



THE AUTOMOBILE WORLD.

ACROSS FRANCE ON A "30-98"

ALONG the world's fastest roads on the world's fastest car! Do not the worlds conjure up in the mind of every enthusiastic motorist the most perfect picture he can conceive? Everybody knows that that Vauxhall model known affectionately by its catalogue description as the 30-98 h.p. is the fastest car supplied to the public in the ordinary way of business, and everybody knows, or thinks he knows, that the roads of France are the fastest in the world. What more perfect combination, therefore, than a 30-98 on those roads?

Although from previous experience I knew that the fame of French roads as ideals for the motorist really belonged to that ever-growing domain of popular fallacies, the opportunity of testing the latest version of this super sports touring car by a journey across France and back was not one to be missed. Whatever the justice of the reputation of French roads, there could be no question of that of the car's, and as roads, like other things, change with time, it was at least possible that we might find somewhere in France perhaps a couple of miles, perhaps only half a mile, that would provide opportunity of verifying the rumours heard to the effect that the new overhead valve 30-98 was a great improvement over its side by side predecessor. When told of this improvement I had firmly refused to believe it, because such a thing seemed impossible. By a stroke of great good fortune we managed to find the requisite two miles stretch several times in our journey across the terrain of our closest and most friendly neighbour, and the result is that we believe the current 30-98 Vauxhall to be even more ahead of its rivals than was its predecessor of its contemporaries. And to describe the modern model as a great improvement over its ancestor is to express things very mildly indeed. What most of us who knew the old 30-98 considered to be impossible has been achieved, and a car has been produced, and is available as a standard production to anyone who can appreciate the best, which will leave the old 30-98 standing under any conditions, and which has powers of acceleration that will make any other internal combustion engine touring car look silly. In its day the side by side valve model had to search among the racing cars and the super sports sixes for a rival to its acceleration. The present 30-98 finds a worthy rival only in the absolutely "crack" racing cars.

A trip by road across a foreign country is inevitably interesting whatever the means of transport employed, but when that transport is a motor car of quite exceptional character the interest is increased much more than two-fold. Therefore I propose to deal with this adventure in two sections. In the present and first the car and its behaviour will be the main theme; in the second, to follow in due course, my

chief object will be to describe some of the most attractive motoring country in France. But because many Britishers are now on the point of returning from the Riviera by road, perhaps a brief reference to the routes we followed out and home may be of practical value as indicating where the best and worst roads are to be found.

A way down to the south of France previously described in these pages and having the attractions of really beautiful scenery and most interesting historical associations is that right across the Auvergnés and Cévennes Mountains. The normal route for the crossing of France is that which, after skirting Paris to the west, picks up Route Nationale No. 7, and after running alongside the River Loire for some distance, leaves it to rise over a spur of the Cévennes (near St. Etienne) and thence follows the Rhone Valley down to Avignon. A variant of the same route is through Dijon, Macon and Lyon, but previous experience of Route Nationale No. 7 and recent reports of the condition of the Dijon-Macon route led me to choose my old favourite way, the line of which may be traced on the map through Rouen, Chartres, Vierzon, Bourges, Montlucon, Clermont-Ferrand, le Puy, Alais, Avignon, Aix-en-Provence, Brignoles and San Rafael.

Because much of this route lies through mountainous country, where the French lorry driver cannot drive at full speed all day and every day, the roads have previously been fairly good by comparison with those of other routes. This year all went well with us as far as Bourges (263 miles from Dieppe after a detour to Blois),

and during this, our first day's run, we covered many stretches of half a dozen miles or more in as many minutes, a feat that the 30-98 accomplishes just as naturally, comfortably and easily as the ordinary car would travel at half the speed. The few bad stretches that we met were no worse than might have been met in North Wales or Lancashire, most cars would have negotiated them at about 15 m.p.h. without risk or discomfort, we went over them at 25-30 m.p.h. without anxiety or sense of imposing any undesirable stress on selves or car. And so in nine hours running time we covered the 263 miles without feeling unduly tired at the end. But that day was to be our best, although it witnessed our only puncture. A big nail penetrated the back tyre when we were doing our normal 60 m.p.h. on a good surface, and we had our first evidence of the true wonder of the car that was carrying us, for we deviated from our course not one inch, although the cover partially left the rim, and came to rest as steadily as if all four tyres were O.K.

