



A fine shot which conveys something of the atmosphere of the night sections. A cloud of exhaust vapour rises in the cold night air as the writer's Jupiter leaves the Valence control in the middle of the last night to tackle the snow-bound Col de Cabre.

## No Snow on Our Boots

A DRIVER'S IMPRESSION OF THE 1951 MONTE CARLO RALLY

THE revs rose to a scream in second gear—the finishing line flashed by, the cotton thread broke and we could cut, brake, park the car and relax the tension built up over four days and three nights of motoring. We had checked in on time at Monte Carlo and had just completed the vital acceleration and braking test in 24.5 sec; nearly two seconds slower than all three Jupiters had achieved in practice, but still not too bad on a water-logged course. Now to relax and enjoy the luxury of doing nothing, and doing it slowly while waiting our turn to unload the baggage and put the car in the *parc fermé*.

It was easy to relax the body, but flashing through the mind like an endless newsreel were scenes from last night and those breathless early morning hours. Fighting against fatigue and driving with the fingertips to control incipient skids on the miles of ice over the notorious mountain sections from Clermont Ferrand to Le Puy and Valence. Vainly trying to sleep while Raymond Baxter took the car over the snowbound Col de Cabre and rushed on, making up time over slippery roads through Grasse to Digne.

Taking the wheel again to plunge into a snowstorm and fight for wheelgrip in deepening snow on the Col de Leques. Debating whether to lose time fitting chains or press on and

take the chance of getting stuck. Deciding to take a chance, and then juggling a way with spinning wheels past other competitors who had made the same decision and got hopelessly trapped in the snow. The descent to Castellane and the slide through the snow-covered square in a tightly packed bunch of cars which nearly demolished the ciné camera on the corner, and gave a lensful of action. Then up over the Col de Luens, the Col de Valferrière, the Pas de la Faye and the Col du Pilon. They are all names on the route card with height figures rising to 3,800 feet, but in retrospect they merge into an endless succession of slippery snow-covered hairpin bends, of desperate efforts to get past slower cars, of slides on the edge of dizzy drops as we dodged trucks and snow ploughs, and somewhere a fantastic struggle with coils of wire from a line of demolished telegraph poles.

Then the dash down the treacherous lower slopes from Grasse in blinding rain, a quick refuel at Nice, a check of all electrical equipment and the never-ending run along the tortuous Lower Corniche to clock in at Monte Carlo with a minute in hand. Finally, screwing together every remnant of skill and concentration, using every rev the engine would give and using all the brakes one dared in the acceleration





and braking test on a course which was swimming in water.

Now to relax. But here was Donald Healey telling us we had all lost time by braking too gently and the sun was already peeping through the clouds to dry the course for the later arrivals. Soon little wisps of steam were rising from the track and tyres were beginning to squeal as later arrivals crammed their brakes on really hard. The Lisbon starters were still to come and would do the test on a dry course. A Lisbon winner seemed certain and for a gloomy period as one car after another crashed over the recording strip with locked wheels it seemed as if Lisbon starters would monopolize the final test, to which only the best fifty performers in the brake test would be admitted.

**But No**

It did not turn out quite like that, and the British contingent from Glasgow had a fair share of success, but these were the agonized speculations which occupied tired crews during the excessively long wait outside the *parc fermé*.

From the time the first car arrived at 8.07 a.m. it was an hour and a half before any competitor recorded less than 25 seconds. Then Hillen and Schade (Ford) did it, followed by a procession of Simcas and Ken Rawlings (Vanguard). During the next hour and a half only two big cars managed it and there was another long wait until soon after midday, when Vard and Waring with Jaguars and Ellison and I with Jupiters broke "25." The course was drying off nicely when a Citroen from Monte Carlo did it, then Mrs. Stanley Turner's Alvis clocked 24.7 and Trevoux came in with his unbeatable 22.6. From then on it was plain sailing for the

**by Gordon Wilkins**

remaining Lisbon finishers, five of whom recorded less than 25 sec. Against this background, Colin Vard's run in 23.1 sec on a waterlogged course stands out as a magnificent effort.

