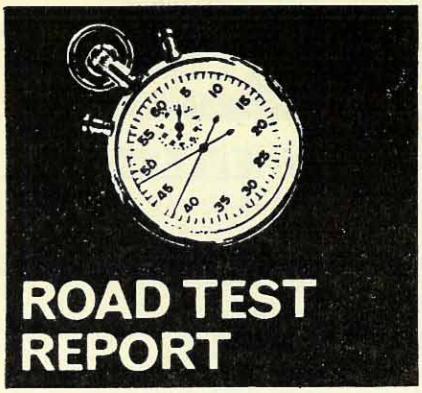
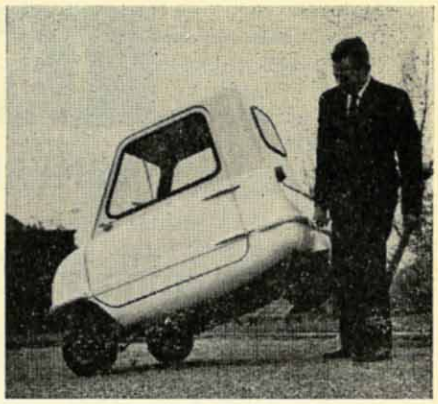




The smallest car in the world

PEEL "50"

SO extraordinary is the new three-wheeler P.50 that testing it objectively and without making unfair comparisons proved tricky. Comparisons with any of the other well-known three-wheelers would be unfair because the P.50 has three unique characteristics. Firstly, it has only one seat—this means, incidentally, that it would be used by a provisional licence holder without a qualified driver in attendance—secondly, the engine is only 49 c.c., and thirdly, the entire body is made of glass-fibre. As a final point, no other car tips the scales at only 130 lb.

That is a lot of onlies, but the fact is that the Peel Engineering Company in the Isle of Man have built what must be the smallest car in the world. It is not intended to carry a lot of weight or to go great distances at great speeds. The sort of work we presume it would be used for is short trips, particularly in wet weather, to railway station or shops. Anywhere where the parking or congestion problems are acute would be ideal for the car's use—even if a car park or street is apparently full there is probably a corner to accommodate the armchair-sized P.50. It is just under 4½ feet long and 3 feet 3 inches wide.

Our test machine was borrowed from Two Strokes Ltd., of Stanmore, the distributors for Peel in the Greater London area. They have models on show at their Stanmore premises.

Starting is by hand lever beside the driver's seat, and the clutch, brake and throttle controls are pedal-operated as conventional car lay-out. The gear lever is mounted on the steering column with a simple straight-through gate. There is no reverse.

With the exception of the engine access panel, the car body is one complete piece of glass-fibre, with a single door hung on the nearside. The front, rear and door windows are fixed single panes, but the offside window has a sliding panel, necessary for hand signals as no indicators are fitted.

Fuel is carried in a cavity in the bodywork just above the engine, and a transparent panel allows the level to be seen from inside the car. Another ingenious device is the windscreen washer, which is worked by squeezing a plastic bottle full of liquid. An electric windscreen wiper is fitted, and the seat is the tubular metal type, level with the floor. There is some space beside and behind the seat, suitable for parcels or shopping bags.

On the outside of the car, strips of rubber beading at the front corners and rear act as bumpers and there are two large rear lamps. Apart from the two sidelights at the front, there is a large single headlamp mounted in the centre.

