

Introduction of the KR201 Roadster

by Wolfgang Kraus and Uschi Kettenmann

Contrary to the widely held belief that the KR201 was developed by FMR from the KR200, it was first announced at the 1956 IFMA international bicycle and motorcycle show. That was a full three months before the founding of FMR.

In August 1956, dealers were notified about the development via a newsletter but there had been some press releases that caused some consternation in Regensburg. They would have liked more time as they had not yet finished the development, calculations, and testing of both the car and the hood.

On 21st October 1956 the third IFMA international bicycle and motorcycle show in Frankfurt opened their doors for eight days. Motor Compagnie, a local firm under the direction of Franz A. Guilleaume was responsible for the show stands. Contemporary manufacturers including Gogomobil, BMW Isetta, and Zundapp all had large central stands in Hall 2. While Messerschmitt exhibited on a small stand numbered 125-126 against the wall in Hall 3. Displayed were the KR200, KR200 deLuxe (with gold- folding top introduced as a special accessory) and the Mokuli. Next to them were two examples of the new Roadster with the description of Me201. At a price of Deutschmark (DM) 1998.00 it was the first KaRo under the magical price of DM2000. The folding scissors hood frame was offered at an additional DM150 and the fabric soft-top with cover was a further DM40. According to the press release a macho, sporty, and racy with the characteristics of a well-engineered Messerschmitt version was created. With a price around DM400 less than the KR200 de Luxe it was hardly more than a well-equipped

German manufactured scooter. A Dürkopp Diana, Zündapp Bella, or a Triumph Comtessa were priced at DM1795 while the Maicoletta was DM1870 and the Heinkel Tourist was DM 1895. It is not known why the new KaRo was displayed with the prefix 'Me' other than perhaps tradition. Possibly Messerschmitt wanted to associate it with the well known aircraft type following the Allied approved rebuilding of the former aircraft plants. Willy Messerschmitt announced in the spring of 1956 that in any case vehicle building would continue. Perhaps Regensburg also wanted to signal that the 201 was a further development of their administration as the KR201 went into series production.

Roadster
ME 201

Der sportlich-rassige Messerschmitt-Roadster ist wie sein Bruder, der Messerschmitt-Kabinenroller, ein wirtschaftliches und schnelles Fahrzeug. Dazu der sensationelle Preis:
DM 1998.-

RSM MESSERSCHMITT-WERK REGENSBURG

A contemporary press release from RSM (Messerschmitt Werk) with the bargain price

of DM1998 was only made possible because of the “high demand from overseas markets” and although this was the explanation, the evidence was lacking at that time. However, we can now see from MFGB archives that the burgeoning British market had indeed provided a much needed boost to RSM sales. With this promotion pricing Messerschmitt sought to hide the miserable sales figures that threatened the future of RSM. According to KBA (Kraftfahrzeug Bundesamt equivalent of British DVLA or American DMV) sales in the first half of 1956 were just 2084 KaRos (KR200 & KR175). Compare this to the figures for BMW Isetta (15,043) and the Goggomobil (12,596) then it looks like a disaster!

What luck then that the British and French Governments embarked on the disastrous Suez campaign that resulted in a humiliating withdrawal as the USA declined support. Fuel rationing in the U.K. brought about by the blockade of the Suez Canal by president Nasser created huge demand for economy cars that could use the allocated ration tickets for larger vehicles. RSM had the capacity to exploit this and the support from the new import agent Cabin Scooter Assemblies who had taken over imports from the recently bankrupt Beulah Hill Motors.

Based on the then current KR200 Sport, the KR201 had a frameless windscreen with aluminium covers on the support brackets. At DM1998, the ‘scissors’ folding hood and flexible plastic side-screens were not included but could be ordered as extras. Advertised with five new standard colours, Pastel Green, Sand, Rubin Red, Polar Grey, and Light Blue and it was subsequently available in just white or red unless a customer specified a non-standard paint finish. Optional extras mentioned in the 1956 ME 201 sales brochure included: Protective cover for fold-down scissor frame hood, soft top hood, heating fittings, luggage rack, sun visor, radio, ‘and many other items’.



The KR201 as displayed at the IFMA show differed from series production in a number of ways: It did not then include the elegant leather-cloth and imitation snakeskin upholstery and seats or the perforated hub caps with Rudge type spinner/retainers. Also missing were the chromed gear-change lever, wing lamps, chromed rear lights, and ventilation ‘portholes’ in the rear engine cover. Still to come were the different rear view mirrors from Kontakt replacing the Albert Spiegel manufactured units. As displayed, the Me201 had just one rear view mirror.

