

YOUR CLASSIC: *Restored...ridden...and written by you!*



Puch M125

For **Tony Phelps**, like many of us, the desperation to get 'on the road' overcame any prejudice as to what it was on...



"You don't know what you've got 'till it's gone," Joni Mitchell sings. It's true, we can all think of people, things and circumstances we didn't value until it was too late. At 17, I just didn't understand what a good bike my first motorcycle was.

I'd never intended to have a motorcycle, but at 16 a couple of rides on friends' sports mopeds had got me hooked. I had to have a bike. A sixteen-year special of my own was beyond my pocket and a step through beneath my dignity. I decided to save and get a proper motorcycle at 17.

Come my birthday I'd scraped together £150. Once I'd bought insurance, a helmet and gloves, I'd have about £70 left for a bike. Not much, even in 1977, but enough for a Bantam, or the machine I'd set my heart on, a Tiger Cub. Trouble was, all of a sudden, there were none to be had locally. After a few weeks, I was so frustrated; I was even considering a Lambretta, for sale in the next village.

Then my oldest friend, Dave, came to my rescue. "My mate's selling his Puch M125. He wants £70." My first thought was "A Puch what?" He reassured me that, yes, it really was a 125 and yes, it was a proper motorbike.

The next evening, his mate brought it round. I was struck by the strangely shaped kick-start lever, the small tank and long saddle. Other impressions were of the massive cooling fins and the huge silencer, in-aptly stamped 'Silentium'. This was a weird machine. Despite these odd features, I could see it had two big advantages: a) it was available; b) I could afford it. It wasn't a Tiger Cub but it would do – even if I'd never heard of a Puch M125 before.

I wasn't on my own, not having heard of the M125. Puch meant 'moped' to most youngsters in the late 70s. It was great fun to be challenged at traffic lights by Fizzie riders who saw an elderly Puch as an easy victim. They'd pull up alongside, all blipping throttles and smug expressions. The lights would change and amid clouds of blue smoke we'd be off – with the H registered Puch 'sports moped' well in front.

Without realising it, I'd made a good choice of learner machine. Slim and light, it was as easy to handle as a bicycle. After a push-bike, the brakes and the supple ride were a revelation. It was easy to start. It was almost impossible to stall; first gear was so low that the clutch was home at walking pace. The engine was peppy without



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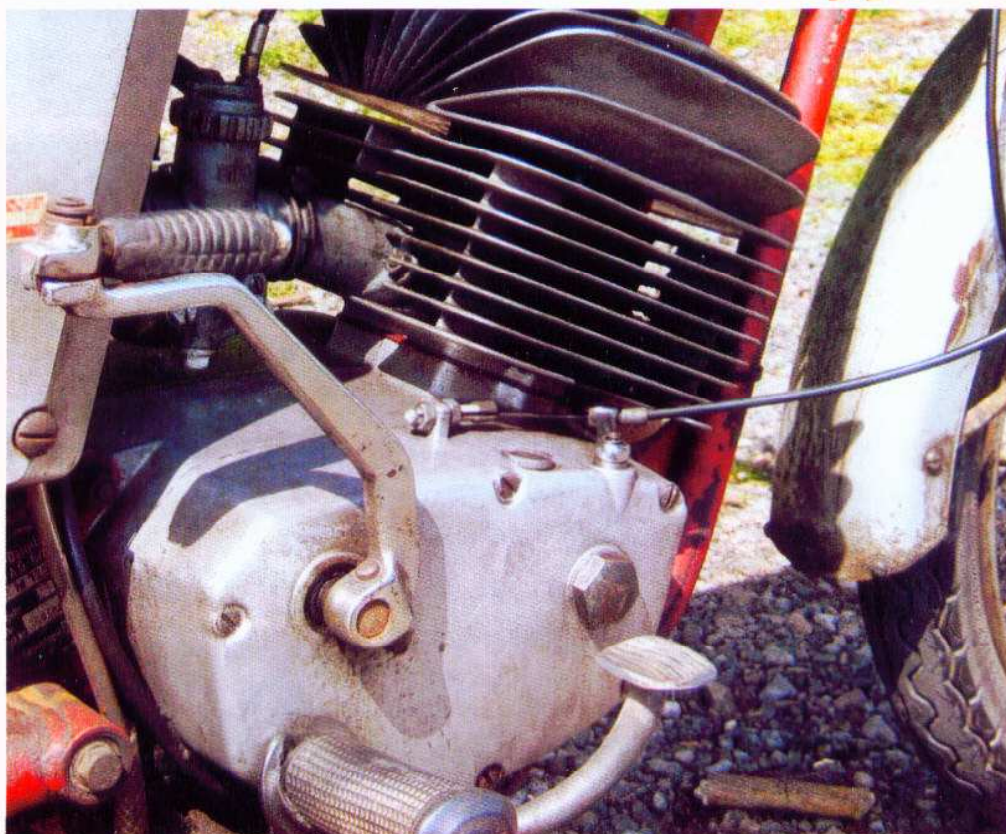
PUCH 125 TEST

“ It was almost impossible to stall; first gear was so low that the clutch was home at walking pace. The engine was peppy without being peaky. **”**

being peaky. Good as it was, though. I wasn't really fond of it. The thing was it wasn't really what I wanted.