The vital importance of the acceleration and braking test arises from the method of marking.

On the 2,000-mile road section, drivers had to average 50 k.p.h. (31 m.p.h.). They could maintain a higher speed up to 65 k.p.h. (41½ m.p.h.), and, at each control, cars arriving early were put in a closed park. The crews could then rest or relax until the time equivalent to the 50 k.p.h. average was reached. With Raymond Baxter and I, the time margin usually went making recordings for the broadcast reports of the rally, but we did manage to get about an hour's sleep at Lille, Amsterdam and Brussels. As hotels seem to have the habit of charging the same for an hour in bed as for a full night, sleep cost about a £1 an hour, but seemed well worth it at the time.

Competitors checking in before the minimum time fixed, or after the maximum time, were penalized, and in the interests of public safety a competitor who had driven much too fast could be excluded at the request of the national club of the country in which the incident occurred.



After checking in at the final control, competitors pass under this arch to begin the acceleration and braking test on the quayside at Monte Carlo. The car is the Humber Super Snipe driven by three London police officers, which was handled magnificently on the road section, but was not quick enough in the acceleration and braking test to qualify for the final run round the Grand Prix circuit.

Time early or late on the road section carried penalties at the rate of 10 marks per minute but the time taken in the acceleration and braking test was counted at the rate of a half mark per second, or 30 marks per minute.

The final test, to which only the best 50 were admitted, consisted of six laps of the Monte Carlo Grand Prix circuit, at 3.18 kilometres (1.98 miles) per lap. The last four laps were the most important, as the times recorded there were used to decide the results on the formula:

$$R = \frac{T + 1.2 (E1 + E2 + E3)}{10}$$

where T is the time of the fastest lap in seconds and E1, E2, E3 represent the difference in seconds between this and the other three laps. Time taken on the circuit is therefore penalized at the rate of only six marks a minute and irregularity at the rate of 7.2 marks a minute. This shows why even Chiron, going extremely fast and with great regularity on the circuit, could not make up for an indifferent performance in the acceleration and braking test.

No one who lost marks on the road section stood any chance in the rally this year and this makes it all the more unfortunate that one or two British competitors, experienced enough to know better, jeopardized the chances of several compatriots by obstruction on the snowbound passes.







Cars of all nationalities assumed strange angles under the stress of cornering at the gasworks hairpin. Here is Peter Harper flinging his Hillman Minx round just after passing Pownall's M.G.

## No Snow on Our Boots

*continued*

No photographer ever gets up near the tops of the passes where the conditions are really bad and there is therefore no pictorial record of what went on, but for many miles the snowploughs had been able only to smooth out a track of single car width. On this narrow ribbon of packed snow, reasonable if spectacular progress was possible, even without chains, but any effort to pass another car meant plunging into deep loose snow which immediately swallowed up the power and defeated the manoeuvre. Passing in safety, therefore, required co-operation from the car in front in pulling over at the first suitable point where there was a level or downhill stretch which would assure an easy recovery after entering the heavy snow. Unfortunately, there were several cases where processions of four or five British competitors were held up, all frantically sounding their horns, behind slow drivers who could not keep up the pace and would not give way.

If a car suddenly appears behind you, when previously the road was empty, it is a fair assumption that it is travelling faster than you are. There is no harm in taking the hint and trying to speed up, but if you cannot lose him there is a clear duty to pull over and give him the chance to get ahead.

Some people went to the other extreme and stopped to help fellow-competitors in positions where they could not possibly restart themselves without fitting chains and losing time which could never be made up. We counted ourselves lucky to get through non-stop, for if we had no chains on our wheels, we had at least no snow on our boots.

