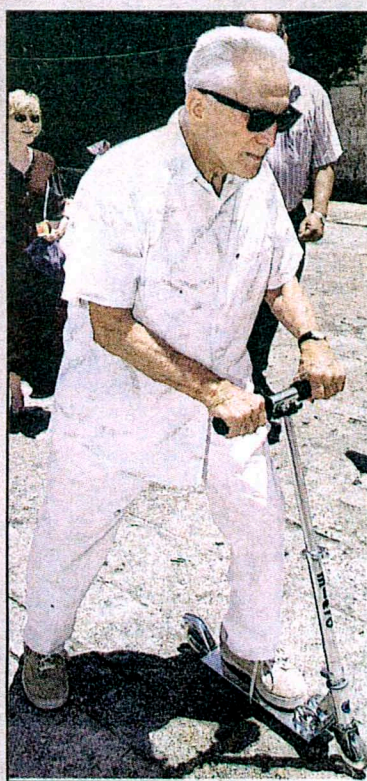


Scooterman

SKATED WITH RUIN TO BUILD HIS TWO-WHEEL VISION



HOT ROD: Sex And The City's Sarah Jessica Parker



TRACK STAR: Kirk Douglas



PRIME MOVER: Canada's PM



POCKET ROCKET: Kylie Minogue on hers



TIDY: The fold-up Micro

Micros went on sale in Japan — and within weeks, they sold out.

Australia was next and then last year Wim linked up with Seth Bishop and Nick Joslin, two British entrepreneurs who had already launched the Citybug, a 15mph collapsible mini moped.

When they saw a Micro they loved it and snapped up the UK distribution contract.

For the past six months, Wim's life has been in a spin. He has become a celebrity in Switzerland where he is seen as a transport visionary.

He won a prestigious design prize in Germany and is often asked to lecture young designers and engineers who are bringing their ideas to him, not the established companies.

Suddenly, all the doors are open.

He has linked up with the Swiss National railway to offer season ticket holders discounted Micros and this summer Berlin will begin the first pilot scheme of Micro stations, where travellers can rent a Micro to avoid buses or taxis.

There are plans to introduce them in airports to hasten a last minute dash to the departure gate.

In July and August a new Micro will have a flexy deck and air tyres for comfort while another will have a suspension fork.

The latest prototype includes a tiny electric powered engine and will hit the high streets early next year.

BUT success has come with a price. The market is being flooded by cheap copies — some from companies which originally turned down his idea.

Wim is trying to avoid spending his time fighting patent infringement lawsuits because he only wants to design new products.

The company is still run by five staff from a two bedroom apartment in Zurich, and Wim is exhausted. He is working 16-hour days and has little time for his children.

"This is the most exciting time of my life, but also the worst," he says.

"There is too much work to enjoy life. There is a war of the scooters being fought and I am not sure if I can win it.

"Within the past six months, there have been around 50 different companies making scooters. Some are direct copies of the Micro.

"I could spend the next ten years fighting lawsuits, but I have decided not to do that. I want to stay positive and work on new ideas.

"Although it is tough, it is very rewarding and I feel proud that I have got this far.

"I could stop now because I am happy that I made my original idea work.

"I saw it through — and got to the finish."

hood saw the scooter and asked my wife, Janine, if they could have a ride. Soon all the kids wanted to try.

"My wife told me she had 16 kids waiting for their turn on the scooter. She said that if children think something is good, they stick with it. She inspired me to stick with the Micro."

Over the next two years, Wim fine-tuned the Micro into the sleek design that is now its trademark. He also designed a sport version, called

the Kickboard, which has two wheels at the front and is built for stunts and speed.

Wim thought he had finally cracked it when Mercedes and watchmakers Swatch teamed up to make the tiny Smart car and agreed, as a sales gimmick, to give give his scooters away with each new car.

But when they refused to bankroll the project Wim ploughed £100,000 of his own money into the idea in the

belief he was safe with the Smart deal. He found a manufacturer in Taiwan — but no sooner had the production line started, than the Smart deal fell through.

Wim was left high and dry with a shipment of Micros on their way.

"Suddenly, I had no idea how I was going to market it," says Wim.

"I took the scooter to trade fairs and showed it to big companies, but they all said it wouldn't sell. People

thought I was a bit of a joke. I thought I was going to lose all the money I had put into the project."

Thankfully, his manufacturer in Taiwan believed in the Micro and delayed the payments he owed them.

"We decided to go it alone and get it into the shops ourselves without the backing of an established company," says Wim.

And 18 months ago the first 20,000

Picture: FRANK DORAN/MATRIX