But at Bourges we left the good roads behind for a long interval, and the farther south we went the worse they became, after an interlude of improvement in places over the mountains, the climax arriving between Aix-en-Provence and Toulon. We had become quite used by this time to covering stretches of half a dozen miles or so without once exceeding 20 m.p.h.—a speed that may be taken as equivalent to about 10 m.p.h. on any other car of less than 40 h.p.—and on one or two occasions we had thought we had reached the limit. But the fifty miles

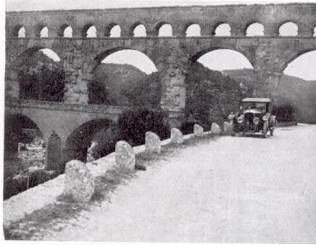
between Aix and Toulon made the previous worst seem like a joy ride. For one stretch of twenty miles we never once exceeded 8 m.p.h., and most of the time our speedometer needle indicated 5 m.p.h.—five miles an hour, not a misprint for fifteen or fifty. And even at this speed we felt we were going as fast as we dare. If I try to express my precise feelings about this road this estimable journal will, I am afraid, come perilously near suppression by the Censor. If I attempt to describe that road surface exactly as it is, I shall either be accused of gross exaggeration or shall simply not be believed. We will let it go at the bald statement that on a car in perfect condition that does its 80 m.p.h. as easily as most cars of its power do their fifty, we were more than content with a speed of five miles an hour. It was a terrible strain both to car and occupants, and the liver of at least one of the party received a stirring up from which not even a week's rest in Riviera sunshine and an easy trip home sufficed for a recovery.

The Cévennes mountains between le Puy and Alais are full of the most beautiful and awesome scenery, and le Puy is one of the most interesting towns in France. Although lying at the bottom of a basin of mountains, it is over 2,000ft.



THE PALAIS DE JUSTICE, ROUEN.

PRESERVE



The famous Roman aqueduct Pont du Gard, between Nîmes and Avignon.



Outside the Roman amphitheatre, Nîmes—one of the best relics of its kind extant.



Entering Avignon by the fine suspension bridge over the Rhône.

above sea level, and the enormous outcrops of rock rising vertically from its streets and crowned with huge statues, a chapel or a complete cathedral, surely rank among the wonders of the world. From this town the road lies right over the Cévennes, and until it drops down to the plains of the south—at Alais—its surface is comparatively good. But violent twists and turns and occasional sharp gradients mean that the going must be slow, so that we felt very well pleased with our day's run of 222 miles from Clermont-Ferrand to Nîmes. Clermont is a town that has changed its claim to fame from ecclesiastical councils to the manufacture of pneumatic tyres, Nîmes is content to rest on that accruing from its development by the Romans of old. It does not lie on the direct road from Alais to Avignon, but the detour involved is slight and well worth while, for the Roman remains of the town are supposed to be the best preserved in Europe—the Arena is still used for bullfights, while the aqueduct of Pont du Gard is world-famous.

Like Nîmes, Toulon is off the direct route, but has an inducement to offer for the detour. In this case it is not the town itself but the extremely beautiful coast road from it, as soon as Hyères is passed, to San Rafael. This road with its continuation to Cannes under the name of the Corniche d'Or is a run that no Riviera motorist should miss, but it is not worth the pains of the run from Aix to Toulon, and should therefore be covered by a special run from Cannes to Hyères and back—no one will regret retracing his steps amid so much and so varied beauty.

But I am spending too much time in the description of a route that I advise all pleasure travellers to avoid, at least until authentic information is available that the roads have been repaired—stones ready for the work lie almost all the way from Bourges to Toulon—and must get on to the car part of the story after a very brief summary of the best way home from the Riviera. This is through Grasse, Digne, Col de la Croix, Haute, Grenoble, Chambéry, Amberieu, Chalon-sur-Saône, Avallon (it is most important to avoid Dijon), Auxerre, Fontainebleau, Versailles or Paris—according to one's feeling about driving in Paris traffic which makes Holborn on a busy day seem like a deserted country lane—Gisors and Dieppe. On this route the roads are on the whole very

good, with occasional stretches of bad, instead of, as on most other routes, very bad with occasional stretches of good. There need be no fear of road blockage by snow and the total distance is much shorter than *via* the Cévennes, the respective figures being 760 and 903 miles from Monte Carlo to Dieppe. The scenery is perhaps even finer than that of the Cévennes—it is certainly much more famous—and I hope to be able to say more about it at an early date.