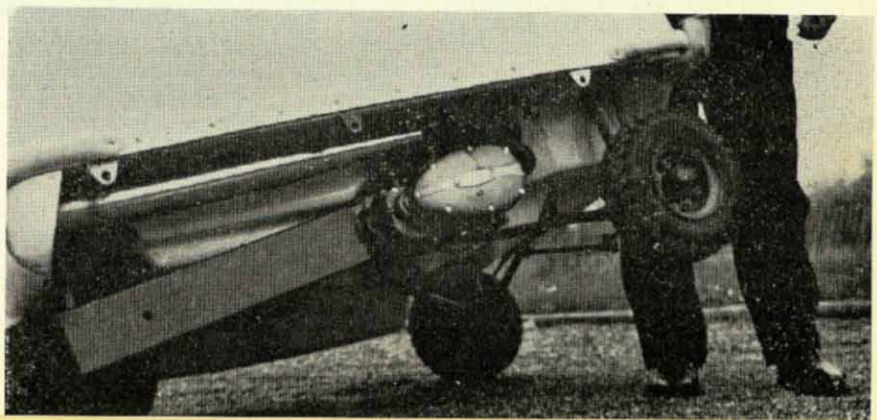
The wheels are fitted with 3.5 × 5-inch studded-tread tyres and are all coil-sprung independently. Both front brakes are operated by the foot pedal, the rear by a hand lever. All brakes are cable operated and easily adjusted, and a spare wheel is standard.

On the road

Getting into the P.50 is a little tricky, but it is an art that can soon be mastered. Once inside there is plenty of head and elbow room for even the tallest of our test drivers, and leg space is quite adequate. The door closes neatly and quietly.

Starting the engine involves the use of a self-cancelling choke lever, and sharply pulling the starter lever. This lever is very easy to pull, but must be moved quickly for prompt starting. We would have preferred it to be slightly higher geared to allow a slower but heftier pull.

First reaction to the starting of the



engine is one of surprise at the noise. There appears to be no insulation on the thin sheet of glass-fibre between the cab and the engine, so the noise is particularly obvious. Outside the car, the engine sounded silky and very quiet.

The gear lever is conveniently placed and we selected all gears with no fuss whatsoever. In first, high revs. were needed to get away from standstill, and on any sort of rise some careful clutch slipping was necessary.

At first the reaction to the controls is strange—for example, we found we were being much too gentle on the throttle for easy get-aways and slick gear changes. The steering seemed far too positive for the first mile or so, but it was possible to become quickly adapted to it and stop making alarming wobbles. After some practice, a test driver, used to the soft steering of a large car, was able to bowl quickly along in the P.50 making rapid and accurate manoeuvres.

Of later models Peel Engineering say they have now "greatly improved the steering and this modification will be incorporated in all our future vehicles. The handling is comparable to a normal car and no familiarisation is necessary".

Second gear did most of the driving between walking speed and about 15 m.p.h. and top gear easily took the car up to its maximum in the region of 40 m.p.h. (being under 50 c.c., the car has no speedometer and our figures were obtained from a following vehicle. We have an insurance to cover speed-testing, but it is unlikely that private owners do.).

Because of the low weight, stopping was very rapid and skid-free. The front brakes were very effective, and gave the driver confidence to use the machine's tiny dimensions to full effect in heavy traffic. Our drivers went to Two Strokes showrooms in a large saloon car to collect the P.50, and then returned to Fleet Street independently, one in each car. This took place during London's darkest hour for traffic, late on a Friday afternoon, and, much to the surprise of both drivers, the man in the P.50 covered the 15 miles in half-an-hour less than his colleague!

Once mastered, the positive steering becomes an asset and gives the car a great advantage in tight corners. To see how easily it would turn over, we drove the P.50 in ever-decreasing circles on a gravelled car-park and had some difficulty in even raising a wheel. There is a skid under the tail on the nearside, and the chain case acts in a similar capacity on the offside, making it virtually impossible to turn the car on its side. Suspension is good, but tiny wheels and wheelbase don't allow a soft ride.

Inside the vehicle there is, as we said before, plenty of room to move, though obviously, no space is wasted. Ingress and egress was not too awkward, and the seat proved adequate and comfortable for most drivers. All controls came easily to hand (or foot) and an hour's driving produced no ill effects other than singing ear drums.

