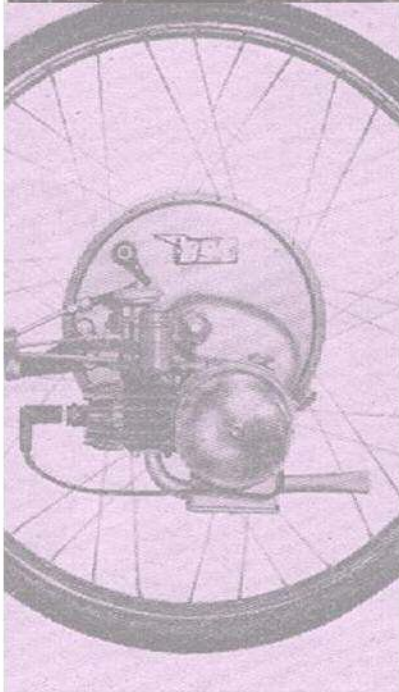
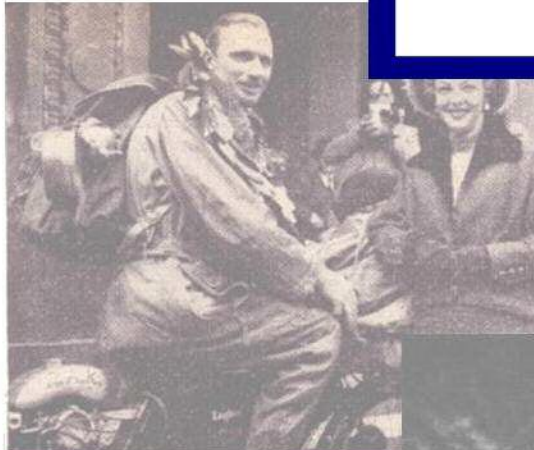


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TO PARIS BY PALOMA

It was quite an occasion. Even the inhabitants of Earls Court, inured though Londoners are to things out-of-the-ordinary, were visibly impressed, although they could not make head nor tail of it all. For it was a strange scene which greeted the casual onlooker on the afternoon of July 24. It was as if all the mopeds in creation were gathered outside Olympia to perform the rites of some mysterious, noisy, summer festival.

In reality, it was nothing quite so sinister. It was in fact the start of a 243-mile pilgrimage by 33 assorted moped dealers from all over Britain to pay homage at the Paloma/Lavalette factory at St. Ouen, Paris. Europa Imports had organized things this side, and it was to them that I presented myself as CYCLING'S representative on the trip.

At last, after distinct signs of asphyxiation had been noticed among the passers-by, the entourage moved off to the accompaniment of sound effects reminiscent of a swarm of infuriated wasps, and disappeared in a cloud of blue smoke.

The sturdy little Palomas which we were all using for the trip ate up the miles, and it was not long before we streamed through Folkestone into Dover, where we were to embark on the 3 a.m. boat to Calais. The good citizens of Dover, having lived under the threat of invasion through the long war years, reacted automatically as we roared into the town centre, and with one accord they took to the hills—or so it seemed, when we looked for signs of life in order to get a meal. Eventually a quayside restaurant solved our immediate problem and supplied ham and eggs.

The custom officers seemed unusually eager to get us through as quickly as possible, waving aside the sheaves of multi-coloured forms which we thrust under their noses. Of course, a collection of 38 high-pitched exhaust notes assembled under one roof is not everyone's idea of peace and quiet.

Arrival at Calais was scheduled for 4.30 a.m., and by that time grey light was flooding the

overcast skies. After establishing contact with two service vans from the Paloma factory, which were to follow us to Paris, to pick up the pieces so to speak, we set off on the 150-mile stretch to the capital. The few people we did meet in the streets dived for cover, probably imagining that the British had at last arrived to avenge the defeat in 1066.

Soon we were out in the rolling countryside of the Pas de Calais. Thick mists cut visibility to yards in some places. Before starting, I had manfully declined to swathe myself in flying suit, etc., smiling to myself when I saw how some of the others had come prepared for at least an onslaught on Everest or the

Centaur joins the Paloma



dealers rally to Paris

South Pole. My smile was a little less enthusiastic as the cold condensation trickled down my neck and my fingers took on an interesting shade of green.

However, as the hours and miles rolled by, although the sun did not exactly beat down with tropical intensity, it was quite pleasant.

Boulogne, memorable for its distinctive salty tang, was soon behind us, as was quaint old Montreuil with its castle and surrounding wall. At 69 miles and a little over 2 hours from Calais we passed through Abbeville, where the faster riders had breakfast and the others, less speedy, had lunch.

The machines were really warmed up by this time and were running perfectly. Most of those being used were the DASL model, the middle man of the Paloma range, fitted with a

two-stage automatic clutch and with front telescopic forks. The remainder of the machines were the PAL models, a de luxe machine with rear suspension. As both machines have a similar engine, performance is about equal. Apart from minor complaints, such as dirt in the carburettor or fouled-up plugs, we experienced no trouble, despite the fact that the machines were being kept continually at full throttle. In fact, it seemed that the harder they were driven, the faster they went. It was an incredible performance, with an average speed around 35 m.p.h. and in excess of 40 m.p.h. on the slightest descent.

Beauvais, with its famous cathedral, came next, after a diversion which led us a merry dance over twisting country roads before we were back on to the fine Route Nationale No. 1.

And then the rather gaunt industrial outskirts of Paris came into view, and minutes later we were knocking at the gates of the Paloma/Lavalette factory. Cool beer and a reception committee welcomed us, and after consuming the first and thanking the second, we were taken to the hotel which had been reserved for us in Montmartre, quite by chance a bare fifty paces from the Folies Bergeres and the attendant night life.

The evening was ours to use as we would. Although, however it was spent, whether strenuously "doing the sights" or just plain relaxing, the subject of mopeds and mopedding was strictly taboo. The following day we had an invitation to lunch at the Paloma factory combined with a tour of inspection. The lunch was perfect, and we began our visit to the assembly lines. Most interesting for me was a prototype moped which Paloma may put on to the market soon. A racer, it has three speeds and, untuned, a maximum speed of 40/50 m.p.h. On a trial run I found it to be a superb road-holder with excellent steering and equipped with very effective brakes—the rear brake being operated by a separate foot pedal rather than by the more usual back pedalling technique.

Another item of interest was an experimental 50 c.c. engine which is capable of 3.5 b.h.p. at 8-10,000 r.p.m. A formidable piece of machinery.

The following day, having breakfasted heartily on the usual rolls and coffee, we set off again in the general direction of London, England. A good run in excellent time brought us into Boulogne by 5.30 p.m., which gave us four and a half hours in which to have a meal before our boat sailed at 10 p.m. A calm crossing, trouble-free customs clearance, and it was all over. Europa Imports had provided a coach to transport us the last 70-odd miles up to London, which was very welcome as, naturally, rain was falling heavily on our side of the Channel.

All in all, an enjoyable and unusual experience, during which I, for one, gained a tremendous admiration for the Paloma moped, DASL model.



Left: Dominating the Paris skyline, the Eiffel Tower seen from the Pont de l'Alma.

Right: Some of the dealers at the Paloma factory.