A REMARKABLE CAR.

And now for the car that carried us so nobly. Let us first of all get away from the idea that this 30-98 is a racing car. It is an extremely fast touring car—undoubtedly the fastest in the world—but there is nothing of the racer in its disposition, although there is no car to which the term "thoroughbred" may be applied more accurately. With a four-seater body the car has a guaranteed speed of 80 m.p.h. or 100 m.p.h. with a single-seater racing body, yet there is no more easily handled car on the road. With all the attributes of the big luxury vehicle, and with all those attributes *in excelsis* too, this Vauxhall handles just like a small light car. One can do anything with it, and greater docility on the part of any mechanical object than that exhibited by this car at the will of its driver cannot be imagined.

On top gear it will literally "tootle" along—the expression is ugly but I think expressive—at any speed between 10 and 50 m.p.h., and it is mere statement of plain fact to say that anywhere between these limits the presence of an engine can barely be detected. We did most of our travelling at round about 50 m.p.h., and at that speed the running of both car and engine was comparable to that of an ordinary 20 h.p. at about half the speed. This is no exaggeration, incredible as it may seem it is mere statement of fact. A slight hiss from the carburettor and a musically gentle burble from the exhaust were the only signs of a working engine to be detected; rather less than half throttle sufficed to give this extremely comfortable and pleasant touring speed, and what a delight it is to be able to do 50 m.p.h. with less than half the horses in the bonnet-stable doing any work!

And what a still greater delight it is to be able to put one's foot down ever so

slightly and at 50 m.p.h. feel a thump in the back and the exhilaration of a fully laden four-seater car simply leaping away! It was worth all the cost of the trip, almost the endurance of those abominable roads, to see the faces of those French drivers who drew up level with us as we toddled along at our modest 50 on good roads. To a Frenchman a good car must be a fast car, and so he drives with his foot hard down and with open exhaust on every possible occasion. We would hear one coming up from behind and would continue our stately march until he drew level and glowed with pleasure at the anticipation of passing the ordinary-looking G.B. touring car with its hood and side curtains erected and its occupants enjoying comfort that was surely quite irreconcilable with any capacity for speed. But when the Frenchman saw that instead of drawing ahead he was only keeping level with this yellow mystery, he began to show signs of surprise; when he tried a little harder and still failed to do more than hold his own, he began to look cross; when finally the Vauxhall throttle went just a tiny bit wider open and the road became once more our own, we heard the roar of that French exhaust first bellowing and then fading in the distance just like an outburst of futile anger.

From the time of leaving London until the return I never once had my foot right down on the accelerator, but nevertheless we did one stretch of some three miles at a steady 80 m.p.h. And this with a fully laden body and the hood up! At this speed the car rode as steadily and was as easily steered as at half the figure, and it goes almost without saying that there was no suggestion of an engine vibration period. If there were, such a car would have a life of about six months with good luck; owing to the super design and partly no doubt to the Lan-chester harmonic balancer, this four-cylinder Vauxhall runs at all speeds like one of the very best sixes ever made, and it has a performance that few touring six-cylinder cars can hope to equal. The dimensions of the engine are only 98mm. by 140mm. (R.A.C. rating 23.6 h.p.), but the actual output on the brake of the latest models is over 115 b.h.p.!

Almost needless to say, the chassis of the car is as good as its engine. If it were not, the car would be all but useless, for it is of no use to have an engine that



A characteristic Auvergne valley (R. Sioule).



On the coast road from Hyères to San Rafael.



One of many similar inlets on the Corniche d'Or.