Despite the great interest from both press and public at the IFMA show, it was already too late. Dealers were advised just one month later on 29th November 1956 that Messerschmitt production would cease. All the IFMA expense and promotion brochures were to no avail. For two months the Regensburg production line was halted and workers laid off until a way forward became clear. On 17th January 1957 RSM Director, Friedrich Goy, announced that the newly formed Fahrzeug und Maschinenbau GmbH (FMR) would reinstate production under the new Directors, Fritz Fend and Valentin Knott.

It would be a further six months, and in time for the Summer season, beginning in July 1957 that the new KR201 went into production. An announcement that it would soon be available and

dated 5th July 1957 was circulated to dealers. However, FMR could not sustain the advertised price which was increased to DM2200. Added to that was a further DM195 for the 'optional extra' folding hood, side screens, and cover making the new Roadster the same price as a KR200 de Luxe thus losing any price advantage.



Technical Data KR 201

Engine: 200 cc. fan cooled single-cylinder F. & S. two stroke engine. Powerful acceleration, high performance on hills, high output. Especially high engine torque with low r. p. m. Reverse gear electrically selected. Rubber mounted rear wheel suspension, which is separate from the engine. Intermediate power transmission by cardan shaft. Cylinder bore: 2,5 ins. (65 mm), Piston stroke: 1,98 ins. (58 mm), Cylinder capacity: 191 c. c., Compression ratio: 6,6:1, Carburettor: Bing piston valve carburettor. Electric starter: 12 volt.

Gears, Transmission

Type: Four-speed gearbox, hand-operated; accelerator, clutch, brake and traffic beam switch are operated by footpedals. Noiseless gear shifting by Teleflex cable.

Chassis

Frame: Torsion-proof steel tube frame with completely closed floor.

Steering mechanism: Front wheels steered by divided track rods, rubber mounted. Modern steering bar with horn button.

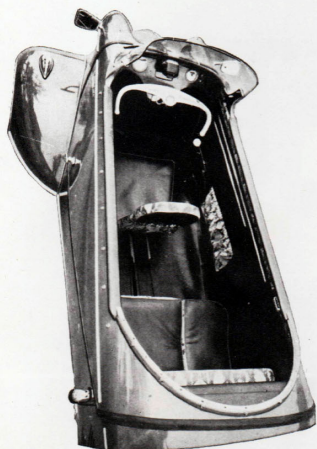
Suspension: Each wheel separately suspended with enlarged track width, soft rubber torsion springs with hydraulic shock absorbers on all three wheels.

Body: All-steel body with very durable furnace-set coat of paint, plyable side curtains; Panoramic windscreen of safety glass. Convertible top (cabrio-limousine). Electric wind screen wiper. Baggage compartment in rear hood.

Brakes: Internal expanding brakes activated by cables, foot brake and self-locking handbrake acting on all 3 wheels.

Cockpit: Seats (one behind another) with foam rubber upholstery. Front seat adjustable which can be tipped up for convenient entrance, full width back seat to fold up.

Electrical Equipment: 12 volt, 90 watt Dynamo. Coil Ignition. ²/₃₅ watt Headlights. Flasher Lights in Side and Rear Lights. Parking Lights on Wings. Starter operated by Ignition Key.



The "MESSERSCHMITT" Cabin Scooter has achieved such a perfection throughout the years, that anybody without any technical knowledge can drive and service the "MESSERSCHMITT".

Specification may be changed without notice!



FAHRZEUG- UND MASCHINENBAU GMBH REGENSBURG

(translation from German and additional material by David Garner)

Analysis of history and chassis numbers for the KR201 Roadster

by Heiko Zimmermann

With the easy availability of replica parts, identification of genuine original examples is especially difficult as the creation of such replicas offers easy profits for unscrupulous traders exploiting the premium prices for these vehicles. Worse still, the VIN plate always indicates the vehicle type as 'KR200' thus there is little documentary evidence to identify a genuine Roadster.

Special equipment for KR201

- Two 'portholes' at each side of the rear engine cover
- side lights as fitted to early British KR200
- chromed gear-change lever with white knob
- hub caps with extended apertures and Rudge type retainers
- chromed rear lights
- 'snakeskin' interior finish
- special 'Roadster paint finish' in red or white
- special mirrors by Kontakt
- British cars with chromed 'torpedo' rear lights

Many enthusiasts regard these items as significant for identification of genuine Roadsters but do not accept that, especially for the British market, some KR201s had the later side lights, 'Albert' mirrors, and standard non-chromed gear lever. British registration documents (the old buff logbook) sometimes recorded the KR201 designation but it must be recognised that this never agreed with the VIN plate that clearly stated KR200. In Germany it was even less clear as the registration number does not stay with the vehicle for life as in the UK. A new document and registration number is issued at each change of owner so unless a copy is taken at the time of transfer, there is no evidence available.