Our short experience with the P.50 left us most impressed—we enjoyed its lively performance and extraordinary abilities in congested traffic. It proved to be all that is needed to carry one man on short journeys that would be either too far or too wet to walk easily. The interior noise is not incurable and, this apart, the machine is a thoroughly acceptable and practical proposition for those who want to be mobile but don't want the rigours of two wheels or the expenses of four.

Specification :

Engine
D.K.W. 49 c.c. fan cooled 2 stroke.
4.2 b.h.p.

Transmission
3 forward speeds, no reverse, enclosed chain final drive.

Wheels
Easily changed steel wheels fitted with 3.50 x 5 pneumatic tyres.

Electrics
Separate side and tail lights and single headlight. Rectifier and battery supply for parking lights, horn, ignition, etc.

Suspension
Telescopic coil spring units, fully independent. Nylon bushes.

Brakes
Compensated foot brake on front wheels, hand brake on rear, all cable operated with easy adjustment.

Fuel Tank
Integral 1½ gallon with visible level.

Body
Chassis entirely glass-fibre.

Dimensions
4 ft. 5 ins. long, 3 ft. 3 ins. wide, 3 ft. 10 ins. high.

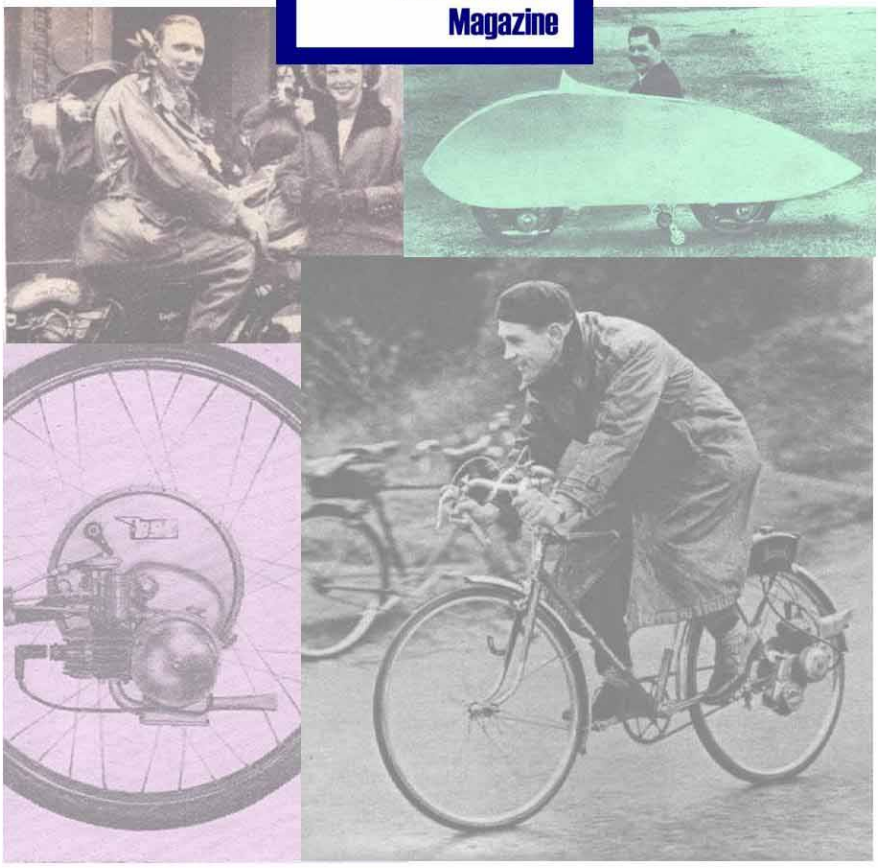
Weight
130 lbs.

Price
£199 18s. 9d.

Manufacturers
Peel Engineering Co., Viking Works, Peel, Isle of Man.

IceniCAM
Information Service

The Iceni CAM Magazine
Cyclemotor Autocycle C Moped



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