It was fun for a while, but my interest in the little bike soon waned. I could only see it as a stop gap. There because I hadn't been able to find a Cub. There only as a stepping stone to bigger bikes, it started to feel slow. I began to take its good brakes, superb roadholding and tough motor for granted. I passed my test and graduated to faster, more glamorous bikes. I only kept it because it had virtually no value, not even worth the expense of an advert in the local paper. It got moved to the dustiest corner of the shed.

It might have stayed there if it hadn't turned out to be the perfect hack. With no battery to worry about, you could drag it from the back of the shed after months of disuse, pump up the tyres and go. Time and again it became the motorcycle of last resort for my mates and myself. Other friends borrowed it to learn on. I can't say I grew any fonder of the bike, but I began to respect its toughness and reliability. Nevertheless, by the early 80s I had no more use for it. Parking it behind the shed, I threw a piece of plastic sheeting over it and forgot about it.





PUCH PLEASURE

ROAD TEST

There is a noticeable step-up in power around the 3000 mark, as a non-motorcycling friend said: "it seems a bit better".

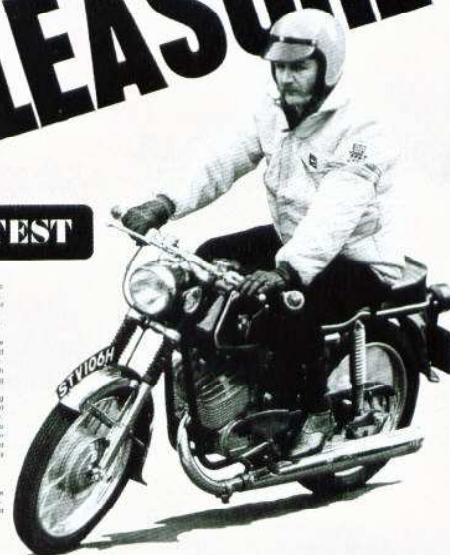
A brief description of the performance on the road would be a long story of slow starts, very much in the 'cruiser' style, but the bike is a lot of fun.

There is a trace of 'tug' at the start, as the bike gets up and the engine gets a little noisy. This is possibly something to do with the extra large 'fin' on the front and head. The exhaust is well placed and gives quite a pleasant note.

controls

All the controls, apart from the foot brake lever, are well placed and easy to use. The clutch is well placed and gives quite a pleasant note.

NOVEMBER 1970



“The motor is a cheerful little masochist; thriving on a good thrashing and just coming back for more.”

Then in the late summer of 1997, my much loved and used Triton let me down just when time and money were at their shortest. This would be the first time in 20 years I'd been without a motorcycle, unless...

After 15 years outside, the Puch looked a mess. There was rust and dirt everywhere. Cobwebs hung in shrouds. Light alloy parts carried a white bloom.

The tyres were flat. The contents of the tank smelt disgusting. Within half an hour it was running.

True, it needed new tyres for the MoT, but as the bemused tester observed: "It looks a mess but it's all up together." While writing out the certificate, he paused at the box marked 'colour' and glanced at the bike quizzically. "Well, I suppose it was red and silver once," he grinned.

By the spring of 1998, the Triton was back in action, but something had happened over the autumn and winter. I'd fallen in love. I no longer saw the Puch as somehow inferior. After more than 20 years, I finally understood what a terrific little bike it is. Since then I've kept it taxed, tested and insured alongside the Triton.

Naturally, it's a bit limiting on fast roads, even tiresome after a while. But on country lanes, it's much more fun to use than a bigger bike. The motor is a cheerful little masochist; thriving on a good thrashing and just coming back for more.

Good brakes and nimble roadholding just add to the fun. S-bends are the best; zip up to the corner, dab the brakes, change down and pitch into the bend. A wiggle of the hips picks you up and leans you in the





opposite direction, all as quick as thought. Take a good handful of throttle and that enthusiastic motor shoves you towards the next corner to repeat the fun. On the other hand, it'll dawdle contentedly, burbling happily to itself. Then the upright riding position allows you to enjoy the view while the little bike more or less takes care of itself.

