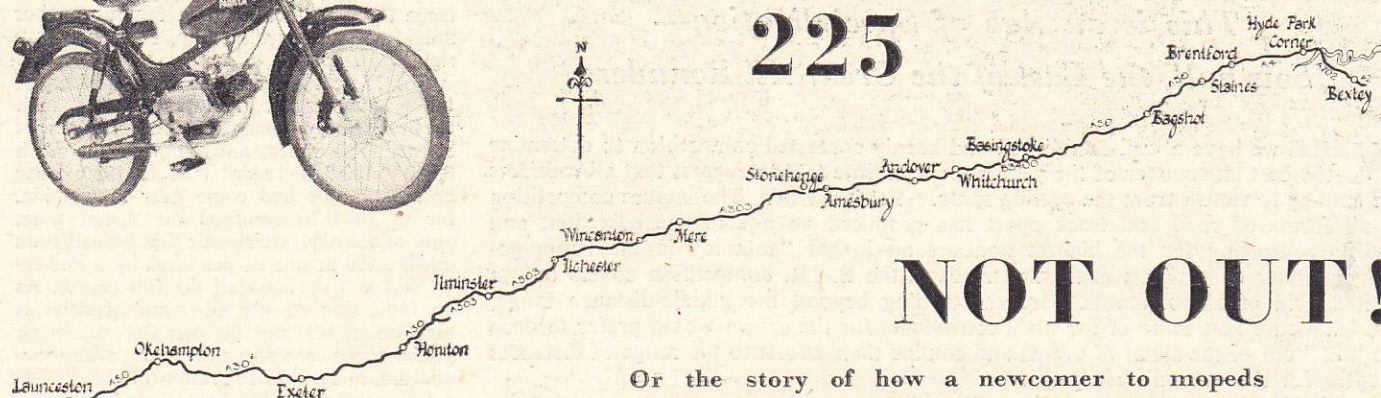




225



NOT OUT!

Or the story of how a newcomer to mopeds broke himself in by riding over 200 miles as near non-stop as possible in the worst weather and the heaviest holiday traffic of this so-called summer.

By KEN BOWDEN

WHAT first put the idea of starting a week's holiday by riding a moped from West Kent to Cornwall into my head, I honestly don't know. It may have been the hope that thereby I could take some of the torture out of one of the most painful of journeys by car or train, and too long to be undertaken for my purpose by bicycle. More likely it was a growing desire really to get to grips with one of these stout little "buzzers" following a number of short but interesting encounters.

Perhaps a neighbour really started it. Not only had he and his son travelled to Cornwall by moped, they had toured that craggy county and neighbouring Devon extensively by two-stroke for a fortnight, and returned, in one piece, with an inspiring tale.

At any rate, one glorious summer day, replete with visions of a sun-scorched road to the west, I broached the idea quite casually, to my moped-expert colleague. Enthusiasts, it seems, are all the same. I remember the one who started me cycling. Life was only real for him when the mud was up to his hubs. . . .

"Cornwall? Lovely little hop. You'll write it up—'First Major Journey by Moped' sort of thing. Jolly good. Now, what you need is . . ."

And so, clapped on the back and committed—Cornwall or bust—a couple of days later I collected, from Carr Bros., of Purley, Surrey, the agents in this country, a four-stroke, three-speed Italian Parilla T4. And on July 27, at 5 o'clock on a fine morning, topped-up with petrol and tools, from a spot 14 miles south-east of Hyde Park Corner I pointed the Parilla westward with 225 to go.

