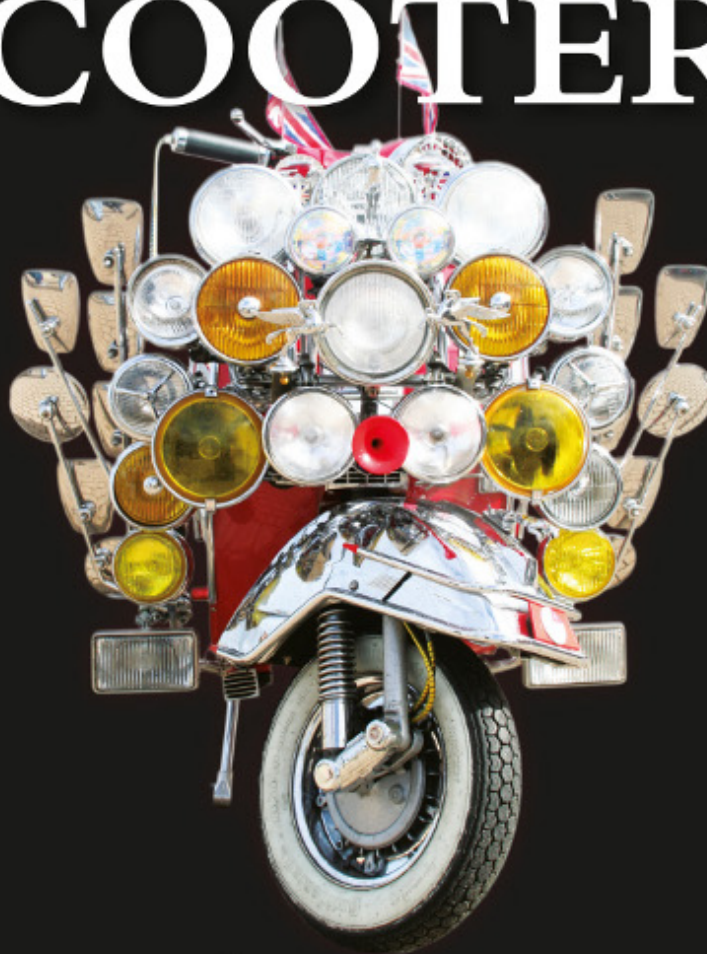


LITTLE BOOK OF
SCOOTERS



Steve Lanham

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Introduction

A 'scooter' is usually described as a two-wheeled motorcycle sometimes fitted with a sidecar but consisting of small wheels, step-through bodywork that encloses the major mechanical components, and a platform for the operator's feet or two foot-rests. There are many variations on the concept that still come under the category but when the idea was first mooted, the aim was to build a light two-wheeled vehicle that was easier to ride and maintain than a motorcycle, whilst providing better level of protection for the rider's clothing. Body panelling will at the very least enclose the engine but can include a front fairing, leg shields and built-in storage boxes. A major difference between a motorcycle and a scooter is that the motorcycle's engine is fixed within the frame whereas, in many cases, the motor on a scooter is either attached directly to the rear axle or swings independently to the main chassis.

The origins of the scooter can be traced as far back as the late-19th Century when vehicle invention and experimentation was still in its infancy. Yet it was not until the late 1950s that the scooter as we would recognise it today had become an established, reliable and easy to manage means of personal transport.

In the pioneering years around the turn of the 20th Century, many manufacturers were marketing motorised vehicles amounting to little more than pedal cycles powered by small and neat clip-on engines. As a cheaper alternative to the motorcycle, this idea was gradually developed into the lightweight moped and subsequently the mini-bike, a type that would play a significant role during the dark days of World War II. Robust construction and with folding or collapsible capabilities, these machines saw service in various theatres of war and were especially favoured by air divisions. Easily packed into the hold of an aircraft or parachuted within a canister onto the battlefield, mini-bikes were used by troops who were trained to quickly assemble and operate them to aid a rapid advance towards the enemy lines.



Above: *Vespas and Lambrettas gather at the 2011 Organford Scooter Rally.*

After the war, European firms that had been engaged in the supply of armaments sought other ways to exploit their manufacturing capacity and smart and luxurious scooters were launched featuring colourful and stylish ‘bodywork’ – a welcome relief after the preceding six years of austerity. These machines were characterised by their step-through access and, with practice, the relative ease with which they could be ridden. Handling the larger diameter wheel moped was not too dissimilar to riding a bicycle whereas the balance and operation of a scooter initially took a little more getting used to.



