

by Antonia  
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**M**Y THREE-YEAR-OLD daughter, Rosie, and I have a morning ritual that, more often than not, leaves my heart pounding with fear.

As soon as we leave our home for Rosie's nursery, she speeds off into the distance faster than my legs will take me.

She dodges commuters on the crowded London pavements with the confidence of a slalom skier, until she is so far away that I start to lose sight of her. Cars beep as she careers towards them and no amount of frantic calling on my part can catch her attention.

Passers-by who have clocked us look at me with a mixture of concern and disapproval, because my daughter is on a scooter, and it is clear I have no control of her whatsoever.

But, like many working mothers, I try not to worry because Rosie's £50 scooter makes my life infinitely more convenient. My daughter is too old for a buggy, but too little to walk a long way. Were it not for her scooter, the mile-long journey to nursery would take hours. Besides, Rosie loves it.

Yet the risk I am taking with her safety was brought into sharp focus with the tragic death of three-year-old Rosa Simon last month.

Rosa was playing on her scooter outside her home in Hadleigh, Suffolk, on June 17 when her neighbour reversed out of his drive and knocked her over, killing her.

Rosa's father Paul, 49, described his daughter as being 'in one of those wonderful heady moments that three-year-olds have' racing around the family's quiet cul-de-sac on her scooter at the time of the accident. He added: 'Her death has robbed us of much of the sparkle of life.'

Tragically, Rosa is far from unique. While there are no specific figures for the number of scooter-related

deaths in Britain, a survey compiled by a motor insurance company last year revealed that British death and serious injury rates for child pedestrians aged five and under were at their highest for ten years.

Research by Waikato University in New Zealand also found a five-fold rise in the number of injuries to children using mini-scooters over the past five years. And a survey in

America found 4,000 children were admitted to hospital for scooter injuries in one month alone.

It is little wonder that so many accidents are taking place. With their lightweight aluminium frame and tiny wheels — children place one foot on a board and use the other to propel themselves along — scooters can reach 25mph.

Yet they are being marketed for

children as young as one (with an adjustable seat attached). And all too often parents adopt an indulgent, some would say negligent, attitude to their children whizzing along the street.

This was demonstrated last November, when an elderly lady was knocked down in the street by an eight-year-old boy on a scooter.

Vera Broadbridge, 94, from

Wimbledon, shattered her hip after falling over, but got short shrift from the boy's mother, who claimed she was probably 'just bruised'. The mother walked off after dismissing the pensioner's injuries and refusing to leave her details.

This is clearly an extreme example of the arrogance we mothers display when with children on scooters — yet it is a common theme. It is up to

# How mini-sc the scourge

## They're a must-have for middle-class children, yet with little terrors reaching speeds of 25mph, it's all ending in tears for them ... and petrified pedestrians



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# ooters became of our streets



PICTURES: JENNY GODDALL / MARTIN SPAVEN

**Scooter kids: Rose Redmond, top, and Merlin Wheatley — minus his front tooth**

scooter hit a dip in the pavement. Merlin went over the handlebars, crashing face-first on the concrete. 'He couldn't put his hands down because they were holding the handlebars,' says Sarah. 'There was blood everywhere. Merlin was crying and I felt awful — that it was my fault because he hadn't had a helmet on and I hadn't seen the uneven pavement.'

The following day, Merlin underwent a general anaesthetic so that dentists could remove the damaged tooth to prevent infection. 'As upset as I was, I realised he was lucky to have only lost a tooth. He could have banged his head or broken his nose,' says Sarah.

**F**ROM then on, she's become 'obsessive' about Merlin and Amelia, who was also given a scooter aged two, wearing helmets.

Two years on, and Merlin is aware his front tooth is missing. 'He asks me why the tooth fairy didn't come,' says Sarah. 'It won't grow back until he is six or seven. There is still a scar on his lip. Merlin [now five] is growing out of his scooter and we're not going to get him another one. I don't think they are that safe. Children will fall off them and you have to be really careful.'

Mini-scooters weren't originally designed for youngsters. The brainchild of Swiss inventor Wim Ouboter, they first became popular in 1998 among adult commuters in Tokyo. By 2000, the phenomenon had

spread to Britain with celebrities such as Kylie Minogue and Robbie Williams owning one. But it is among children that their popularity has endured.

In addition to parental convenience and peer pressure — the moment Rosie saw her friends riding one, she 'had' to have one, too — their appeal also lies in their simplicity.

Slickly marketed, they cost from around £50. They are labelled as a healthy travel option for children and have the support of Change4Life — the Government initiative that encourages us to eat healthily and be more active. But why? Wouldn't children be better off walking?

Youngsters don't need to learn to ride them in the same way they would a bicycle and there is no equivalent of the old Cycling Proficiency Test — now called Bikeability — to ensure competence.

