

# LEARNING THE HARD WAY

*A Reader's Actual Experiences*

by

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I HAVE just celebrated an anniversary. Twelve months ago I became mechanised. Now, six thousand miles later, I can look back with amusement at the baffling and frustrating annoyances occasioned through my complete ignorance of things mechanical. My experiences must have been the same as those of hundreds of other equally uninformed "motorised cyclists". The recounting of them, therefore, may assist many to put their fingers upon the causes of their troubles, and prevent them from relegating perfectly good machines to the scrap heap.

First you must know that I am one of those people who believe implicitly in what the advertisements say. Often I am proved wrong, but I can't help it—I still believe the next one I read. This peculiarity stood me in good stead, however, during the last year or so—whenever anything went wrong I always attributed it to my ignorance and mishandling of my little motor. As I required the constant daily use of the machine in connection with my work I could not leave it with my dealer for minor adjustments. When I discovered he charged five shillings an hour for time spent on the machine I could not leave it for financial reasons either.

I remember the first feelings of delight and pleasant anticipation as I wheeled the freshly fitted bicycle into the road. Cycling, whatever the weather, and however strongly the head winds blew, was about to become effortless—a joy. I didn't like the look of the plastic "L" plates—they made me feel

as though everyone was staring at me, and they seemed as big as placards—shouting to the world at large that here was another learner.

What was it the man had said? "You shouldn't need to use the choke in this weather, and there's plenty of petrol in the carburettor" Which was the carburettor, anyway?

I forced down the engaging lever, and started pressing on the pedals. A frightening hissing noise came from the motor—I sounded like a traction engine. Slowly I moved the control lever into half-throttle (I believe) position. The hissing ceased abruptly, but now I could hardly turn the pedals—the resistance was so great. I moved in jerks, with an explosive "phhh" between the jerks. I wobbled—I stopped, I started, and then, with a sudden spring forward that almost unseated me, the engine sprang to life. The noise seemed deafening, and from handlebars to pedals the cycle trembled—nearly as much as I did.

Momentarily expecting the whole thing to blow up, I gripped the handlebars tightly, and almost shut my eyes. By this time I seemed to be travelling at about a hundred miles an hour. Skilfully, I hope, avoiding a wandering pedestrian, my equilibrium began to be restored. I relaxed a little—the thing wasn't going to explode after all—thousands of people used them every day. Anyway, now I'd bought the thing I'd got to get used to it, and it wasn't so bad. In fact, quite pleasant, really. There was even time to look round a bit. The difficulty over starting was because of the choke, perhaps.

Steady the Buffs—here's the first crossroads—gently move the control lever, gosh, that slackens

the speed—now the brakes—gently there's that frightful hissing again—everybody's looking at you—just ignore them. What's that kid saying? "Silly old learner?" I expect you'll get a lot of that—take no notice. Way clear? Right. Press on the pedals and gently move the control lever right. Hiss! Hiss! Phhh! Phhh! Bang! Bang! We're off again. It started easier this time—why was that? Perhaps because the engine's warm.

Gosh—that lorry was close—I didn't even hear it coming—the racket from the engine is deafening—perhaps I'll get used to it.

Mind this bumpy part of the road—ouch, and ouch again—I nearly lost the handlebars then—better slacken speed a little. I wonder if the spokes will stand much of this sort of treatment—with pressure of 60 lbs. its as good as giving them a kick every time you go over a bump.

Here's the first hill—fancy being able to go up without pedalling at all—ah, this is good indeed—just look at that chap bending low over the handlebars, and pushing like anything—poor blighter—he ought to buy a *Power Pak*—that would take the hard work out of cycling. I think I've done a wise thing after all. Ah! Here's the top—I wonder if you can switch off going downhill—the engine roller seems to act as a brake now—it's not the same as the usual downhill run.

Home at last—look at the kids staring—try not to look self-conscious—act as though you've owned a cyclemotor since they were invented. No good—they've seen the "L" plates.

