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Mo-ped maker to make run at American market



Milton Moskowitz

A motorized bike that doesn't require shifting and gets 160 miles a gallon would seem to be made-to-order for the energy crunch. But human beings have never betrayed a strong predilection for rationality. And besides, most Americans are so addicted to their automobiles they wouldn't consider using another vehicle, even for local errands.

Nevertheless, Bruno Poratti is determined to make a run at the U.S. market on behalf of the Ciao and Bravo mo-peds, two-wheelers related by birth to the Vespa scooter, since the father of them all is Piaggio & Co., a 92-year-old Italian company related by financial blood to the big Italian automaker, Fiat.

Piaggio, which began life making ship fittings and then branched out into railway carriages, is headquartered in Genoa, where Poratti was born in 1941, the year war broke out between Italy and the United States. Genoa is where Christopher Columbus came from, and two years ago Poratti set out from there because Piaggio decided it was time to have its own man and its own company in America.

Poratti headed for South San Francisco, where he organized Vespa of America Corp. to import and market all the Piaggio products. The Vespa motor scooters have been sold in the U.S. since the early 1950s but they were previously distributed through an independent distributor rather than a factory-owned outlet.

Scooters have never caught on here the way they have in Europe but Poratti and Piaggio obviously expect the story to be different with the mo-ped, which is, as its name implies, a vehicle that can be propelled either by pedaling like a bicycle or by the power of a single-cylinder, two-stroke rotary motor.

The lowest priced Vespa mo-ped is the Ciao. It sells in the U.S. for \$399. It has a top speed of 30 miles per hour. Its fuel tank holds three-quarters of a gallon of gas, which should be good for 120 miles of driving. If you run out of gas, you can always resort to pedaling. The Ciao is strictly a one-passenger vehicle.

A problem with the mo-ped is determining exactly what it is to the satisfaction of state licensing bureaus. If it's classified as a motorcycle, then it needs to be registered. In 24 states the mo-ped is not exempt from such registra-

tion. But you still need a regular driver's license to operate it.

The mo-ped was introduced in Europe 10 years ago—and it has done so well that more than 13 million of them are now in use on European roads. Piaggio and other mo-ped makers will settle for just a slight duplication of those results in the American market, where there are annual sales of 10 million new automobiles, 10 million bicycles and 1 million motorcycles.

U.S. sales of automobiles, bicycles and motorcycles are all down from their peak levels. Is the mo-ped's time at hand? Poratti estimates conservatively that by 1980 some 300,000 mo-peds will be sold annually in the U.S. That's about how many Honda automobiles will be sold here this year.

Mo-ped sales last year were approximately 40,000. However, 35 per cent of those sales were in one state, California, where they buy anything on wheels. So it's still a very thin market.

The Vespa models hold 20 per cent of the U.S. market, and Poratti intends to hold onto at least that share. That the mo-ped market will be sold here this year.

Mo-peds are not yet indicated by the presence of a great number of brands. As many as 30 different makes of mo-peds now have some distribution in this country. In addition to the Ciao and more expensive Bravo model being imported by Vespa, there are the Matibec from France, Park from Austria, Bialize from the Netherlands, Peugeot from France, and two other Italian makes, Garelli and Cusani.

That many brands chasing sales of 40,000 doesn't make much sense. Yet to be heard from are the Japanese, who apparently don't think the mo-ped market is worth exploring, although the Kawasaki motorcycle company did ask Piaggio to make a mo-ped that could be sold under the Kawasaki name. Piaggio said no.

Selected Quotations

General Motors	24 1/2	Trans. Inc.	24 1/2
Chrysler Corp.	24 1/2	Lincoln Continental	24 1/2
Ford Motor Co.	24 1/2	Lincoln Continental	24 1/2
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Chrysler Corp.	24 1/2	Lincoln Continental	24 1/2
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Ford Motor Co.	24 1/2	Lincoln Continental	24 1/2
General Motors	24 1/2	Lincoln Continental	24 1/2

The Market In Brief

UP	DOWN	CHANGED
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1
1	1	1

St. Paul Livestock

Item	Price
Live Cattle	42.00
Live Hogs	42.00
Live Sheep	42.00
Live Goats	42.00
Live Pigs	42.00
Live Rabbits	42.00
Live Birds	42.00
Live Fish	42.00
Live Insects	42.00
Live Plants	42.00
Live Animals	42.00

SELLING SHORT

Item	Price
Live Cattle	42.00
Live Hogs	42.00
Live Sheep	42.00
Live Goats	42.00
Live Pigs	42.00
Live Rabbits	42.00
Live Birds	42.00
Live Fish	42.00
Live Insects	42.00
Live Plants	42.00
Live Animals	42.00

Egg Markets

Item	Price
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00
Eggs	42.00

Futures Trading

Item	Price
Live Cattle	42.00
Live Hogs	42.00
Live Sheep	42.00
Live Goats	42.00
Live Pigs	42.00
Live Rabbits	42.00
Live Birds	42.00
Live Fish	42.00
Live Insects	42.00
Live Plants	42.00
Live Animals	42.00

Grain Markets

Item	Price
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00
Wheat	42.00

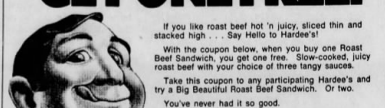
Butter Markets

Item	Price
Butter	42.00
Butter	42.00
Butter	42.00
Butter	42.00
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Potato Markets

Item	Price
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00
Potatoes	42.00

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RECLINERS \$98

DELUXE QUILTED SOFAS \$188

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- ALL SURPLUS STOCK
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