



K, so it's not officially a scooter but Sir Clive Sinclair's infamous C5 three-wheeler kinda falls into the 'automatic' category.

That is, it doesn't have any

gears. And, in some ways, the C5 can be considered an early example of the feet-forward riding style akin to maxi-scooters.

It was back in 1985 that the Sinclair Vehicles Company unveiled the C5 to the world on one cold and snowy morning at Alexandra Palace in London. Around 12,000 C5s were made, and most of these were sold in Britain, although a few made it into Europe and the United States. Production ended after just a few months, and catastrophic losses of up to £7-million forced the sale of the company to Amstrad.

The C5 was originally priced at £399 plus a £29 delivery charge, and it came packaged in a very large cardboard box. Lack of sales, however, meant that the retail price of the C5 plummeted, and Comet quickly slashed the price to just £139.99.

Nowadays C5s are highly sought-after by Sinclair enthusiasts, and they are prized collectables. A C5 in good condition can fetch more than £1000 if unused and accompanied by the original packaging. And, according to enthusiasts, prices are set to rise when the C5 reaches its 20th birthday on 10 January 2005. Well, they would say that, wouldn't they?

Back to the future

I first had a go on a C5 when I was 13 back in the 80s (a year under the legal age that you were allowed on these things, but there you go). And I must confess I was intrigued by the C5. Sinclair home computers were popular back then, so from pocket calculators to computers to transport? Sir Clive's new invention seemed eccentric. Driving around a caravan park was all well and good but, apart from feeling a little bit daft in one, the dangers of riding/driving one on busy public roads doesn't bear thinking about.



Left: The battery cover comprises a key-operated 'master security' switch and a cut-out button.

Back in 1983, Government legislation established standards for new classes of vehicles. Sinclair, of course, took full advantage of this, which meant that the C5 required no licence, no tax, no compulsory insurance and no helmet. And, this meant that teenagers aged 14 and above were allowed to take a C5 out on to public roads – scary.

Built upon a Y-configuration chassis and assembled at Hoover (NOT powered by Hoover, contrary to popular misconception), the C5 gets its power from a 12v DC permanent magnet motor, rated at 250W continuous. The motors themselves were manufactured by Italian company Polymotor (part of the Philips group), which also made torpedo motors. The C5 doesn't exactly go like a torpedo, though. Given the power of the C5 it's a shame an AC motor from a washing machine wasn't used after all.

So how fast does the C5 actually go then? Well, 15mph (or 20mph downhill) is about all you're going to get out of one as standard. According to experts, you can get a 24v conversion to make the C5 go a bit quicker. But the C5's capabilities were actually deliberate on Sinclair's part. When it was launched, electric vehicles that were capable of travelling faster than 15mph required a licence to use them. Sinclair's master plan was to build bigger, faster, C10 and C15 versions which would be more like conventional vehicles. Alas, Sinclair's foray into electric vehicles was short-lived, and Sir Clive's future plans never came to fruition.



An official Sinclair accessory – the 'High-Vis Mast' is simply a reflector on poles which fits into two pre-moulded slots.

SPECIFICATION

Vehicle model: 1985 Sinclair C5
 Overall length: 1744mm (5ft 9in)
 Overall width: 744mm (2ft 5in)
 Overall height: 795mm (2ft 7in)
 Overall weight: 30kg or 66lb (without battery)
 Ground clearance: 56mm (2 1/4in)
 Wheelbase: 1304mm (4ft 3in)
 Motor: Electric (continuous rating 250W)
 Battery: 12v, 36 Ah
 Top speed: 15mph @ 4100rpm
 Cost: Originally £399
 (current value £300 to £1000)
 Availability: Rare
 Braking: Caliper brake (front) and twin-shoe drum brake (rear offside wheel)
 Wheels: Three reinforced nylon wheels
 Bodywork: Moulded polypropylene
 Other details: Built-in pedals, rechargeable 'deep-discharge' battery, LED instrument display, rear tail lamp, 12v headlamp, 1cu ft boot space, key operation, light switch
 Official Sinclair accessories: Battery charger, booster pad (for smaller drivers), seat cushions, 'High-Vis Mast', mudflaps, side panels, wing mirrors, indicator kit, horn, Tonneau cover, clothing

MORE INFO

The official Sinclair Research website can be found at: www.sinclair-research.co.uk
 A wealth of information about the Sinclair C5 can be found at the following C5 enthusiasts' websites: www.sinclairc5.com and www.c5alive.co.uk



Watch the second corner. It's a tightening apex with adverse camber that you'll really need to take in third...

