

# Small TALK

**N**OW that Benelli has appointed a new British importer it will be possible to buy some of the smaller machines in their range.

In the next few months, 'Small Talk' will be trying a selection of models from Benelli's line-up of four 125s and four mopeds. First off this month is the 50 Cross, a restricted sports moped which retails at £476 including the dreaded VAT.

On first sight the Cross looks an attractive and purposeful machine. Despite its small engine size and 159lb (72kg) weight, it looks like a 125 or bigger machine. This is mainly due to the smart styling of the bike, which has a 1.9 gallon



*Cross has neat lines*

petrol tank in red and white, with matching white plastic mudguards and red frame. Also in red are the front fork sliders.

The fancy paintwork helps to make the Cross look like a big bike. Just to sit on the single saddle (there are no pillion footpegs), it is hard to believe it is a moped. But when the engine is fired up — and the test machine we had took some starting when cold! — the rider is brought down to earth with a bump.

The removable muffler on the matt black Lafranconi expansion box exhaust system, which was badly rusted after just 100 miles from new, emits a characteristic small two-stroke buzz. The exhaust is also very smoky, possibly due to the 25:1 petrol/oil mixture. Many mopeds these days run on a cleaner 50:1 ratio.

On the move, the exhaust noise from the conventional, piston-port engine really becomes offensive. The fact that the Cross has a maximum speed of 30 miles-per-hour only serves to increase the rider's embarrassment at the tinny screech, which also upsets onlookers who, no doubt, suspect that the exhaust pipe has been tampered with. And that is with the muffler in place! This is the worst disadvantage of what is otherwise a welcome addition to the sports moped line-up.

Full use has to be made of the five gears to maintain a good rate of acceleration and to try and keep up with town traffic. Despite this, the fuel consumption is a respectable 100 miles-per-gallon. First gear is very low but moving off in second requires too much clutch slipping to be satisfactory. The multiplate wet clutch has to be treated carefully. On our test bike, it repeatedly 'grabbed' first gear, making smooth starts difficult to master. Fortunately, and with only a little practise, changing gear with just a slight touch on the clutch lever proved to be the best way to go up or down the box.

The low power of the smooth running engine is reflected in the fact that fourth gear was necessary on the slightest of hills. Even riding against a breeze, the wide handlebar meant that fourth gear was needed to make headway. With an 11 stone rider aboard, many hills could not be climbed unless third gear was selected. Even when flat out in top, the Cross was barely able to keep up with traffic and it was difficult to avoid being buffeted in the slipstream of overtaking lorries and buses.

Off-road, the Italian origin of the Cross was obvious. In Italy, trial and trail fifties have been popular for many years and are manufactured by a vast number of companies, many of whom do not export their products to Britain.

Of those that do, Benelli is fortunate in being able to offer the Cross. It is one of the best machines of its type. In looks, it is very similar to the Malaguti Calvacone. This machine, and others such as the Fantic, boast an excellent off-road performance.



*New boy in town — the Cross, Benelli's flashy fifty*

Although hampered by the engine's low power and tricky clutch, the Benelli 50 Cross is comfortable to ride off-road due to the excellent seat and suspension. The front telescopic units are effective in absorbing all but the harshest of bumps. On their softest setting, the three-way adjustable Sebac units at the rear could only be bottomed with difficulty. There is a choice of three top and bottom mounting points for the rear units. Experimenting with these would find the best set-up for rider weight and various types of terrain.

Pirelli trail tyres front (2.50 x 21) and rear (3.00 x 18) provided excellent grip on mud and rock alike. Braking on the Cross is one of its best features. Both drum brakes worked well and seemed unaffected by a ride through a two-foot deep river!

At no time during the off-road mileage did it feel as if the bike's handling was being fully tested. Even with a more powerful engine it is likely that the 'feel' of the machine would remain superb.

As usual on an Italian bike, the Cross has its gearchange lever on the right hand side. First gear is at the top of the box. This took some getting used to but apart from a few hair-raising moments when changing down instead of

changing up, the gearchange was no problem.

For the hefty price tag, the Cross seems fairly basic, particularly if it is compared to Japanese alternatives. It has no mirrors, no indicators and only rudimentary lighting.

However, it does have a true 'character' and one which will be

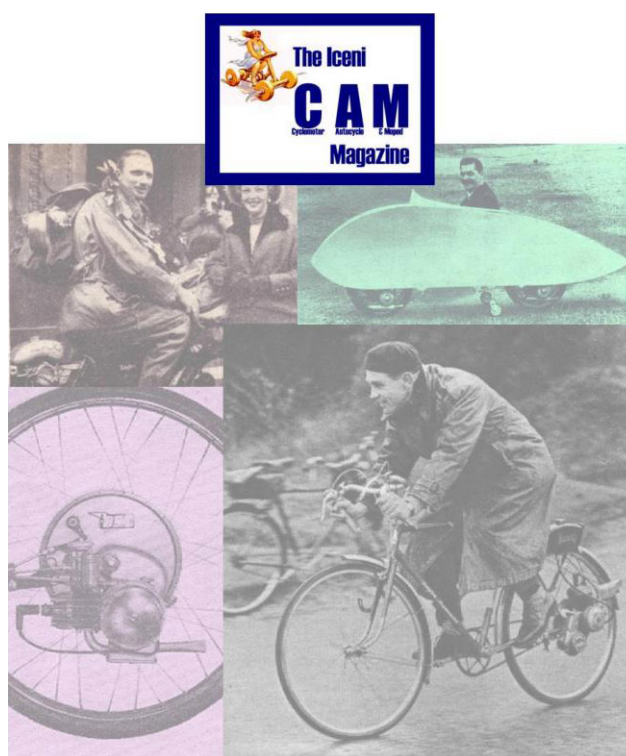


attractive to all off-road enthusiasts. If you do not intend ever to leave the streets, then there are other machines.

For those who at 16 want the freedom of the roads and the green lanes, the Benelli 50 Cross would be a good choice.

**Nick Harvey**

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