

AUTO VAP CARAVELLE DE LUXE

A well-mannered, ultra-silent model from France

SPEAKING on television, Yehudi Menuhin mentioned the fact that Bartok required very little in the way of amenities for composition except silence. In the American city where Bartok lived it was a rare commodity.

Although most of us do not suffer the same agonies as Bartok did in his quest for peace, there comes a time when the continuous sounds around us, in our daily lives, become terribly oppressive. Transport, in all its forms, is the main offender, and among these forms, the two-stroke engine has for long been considered one of the major criminals.

This was true several years ago, but I do not believe there is still the same amount of substance in the accusation. A credit-side example can be found in the Auto Vap Caravelle de Luxe. No lengthy silencer is fitted; merely an unobtrusive expansion chamber well tucked away. Yet this system is quite sufficient to put the moped on a par with many middle price range cars, when it comes to silencing. Riding it wearing a "space" helmet causes the engine note to die away into something just this side of audibility.

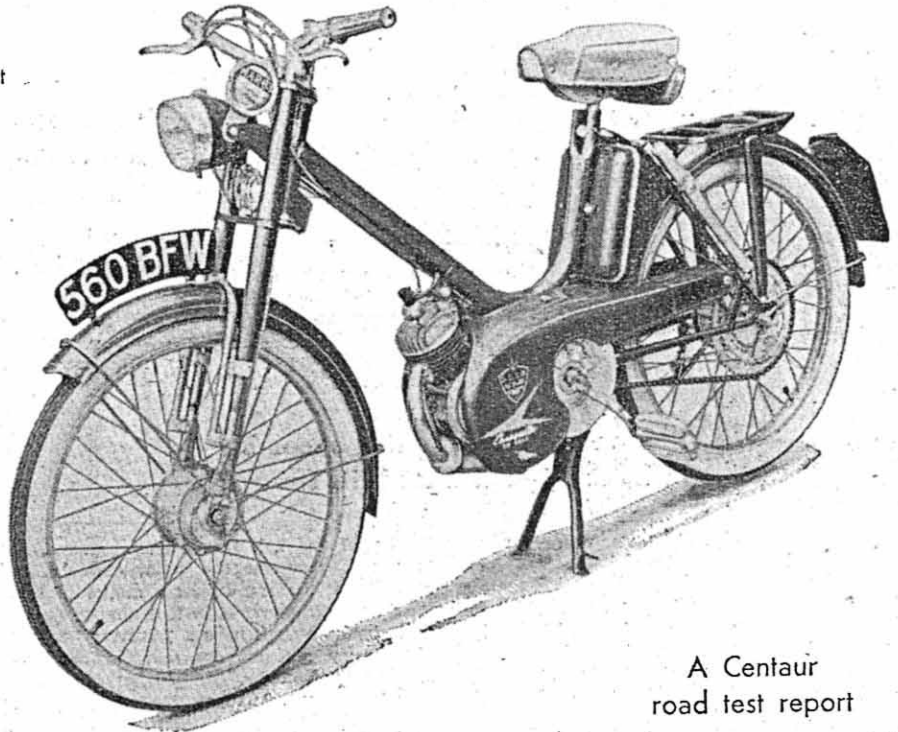
The argument which has always stemmed from the noisy two-stroke brigade is that excessive silencing reduces engine power. Nowadays this only applies to the pure racing machine, for two of the most powerful production motorcycles available in this country, both capable of nearly two miles a minute, have most dulcet exhaust notes except when pushed right to their limit of acceleration.

As it is, the Caravelle suffers hardly at all. As a normal, economically priced moped fitted with an automatic clutch it offers a top speed of just a fraction less than 30 m.p.h., while acceleration is typical of mopeds equipped with such transmission. Overall consumption was approximately 145 m.p.g.

Clean lines coupled with practicability are the keynotes of the Caravelle. Unlike most models, the fuel tank is set on the seat pillar thus leaving the single large-gauge down-bar from the forks to the engine uncluttered. A rather small screw tap is fitted, but it has the advantage of being positioned at the top of the tank and is therefore easy to reach.

The carburettor is equipped with the simplest type of strangler slide and, due to the layout, this is particularly accessible, requiring very little more effort than the sort of strangler control which is cable operated from the handlebar.

If an "automatic" moped runs out of fuel it becomes necessary to



A Centaur road test report

disengage the clutch temporarily so that the machine can be pedalled. This is often a very weak feature on this type of machine and I recall a frustrating 10 minutes spent trying to operate the disengaging mechanism after I ran out of petrol on one road test machine. Things could hardly be simpler on the Caravelle, and it only needs a little finger pressure on the vanes of a small circular plate in the centre of the pedal pulley, to turn the moped into a bicycle.

Handlebars are nearly straight but offer an easy riding position. They are adjustable only for angle and not for height. I particularly liked the brake levers which are well flared yet do not require a phenomenal handspan to operate them. They are also designed with a small protuberance at the end which prevents the fingers from slipping off. The brakes themselves are superb and although there was no speedometer to offer a guide to the steady 20 m.p.h. which I require for a brake test, I felt they compared favourably with a majority of other models.

Rider Comfort

The saddle provided the main grumble. Although reasonably sprung it was too small and was a source of discomfort over journeys of more than about 20 minutes duration. Surely a rubber "pan" saddle would not represent too big an increase in the retail price for an enormous improvement in rider comfort.

Suspension is confined to telescopic front forks which I am glad to see are most sensibly braced in previous Auto Vap fashion. The rigid rear end was not unduly obtrusive although on one sharply banked corner it did jump away a little. However, since this happened only once I do not think the fault is inherent and the slight hop may have been due to a patch of oil or grease on the road.

A couple of half fairings protect trouser turn-ups from reaching the engine and although these could have been slightly larger with profit this could possibly have introduced the problem of fitting differently positioned mounting brackets to prevent rattle. Since the fairings are commendably rattle-free at the moment this is definitely a point upon which it is difficult to be dogmatic.

The pump is not fitted in the safest position, on one of the rear fork members, and could quite easily be knocked loose. Tools are handily carried in a small bicycle type saddlebag.

As one who frequently has to transport impedimenta around, I welcome the rear carrier. I also think that the transfer mounted on the rear of the fuel tank, giving detailed information of petrol-to-oil ratios is a very good idea and should clear up this knotty problem once and for all; for Caravelle riders at least.

If necessary, the pedals could be used without too much discomfort and the centre-stand is easy to use and substantially constructed. The finish of the Caravelle, which is in the very popular shade of "metallic" red, is most attractive.

SPECIFICATION

Engine: Auto Vap two stroke; 40mm. bore × 38mm. stroke gives 49cc.; compression ratio, 6.5 to 1; output 1.75 b.h.p. at 5,000 r.p.m.; Gurtner carburettor.

Transmission: Fully automatic clutch.

Tank: Five pints capacity.

Suspension: Telescopic front forks, rigid rear end.

Wheels: 23in. × 2in., Michelin white wall tyres; Mayard brakes in full width 3½in. diameter alloy hubs.

Lights: Vap flywheel generator, 12 volt 10 watts rear, 6 volt 1 amp front.

Weight: 88lb.

Equipment: Pump, electric horn, centre stand, rear carrier.

Finish: Bordeaux Flanne (red) with chrome fittings.

Concessionaires: Scootomatic Ltd., St. Mary's Works, Barton-on-Humber, Lincs.

Extras: Legshields, £2 19s. 6d.; windscreens, £2 19s. 6d.

Price: £55 2s. 8d. (inc. £8 13s. 4d. P.T.); dual seat model, £57 2s. 1d.

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