



The eight Mokes bought by the Australian Army for Tropical Trials, at BMC Zetland - August 1969.



Tropical Trials

A modification to help buffalo hunters gave the Moke another chance with the military.

Production of the Moke began in Australia in early 1966, but it appears the Australian Army was given a demonstration of a Moke as early as 1963 or 1964. *Wheels & Tracks* magazine, Issue 19 in 1987, reported; "Back in the early 1960s, BMC had demonstrated the Moke to the armed forces of several Commonwealth nations, including Australia, where in 1963 a 1,000-cc version had been tried by Army Headquarters."

This date could be passed off as a mistake, but for another reference in the final report of the Army Tropical Trials of Mokes in 1969/70, which stated; "The original 'Mini Moke' which utilized 'Mini' 998cc machinery was demonstrated to AHQ six years ago."

Their evaluation was consistent with that of the British, continuing; "although it was considered interesting, it was deemed unsuitable for military use due to low ground clearance and high rolling resistance on soft ground due to the small diameter wheels, and insufficient power/weight ratio."



Mokes were popular with Darwin's buffalo hunters. This one is in 1966.

That might have been the end of it, if not for the work of Port Darwin Motors in the Northern Territory. Since the release of the Aussie Moke in 1966 (again, see Issue 6 for details on how the Australian version differed from the English Moke), Port Darwin Motors had been Australia's biggest supplier of Mokes, selling them to many station owners for work in rounding up cattle and buffalo hunting.

Like the Army, the station-hands found the lack of ground clearance and the small wheels to be a problem over rough ground. It's often said that necessity is the mother of invention, and the problem was solved with the fitting of fourteen-inch wheels from the Morris Minor, to the front of the Mokes.

Des Nudl (pronounced Null), the former principal of Port Darwin Motors, recalled ten years ago; "We were approached by them to modify the rear, fitting the fourteen-inch wheels all round. We showed one of these to BMC, who were impressed and set about production, but with thirteen-inch wheels."

The big-wheel Moke was released in April 1968, and got the 1100cc engine in April 1969. With the problems of ground clearance and power-to-weight ratio now addressed, BMC approached the Army again.

This time the Army decided the Moke was worthy of further evaluation, and ordered eight for Tropical Trials testing.

These were supplied in August 1969, with the thirteen-month trial to be carried out from 1 September 1969 until 30 September 1970.

Although only one black-and-white photo exists of the Mokes at Zetland before delivery, it appears that they were standard Mokes, probably painted dark green, and had one or two extra items fitted – most notably the stack-type air cleaner.

The Army also received four prototype BMC ¼-ton trailers, designed specifically for use with the Moke.

Two of the Mokes and one trailer were delivered to Tropical Trials Establishment, Cowley Beach (near Innisfail), Queensland, with the remainder deployed to Pupua/New Guinea Command, for general duties.

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One of the Mokes and the trailer undergoing tests in tropical North Queensland.