Any attempt to build up a reasonable time margin in these conditions means proceeding in a series of controlled slides uphill and down, and drivers with a trials background seem happiest at the job, as they are fully accustomed to keeping the throttle wide open when the car is at about 45 degrees to the direction of travel.

On the earlier part of the road section a few impressions stand out vividly from all the rest. First of all, the

astonishing enthusiasm in Britain. In Scotland coalminers and schoolchildren lined the roads to watch the cars pass, and in Ruabon and Wrexham it seemed as if whole populations were pressing on to the road, three or four deep, waving the drivers on as though it were a long-distance road race instead of a rally at closely controlled speeds. The present public enthusiasm for motoring sport in Britain is something never known before, and if the matter were handled properly, we could have Continental-style long-distance rallies and road racing on closed circuits with overwhelming public support in quite a short time.

The same enthusiasm was to be found in France, but not so much in Belgium. In Holland, however, the peak was reached. Customs formalities took less than 30 seconds and on entering the country each British crew was presented with complete route directions for the passage through Holland printed in English. Every important turning was marked by signs which glowed in the light of the head lamps and every major junction was guarded by smart police in black uniforms. Through the main cities we were guided by motor cycle police, who looked like T.T. riders in their white crash helmets and black leathers, and certainly rode to fit the part. Most of the roads were covered in black ice, but if ever we showed a desire to travel faster than the convoy one of the escorts would immediately detach himself and beckon us on. He would then lead us in a fantastic chase through the deserted streets at over 50 m.p.h. Their ability to travel fast on two wheels on ice, while we were using all our efforts to keep going in the right direction on four wheels, excited our unreserved admiration.

## No Help

In Belgium, on both the inward and outward loops, the situation was quite the reverse, and no guidance at all was received. A reader's letter in last week's issue seems to suggest that this was because nobody remembered to tell the Belgian police that the Monte Carlo Rally was happening. However, the situation was restored on re-entering France, and the usual admirable traffic control by the French *gendarmarie* gave competitors an easy and trouble-free run through Rheims to Paris, where further mobile police provided high-speed escorts into and out of the city, the dense



... Trevoux has ten . . .  
(Photograph taken as he watched the scrutineers at work on his engine.)



and rapid traffic of the French capital providing quite as much excitement as the ice-bound roads of Holland.

Another thing which astonishes the British rally competitor is the lavish hospitality offered to crews en route. For the Glasgow contingent it started with open house at the Royal Scottish Automobile Club before the start, and at Lille there were quantities of champagne, far greater than a prudent crew could absorb. At Liège the Royal Motor Union, organizers of the famous Liège-Rome-Liège trial, presented each crew with an enormous hamper, much too large to go in a car the size of ours. Besides sandwiches and fruit, it contained such welcome items as bottles of wine, packets of cigarettes and veal steaks wrapped in Cellophane. At Amsterdam a delightful restaurant was turned over to competitors, who enjoyed meals from a menu on the generous Dutch scale and, as parting gifts, were presented with small bottles of gin and slabs of chocolate by pretty girls in national costume.

In Rheims, the great champagne producers co-operated most effectively with the local automobile club in its efforts to fortify the fatigued crews.

In Paris the *Action Automobile* excelled themselves as usual. Each British crew was taken care of by a beautiful girl, gowned in the manner one normally associates with Paris, and, after champagne and refreshments, they were sent on their way with quantities of ham, fruit, *apéritifs* and liqueurs. Perhaps the Paris control was the hardest of all to leave on schedule, but then that is usually the trouble in Paris, rally or no rally.

At Bourges there was a well-stocked buffet in the former bishop's palace, opposite the lovely cathedral, and at Clermont Ferrand the control was in a local sports stadium. From then on there was little time to enjoy hospitality, but things continued to tumble in through the windows of the car. At Grasse there were bottles of the local perfume, but it has not so far been possible to verify the claims that these were immediately opened and drunk by tired crews, who were by now thoroughly accustomed to receiving alcoholic refreshment as a parting gift.

