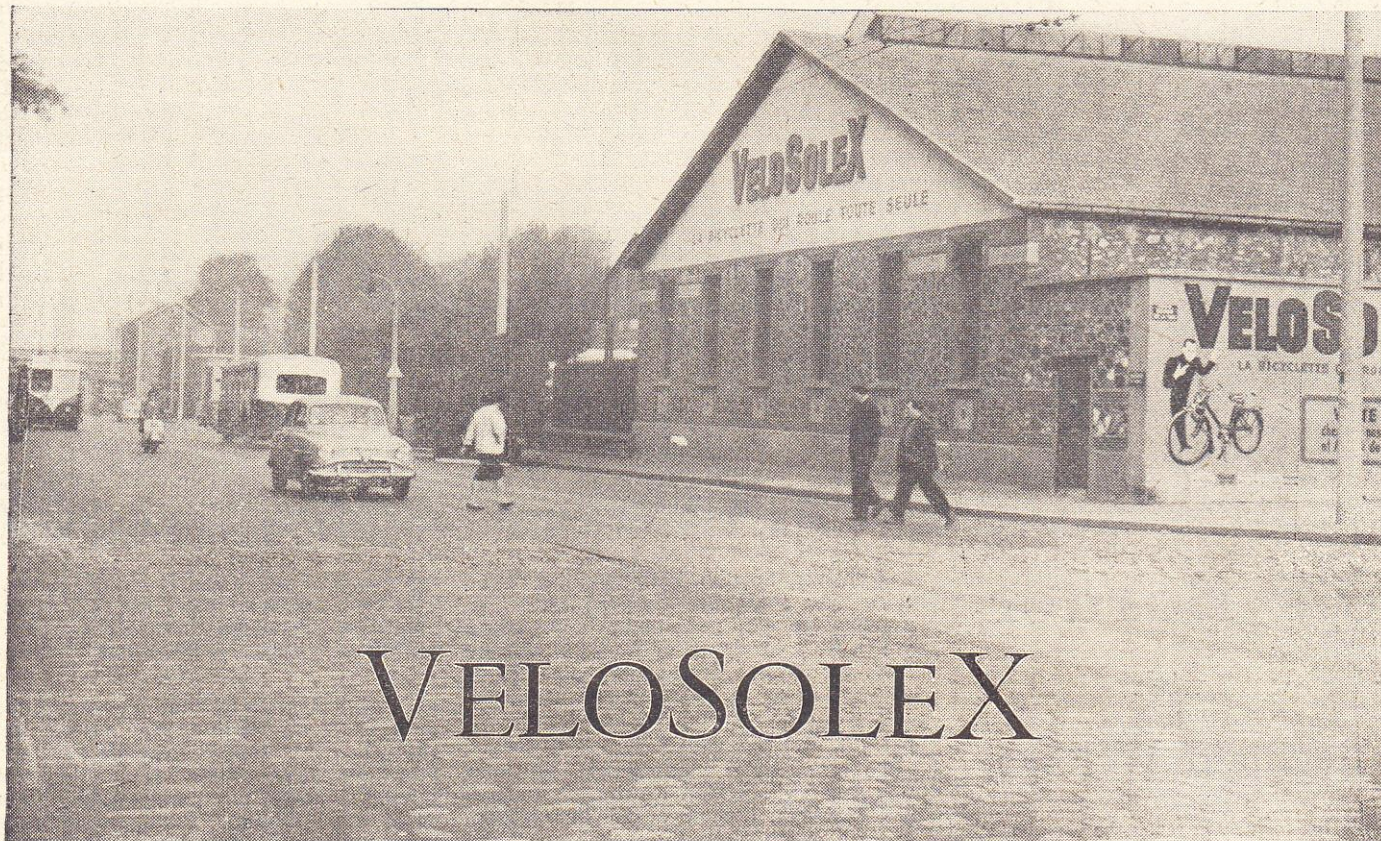


## Homes of the Moped

No. 4



## VELOSOLEX

## FRENCH FACTORY WHICH HAS BUILT MORE THAN 1½ MILLION MACHINES

**W**HAT is a moped? Upon your answer to that question depends whether or not you regard VeloSolex as the world's largest manufacturer of mopeds. If you believe that a moped is a 50 c.c.-engined machine with such items as gearbox, positive drive and springing, then VeloSolex do not produce them—and, moreover, do not *want* to produce them. If, on the other hand, a moped is a powered bicycle—tough, reliable, economical; with all the attributes of a pedal cycle and few, if any, of a motor-cycle, this French factory must be rated as the very pinnacle of moped production.