A description of this vehicle type can be found in the ABE (Allgemeine Betriebserlaubnis für Fahrzeuge or type approval) Nr. 1812 of 2. August 1957. There are four endorsements relating to condition, noise emissions, lighting, and brakes that are included in the Kraftfahrzeug Brief (equivalent to the British Registration Document or American vehicle title).

MESSERSCHMITT
KR 201
SPORTS CONVERTIBLE
Sporting ■ Fast ■ Economical ■ Reliable ■ Highly manoeuvrable

CONVERTIBLE with De Luxe finish, Handsome black interior upholstery padded and in imitation snakeskin. New Rear View Mirrors, Chromium Plated Rear Lights, Additional Air Inlet for Engine, Hood Cover in Black with silver piping.

FIMR FAHRZEUG- UND MASCHINENBAU GMBH. REGENSBURG

Additional information:

Type approval number 1812 was cancelled on 26th November 1965. Chassis number series is specified as commencing with chassis number 64000 and 65188 is the earliest known example located in Switzerland. In 1977 all the available data from the Kraftfahrt-Bundesamt (KBA) in Flensburg, (German equivalent of DVLA in the U.K. Or DMV in the U.S.A.) was

purchased. RSM and later FMR were allocated a series of registration documents by KBA that were issued to each vehicle produced at the factory for the German home market. This system is different from the U.K. as documents were issued by the local authority where the car was sold. KBA listed all chassis numbers commencing with KR200 66435 from 21st November 1957 and all previous data was destroyed. Unfortunately, the numbers of German registered KR201 cars could not be specifically identified from the data. The earliest chassis number in the KBA list is 65906 of 12th September 1957 and this is included in the total of 197 vehicles in the number series of blank registration documents issued to the factory. (9 318 401 to 9 318 598) from 12.09.1957 to 19.05.1958. A further series of 45 was issued to FMR (9 761 801 to 9 761 846) 19.05.1958 to 05.10.1959.) and of those there were only isolated entries identified as KR201 therefore numbers indicate in the region of 250 KR201 types registered in Germany. There were 233 KR201s registered on 1st July 1959 making the previous figure plausible as a total especially since there is no data previous to chassis number 65906.

Exports: Incomplete data is available for Switzerland compiled from customs documentation that identifies 34 KR201 Swiss imports. In the U.K. more precise data extracted from factory invoices held in Messerschmitt Foundation archives indicates 134 British imports. Despite our inclement weather, the UK has always had a significant following for open top cars and was the largest export market for FMR. As with all Regensburg cars, they came to the UK without wheels and batteries thus avoiding the high purchase tax on imported vehicles. Here the KR201 was not sold with the ‘optional’ folding hood and sidescreens but always as a complete car and initially in an exclusive red. The red used on the 201 was unique to that model, not used on

any other Messerschmitt. It was called Signalrot, or Signal Red. It was a bright, warm red, not the orange Korallenrot, nor the blood red typical of Italian racing called Monzarot. Both Coral and Monza came after 201 production ended, beginning in late 1958. The bright Signal Red was a refreshing change from the darker Rubinrot, or Ruby Red which was used on the normal cars contemporary with the 201. Of course later cars could be in any colour and FMR embossed hub caps came with the late versions updated with 10mm wheel studs.

In a copy of “Motor Cycling” of 25 Aug 1960 a list appears on Page 531 (following an article announcing the Sport - “Deliveries to commence this month”) of current Messerschmitt prices. Included is the KR201 Sports Convertible (at £332-10s-9d), the same price as the KR200 Sports Saloon and KR200 Sports Cabriolet.

In the Netherlands, where large numbers of Messerschmitts were imported, there is unfortunately no remaining data. Worldwide there would have been just a few examples with Australia being a prime destination because of the favourable climate for open cars.

Following analysis of all the production data from worldwide sources that is given in the above text, we can estimate that around 450 KR201s were produced. Thus the KR201, after the Tg500, is among the most sought after Regensburg products. Whether original or replica the KR201 offers a completely different driving experience and is especially enjoyable in warm weather without the hood. For the rear seat passenger exposed without the protection of the screen, it is not a pleasant experience. Winter is a different matter as the hood does not seal completely at the top of the screen creating a cold draught at the centre of the forehead.

Additional information by David Garner