300 yards further down the road but his earlier action may be com-

pletely unexpected by the unwary moped rider at the time. Buses can also provide frightening moments. If bus drivers stuck to the Highway Code when drawing up and pulling away at stops, it would be impossible for them to keep up their schedule. Therefore, they bank on the fact that they drive large, immediately noticeable vehicles and slowly yet firmly ignore the lines of traffic. This system works most of the time, but now and again hair-raising moments can occur.

There are a variety of other hazards—the fantastic front wheel lock on taxis which permits U-turns in narrow streets, queues of traffic which cause desperation in drivers who then try and jump the lights, and long articulated lorries the trailers of which, when empty, swing about wildly under hard braking. These are just a few of the dangers and after a quick perusal of them it becomes apparent that the moped rider must have a vehicle that is, as near as possible, an extension of his body so that his reactions can be swiftly and accurately translated into the appropriate use of controls, if he is to stay alive.

Ideal Machine

The ideal machine would be impossible since it would combine the accelerative powers of a 1,000cc. supercharged sprint motor-cycle with the delicate "feel" of a trials machine. The handlebars would have to be narrow enough to squeeze through restricted gaps in columns of vehicles yet wide enough to provide sensitive steering at slow speeds. The brakes would have to be fierce yet not too fierce to provoke slides on the potentially greasy streets. The machine itself would have to be light enough not to make "foot paddling" too strenuous yet heavy enough to have inherent stability. Control levers would have to be widely flared for instant and effective usage yet not protrude so as to be likely to catch car wings, pedestrians' clothing, etc.

No moped combines all these diverse and contradictory factors, and the Mobylette Minor would be disqualified on the first count alone, due to its rather modest acceleration. Nevertheless I rate the Minor highly in my list of favoured "traffic tools" all the more so since I recently transferred to it after riding a more powerful and more suitable machine. I had expected to find the Minor a disappointing machine in this role but was pleasantly surprised.

Possibly the most important reason is a quality mentioned earlier—that of "feel". A difficult factor to explain, I can only describe it as a sensation transmitted to the rider that the moped beneath him is instantly capable of obeying his slightest and most precise command. The Mobylette is a very light machine and the front end, with its bicycle type J-forks is even lighter than usual.

The forks are surmounted by a pair of delightfully shaped handlebars which seem to offer themselves very naturally to my grasp. They are quite wide but not excessively so.

Thus equipped I find myself able to proceed very slowly between the twin red walls presented by adjacent L.T.E. buses knowing that only the tiniest and subtlest twitches on the handlebar will keep me on a straight line at a speed little above that of walking pace. Delicate control is also necessary when making right-angle turns from the gap between two stationary columns of vehicles into the next. Car drivers give agonised expressions as they watch their chrome and paintwork apparently threatened, but if they knew the Mobylette they would not be so worried.

Penetration

One particular manoeuvre to which the Mobylette is suited, is the penetration of a queue of vehicles along the gutter, when there is less space available than the tip-to-tip handlebar measurement. Here the technique is to "paddle" along with the left foot on the pavement and the moped canted over above it. The lightness of the Mobylette reduces the necessity for strong-arm methods here and the high centre stand does not scrape on the kerb producing that fearful noise which attracts the eye of every driver worried about his vehicle's bodywork.

At the head of the column and waiting for the lights to change, the Mobylette's slow take-off puts it at a disadvantage. However, a good deal of compensation for this can be obtained from the fact that the pedals are well positioned and are meant to be used. Without rising from the saddle it is possible to double the rate of acceleration without too much effort. Incidentally the "easy-to-pedal" feature fits in with lack of a reserve tap on the fuel tank. Should the latter run dry, conversion to the status of temporary bicycle (via a small switch on the pulley to the nearside of the machine) is swift and the subsequent gearing is not too low to make pedalling an unbearable chore.

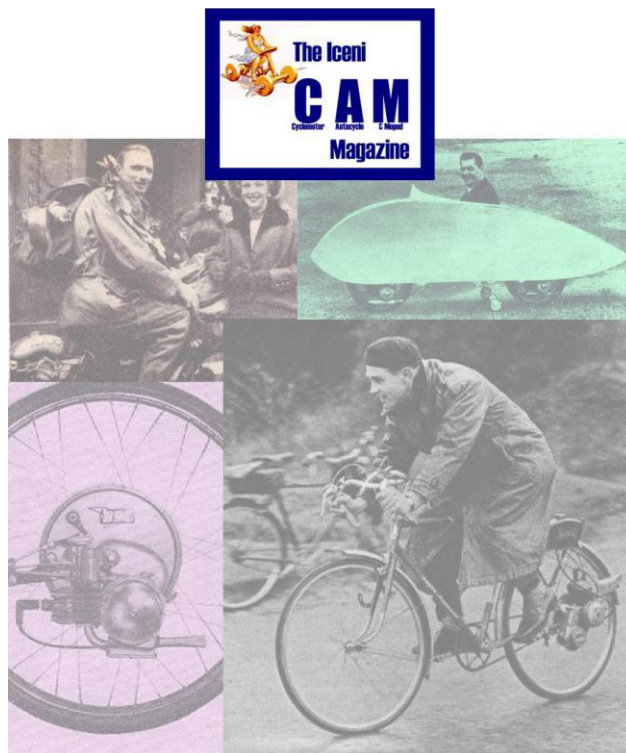
Coupled with the excellent angling of the handlebars are the intelligently placed controls. The strangler (rarely needed) can be depressed by the left thumb without removing the rest of the left hand, the decompressor is operated by merely reversing the twist-grip, and the brake levers are flared scientifically to give plenty of leverage.

The silencer is quiet and therefore not likely to attract the attention of the law and the seating position allows the rider a high viewpoint.

Try a Minor and see if you can't beat the Underground to work.

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