ROAD TEST OF 1953—54 MODEL

The 197 c.c. VILLIERS-POWERED "FALCON 58"

FRANCIS-BARNETT

A Midland Clubman, **K. E. HUNT,** *Contributes "Motor Cycling's" Show-time Road Test of a Popular Lightweight*

ROAD Test 1953-54! An intriguing title —and one which should have a wealth of meaning. Though the normal Press road test will tell the prospective buyer what the model he is considering will do in the way of performance, it is of necessity a short-distance trial, and cannot indicate what can be expected of the machine after a year's wear and tear under every sort of riding conditions.

When, therefore, after 23,000 satisfying miles aboard a "big 'un," I decided to buy

(Above) Mr. Hunt and the "Falcon 58" Francis-Barnett which inspired him to write a "one-man road test" for "Motor Cycling." (Right) The windscreen and side extensions. (Below) A close-up of the off-side showing dual seat and legshields.

TESTER'S ROAD REPORT

Maximum Speeds in:— (Time from Standing Start)

Top Gear (Ratio 5·75 to 1) 56 m.p.h. = 4380 r.p.m. 38 secs.

Third Gear (Ratio — to 1) — m.p.h. = — r.p.m. — secs.

Second Gear (Ratio 8·0 to 1) 47 m.p.h. = 5050 r.p.m. 17 secs.

Speeds over measured Quarter Mile:—

Flying Start — m.p.h. Standing Start — m.p.h.

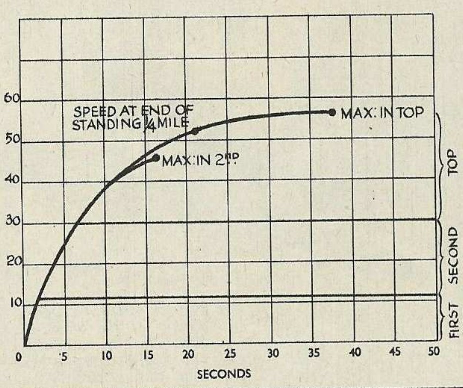
Braking Figures On DRY TARMACADAM **Surface, from 30 m.p.h.:—**

Both Brakes 35 ft. Front Brake 58 ft. Rear Brake 60 ft.

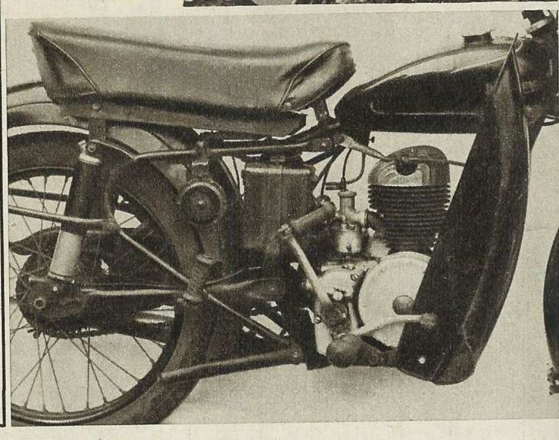
Fuel Consumption:—

OVERALL :— 84·3 m.p.g.

~~30 m.p.h. m.p.g. 40 m.p.h. m.p.g. 50 m.p.h. m.p.g.~~



This graph was prepared from speeds supplied by the writer coupled with "Motor Cycling's" tester's experience of applicable times obtained with a similar model.



The privately owned Francis-Barnett, the subject of this test.

a lightweight, I determined that from the outset I would keep a log of the service given by it.

The running-in period of the "Falcon 58," which I chose, lasted for precisely 50 miles. I was assured that the normal 500 miles would not be required, and this, indeed, proved to be the case. My first few weeks with the "tiddler" were sheer fascination. The lightweight could be thrown around in a manner that turned the riders of "big 'uns" green with envy and, when I had become thoroughly accustomed to the model, I found that the duration of my daily pilgrimage from Rugby to Coventry was increased by a mere three minutes (two, if I really tried!). That willing Villiers engine thrived on hard work, and I found that the "Falcon 58" would cruise happily in top gear at any speed between 18 and 55 m.p.h.

It was September, 1953, when I first obtained the machine. With October came the dark nights, and a chance to see how the "electrics" worked. One journey home ended with no rear light showing. Within a week, two more bulbs had blown. Vibration proved to be the trouble—a slight slackening of the bolts holding the lamp to the mudguard allowed the rubber surround to absorb the shocks better and no further trouble resulted.

At the front, the head lamp was eminently satisfactory, providing a beam of such an intensity that I was able to maintain my normal gait of around 50 m.p.h. without qualm. Dipped, the well-diffused light did not appear to trouble oncoming traffic.

Overall fuel consumption, meanwhile, was steady at an average of "90 m.p.g. plus," and at the eighteenth gallon it reached a peak with 93.6 m.p.g.—which would have been higher had I not tried to add two gallons to a two-gallon tank that already contained some of the two-pint reserve! That resulted in only 150 miles being covered on that filling—which pulled down the average.

