Centaur Road Tests . . .

The F.N. UTILITY

THE F.N. model I tested went under the name of the "Utility." Comparing it with some of the other graceful models in the F.N. range I suppose this description might be just applicable, but in the wider field I feel it is something of an injustice.

True, by some of our streamlined standards it has rather stark lines. The main frame tube is just exactly that—an unadorned tube, while the plates which hold the engine are there strictly for use and not for decoration. Perhaps the only concession to modern trends in design is the headlamp, integrally mounted with the forks and with a space for mounting the speedometer.

But the F.N. is not ugly, it is functional. It has also been designed with the mechanic as well as the rider in mind. It is an "honest" machine and to many minds it is the type of machine which springs to mind when the word "moped" is mentioned.

Rider comfort and handling are its most salient features. The springing is superb and the sturdy telescopic front forks are among the best of their knd I have met. Erring rather on the firm than the sloppy side, they are tough enough to keep an even course along the newly ripped-up Marylebone Road without a suspicion of bottoming. Similarly the rear swinging arm arrangement is built to be used by the heavier rider, and used on the same testing ground as the forks it provided eomplete insulation between rider and the shocks from the jagged surface below.

Comfortable Saddle

The saddle also plays its part in keeping the rider happy. Not only is it one of the "pan" variety but the long flange of springy steel on which it is mounted adds yet another device to iron out the bumps. I did not ride the F.N. over any very vast distances but it is my belief that it would have happily taken me over 200 miles in a day without any complaints.

The engine, a two-speed F.N. unit, is a very eager worker and distinguishes itself by being a quick starter, even after it had stood for some days. This is not a point I have referred to of late, in my road tests, but it is a curious fact that quite a few mopeds do not start readily. The engine note will not be to everyone's taste, and is in direct contrast to the German mopeds which are kept quiet by law, but it is nevertheless a healthy sound with overtones of the highly tuned small capacity racing motorcycle ticking over on the starting-grid. Nobody will grumble about this when they discover the top speed.

Gearbox Quibble

Unfortunately I have a quibble. As I mentioned before, handling is superb and I circulated the Temple Press car-park late one evening in "trials-bike" circles. But I did not possess a trials-bike gearbox. To perform a tight circle it is necessary to slip the clutch throughout, for the first gear was just a little too high for this sort of thing, as it was for traffic-crawling. Curiously enough there was a discrepancy between the two gears also, and to make a really smooth change it was necessary to achieve something near peak revs. and even then the gearchange would only be right eight times out of ten.

If a change was attempted without hard revving, the engine would "die" a little and labour along until suitable second-gear revs. were reached.

It is a pity that the output of this fine engine is somewhat spoiled by what seems to be a case of incorrect gearing.

That is the only really derogatory thing I have to say about the F.N. and the rest of its qualities are well above par. The front brake, a large diameter full-width hub, provided all the normal retardation I needed, and if I needed a little extra on the descent of a steep hill which ended at red traffic-lights, a slight backwards pressure on the pedals produced the effect of a large friendly hand firmly slowing down my progress. The only time when the brakes were a little too fierce was on the cinders of the car-park, not an average surface I would agree.

The controls are light and positive and I particularly welcomed the gearchange device, really slick. The rear mudguard is deeply valanced and looked an obviously efficient protection against spray when I picked the moped up. Later it turned out to be just that, and, more surprising, so did the front 'guard despite the fact that it is of the normal shallow design. Caught in the rain with only a mackintosh I merely tucked my legs in and the front 'guard did the rest. My mackintosh was drenched but the bottoms of my trouser legs were only sprinkled with rain.

Pedal Point

There is enough backward play in the pedals to allow the kickstart to be made from wherever the pedals are in their circle of revolution. This avoids the necessity of operating the clutch to get them into the desired position, a very good time-saver.

The tool-container, a small metal cylinder mounted under the saddle is adequate for a small selection of tools, while the pump is located snugly and safely under the fuel tank. A small carrier, a tank fitted with reserve tap and a horn of surprisingly piercing note round off the fitments of this product of the world-famed Belgian concern.

That is the F.N. "Utility" by name, but not by nature would be my description of it.

Performance

Maximum Speed:
Flying 1/10th mile, 36 m.p.h.
Standing 1/10th mile, 19 m.p.h.

