

Close-up of the engine and automatic clutch, made under licence from the French Motobécane factory.

## Riding the Raleigh

*Wearing his Commuter suit, just in case of rain, C.Q. heads westward on his Island lap*

# WISP

by CYRIL QUANTRILL

WHEN a moped is launched with all the hoo-hah that attended the birth of the Raleigh Wisp, it is time for even a big-banger diehard like me to have a look at it. The launch itself—all pretty girls, wine, food and cigars—was quite a memorable occasion and it concluded with an invitation to sample a Wisp on the windswept tarmac of the airfield chosen for the little machine's debut. Which is how I came to be cavorting round the perimeter in pursuit of a lass from a ladies' magazine who, having confessed that she hadn't sat astride a two-wheeler since she was a schoolgirl, promptly assumed control of her first powered vehicle as expertly as if she had been riding one for years.

The Wisp seemed to be a very good little machine. Extremely easy to ride. Or had that excellent lunch furnished me with rose-tinted goggles? Only one way to find out . . .

Arrangements were made to borrow one of these mopeds for round-town transport in Douglas during the T.T. period. The Isle of Man at T.T. time is not the most sympathetic testing ground for a machine. Everyone is busy, everyone is in a hurry.

This Raleigh is a successful marriage of the small-wheeled bicycle (successfully pioneered by Alex Moulton and since taken up by most other manufacturers) and the world's highest selling moped engine/transmission unit. The French Mobylette, with centrifugal clutch and belt primary drive, this was originated by Motobécane of France and for some years has been made under licence by Raleigh: a fine example of Anglo-French co-operation.

Attractively styled, very fully equipped

and selling for fractionally less than £60, the Wisp was launched with a publicity campaign beamed not so much at the very young motorcyclist or at the traditional moped user—the ride-to-worker looking for the most economical of all forms of transport—but rather at the housewife or the car owner who wants a second runabout vehicle but doesn't want, or cannot afford, to become a two-car owner. Our aim was to see if it would stand up to rather more strenuous use.

Starting proved almost as easy as the makers claim. Using the decompressor, the machine can be wheeled forward and when the decompressor is released, the engine will start. Usually, anyway.

Once started, the little engine shows a refreshing persistence to keep running. Not all very small two-strokes are so obliging. When it is just ticking over, the clutch disengages completely, as the throttle is opened the drive is progressively taken up . . . and away you go.

The brakes, internal expanding, are most effective. In fact the rear one on our test machine was almost too good, it would lock the wheel if applied indiscriminately.

Handlebar height, saddle height and position fore and aft are adjustable, so that the Wisp will "fit" anyone tall or short. There is no front or rear springing but the 2-in by 16-in tyres provide rather more cushioning than one would get with a normal bicycle, and the saddle is thickly padded. Even so, it is vibration, felt through the saddle and the pedals, which limits top speed to the manufacturer's claimed 25 mph, rather than reluctance of the engine to turn over faster than it is intended to do.

With the clutch fully home, the overall gear ratio is 13.8:1. Pacing the Wisp with John Stoddart's Reliant, we found that when the twistgrip was kept wound fully open, the 49.9 cc engine (which has a chromed bore for its aluminium cylinder barrel, runs on a 16:1 mixture of cooking petrol and oil, and turns out 1.4 bhp at 5,000 rpm) would keep the Wisp spinning quietly along at speeds that varied between a little over 20 mph and a little under 30 mph on reasonably level road. The fluctuation can be attributed to normally unnoticed variations in gradient, or possibly to changes of wind.

It is not true to say that, because of the automatic gear, it will climb any hill. The steep "back double" up behind the Castle Mona Hotel would have reduced its progress to a pace at which it would have been difficult to maintain balance, unless one resorted to pedal assistance. Bray Hill—what would that be, about 1:12?—called for no pedalling. Approached at low speed, it was climbed at low speed. Say, 8–10 mph. Approached at near full noise—say 25 mph—it was crested with remarkably little falling-off in speed.

This is true of most other low-powered automatic transmission machines I have ridden. If the drive can be kept fully "home" and the revs are not allowed to fall too low, one makes far better and more pleasant progress.

A mile or so round the block will give no indication of even a moped's worth. You must put in at least one continuous run of several miles. For the Wisp, the Isle of Man presented just the right route for that, in the shape of the T.T. circuit, all 37½ miles of it. Which



Among those who found the Wisp a useful means of transport was MCI advertisement manager Harry Sage, who totted up quite a mileage

accounts for the fact that I now have a 2 hr 5 min lap to my credit. Not exactly in the Mike Hailwood bracket, but quite good enough to demonstrate that this little Raleigh is no mere toy.

The lap time would have been under two hours, too, if I hadn't rather stupidly set out with the petrol only half turned on . . .

The tour started with a brisk 25 mph plunge down Bray Hill, the speed scarcely dropped on the rise before Quarter Bridge, and the brakes brought my steed to a halt, as required, at the roundabout. Away to the west, taking a very long line round Braddan in order to keep out of the way of the tea-time racers and kerb-hugging through Union Mills. The climb up to Glen Vine knocked the speed down to about 15 mph, then it built up again, only to be reduced by the drag through Crosby. But so far there had been no need to pedal. Greeba to Ballacraigne was a fast stretch, flat out until the motor misfired—once or twice at first, then more regularly.

