

THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES

SIMON DE BURTON ON THE TOMOS MOPED'S REBIRTH OF COOL



THEY SAY THAT WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND SO, IN VIEW OF THE WORLD'S ON-GOING LOVE AFFAIR WITH ALL THINGS RETRO, I really should have expected the email announcing the return to British shores of the long-lost Tomos moped.

For those who weren't there back in the day, Tomos mopeds were the bikes that helped to get countless 16-year-olds on the road during the 1970s and '80s. At the time, they were considered to be just about as un-cool as you could get, but the fact that they spelt freedom from the drudgery of pedal power made it worth suffering the ignominy of being seen aboard one.

If you really missed pedalling, though, you could still do it on a Tomos because legislation decreed that a 'moped' could only be called such a thing if it had an engine of less than 50cc in capacity and was capable of being propelled by pedals.

(This is why even the trendiest sports mopeds of the era, such as Yamaha's FS1-E and Fantic's GT, were often seen sporting a single pedal in order to display a legal appearance).

The (then) Yugoslav-built Tomos ceased to be available in the UK around 30 years ago, but now an enterprising man called Paul Keppler has brought it back, in the hope that the old-fashioned, low-tech simplicity will appeal to short-distance commuters who are somewhat tired of life in the fast lane.

Looking at a 21st-century Tomos (now produced in Slovenia) provokes waves of nostalgia because the design, originally built under licence from Puch, has hardly changed at all. You still get a 49cc, two-stroke engine with a restricted top speed of 28mph, a small rear carrier, pedals (although, since the definition

'Tomos mopeds helped countless teens onto the road in the 1970s'



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of a moped has changed, there's now a kick-start option) and not much else. When they arrive here, in fact, the Classic XL models don't even have an ignition switch or indicators, both of which are retro-fitted before sale.

Apart from the 2013 price of £1395 (against £250, 30 years ago) there is one other notable difference between old and new – and that is colour choice. Anyone who remembers Jasper Carrott's 1975 top-five hit *Funky Moped* will be humming it all day long once they see one of the new Tomos in green mint, baby blue or shadow black.

But, as mentioned, the real appeal of these machines lies in their sheer simplicity. Dynamo electrics mean there isn't even a battery to think about, so you can leave a Tomos in storage for as long as you like and, so long as it has fuel (it costs about £2.50 to fill it up) and air in the tyres, you should be good to go. And the fact that they've been building them in pretty much the same way, since President Tito officially opened the factory as a state-run enterprise in 1959, means all the gremlins have long since been ironed out, so reliability should come as standard.

Keppler is banking on them appealing to trendy, design-conscious types rather than freedom-hungry teenagers – which is probably why the latest dealer to be appointed is in London's achingly cool borough of Hackney.

A place, ironically, where few people would have dared to ride a Tomos through back in the '80s...

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