

WHEELS MARTIN LOVE



The little engine that could

The Tomos is cheap, robust and a retro classic – and when you ride it everyone wants to be your new best friend

Just as you can't explain a joke to someone without a sense of humour, so you can't describe the appeal of a tiny Tomos to anyone who takes life too seriously. It's a beyond-basic moped from Slovenia which hasn't changed much in 60 years. It should probably have been parked years ago in the bay marked: Noisy, Dangerous and Stoopid. But this chortling, splurting, juddering little moped has been winning over our hearts (and wallets – it costs just £1,395) for decades. And now, after a gap of more than 30 years, you can once again buy the timorous wee beastie in Britain.

One of the many reasons why children have more fun than adults is that they can truly live in the moment. They are happy because they are on that trampoline and how high they're bouncing is all they can think about. Adults, however, would be bouncing but they'd also be thinking about pelvic floors, failing pensions and, oh, that guttering looks full from up here. But a Tomos has the gift of making it impossible to think about



anything else. When you feel its feisty 49cc air-cooled two-stroke engine putter into life beneath your buttocks, its chopperlike handlebars start to vibrate violently in your hands and you surge out into the traffic... Certain death seem so imminent that savouring your last few moments of life on a

Tomos becomes all consuming.

To add to this sense of merriment, Tomos UK is importing baby blue mopeds and minty green ones (it will do a "shadow black", but I'd say that would only be for people who refuse to wear paper hats at Christmas).

There is no ignition, the bike doesn't have a battery and starts with a push of its pedals – you can actually ride it very slowly as a bicycle using the pedals. In theory you might need to add some leg power to aid the trifling engine up the steepest of hills, but I rode up Crystal Palace hill in south London and it put in a heroic Chris Froome-like performance. It's an automatic and has two gears with

Saddle up: admit it, you'd love a go on the Tomos XL 45 Classic in minty green and, below, in baby blue

TOMOS XL 45

Price £1,395

MPG 110

Top speed 28mph

ON THE WEB

Email Martin at martin.love@observer.co.uk or visit theguardian.com/profile/martinlove for all his reviews in one place

a top speed of about 28mph – which feels fast enough. It weighs in at 57kg and it'll do more than 100 miles to the gallon. I filled it up and it cost a whopping £2.40 at the pump. It's congestion-free and the road tax is £17. You can ride it on a driver's licence if you passed before 2001 – otherwise you will need to pass your CBT and be over 16. It's sturdily built, as if it has every intention of being here in another 60 years. It's Tomos the tank engine.

I have never been on a vehicle that has provoked such goodwill from my fellow road users. It turned my seven-mile commute into a sea of waves, grins, thumbs-up signs and marriage proposals... not quite, but you get the picture. When I got home I thought I'd better wheel it through to the back garden for its own security, but then – brimming with *joie de vivre* – I decided to ride it through the house, round the kitchen, down the back steps on to the patio and across the garden. Yee-haaing all the way. Adult behaviour? No, it must have been the Tomos factor. ■