The road at least was familiar. The R.R.A. record-breaker's route in reverse, as far as Launceston, my objective, it comprised the A30 as far as Basingstoke, a short cut via B3400 from there to Andover, and then a long haul on A303 to just short of Honiton, where the A30 was to be rejoined for the rest of the run via Exeter. Scenically pleasant and varied enough, with woodland and

common beyond Staines giving way to the open vistas of Salisbury Plain after Andover, and low-lying woodland around Exeter preceding the typical Devon scenery of the last stretch, Dartmoor frowning on the left, it can nevertheless give the summer week-end traveller a 100 per cent, grilling. Nose-to-tail driving is the motorist's headache. Hills, few "killers," but one undulation after another find out most ambitious bike schedules. In previous years, by car, the run had taken me anything from nine to 13 hours, and by bike from one and a half to two days.

Just how a moped would compare with this was, then, a matter of considerable interest. Allowing for my relative inexperience, I had asked my Launceston hosts to have the kettle on at 3 p.m.—a 10-hour run at 22.5 m.p.h.

Superb Handling

But that was before the Parilla! The machine loaned to me was the "Turismo," one of four types (the others are the T2 two-stroke and sports two-stroke, and the four-stroke sports) from the Milan headquarters of the concern that originally came into the powered two-wheeler field purely for the fun of it. It proved its paces at our very first collaboration prior to the big run. With a top speed of around 35 m.p.h. once the revs built up, and running not much under 200 miles on a gallon of top-grade petrol, full use of the three gears meant rapid progress under almost any conditions. But what really impressed me, and boosted my confidence, were the Parilla's superb handling characteristics and obvious solidity.

Skilful design has achieved a layout and balance in this machine that produces an armchair ride with the minimum of effort. Cornering, even in wet and greasy weather, is done with confidence. Making full use of middle gear and the smooth but positive

brakes, coupled to the solid-mounted but perfectly positioned right-hand lever, town riding is light labour indeed. Lack of noise and particularly of reverberation are equally fine features. As a newcomer to mopeds, if I have a general criticism of them, it is their "tinniness," particularly in the non-moving departments, frame, mudguards, cowlings, and so on. The Parilla eats up the road sweetly with never a rattle, shiver or shake. It has "body" without excessive weight, rakishness of line without contrived trimmings. In fact, if I had only left well alone, we would have been perfect partners from the start of the long road to Cornwall!

The first 20 miles, through London via



The Parilla and author look around Dartmoor after recuperating from the long haul.



A lonely road for the Parilla at the 5 a.m. start—but it did not last long . . .

Watling Street and Hammersmith out on to the Great West Road, I had anticipated as a pleasant settling-down period. Instead it became increasingly disconcerting. By Osterley in fact, with the west-bound holiday traffic already heavy at before 6 a.m., my back was aching sufficiently to demand an immediate remedy.

A believer in the peak-up saddle position on a bike, in a final run-over the Parilla I had tilted the rather small mattress-type saddle slightly, and also lowered the bars, which seemed much too near eye-level. Out came my half-hundredweight of tools. Back went the saddle to horizontal. Up came the bars to their original position. Result: not another twinge all day. Moral: leave such things to them as knows!

Much relieved in body and spirit, the little time loss was quickly made up, with 25 miles clocked in the first hour, and Basingstoke, my personal "Gateway to the West," 50 miles, reached in two hours.

But, even at that stage it was becoming clear that my secret hope of beating schedule by an hour or more, and averaging "25s" throughout, was almost certainly doomed. To miss the great summer Saturday ooze west nowadays I imagine one would have to start at somewhere between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. At 7 a.m., at the start of the Basingstoke by-pass, the Parilla must have been one of a thousand vehicles an hour following the sun, and the hope that a noticeable percentage would bear left at Basingstoke for Southampton and points south did

not materialize. Moreover, the breeze blowing from the south-west at 5 a.m. was two hours later becoming a full-scale wind.

Even on the fairly sheltered run along the pleasant Basingstoke-Andover cut-through, changing down on the inclines became more frequently necessary. No sooner had I cleared Amesbury than the wind really got down to its, from then on, unflagging efforts to blow me back home, and, the higher the road crawled, the less able was I to hold the pace of the accompanying traffic, which had until then been fairly easy.

