

Sidewalk

It began as a joke, now
the Micro Scooter is
the hottest ride in town

AT first glance it looks more like an oversized can opener than a revolution in personal transport. It weighs just over 6lb, folds up to the size of a handbag and sells for the same price as a pair of Nike Air Max trainers.

But already the Micro Skate Scooter has been hailed as the solution to urban congestion

By **Rob McGibbon**
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Pictures **Philip Ide**

and, at under £100, spawned a host of imitations.

More than 40,000 have been sold since they arrived in the UK last October and with a major supermarket chain ordering three million, it could see 2000 as the year of the scooter.

The Micro's lightweight aluminium construction and inline skate-style wheels mean it is both faster and easier to manoeuvre than the traditional scooter. It is controlled by a central telescopic steering column and the rear mudguard doubles as a brake.

Although the first to catch on to the new scooters were skateboarders and surfers, now it is office workers and housewives who are buying them to commute or just to exercise in the park. In Germany, MPs even use them to zoom around the huge Reichstag parliament building.

In the UK, devotees of the Micro include stars such as Jude Law and his wife Sadie Frost, Robbie Williams, Jack Dee and Richard Branson. Prince Harry apparently uses his to scoot round the royal palaces.

The breadth of the Micro's appeal is reflected in the range of shops selling them - from Slick Willies skateboard shop in Kensington, West London, to that shrine to good taste The Conran Shop.

The Mail on Sunday decided to see how it fared in London's rush hour traffic and set it against a black cab taxi, inline skates, the Tube and a London bus. The distance was over two miles from Marble Arch to the Millennium Eye and the result was favourable.

The taxi took 18 minutes, the inline skates were 25, while the Micro rolled in at 29, the same as the Tube, with the bus at 32.

Jack Kevill, 22, who put the Micro through its paces, said: 'It may not



JAM DODGER: Commuters have taken to the Micro Scooter

be the quickest way to get around but it is definitely the most fun.'

This last observation will undoubtedly reassure the inventor, Swiss banker Wim Ouboter, 40, who endured six years of doubt and setback.

He said: 'I originally invented it because I needed a quick and easy way to get to the local takeaway. I wanted something portable and I remembered how much fun I had as a child on my scooter.'

His early versions were not a success - 'even some of my closest friends laughed at me' - but he

ploughed more than £100,000 of his own money into manufacturing the Micro and eventually a Japanese retailer offered to take 20,000. Within weeks they had sold out, the Micro craze was born - and he became a millionaire.

Last October, Ouboter linked up with Seth Bishop and Nick Joslin, two British entrepreneurs who had already launched the CityBug, a 15mph collapsible mini moped. With UK sales of the Micro now at 5,000 a week, CityBug is convinced it can repeat the Japanese success story.

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100
Micro Skate
Scooters
must be won

The Mail on Sunday has 100 Micro Skate Scooters, each worth £99.95, from CityBug to give away. Simply call the contest line on 0900 1787419 and record your name, address and daytime telephone number. Calls cost 60p per minute and should not exceed two minutes. Alternatively, send your entry on a postcard to: CityBug Competition, The Mail on Sunday, PO Box 111, Chatham, Kent ME4 4LS. The winners will be the first 100 entries drawn at random after the competition closes at 11.59pm on June 29, 2000. Standard Mail on Sunday rules apply. The Editor's decision is final.



ON SUNDAY

surfing

How its rivals shape up to the original



Micro Skate Scooter

Cost: £99.95
Weight: 6lb 1oz

Ease of use: Folds out in two easy movements, but when collapsed handles dangle annoyingly at the side.
Verdict: Stylish with excellent riding performance, but not springy enough for many tricks.



K2 Kickboard Jun-or

Cost: £200
Weight: 7lb

Ease of use: Folds away into its own rucksack (extra).
Verdict: Joystick-style steering rod difficult to master, but with three wheels and bouncy wooden deck, it's ideal for tricks.



Ninja

Cost: £99.99
Weight: 6lb 2oz

Ease of use: Difficult to fold. Levers not as flexible as the Micro and too many nuts and bolts.
Verdict: Stylish alloy frame, but not quite as solid as the Micro though bigger. Doesn't feel very safe.



K2 Kickboard Pro

Cost: £225
Weight: 8lb 3oz

Ease of use: Clunky and awkward. Difficult to carry, as removable steering rod does not fold into board.
Verdict: Very sturdy making it great for tricks.

YOU can perform tricks on the Micro Scooter. Expert Pete Williams, 18, of Southampton, shows how.

The Ollie Lock your feet towards the end of the board and wedge them against the metal. Bend your legs and while doing that pull up on the rod. As you jump you get the spring and the whole thing lifts up.

The Drifter GET up a good speed, then bend right down on the board and put one leg out in front and along the side of the rod and balance. The rod will be bent quite far back and then you just pull

back up on it to get up again - although that can be the tricky bit.

The Fakey THIS is simply skating backwards. But just like reversing a car, you have to steer in the other direction which can be quite hard. You can get up speed while faking but I tend to take it quite easy - you don't want to end up in a heap on the pavement.

The Sidewinder STARTING slowly twist one leg around the rod and keep the back leg bent and facing forwards. This is good for going down hills, but you must be careful to maintain a firm grip on the handles and keep your balance at the back because it is quite easy to flip forwards over the board.

LEAN MACHINE: The scooter folds to the size of a handbag



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