During lunch I studied the booklet provided with my *Power Pak*. Where was the choke—what

was it like—what did they mean when they said “tickle the carburettor”? Why did they say “nurse the throttle for peak petrol consumption”. Surely that should be “for *minimum* consumption,” or “peak mileage”, unless nursing the throttle meant opening it to the full, and I didn't think it did.

And wouldn't it be a lot simpler and easier for people like me if they printed the names of the various parts in the appropriate position on the diagrams, and not use numbers, the explanation of which was somewhere in the text.

Lunch over, I once more wheeled the machine into the road, found the choke and closed it, engaged and started. Almost immediately the engine spluttered into action. “Use the choke as little as possible” ran through my mind. I reached down behind to re-open it, the bicycle swerved violently, and I hastily replaced my right hand on the handlebars.

This was silly. Why did the makers put the choke in such a position that it required a gymnastic feat to open it. I stopped, opened the choke the easy way, and remounted. Off I went easily enough, but within fifty yards the engine just stopped running, and once more I came to a halt. *Now* what was wrong? This business

wasn't going to be all honey. Did the choke need using again? I tried it, but the engine refused to function. I remembered something I saw the chap in the shop do. On the top of the carburettor float chamber was a knob. When he wiggled it up and down a squishy noise could be heard. It was after he had done this that he remarked about “plenty of petrol in the carburettor”.

I wiggled the knob in the same way, but there was no squishy noise—the carburettor must be empty. Next to the knob was the pipe through which petrol was supposed to enter. At the top of the pipe was the petrol tap. And the petrol tap wasn't turned on.

I sighed with relief—a little petrol might make all the difference. It did, but by this time the engine was cool, and once more I was forced to use the choke, stopping a little further on to re-open it.

Apart from this trouble with the choke I experienced little difficulty for the rest of the day, except for almost losing the handlebars every time I passed over a bump or dent in the road.

“If these were sprung, this danger would be overcome,” I thought. How to spring them?

I surmounted the difficulty of

the choke position by loosening the bolt which held it rigid, and turning it through 180 degrees. This resulted in making an upward movement of the projecting knob open the choke instead of closing it. A piece of flex attached to the knob and secured under the saddle completed the change.

It was simplicity itself to close the choke before mounting, start off in the usual way, drop one hand to the flex, and open the choke by giving a slight upward pull. No turning—no gymnastics, and no danger of losing control.

I looked at the little engine with a new respect, and considerable awe. It had shown me that it could do what the makers claimed, but it had also shown that like a new friend it required understanding and careful handling if we were to get on well together.

What a pity it could not talk. Poor, mechanical thing. It was completely dependent upon me—I could maltreat it, and it would die on me. Or I could treat it carefully and correctly, to be rewarded with long and faithful service—200 miles plus to the gallon—an average speed of 20 miles an hour—and no trouble.

Or so the advertisements said.

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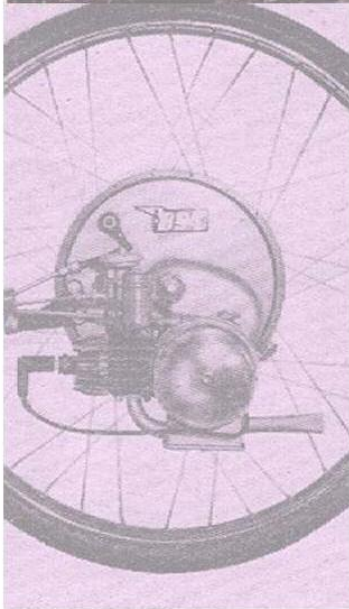
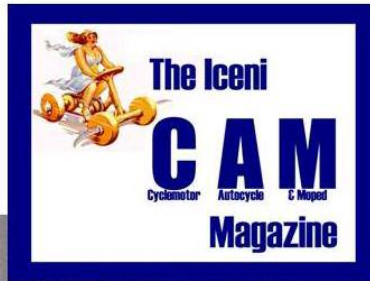
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