However, once resigned to a less ambitious schedule, and to matching the progress only of the two-up, luggage-laden scooters (of which there was abundant and interesting variety) the jaunt remained fun, thanks to the Parilla. An inspiration to its rider, the machine refused to pander to the rock and roll of the wind. And even when, at Wylde, eight miles beyond Stonehenge, 104 miles covered in four hours, suddenly and torrentially the rain began, driving remained relaxed and road-holding secure, even if the schedule suffered another blow.

With no sign of a let-up in the downpour, I stopped near Wincanton to adjust weather-proofs. Diving under a tree to eat a quick sandwich, I was surprised to drive a pair of pheasant out of their lie within 3 ft. of the London-Land's End road. At least, pheasant they appeared to be. A pair of harpies disturbed about a bit of spell-casting couldn't have put a bigger jinx on me!

No sooner had I rejoined the dampened-

down procession westwards, rain stinging hard in the face, than the Parilla, so staunch a friend for 130 miles, began to misbehave in a vital department.

The trouble was some sort of gear-slip. Second gear could not be firmly engaged. Within a few miles I found it necessary to hold the clutch-lever in place whenever the middle ratio was needed—which, on a switchback road like that to the west, was pretty often.

Now, quite possibly, there was a simple remedy to this. Perhaps a quick adjustment to a cable, a bit more tension on a spring. . . . What was certain, however, was that the Parilla and I still had nearly 100 miles to go. What was uncertain was my technical knowledge of moped gear-boxes. The top and bottom gears still functioned perfectly. Despite a plentiful supply of tools, roadside experiment with the whole clutch system and gear-box possibly at stake was not to be risked.

Hence, when I stopped at Ilminster to dry out a little over a cup of coffee—the rain having temporarily ceased—and take on fuel, my wrist was beginning to feel the effects of preventing the clutch-lever from slipping.

Easing it, I had my first glimpse of something that had lost significance after the pheasant encounter—the time. My watch said 11.15 a.m.; 150 miles in six and a quarter hours—only just outside "25s."

Considerably cheered, I took the road with hopes of attaining the secret schedule rapidly rising, and ran slap bang into the *hoi polloi* that in the end prevented it—the start of the mother and father of all traffic jams.

Monster Creep

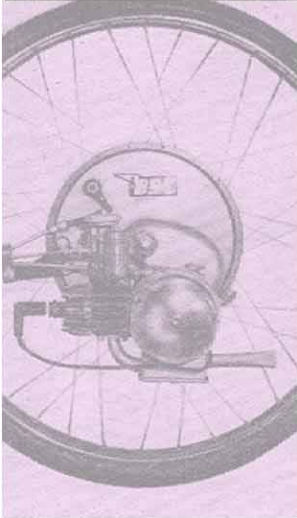
I came up with the tail of this monster creep seven miles east of Honiton, two miles or so before the junction of the key routes to the west. One of hundreds of two-wheelers making slow and erratic progress—but at least moving—the Parilla took a narrow channel between cars moving both ways at not more than 10 yards a minute. And not before 26 miles and two hours had elapsed, with chaotic Exeter at last behind, did the nose-to-tail snakes of car-bound holidaymakers break down, as roads north and south to the resorts eased some of the load on this so-called "trunk road."

From Exeter to Launceston is 42 miles. With the hills now really making themselves felt, this last drag, the rain and wind whistling hard off Dartmoor, took more and more resolution to get through. But, if the Parilla was limping on the ups, she was still game on the downs. I rode into the "Gateway to Cornwall" one and three-quarter hours after leaving Exeter. I was very wet and wind-blown and slightly weary, but a bath, a meal and a coffee and cognac removed all but the memory of it inside an hour.

And I was still congratulating myself on the 225 not out in nine and a quarter hours when, some hours later, a car-load of friends, who'd started an hour after me on the same run, turned up—after 12½ hours on the road!

Vive la two-wheeler!

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