



*A Beautiful New Zealand Stream.*

## THE KING'S HIGHWAY

### A CAUSERIE ON MOTORING MATTERS

**M**ATTERS motoring at the time of writing boil themselves down to the dismal subject of taxation, and the equally dismal subject of the state of the roads. The long-promised Motor Vehicles Bill contains few surprises, and is not greatly changed from what it was on its former appearance in 1921, though when one compares the two editions it is noticeable that a number of minor changes have been made, and in nearly every case, alas, imposing additional obligations on car owners, such, for example, as that queer provision requiring us to report at the nearest police station after an accident apropos of which I notice it has been satirically pointed out that on no other class of criminals is this duty imposed: all the others can wait to be fetched!

What all motorism was anxiously awaiting was information as to the amount of the annual motor tax. Originally the Government proposed £5 per annum per private car. The South Island motor associations, being quite satisfied with their roads as they are, were violently indignant, wanted no tax at all, and contended that the 25 per cent. tyre duty was ample taxation for good roads. The North Island suggested £3, and, though the South at first refused to budge beyond £1, a united stand was eventually taken on the modest figure of £2, the amount now appearing in the schedule of the Bill. Our chief tax, of course, is the tyre duty which we have been paying for over two years past, and a shockingly expensive way it is of raising money when you come to think about it. The importer adds the 25 per cent. duty on to the landed cost of a tyre, and then puts on, say, a 20 per cent. profit on to the whole. The retailer next adds, say, another 20 per cent. profit. The net result is that we pay on a £5 tyre about 25s. on account of tyre tax plus trade profits, whereas all that reaches the Highways Board to spend on good roads is about 12s. 6d. There ought to be a better way of doing things than this.

So much for the Motor Bill. As for the state of the roads, first and foremost we have the Manawatu Gorge (at present advice) indefinitely blocked. It seems that

in the splendiferous improvement scheme in the Gorge (and a fine road it will eventually provide) they started cutting back the mountain side, and travellers return with tales of the whole Tararua Range being ever since on the move. Anyway, one gathers that the engineers are encouraging everything that is likely ever to move to come down now and make a job of it. On the main Wellington-Taranaki-Auckland route there is the usual winter morass between Tongaporutu and Awakino. Last year the impassable winter gap was 27 miles in length, but this year it is only 14 miles, thanks to the fine new metalled surface in the Awakino Valley. Next winter, with luck, one may be able to motor right through to Auckland on a good hard road.

The only winter route through the Island at present open is that via Napier, Taupo, Putaruru and Hamilton, and this has an exceedingly sticky stretch between Atiamuri and Putaruru, and also, of course, the fearsome Rangiriri Hills. The Wellington-New Plymouth and Wellington-Napier roads are both in fair winter state, the worst portions being probably in the vicinity of Wellington, loud complaints arising as to the execrable condition of the road from Wellington to Paekakariki.



New cars continue to be in great evidence, and to a patriotic Britisher it is pleasing to note a sprinkling of English-made vehicles among the newcomers on the road. It cannot be said that the British manufacturer, however, is going to any particular pains either to push his wares (with a rare exception or two) or to provide us with a car built with any special regard to our conditions. The small car is all the vogue in Britain nowadays, and excellent little vehicles the best of these are, with remarkable efficiency and economy. For our conditions, however, most of them could, with advantage, have their springing strengthened.

The taste for the closed car develops, and recent price reductions are greatly increasing the number of these on the road. The closed car is undoubtedly an attractive proposition for town work, and makes a strong appeal to the ladies by reason of the comfort, not to say luxury, of its interior. In buying a car, however, it is the "innards" that take one there and bring one home again, and when price is a consideration mere man in selecting a car would be wise not to allow his better half's predilections in the way of upholstery to warp his judgment unduly. Apropos of closed cars, it is very noticeable that the great majority of touring cars encountered nowadays appear to be almost invariably run by their owners with the hood up, irrespective of the weather. This scribe's own taste is for all the air and sunshine that is going, but there is no doubt one absorbs with it much dust in summer and mud in winter, and indications are that the car with no hood up will ere long be as rare a bird among motors as the member of the hatless brigade is among pedestrians.

The move inaugurated by the Wellington Automobile Club for securing the services of a first-class man as organising secretary and executive officer for the North Island Union is thoroughly sound. It is high time that motorists took effective steps to keep their end up, and there is no doubt they could secure many benefits for themselves by combination. A New Zealand engineer lately in the United States has come back singing the praises