



Road Safety..... Information

JULY 2003

SCOOTERS

Lightweight, foldable Scooters (often called micro or push scooters) are propelled by the user pushing forward with one leg on the ground and the other on the scooter. They have recently become very popular among both children and adults, and are increasingly being used for leisure, play and commuting. Sales of new scooters are reaching 10,000 a week and this is expected to increase as Christmas approaches. Unfortunately, as the use of scooters increases so does the number of people being injured while using them.

Accidents and Injuries

In America (where the current scooter 'craze' began) accidents involving scooters have increased by 700%. Over 9,500 scooter users have been taken to hospital, almost all of whom (90%) were children. In one month alone, around 4,000 people were injured while using scooters.

In the UK, the DTI's Home Accident Surveillance System shows that in 1998 more than 2,200 people were injured seriously enough while using scooters to require hospital treatment. As this was well before the current fashion began, these figures are expected to rise dramatically.

The majority of injuries sustained have been cuts, bruises and sprains, but one third involved broken bones or dislocated limbs. Tragically, one child has been killed while using a scooter on the road.

The Scooters

There are many different models available in the UK, some of which have been suspended from sale after failing safety checks. One model was recalled after a child lost the tip of a finger in the folding mechanism. Buyers, particularly if they have children, should check whether the folding mechanism can trap their fingers. Any concerns should be raised with trading standards officers.

Scooters are subject to the Toys (Safety) Regulations 1995 and must satisfy the "Essential Safety Requirements" and be **CE** Marked. Ideally, they should comply with the Regulations by meeting the requirements of the Toys Safety Standard EN 71.

Under Product Liability (Part I Consumer Protection Act 1987) any person injured by a defect in the scooter can sue the producer/importer for damages.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

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Where to Use Scooters

Scooters should not be used where they will cause danger, fear or inconvenience to other people, or danger to the scooter user. Riders should be particularly careful on hills as scooters can pick up speed quickly. And scooter users should avoid using them in the dark as they do not have lights or reflectors and are difficult to see.

The Road

Scooters should **NOT** be used on the road. Motorists will not be expecting to see them among traffic, and because they are so small (especially when ridden by children) they are difficult to see.

Their small wheels can easily become stuck in drain covers or pot holes bringing the rider to an abrupt halt, and quite likely throwing them to the ground, in front of vehicles.

It is also dangerous to cross roads on a scooter. The temptation is to scoot off the kerb at speed in a bid to beat the traffic. A slight misjudgement could be fatal. It is also dangerous to try to “bunny hop” up the kerb on the other side. If the hop fails, the rider may fall off or be left in the road with vehicles bearing down on them.

The Pavement

Most scooter users seem to ride on the pavement. However, the legal position about riding scooters on pavements seems to be unclear. It has been suggested that they are covered by the same legislation which makes it an offence to ride a bicycle on the footpath. But it seems more likely that police will decide whether or not to take action according to local circumstances.

Scooters should not be used on narrow or crowded pavements, or where they will cause inconvenience, fear or danger to pedestrians, especially elderly or disabled ones. The small wheels of scooters have caused accidents on the pavement, where a slightly raised paving block, and even wet cement, have thrown riders to the ground.

Crowded Areas

To avoid collisions with innocent people, scooter riders need to keep away from areas where they are likely to come into conflict with pedestrians. A shopper walking out of a store will not expect to be confronted by someone speeding past on a scooter. A collision, particularly with an elderly person, could have serious consequences. Scooters should certainly not be used inside indoor shopping centres.



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Protective Clothing

The USA Consumer Product Safety Commission predict that protective clothing could prevent more than 60% of scooter injuries. If buying scooters for children, parents should consider also purchasing a helmet (a cycle helmet is probably best), knee and elbow pads and wrist protectors.

Adult scooter users should also consider wearing protective gear, particularly if doing stunts. Scooters can reach high speeds, especially on slopes, and serious injuries can easily be sustained.

Wearing bright or fluorescent clothing during the day, and reflective materials in the dark, will help other people see scooter users more easily.

Fit to Scoot?

Amazingly, a man was cautioned by police for riding a conveyance while drunk on a public highway. Police said the scooter was covered by a law previously used for "people who were very unsteady on pedal cycles, vehicles propelled by foot and steam-propelled vehicles".