Acceleration:
0-10 m.p.h., 3½ secs. 0-20 m.p.h., 12½ secs.
0-30 m.p.h., 25½ secs

Economy
At 20 m.p.h., 160 m.p.g
At 30 m.p.h., 110 m.p.g

Hill climbing:
Time for hill: 1 min. 20 secs.
Bottom gear engaged at 0.3 miles.
Test hill 0.5 miles long, max. gradient 1 in 10; average gradient 1 in 16.

Braking:	**Front**	**Rear**	**Both**
At 20 m.p.h.	21ft.	26ft.	17ft.
At 30 m.p.h.	55ft	68ft	45ft.

Pedalling.
Maximum pedalling speed: 17 m.p.h.
Comfortable pedalling speed: 7 m.p.h.
Tester's rating: fair
Tester's weight: 190lb

Specification

Engine: F.N. two-stroke, 38mm. bore x 42mm. stroke = 47 6cc., c.r. 7 to 1, 2 b.h.p. at 5,500 r.p.m.

Gearbox: Two-speed integral with engine, multi-disc clutch with inserts in oil bath, clutch and gearchange handlebar operated, final chain drive, pedal kickstarting.

Frame: Large section monotube construction, telescopic front forks and swinging-arm rear.

Tank: 1½ gall. with reserve.

Lights: Head and tail lamps fed direct from flywheel magneto generator.

Wheels and brakes: Both brakes 4in. diameter internally expanding in full-width alloy hubs, rear brake back-pedal operated, light alloy rims 23 x 2.00in. tyres.

Equipment: Tyre pump, tool container and tools, carrier, centre stand, horn, headlamp dipswitch.

Finish: Blue and cream.

Concessionaires: F.N. (England) Ltd., 102 Eaton Place, London, S.W.1.

Price: £76 10s.

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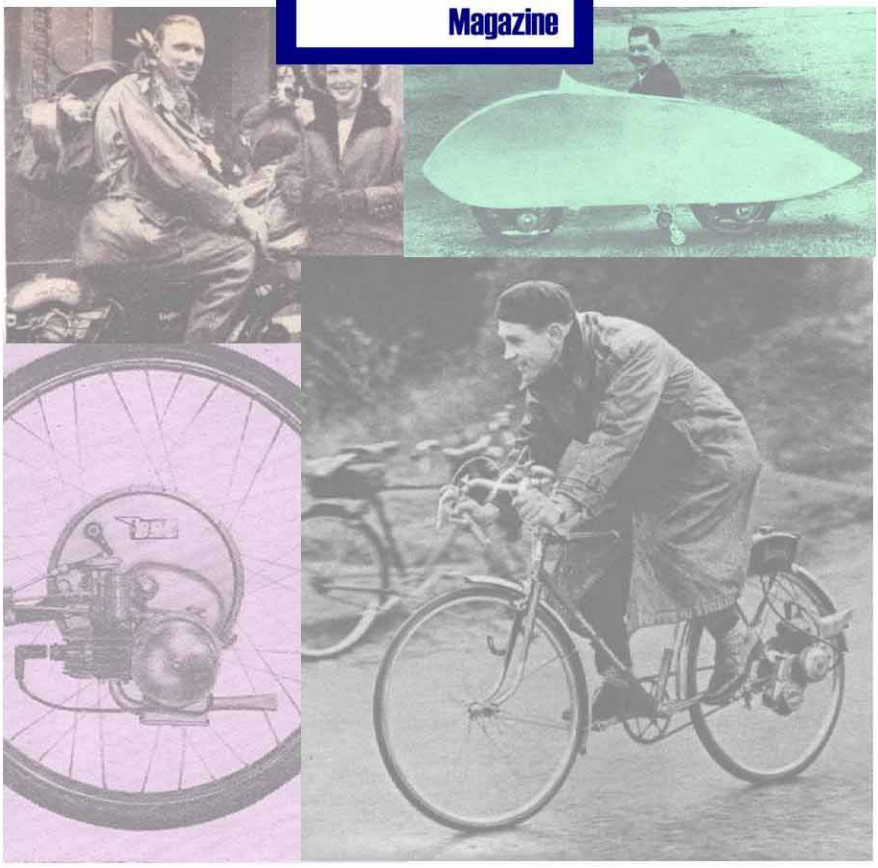

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