How many bikes do you know that are actually fun to ride when conditions are really bad? It must be Puch's experience in off-road competition showing, but the Puch is fun to use even with snow on the ground. It's surefooted, the brakes are smooth and progressive and the gearing and gentle power help maintain traction. When things get tough, it's on the rider's side.

Spares aren't a problem. I can get air filters from my local motor factor and points are the same as the Maxi. Two Austrian companies, RBO and Weiser can supply most items. It pays to keep my own stock of consumables like cables: there's no comfort in knowing that the part you need is available off the shelf when the shelf is the other side of Europe.

It has its faults though. Perhaps because of the engine speed clutch. The gear-change isn't exactly like hot knife through butter. More like knife through cream cheese – the sort with walnuts in it.

The four-speed box can make life tedious. The problem is the chasm between second, flat out at 35mph and third, good for nearly 60mph. It's OK on the flat, but if a hill forces you into second, you're stuck there. It's an especially annoying fault because it could have been avoided; the competition machines, close relatives, had five and six speeds.

Direct lighting always sounds like a good idea; the faster you go, the brighter the lamps get. The trouble is they're always 100mph too slow. After putting up with this for years, I came up with a solution recently. I'd already fitted indicators for safety's sake. These are powered by a battery charged from the generator's stop-lamp coil. By wiring the tail lamp to the battery, I have the full 35 watts of the main lighting coil available for the headlamp. It may not sound much, but the improvement is incredible. Now the headlight is more than bright enough for muddy lanes on a January night. Even more important, the tail-lamp stays bright even at tickover.

Fuel economy isn't great at around 80mpg. On the other hand, tyres and chains last for ever.

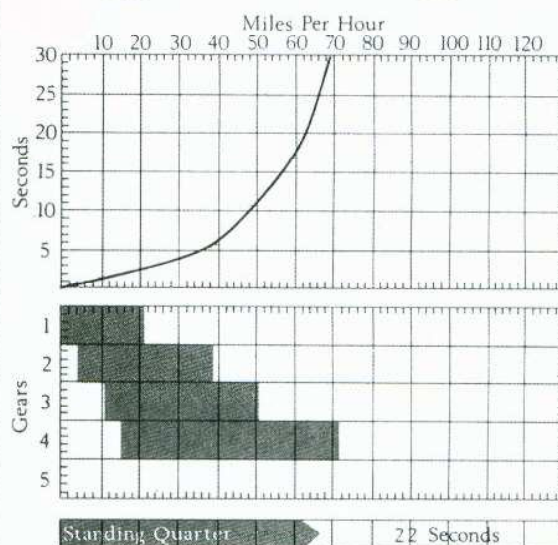
But all these are minor criticisms compared with the sheer fun of riding such a willing little bike. In fact, if the measure of a motorcycle is the size of the grin it puts on your face, then the Puch is one of the best I've ever ridden. When I think how little it costs in pence per smile, my smile gets even bigger. I shan't be restoring it though. The scuffed paintwork and pitted chrome are all part of the bike's character. It just wouldn't be the same restored. Besides, renovated, I wouldn't want to use it in bad weather.

You often hear of people spending a fortune on an example of their first bike only to find it a disappointing exercise in nostalgia. In my case, the complete opposite happened. Thankfully, Joni Mitchell isn't always right; sometimes you do get a second chance to appreciate a good thing. ■ **Words and pics Tony Phelps**



ROAD IMPRESSIONS TEST

PUCH



fuel consumption (average figure)
braking from 30 mph

74 mpg
29 ft.

SPECIFICATION

Engine: Single-cylinder two-stroke with piston-controlled ports and petrol lubrication. Bore x stroke 55 x 52 mm, giving capacity of 124 cc. Compression ratio 10:1, claimed power output 12 bhp at 7000 rpm. Carburettor, single Bing.

Transmission: Primary reduction by helical gears, secondary by chain. Four-speed gearbox driven through multiplate clutch mounted on crankshaft. Gear ratios, 1st 23.26, 2nd 13.48, 3rd 8.98 and 4th 7.91:1.

Electrics: Bosch 6-volt flywheel magneto ignition, with battery

lighting. Flashers fitted as optional extra.

Wheels: Front 2.50 x 17, rear 3.00 x 17, both brakes 6.3 in. single leading shoe.

Suspension: Front, telescopic forks, rear, swinging arm with non-adjustable damper units.

Dimensions: Wheelbase 49½ in., ground clearance 6½ in., seat height 31½ in., weight 218 lb.

Price: £216 19s., including £2 delivery charge and UK purchase tax.

Importers: Steyr Daimler Puch (GB) Ltd, Steyr Puch House, Lower Parliament Street, Nottingham.