After 27 gallons had passed through the "Falcon's" carburetter I decided upon decarbonizing the machine, having heard that two-strokes required such attention after 3,000 miles. I needn't have bothered—the carbon was soft and thin. But I stripped it and, for good measure, cleaned and polished some of the "internals," fitted new rings and so forth. Time? an hour and a half—thanks to the minimum amount of dismantling required. But, even so, there was one annoying point, in the need to remove the dual seat before taking off the tank—an operation which, though not strictly necessary, obviously enables one to work more quickly on the engine.

After 3,453 miles I had used 39 gallons of fuel—average 88.5 m.p.g. Consumption was obviously increasing and, though I couldn't complain at that since I was riding it hard, it *had* done better. So the "works" were consulted and the model left with them. Later that day I collected it. "They" didn't tell me what "They" had done to the engine, but it was obviously very different. And so, to my surprise, were the forks. Feeling that the bushes were tight, the Francis-Barnett folk had taken the chance of line-reamering them. Some service that!

By January 4, 1954, 47 gallons had been used in over 4,091 miles—87.1 m.p.g. But the reason for this was cleaning—petroil is not only good for the inside of a two-stroke, but for the outside as well. For when the petrol has removed the dirt, it evaporates and leaves a thin film of oil which protects the chrome and makes the next cleaning session considerably easier. I pass on the tip without expecting a spanner from "Workbench Wisdom"! But drawing off the odd pint for cleaning had its effect on the average consumption—though the actual figures obtained on four consecutive gallons were 91, 91, 88 and 94 m.p.g.

Throughout the year, top speed has always been 57-58 m.p.h., with an easy cruise of 50 m.p.h. available at any time. Head winds, however strong, have never reduced level road speed to less than 45 m.p.h., and on hills the lowest speed recorded has been 35 m.p.h.

In April, legshields and an H.J.S. windscreen were purchased—drag effect, nil. And at this juncture, too, I forsook the normal 16 : 1 petrol/oil ratio for a 24 : 1 mixture. This experiment has proved very successful, increasing the range to 150 miles and bringing the fuel consumption down to 94 m.p.g.

One aspect remained to be tried—its long-distance capabilities. An opportunity was given by this year's National Rally. With the Antelope M.C.C. team, I left Northampton without carrying out any prior maintenance other than cleaning the carburetter. And that was my undoing for, at about half-distance, I lost a full hour through a sudden engine failure which I eventually traced to the main jet having fallen into the bottom of the float chamber. Obviously, I had not replaced it properly after the cleaning.

But that *did* give me an insight into how a lightweight could motor! That Francis-Barnett not only made up the time I had lost, but finished with 20 minutes to spare! And on the return journey from Rhyl it averaged no less than 37 m.p.h.—including passing through Birmingham—without inflicting upon its physically tired rider any trace of saddle soreness.

Finally, the cost of all this. Taxed, insured, and "all on," the "Falcon 58" cost about £130. Since then I have spent £35 17s. on petroil, £4 6s. 6d. on the windscreen and legshields, and £2 18s. 10d. on renewing the tax, new plugs, piston rings and bulbs—total £43 2s. 4d. This gives a discrepancy of one penny with my calculated total figure. My last log entry reads:—

9/9/54. 140 gal., cost 3,461s. 3d.; miles, 11,753 = 84.3 av. m.p.g.

This cost can be reckoned in three ways—as an all-in total of 3,461s. 3d. for 11,753 miles, which equals 3.53d. per mile. As the simple running cost of 962s. 4d. for that distance, which gives 0.743d. per mile. Or, allowing a re-sale value for the machine of £85, the total cost, with depreciation included, which then becomes 1,761s., giving a cost per mile of 1.495d.

And that is good—in anybody's language!

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

Engine: 197 c.c. Villiers Mk. 8E single-cylinder two-stroke; bore 59 mm. by stroke 72 mm.; cast-iron cylinder, with light-alloy cylinder head secured by four bolts; Villiers twist-grip operated S.24 carburetter; petroil lubrication.

Transmission: Gearbox in semi-unit with engine; positive - stop foot - change mechanism; ratios, 5.74, 7.7 and 14.65 to 1; ½-in. pitch pre-stretched primary chain in oil-bath; ½-in. pitch final drive roller chain.

Frame: Loop type Francis-Barnett non-hydraulic telescopic front forks; swinging - fork - type rear suspension; adjustable saddle, footrests and handlebars; front and centre stands; triangular toolbox.

Wheels: Fitted with Dunlop 3.00-in. by 19-in. tyres; ribbed front, Universal rear; 5-in. brakes front and rear with finger adjustment.

Lighting: Six-volt 12 a.h. battery charged by rectified current from flywheel generator: Lucas 575 head lamp with optional A.C./D.C. switch.

Tank: Petroil, capacity 2¼ gallons, with one pint reserve; oil measure housed in anti-splash filler cap.

Dimensions: Wheelbase, 49½ in.; overall length, 78 in.; overall width, 26½ in.; saddle height, 28-29 in.; ground clearance, 5 in.; dry weight, 218 lb.

Finish: Optional in black or azure-blue enamel with chromium-plated handlebars.

Equipment: Smiths illuminated chronometric speedometer.

Price: £99 10s. plus £27 12s. 10d. P.T. Total, £127 2s. 10d.

Annual tax: £1 17s. 6d.

Makers: Francis and Barnett, Ltd., Lower Ford Street, Coventry.