**The Idea Originates**

Its moped history started during the dark days of the German occupation, but the origins of the Solex company lie farther back—in 1906, when Maurice Goudard and Marcel Mennesson set up in business to manufacture radiators for Parisian omnibuses. From there, they moved into the carburetter field. This was in 1910 . . . the same year in which the name of Solex was originated to re-

Described by  
**JOHN THORPE**

place the somewhat unwieldy “Goudard et Mennesson” nomenclature.

But let's move on to those wartime days, when the two founders were sitting in their carburetter factory at Neuilly, thinking of the future. It appeared to them that, at long last, practical power units for cycles were a possibility. They discussed, over and over again, the desirable attributes of a powered cycle, and then—being men of action—set to and designed one. More than that . . . they built prototypes. Five hundred of them! These they loaned to selected folk, free of charge, with only one stipulation—“Tell us what you think!” The 500 guinea pigs told them—when the machines were offered for sale to their temporary owners, not one refused the chance!

Satisfied that their machine was right, they launched it upon the market as the

VeloSolex, 2,289 machines being produced in the first year—1946. Production had only commenced that May. Within a year, 10,000 machines were leaving the factory; the 50,000 a year mark was passed in 1951, when 59,817 were built, and in 1953 the figures topped 100,000 for the first time.

**Still a Backlog**

Within two years, prodigious efforts to keep up with the demand had resulted in 202,687 rolling off the production lines, but demand still outpaced supply. Up went the 1956 figure to 228,030. Still a backlog. So, for 1957, VeloSolex hope to have touched an all-time record production of 261,000 machines. Even so, when I visited the factory last month 46,000 orders were still outstanding, and the staff of 650 were working a frantic 52-hour week to try to keep pace!

This is a terrific record, by any yardstick. What is even more surprising is that it has been achieved mainly in an oldish factory, with little mechanization, though this is a situation partly remedied by the building, last year, of a new “B”

factory close by, and in the very near future this will be joined by a "C" factory with its own rail link.

In the mother factory, I saw such diverse sights as an automatic machine carrying out eight consecutive operations on a cylinder head without supervision, and a woman with a mallet and punch laboriously inserting steel plugs into casting holes in the cylinder barrel. Solex micrometer tests on parts—tests accurate to within one thousandth of a millimetre—contrasted with women hand-painting the gold lines on the cycle parts in a light so dim that it was almost dusk-like.

The engine assembly shop was a joy to

everything save such obvious items as wheels, tyres and seats are of Solex design and manufacture—none the less turn out good work, such as flywheels with cast-in magnets, at the rate of one a minute.

Like Henry Ford, VeloSolex offer the customer any colour he likes as long as it's black! Undeterred by the current fashion for polychromatics, they remain faithful to hard-wearing and smart black stove enamel. I saw the old-style paint plant in the "mother" factory, and was then whipped round the corner to inspect their pride and joy . . . the Thermo-Chinie fully-automatic plant in which parts can be rust-proofed, undercoated, dipped, and stoved at the flick of a switch!

As they emerge from the ovens after their circular tour, they are clamped on to power rigs, and the gold lines applied—very different from the hand-brush method employed across the road!

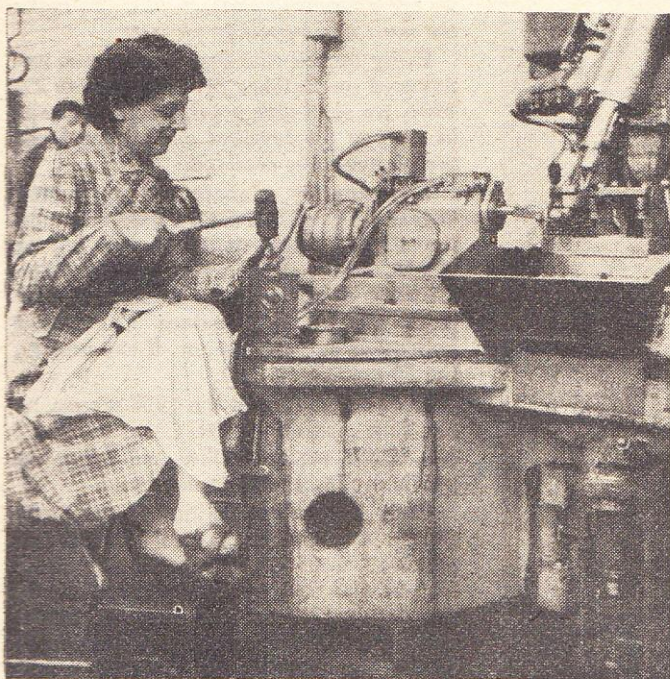
This latest factory has yet to get under way. When it does, it may help cut back those 46,000 outstanding orders, for this in a light, airy, highly mechanized plant. Some of the new press tools being installed there can produce 1,500 parts in an hour; there are automatic tools such as the eight-operation, frame-finishing "merry-go-round," which was demonstrated to me; and new pressure-casters, including a "giant" from the U.S.A.