Above: A Vespa at rest on a street in Italy. This one was photographed at Palaia in the Pisa Province.



Above: *A lovely period promotional shot of the DKW Hobby of 1954.*

Scooters, however, attracted a huge number of women customers proving to be more manageable than the heavy and somewhat cumbersome motorcycle. The 'body' panelling meant clothing remained free from engine grime, road dust, and mud, and with the option of a full-length fairing, a rider could be relatively well-protected from inclement weather.

With a boom in post-war sales, two Italian firms emerged as industry leaders and while Innocenti's Lambretta and Piaggio's Vespa became the benchmark of chic design, many other famous manufacturers tapped into the market at one time or another. As the popularity of scootering spread, clubs were soon formed, meeting at weekends or at specially organised rallies across the country. One of the first to do so was the Manchester Lambretta Club (later The Lyons) which held its first get-together over a greengrocers shop in 1954.



Above: *The 1964 BSA Sunbeam gave its rider good protection during inclement weather.*

Among youths of the ‘modern community’, the scooter became very much the fashion accessory especially during the mid-1960s. Bitter rivalry, however, led to notorious bank holiday clashes between the scooter-loving ‘Mods’ and the old guard of Rockers who still preferred the classic British single-cylinder bikes and café racers. In reality, these scuffles were few and far between but the tabloid newspapers chose to brand all scooter-riding Mods as troublemakers, stirring up public hostility against many who had simply chosen to adopt a new fashion or purchase a cheap form of transport.



Above: *A lot of elbow grease goes into polishing the headlights, mirrors and all that chrome.*

Nevertheless, for Mods, a completely separate lifestyle began to evolve with devotees choosing to dress in a unique style of clothing designed by a fresh breed and avant-garde generation of fashion houses. Many scooter owners further stamped their individuality by customising machines with artwork or by attaching items from the enormous range of accessories on offer.



Above: A Lambretta LI 150 of the early-1960s.

In recent times there has been a resurgence of interest in scootering, fuelled by celebrating those first postwar Italian machines that originally set the standard, and that others could only hope to emulate. In the last twenty years, numerous manufacturers have responded by unveiling modern or retro-styled models to meet the demand of a new generation of enthusiasts.

In the sixteen years I worked at The National Motor Museum Trust, Beaulieu, I could always find time to have a good look round some of the fantastic machines that made up the motorcycle collection. Tucked away and almost overlooked in their separate section of the building, famous marques such as AJS, Douglas, Norton and Vincent were interspersed with a sprinkling of iconic scooters from the post-war boom years including examples of the BSA Sunbeam, Dürkopp Diana, Innocenti Lambretta and Piaggio Vespa. In addition there were one or two exhibits representative of the early experimental period of the 1920s such as the ABC Skootamota, Autoglider, Mobile Pup and Ner-a-car. It is only natural that scooters will never be everybody's cup of tea but it was always fascinating to see how

inventive some of these firms had become in their attempts to get 'The Masses' mobile with a cheap-to-buy and economic form of two-wheeled transport.

In putting this book together, I would like to thank the following individuals for their help with technical and historical information, and for the use of some fine scooter images:

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Steve Lanham

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A Stuttering Start

It was more than 140 years ago that the first pioneering inventors attempted to harness any form of self-propelled motive power aboard a two wheeled carriage. During the mid-1800s, steam engines were the 'latest thing' but proved too heavy and cumbersome for the comparatively spindly cycle frames of the day. In an era when it was rare to find a road with a decent flat surface, these experimental machines were naturally unstable and dangerous to ride. Aside from the fact that other road-borne vehicles consisted almost entirely of carriages and waggon pulled by livestock including the horse, an animal that could easily be alarmed in the presence of a 'living' hissing steam engine, these early contraptions required constant attention in order to keep a good fire burning and the right level of water in the boiler. It was not until the introduction of the internal combustion engine that a more successful motorcycle-type vehicle could finally be made.

At a time when the first rickety motor spirit-powered autocars were taking to the road, Rinaldo Piaggio was establishing a foundry and railway works in Genoa, Italy, to build steam locomotives and carriages, more than sixty years before his son, Enrico, would embark on the construction of a form of transport that sparked an enormous wave of enthusiasm.