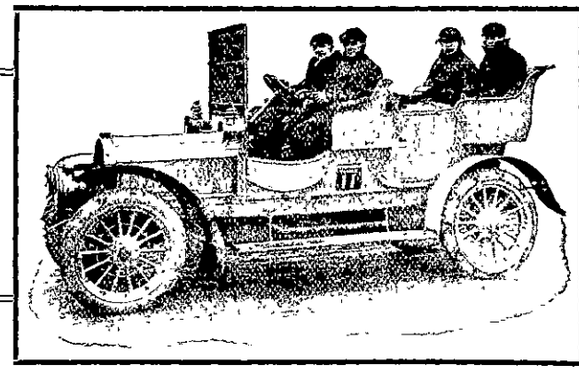
Motors Motoring



Motors, Motorists, and Motor Matters.

In England the war of prejudice against motorists continues unabated. At Cambridge the University authorities are imposing galling restrictions that will make it virtually impossible for the average student to motor and preserve his self-respect. Every petty vestryman of the shires seems to spend half his time devising schemes to trick the motorist to his undoing. The land is close set with police-traps, and at every likely corner stands the parish constable, watch in hand, grimly waiting to drop on some motorist—greatly to the joy, one supposes, of the criminal classes. The London County Council has closed the parks to persons learning to drive motors, who have profited much by their practice in unfrequented corners, and harmed nobody. In short, the persecution of the motorist is at its height, and the thing has gone so far that there is some reason to hope that pretty soon now we shall have the recoil to common-sense.

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It must be remembered that with all this English talk of the danger of motor vehicles, there is a far higher percentage of accidents caused by horse-drawn vehicles than by autocars. But human nature in the parishes is as queer a thing in 1909 as it was in 1606. When a brewer's dray or a grocer's cart knocks down and kills somebody, there is a murmuring of sympathy, a perfunctory inquest, and the incident is closed. But if an autocar runs over a hen, all the provincial papers come out with scare headlines about the "Toll of the Motor." Police misstatements as to motorists run pretty close to the perjury line, and the average magistrate (who thinks nothing but the thoughts of his forefathers) almost invariably backs the police. Lord Savile, himself a magistrate, but modern, has formulated a definite complaint. He alleges that the evidence of the police is not always trustworthy, and that all sensible and unprejudiced magistrates agree that the police would be far better employed in endeavouring to catch murderers and burglars, who now pursue their callings without interruption, because the officers are lying behind fences, trapping unoffending motorists who may be exceeding the speed-limit by two miles an hour on a clear road. Unhappily for the motorists, most fortunately for the burglars, sensible and unprejudiced magistrates are rarer in the smaller towns of England than daisies in December.

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In New Zealand things are better. We are not pledged to keep inviolate any outworn tradition of the Tudor period, and we are not of necessity haters of new things. In the English counties, Mr. Justice Shallow and his myrmidons object to motorcars, just as they objected to railway trains and steel pens. "Our ancestors," they say, in effect, "knew nothing of these things; wherefore, these things are vile, and must be put down." This essential contagion of parochialism lies heavily on England It is in the kitchen, and in the War Office All the good squires and their relations are proud of it. Motorists in New Zealand owe much of their reasonable liberty to the fact that there are no squires, and few men can trace their ancestry beyond the second step back. And some part of the liberty enjoyed is doubtless due to the fact that New Zealand motorists are, as a class, keener on keeping the law than on breaking it. They do not suffer the irritation of a constant conspiracy to annoy, and thus they look with friendly eyes on policemen, country justices, pedestrians, and roadside hens.

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D.V., who seems to be a somewhat extravagant person, writes to PROGRESS:—I am not a motoring man. I don't know anything about the machines. Although I have smelt them for years now, I only had my first ride the other day. And my hair is still standing. I know a man who has recently been learning to drive, and when I met him on the day I am talking about he said he had learnt it all. That was at Khandallah. He said he should drive me into town, and I timidly murmured a grieved assent. I climbed into the affair and sat beside him. He pulled on a big pair of gloves, set his jaws, squawked with the tooter thing, and the machine jumped for the Ngahauranga Gorge. The Gorge is a complex drop, full of sharp twists and dangerous indecisions; and my man, who had now learned, did most of the distance flying. When he kept the road, he was either skirting a precipice or grazing a cliff; but half the time he was hitting things, and leaping forward like a kangaroo. At one point there is a long loop in the road. He didn't take the turn quickly enough, so the car jumped over. It was only our speed saved us. While we sailed through the air I looked over the side into a blue profundity and prayerfully prepared for the worst. It was my first experience of an aeroplane, and I knew that Wilbur Wright must be a very brave and reckless man. But fortune favours the idiotic; just as I was prepared to die we struck the road again on a slant and skidded on one wheel round the hundred yards or so of the next curve. Then we grazed the fronts of several cottages, stampeded fourteen dogs, and finally fell noisily on Kaiwarra. My man told me that driving a motor was the easiest thing on earth, once a chap had learnt how. I told him I was quite convinced of it.

As to aeroplanes (or aerodromes—take your choice) you will find an admirable article on the Wrights' achievements in the last number of *Everybody's Magazine*. Among a multitude of hoppers and gliders, Farman and one or two others have flown with some success; but there is adequate proof that the Wrights are now flying with complete confidence and security. They have solved the problem, so far as aeroplanes are concerned But there are essential limitations to the possibilities of the new thing. With motors as they are, with aeroplanes of strictly limited carrying capacity, the new flyers can make no very long flights. But, even now, they may revolutionise warfare. An aeroplane like the Wrights could easily sweep over a fort and by dropping one charge shatter it to dust. It marks, for war purposes, an almost infinite advance on the balloon idea. For this reason, it is curious to note that the English War Office has not secured the Wright or the Farman aeroplane, but is still experimenting with hoppers and gliders. The lessons of the Boer War are forgotten, and the War Office remains the stodgiest and dullest department in Britain. It is merely a higher extension of the stodginess and dullness that leads to the persecution of motorists in the rural districts and provincial towns. If somebody doesn't wake up soon, there'll be a good deal to be anxious about

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The growing popularity of small cars becomes more notable in Europe every day. In the English Midlands, the principal demand is for cars from 8 h.p. to 16 h.p., at prices from £200 to £350. South Wales demands cars of from 12 to 15 h.p., four-cylinder, two or five seated. And so it is right through. People of moderate means (the average motorists, that is to say) are getting tired of heavy cars that are costly in up-keep and offer no special compensating advantages. In short, the instinct of empty display is passing, the peacock period is well-nigh spent.

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The introduction of taxicabs in Melbourne is causing much discontent among the drivers of ordinary hansoms. The drivers of the taxis. are smartly dressed, courteous, intelligent fellows, and their charge is regulated to a penny by the useful little dial. Also, the vehicles are clean, comfortable, and swift. Cabbie of the hansoms sees his livelihood threatened; but Cabbie of the hansoms has himself to blame in large measure. Melbourne cabfares, as fixed by law, are not excessive, but Melbourne cabmen are keen on any chance to extort money. Meantime, while we have no knowledge of taxicabs coming to Wellington yet, they are coming to Christchurch. It is an excellent thing that they should come; and the sooner they come to the capital, the better. The by-law regulating cabfares in Wellington is a farce in practice. Scores of people who can afford