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Automatic, Foolproof and does not need Feeding

A review by [Arbrette](#) on [Optimate Battery Charger](#)
March 30th, 2003

Author's product rating: ★★★★★

Pros: Can be left on 24/7 and automatically tests and maintains your battery in peak condition.
Cons: You may forget it's there, it becomes such an unobtrusive part of the furniture.

Recommend to potential buyers: yes

Full review

Put this one on your Christmas List, for yourself or anyone who has ever suffered from a flat battery! It retails at between £35 - £39 and can be bought online (search on Optimate) or in any good motorcycle equipment shop. If you are already thinking "I'm not a biker, why on earth am I reading this" ... don't stop – this little baby is good for loads of batteries... trust me, just read on!

When I was calculating the total cost of buying my bike, I decided to learn from experience, and to take a look at all the problems which I had encountered before in order to try to prevent the repetition of disasters or problems. One of the most annoying troubles I had had with a little Peugeot scooter had been a very frequent flat battery – probably the one most embarrassing thing of all. It had cost me dearly too, to call out the local bike shop to sort me out and get me moving! I had felt very small and silly, being told that of course the bike needed to be ridden every couple of days or so, or this would

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keep happening.

I most certainly didn't want that happening to me again. As I also had decided to have an alarm fitted, I asked for advice in order to get ideas as to what was on the market that could help with the very real problem of battery drain from simply having an alarm on the bike. The advice I received ranged from the silly – "Oh, don't worry about that, the alarm uses practically nothing" to the ridiculous – "Oh, if we're fitting an alarm for you, we'll make sure you can connect it to the power – have you got power in your garage?" Strange idea this; I plug my bike into the mains? "Yes, our guys put this special lead on it for you and you just plug it in and leave it." No-o, I thanked that particular gentleman kindly and put the phone down in shock.

I went back to Carole Nash Secure and spoke to a young sounding gentleman who seemed to know what he was talking about and he laughed loudly at the last information. "No, look, if you're likely to be leaving your bike for a couple of weeks without riding it, the alarm could drain the battery – how about us fitting an Optimate 3 connection for you?" He told me that it was totally fool proof, that it needed to be plugged into a mains socket at one end and had plenty of lead to reach, then there was the lead that came out of the other end to literally push-connect to the bike end. The bike end would be either crocodile clip type or actually fitted permanently. Simple design, no switches, buttons, fuses or dials, nothing to adjust or do, just push-plug it in and leave it to its own devices.

At that time, not knowing that I would end up with the hard-wired version, I asked hesitantly about using the croc clips – no, no problem, the Optimate 3 is protected electronically against user errors such as short circuiting and it is impossible to even cause a spark – I hadn't thought about that, but yes, it was a good safety point, as I do keep a container of petrol in the garage for emergencies!

He had explained it thus in simple terms for me, and assured me that when the fitter came to alarm the bike, he would have one in the van for me to look at and that he would ask the fitter to explain the Optimate 3 to me so that I could make up my mind then. That seemed fine to me – so I sat back and waited until they came to fit the alarm.

True to their promise, when he arrived, the fitter from Carole Nash Secure explained to me all about Optimate 3 whilst he was busy fitting the alarm. To simplify it into one sentence, Optimate 3 is a battery charger which also tests the battery and there are various lights which indicate if the battery is low, is charging or if, horrors, it is irretrievably 'damaged' or out of condition.

It comes in a brightly coloured daffodil yellow box, with neat and friendly pictures of bikes, caravans, boats etc, as the pictures indicate, Optimate 3 is suitable for all types of rechargeable lead-acid batteries: filler cap types; absorbed acid "MF" for motorcycles; valve regulated (VRLA); & GEL-electrolyte types, in fact anything that can have a 12v lead/acid battery! Everything you may need is supplied; the charging unit itself, which is a tiny, exceedingly tough, mushroom-coloured chunky little box, measuring just 16 cms long by 5.5 cms wide by 5.5 cms high. The mains lead neatly comes out of one end to plug into a wall socket, the lead to connect up to the battery end coming out of the opposite end. Very neat, tidy and discrete. I one day will get round to mounting it on the wall, but that may be some time! The leads themselves are long – the one from charger unit to mains is nearly 2 metres long, the lead coming out of the other end that connects to the battery lead is another 2 metres and then you have the cabling to the battery itself.

The charger unit, as I said above, is a beige colour, with a clearly marked panel on the upper surface. The panel has two LED lights on the left, labelled "Power" and "Polarity", on the right hand side there are four: the top two are Maintenance states of the battery, being "Good" or "Weak", and below that is the "Charge" light and the "Desulphate" light, the 'nasty one' which indicates that your battery has been tested and found to be badly discharged or sulphated – I prefer its other label of "Recovering", because this is where the Optimate 3 comes into its own, for if it possibly can 'recover' the battery, it will proceed to do so.