Inevitably the Llandrindod Wells control did not compare favourably with the others, but the mayor did present us each with a guide book, including a view of Station Crescent and the Post Office.

### Private Enterprise

A happier impression was left by the magnificent buffet offered by one of the garages at Lee which has now become a recognized stopping place for competitors on the route down to Folkestone.

Monte Carlo itself provided a curious incident in the cocktail party at the Exotic Gardens. After the long trek up the steep hill behind Monte Carlo, about half of the guests were unable to obtain any refreshment stronger than a glass of soda water, and in case the revelry should get out of hand on this unaccustomed intake, they were shepherded off the premises by uniformed officials blowing whistles. Fortunately the ball at the Café de Paris and gala dinner at the Sporting Club were more in accordance with the Monte Carlo tradition.

The comic and farcical incidents during the rally and after would, of course, fill a book. There was the British Ford Anglia crew who failed to notice that, from Valence onwards, early time margins were cancelled at each control to make things more difficult, and happily occupied them-

The delays at the finish were prominently reported in the London Press, but any suggestion that the British were going to miss the Gala Dinner in protest was exaggerated.



Accelerate for 656ft and stop with front wheels over a recording strip, reverse until front wheels are behind the line, then accelerate for a further 165ft to a flying finish. That was the acceleration and braking test, and here it is being done by W. H. Waring and W. H. Wadham in a Jaguar, while the surface was still very wet.

selves practising brake tests outside the final control when they should have been checking in. Then there was Prince Lanza di Trabbi, henceforth known as Rip Van Lanza, who slept his way into a heavy time penalty after stopping outside the Clermont Ferrand control with an hour in hand. Prince Lanza gave me a run along the Corniche in his Alfa Romeo 1900 afterwards, and it seems there is some proposal that Alfa Romeo should give him and his crew a dinner at which they will each be presented with an alarm clock.

Then there was the man who fell asleep and got himself locked up for the night in one of the more exotic night clubs. After waking up at about nine in the morning, he broke his way out, only to fall into the hands of two gendarmes who proposed to arrest him for breaking and entering. He protested that he was merely breaking and exiting.

The 4½-litre Delahaye used by Trevoux and Chiron is a post-war model not hitherto seen much in competitions. Front suspension is Dubonnet and there is a De Dion axle at the rear. The chassis is usually fitted with special bodywork by the great French *carrossiers*, and none of the literature I have seen makes any specific claim to the weight of a complete car. The two cars which finished in the first ten had very light special bodywork with every surplus ounce pared off the panelling and fittings, and the one used by Chiron had the popular lightweight seats made of rubber stretched over a tubular framework. It must be emphasized, however, that they were thoroughly practical in style, with large space within for four or five people.

### Auxiliary Power

Chiron's car was well streamlined with a fully swept back, but the winning car used by Trevoux had a more conservative notched back with big rear windows. This results from Trevoux's experience in being hustled in last year's Mexican road race by transatlantic thrusters, who did not hesitate to close up and give him a nudge from the rear. It is a considerable shock to a driver bred in the well-ordered European road racing tradition when, to quote Trevoux's own words, "I suddenly find there are horses which I do not have under my foot." Hence the large rear window on his latest car.

With three carburetors, as used for the rally, the 4½-litre six-cylinder engine, which has push-rod operated overhead valves, normally gives 137 b.h.p., but the inspection after the event showed that proper advantage had been taken of the modifications permitted by the regulations, and it seems reasonable to suppose these engines were giving about 180 horse power.

Well, it is all over, and now a lot more of us are entitled to wear the little round badge with the bar which indicates the year in which we finished on time. More than ever, we envy the veterans with the long strings of bars which seem to dangle almost to their knees. Trevoux, for example, has ten of them. One of the best consecutive sets is that of Col. Barnes, of the R.A.C., who has seven in a row.