Besides the two Courbevoie plants and the projected Factory "C" VeloSolex have assembly factories at Arras and Tours, and licensee factories abroad in Denmark, Spain, Switzerland and Holland.

### Huge Potential

Of the terrific French production, only 10 per cent. is exported. The rest sells at home, making inroads into the reservoir of 12 million French cyclists for whom it has been cunningly tailored. This accent on "a cycle which pedals itself" is the secret of its success—that and the strict insistence on proper servicing facilities wherever a VeloSolex is sold.

A good cycle sells, in France, for £15; a VeloSolex for little more than £26. With huge home sales backing the 47 export markets to which the machine goes, expenditure can be justified. Thus it is that the automatic paint plant, and automatic-feed presses, representing investments of many millions of francs, can be purchased with confidence. Production pays!



☆

"In the mother factory I saw such diverse sights as an automatic machine carrying out eight consecutive operations . . . and a woman with a mallet and punch laboriously inserting steel plugs into casting holes . . ." And here she is, chic and pertly French, carrying out a hand operation alongside a massive automatic machine.

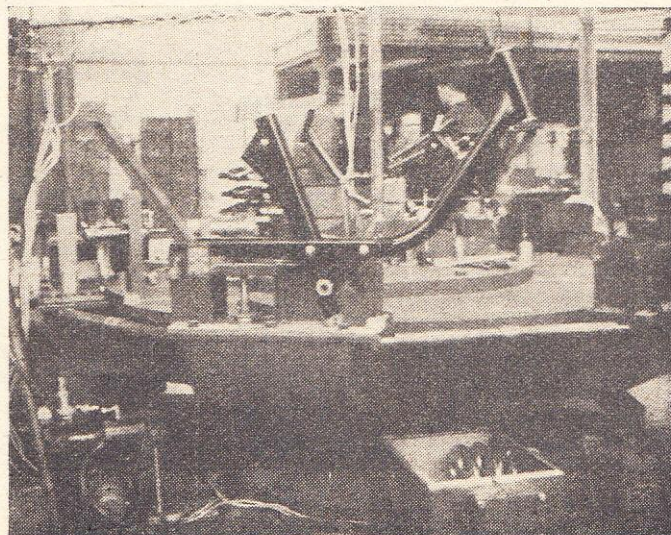
behold—not for its mechanization, but for the sheer vivacity of its mechanics. There they stood, smoking, talking, joking; deft French hands swiftly adding part to part as an engine grew from a pile of pieces at one end of the bench to a complete unit at the other. Pneumatic tools were available for some tasks, but generally this was assembly on the classical model, with the skill of the man on the bench the deciding factor.

### New Factories

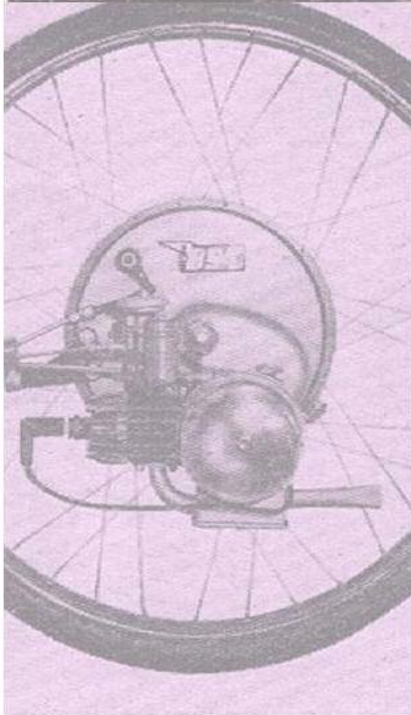
Similar ant-like activity was to be observed in the cycle assembly shop—hustle, bustle and seeming disorder, yet with those massive production figures to disprove the impression. And, though old, the pressure casters in the casting shop, where parts are made for the VeloSolex engine, carburetter and magneto—for

☆

On the merry-go-round! A VeloSolex frame clamped in place on the newly installed eight-operation automatic machine at the recently built "B" factory. A high degree of mechanization is to be a feature of this expanded "works."



# IceniCAM Information Service



[www.icenicam.org.uk](http://www.icenicam.org.uk)