I have listed out all the stages it goes through – they are daunting on first reading, but do not be offput, for the entire thing is AUTOMATIC!
Months on, I can say that this is a 'must' for anyone who uses such things as boats or

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caravans for the summer season only. The best thing as far as I am concerned is that once connected, you can just leave it – there is no possibility of over-charging and once the battery is charged, the unit goes into an Auto -mode cycle of testing and trickle charging as needed. Thus it not only can rejuvenate 'tired' batteries, but it maintains them at peak performance without any further attention from you, and once in full auto mode, it is energy efficient.

Optimate 3 comes complete with the leads with the familiar crocodile clips, as well as a set with the little eyelets on for hardwiring. Which you use depends entirely on the application and how easy it is to get at the battery. With motorcycles it is dependent more on what make and model of bike you have, as with some bikes it is a simple matter to get at the battery, whereas on others the battery is tucked away – mine comes into the latter category.

It can be wired in to your bike, boat etc so that you simply plug it in when parked. Can be left on 24/7 as it carries out a routine battery test, analysis and charge. It identifies battery faults and automatically goes into appropriate mode for correction. You can now leave your bike or boat totally untouched for weeks or months, knowing the battery will remain in peak condition. Comes with assortment of connection leads for various makes and types of vehicle. Totally foolproof!

I do not pretend to understand the intimate details of the workings of this little gadget, but I can list out for you what happens when you connect up to it. Everything is automatic – so although the following might sound daunting, trust me, I can assure you that if a light is on, you can simply read what it means on the label beside it – and another plus point, even in a dim garage without my specs, I could read the labels!

(1) First you connect the charger to the battery, or, in my case, plug the leads in. If you are using the croc clip leads and get it the wrong way round, a red LED on the left goes on which is the indicator for "Inverse Polarity" – so undo clips and swap over – no damage done, you get warned of any errors – it is such a user friendly gadget!

(2) Next step is to plug into mains. Green "Power On" LED lights up.

(3) Orange "Recovering" LED comes on as long as battery voltage is above 2 Volts. If the battery is very flat, this LED may remain lit for up to 2 hours while a special high voltage is applied in attempt to recover the battery. After either 2 hours or when the battery is again able to accept the normal charging programme, whichever is the shorter, the orange LED will go out and the normal yellow "Charging" LED comes on instead.

(4) Charging state, yellow LED; constant charging current until rising impedance causes charging voltage to increase until 14.3V, when the "adsorption and verification" stage commences. Charging voltage is now limited during 30 minutes to 13.6V, unless the voltage reduces or the current being drawn increases beyond set parameters, in which case the Optimate 3 reverts to the main Charging stage and repeats this part of the cycle.

(5) Maintenance: the float voltage stage includes an automatic battery test for self discharge, which is repeated for 30 minutes each hour. During this period the battery is not subjected to current and the circuitry monitors for stability alone. Should the Voltage fall beyond the critical 12.3V, you will find that the red "Suspect" LED in the "Test" panel lights up to indicate that there might be a problem. This does not mean that Optimate 3 has ceased to operate, in fact it continues to hold the battery in float voltage mode until you disconnect. Conversely, should the voltage remain at or exceed 12.3V during the entire 30 minutes test period, the green LED will light up and continue to be lit unless a subsequent test period reveals a failure which results in a red indicator. It is worth noting, for anyone else who may run the Optimate 3 in conjunction with connected accessories such as the alarm systems, that with the green on, during the other half hour periods of each hour, the Optimate 3 allows the battery to draw up to a maximum of 200 mA of current –so no alarm failure is triggered.

(6) The red LED warning indicator: means that even after charging, the battery's voltage is not holding, or, in the case of a damaged or flat battery, it was irrecoverable despite

attempts by Optimate 3. The red indicator may be on due to a defect in the battery itself or, if it was still connected to the vehicle's loom, it may be indicating a loss of current through wiring, switch or contact degradation. If this latter is possibly the case, it is a good idea to totally remove the battery from the vehicle or bike etc, and reconnect to Optimate 3 and allow it to run through the diagnostic and test process once more. If the green LED lights up, you have a wiring, contact or switch fault! If the red LED is still lit, then it is the battery. Even then, with a severely deteriorating battery, it will continue to feed it a float charge to prevent or minimise further damage.

I hope that the above has explained the workings of the little gem – It is unbelievably easy to understand, and I can say outright that it was such a relief in the really bad weather in the winter that I didn't even have to go out and check the charger, as it would quite happily continue maintaining the battery at peak performance without any assistance or attention whatsoever.

Oh, in case anyone wonders if it does actually do all the above, the lights and stuff - yes it does - I admit openly to sitting in the garage watching it for a couple of hours ... sad person!

The object of writing the opinion is to also point out any possible problems or suggestions that one has encountered with a product. Well, I can say that Optimate 3 has taken a massive worry off my mind, as when I feel like going out, all I do is get kitted up, open the garage and unplug the little white connector, hang the lead over the hook I have put on the wall, wheel bike out – and go!

The only suggestion I would make to the manufacturers is that they think about providing a little push-on cover for the connectors at the end of the lead when it is hard-wired. I pop the cut-off end of the finger of a rubber glove over my lead-end, simply to prevent any dirt or muck perhaps getting inside the connectors, but that is my choice. After months and months of continuous use, plugging in and unplugging, that is the only minor complaint or criticism I have been able to think of!

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