

EXCLUSIVE

By **ROB MCGIBBON**

IT IS the must-have gadget of the summer. Robbie Williams has one and Kylie Minogue is a whiz on hers.

Even Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas has been spotted whipping along Sunset Boulevard on his.

Students use them instead of the bus, City gents cut through the morning crush on theirs and top designer Alastair McQueen raced down the catwalk on one.

Everyone is scooter loopy.

To be more accurate, they are wild about Micro Skate Scooters, a super-slick, pearl polished aluminium version of the 1970s children's toy.

The £100 Micro glides on 100mm nylon wheels controlled by a rear mudguard that doubles as a brake. The telescopic steering column slides down, the handlebars slip away and the 6lb machine fits neatly into a shoulder bag.

The Micro may be small, but it is big business.

It was launched in the UK last October and now 5,000 a week are vanishing from the shelves, a figure which is expected to double this summer and climb even further closer to Christmas.

In Japan, sales have hit 75,000 per week and Micros are selling out across Europe. America is so hooked on what they call "sidewalk surfing" that retail giant Wal-Mart has ordered three million.

Its Swiss-born inventor Wim Ouboter is now a millionaire and his fortune is set to grow as the scooter frenzy sweeps the world.

Two new Micro designs will be launched this summer and giants such as Volkswagen are wooing Wim with a huge takeover offer.

"There were many times over the past few years when I nearly gave up, but I had to stick with it," says Wim, 40. "I knew that people would want my scooter."

The seeds of the Micro were sown when he was a child.

His sister Corinna was born with one leg shorter than the other and was unable to ride a bike, so Wim and his two sisters took to the fat-wheeled scooters of those days.

IN 1994, 24 years later, the former banker was juggling several businesses — but dreamed of being an inventor.

Living alone in an apartment in Zurich he was frustrated by the distance to his nearest takeaway — too close to drive, too far to walk.

"I had wanted to create something and was always coming up with various ideas," says Wim, now married with two children.

"I wanted something that would get me to the local takeaway and remembered how much fun my family had on scooters.

"I also wanted something portable that people could use for a short distance. I did some designs and made the first prototype over two weekends.

"The first weekend I bought the materials — some in-line skates and some steel — and started making a scooter."

It was the first Micro.

"It was a bit difficult to ride and it did not fold up very well, so I started making a second," says Wim.

"This was made of aluminium and was much better. I used it

It's

HOW WIM



COOL CAT: McQueen



ROAD RAVE: On the street

RIDE TO FORTUNE

Wim Ouboter risked everything to develop his scooter which is now selling millions around the world, and here he is on his latest three-wheel stunt model

around my neighbourhood and in the city on my way to work. Everyone thought I was crazy and laughed at me. Even some of my closest friends laughed.

"I was very upset and put the scooter back in the basement for nearly two years. I gave up, although I kept thinking about it.

"But when I got married the children from my neighbour-