Dear, dear! That old two-stroke trouble, perhaps, a whiskered plug. So long as it would keep running at all, I wasn't going to stop, though, and having got over the sharp rise from Ballacraigne, I proceeded non-stop to Glen Helen. Where the motor died.

No tools on me, of course. But, surprisingly, when I twiddled the pedals, after setting the Wisp on its stand, it started. Away again. Only to have another bout of misfiring, and another stop. Once more it re-started as if nothing was wrong. And this sort of progress was repeated all the way to Kirkmichael where, at last, I spotted the trouble—the petrol tap half on, half off.

After that, it never missed a beat.

Because the ear'olers were out in force, I felt it prudent to keep right in to the side of the road—where the surface is extremely bumpy—and because of that, perhaps, I became rather conscious of the fact that the Wisp has no rear springing.

The most interesting part of the test arrived after Ramsey, the seven mile climb up the Mountain. It was a glorious evening and I have seldom had a better opportunity of admiring the view. Indeed I became so engrossed in it that on three occasions I allowed the speed to drop to about 10 mph—at which stage a couple of turns of the pedals were needed to get the revs up again. Apart from that, the one place where slight use of the pedals did seem necessary was in the cutting just before the Guthrie Memorial.

Most of the way up the Mountain,

speed was not far short of 20 mph. Coming down the other side, I kept it at somewhere near 25 mph and when it was allowed to go about that the combination of cowhorn handlebars and the rippled road edge brought about a lack of definition in steering which persuaded me to ease back.

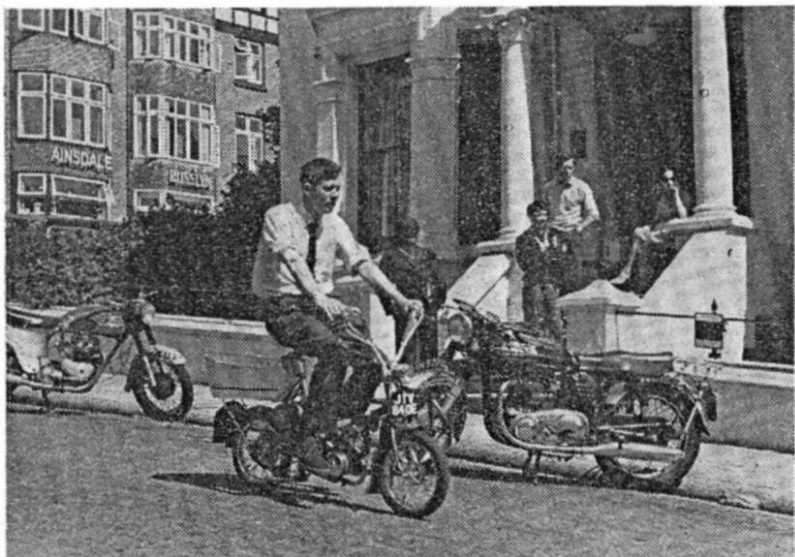
Cronk-ny-Mona—quite a long climb, as any unfortunate who has pushed in at the end of a T.T. race will confirm—had little effect on the cruising speed, and from here it was a gentle run in to the finish.

The little engine was still running quietly and effortlessly, obviously not worried about being used for rather more than a round-the-houses spin. I had been impressed most of all by its pulling power, but almost as much by its quietness. And I had proved that it would be quite as feasible to go touring on a Wisp as to use it for the daily journey to and from work, school or the shops.

Things I liked about it were the big carry-all basket, a weatherproof container of considerable capacity which can be removed from the machine in a jiffy; the full lighting equipment; and the machine's light weight, only 77 lb. What I disliked most of all was the capacity of the fuel tank—only 4½ pints.

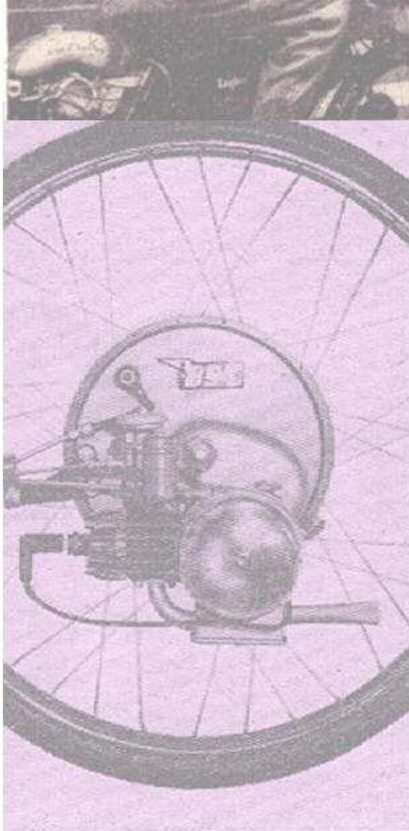
LEFT: Photographer John Stoddart sets off to post more films to MCI.

RIGHT: Quantrill on his way across the Snaefell road





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