Parents are less likely to equip their children with a helmet because accidents seem less likely than when riding a bike. I tell myself that because scooters are predominantly ridden on pavements, the risk of injury is lower.

But the legal position of scooters on pavements is unclear. Technically, they could be covered by the same legislation that makes it an offence to ride a bike on a footpath. The Royal Society For The Prevention Of Accidents advises against crossing the road on a scooter, given the risk of a child colliding with a car or falling over the kerb.

Even when children are wearing helmets they are not always safe, as Michelle Redmond, 44, discovered.

Michelle, a company director, and her husband Shaun, 42, a mature student, gave their daughter Rose a mini-scooter for her second birthday in September 2007.

**S**INCE then, Rose has veered into lamp-posts, careered headfirst into a tree trunk, tripped over a kerb while trying to dash across the road and chipped her front tooth.

'She went terrifyingly fast on it from the start,' says Michelle, who has always insisted on Rose wearing a helmet. 'But I didn't want to be overprotective. The scooter helped Rose to be independent and hurried her along when I wanted to take her somewhere.'

In August 2011 Rose, aged six, had her most serious accident when the scooter stuck in a crack on a pavement near the family's home in Twickenham, Middlesex. She went head first over the handlebars, bit a chunk out of her gum, split her lip and banged all her front teeth.

'There was blood all over Rose's face. She was wailing, her teeth were wobbling and we were incredibly distressed,' says Michelle.

After Michelle's dentist initially told her Rose would have to have her teeth removed, Michelle sought a second opinion. She took Rose to a specialist dentist at a paediatric health centre, who decided Rose's teeth could remain — but warned they may well have sustained long-term damage.

'The front teeth became discoloured, which I was told was due to the trauma,' says Michelle. 'She will definitely need work on them in the future.'

Yet remarkably, none of her accidents seem to have put Rose off her scooter. 'She is more cautious but still enjoys it,' says Michelle, who isn't as relaxed. 'I'm not against scooters,' she says. 'But every parent should be aware of the risk that comes with them.'

So what can we do to make our children safer on scooters? David Walker, leisure safety manager at the Royal Society For The Prevention of Accidents, says: 'Some commonsense precautions should be followed, including finding a suitable place to dismount before crossing the road. Wearing bright or fluorescent clothing during the day, and reflective materials in the dark, will help other people see scooter users more easily, and a helmet is a good idea.'

I have decided I will at least buy Rosie a helmet before taking her on her scooter again. I don't want to mollycoddle her, but I have to concede she is too young to understand what a liability she is on her scooter — to herself and those around her.

us parents to ensure our children are not a liability, yet some fail to realise how dangerous scooters can be for pedestrians and children.

Fortunately, Rosie hasn't suffered anything more serious than a couple of scraped knees since my husband and I gave her the scooter nine months ago.

But my eight-year-old niece broke her arm going over the handlebars

of her scooter last year, and my mother-in-law is so convinced they are dangerous that she refuses to chaperone Rosie on one, believing that broken bones are by no means the worst that could happen.

Many schools have become so concerned by the number of scooter accidents that they have banned them from their grounds. Charles Davies, headmaster of Moulsecoomb

Primary School, Brighton, who has implemented a ban for health-and-safety reasons, explained: 'It is not really a good place to be riding scooters around — we have under fives here.'

The irony, of course, is that it is often children under five who are themselves riding the scooters.

Sarah Wheatley's son, Merlin, is missing a front tooth after a fall from his scooter resulted in a trip to Accident & Emergency in December 2011, when he was two-and-a-half. Sarah had bought Merlin a Micro-Scooter (the original and still most popular brand of these scooters) six months earlier, shortly after his sister Amelia, now three, was born.

'I hoped it would make getting around with a baby easier and less cumbersome than using our double buggy,' says Sarah, a teacher, 44. 'But because he was still small I ended up pulling him around.'

On the day of the accident, Sarah, her husband Charlie, 40, an assistant shop manager, and their two children had been for an afternoon out on London's South Bank. Merlin was tired and Sarah was pulling him to Waterloo station when the

## Avocado vodka, anyone?

**P**ARENTS have long tricked their children into eating vegetables by pureeing and hiding them in sauces. Now, London's bartenders are at it, too — squeezing your five-a-day into cocktails.

It started with garnishes — radishes or grapefruit slices — and developed into a trend for 'juicetails'. Mushrooms, peppers and avocados are matched with absinthe, tequila and vodka for cocktails with at least a pretence

at virtue. Vermouth goes well with carrots and peas, while parsnips complement champagne.

Barman Michael Stringer, of BlackLeaf Events, claims: 'Spirits which are distilled with herbs and spices, taken in moderation, can actually be beneficial — these were originally created for medicinal purposes, after all.'

And if you fancy making your own at home? Try fresh beetroot or tomatoes — or even celeriac.