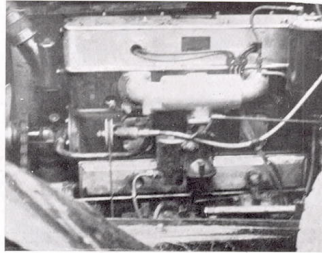
PRESERVE

will pull a car at high speeds if the chassis is not fully up to the enormous stresses imposed. Steering, braking and suspension must be perfect, otherwise such a car becomes a danger to all connected with it. As a matter of fact, the one point about this car that left a shadow of doubt in my mind was its braking, for after the run down and about half of the journey back the four-wheel brakes—actually one on each front wheel and one on the transmission behind the gear-box—required frequent adjustment, and such adjustment is not given so easily as might be the case. For ordinary roads the suspension is just perfect, though on some of the very bad patches we unavoidably struck at over 25 m.p.h.—these bad patches often follow perfect surfaces with absolute suddenness and no signs of a coming change—the back axle struck the chassis frame with a nasty jar so that stronger rear springs for continuous foreign touring seem to be indicated. Tightening the Hartford shock absorbers failed to effect a complete cure, though this reduced the evil appreciably. And while on the fault-finding tack, I may as well enumerate those others which revealed themselves. Such a car as this can stand criticism, and such a trip as ours may be relied on to reveal any potential weakness. And in spite of these failings I still regard this 30-98 as the very best thing yet done in motor cars where large body capacity is not important.

These failings are then, first, simplest and least excusable, that the filler of the fuel tank is so placed that refilling when any luggage is on the grid is all but impossible. In extenuation it may be urged that a luggage grid is not a standard fitting, and so the owner who has one introduces a factor for which the designer has not allowed. But, on the other hand, such a car needs a luggage grid. Second, the carburettor is so placed that when flooded its drippings fall on to the dynamo; this may not be really serious, but it

suggests unpleasant things. Third, the all-weather side curtains are of the old-fashioned kind that cannot be erected without the hood to support them, and they are held by push buttons. Lastly, and this is of little significance for British use of the car, the steering lock is rather small. I found it necessary to reverse this car on several road corners that I used to swing round quite easily on another car of about the same over-all dimensions.

But what can one expect? The perfect motor car is as yet a long way



The engine of the world's fastest touring car.

ahead—thank Heaven, for if it were not my job as a critic would cease—and in spite of these things it is undoubtedly one of the best cars on the market at anything like its price, viz., £1,150. Oh, yes, there are many cars both cheaper and larger, there are even some that will make the 30-98 driver put his foot down, but taking all in all, there is nothing better, and those who intend to wait until there is before they taste the best and greatest joys that motoring can offer will need a long lease on life. For whatever the view-point or standard from which one

may judge a car, no one in his senses will attempt to deny that for the very best, the truly most enjoyable *pleasure motoring*, the 30-98 is the car.

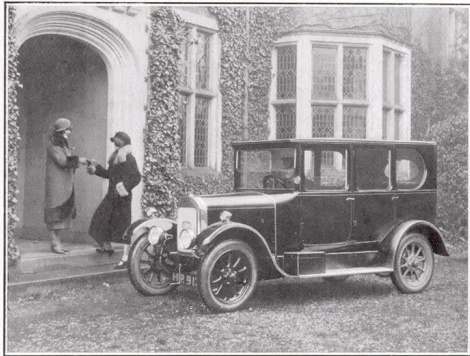
And just a final word on one aspect of this Vauxhall performance that will speak volumes to those who can understand—the gear-box gives four forward speeds (and a delightfully easy change at that) and the car will do 40 m.p.h. on second and a mile a minute on third! Not that any reasonable driver wants to take advantage of these two wonderful capacities, but think what they mean in handiness, in traffic and in hill climbing. Oh! I could write a book about this car and its behaviour at home and abroad, but this must suffice for the present. And perhaps I shall be able to sandwich a few more words about the car in my later story that will chiefly tell things about some of the good roads and beautiful scenery that may be enjoyed in France in springtime. W. HAROLD JOHNSON.

A GOOD RECORD.

AN example of the lasting capacity of a high-class car is afforded by the 1924 record of Colonel Forbes' Wolseley. This car of the 14-20 h.p. type was bought new in 1909, and has been in continuous service ever since its total mileage being over 73,000. The following table of last year's running costs speaks for itself:

Weight unladen, 23cwt.	
Miles run, 7,932.	£ s. d.
Petrol consumed, 350	
galls., costing	31 18 7 22.6 m.p.g.
Oil and grease, 19 galls.	5 4 3 41.0 m.p.g.
Repairs	4 6 6
Tyres	10 11 0
Tools, spare parts and	
extras	5 3 9
Carriage tax and licences	16 0 0
Insurance	9 3 7
Total cost for year 1924	£82 7 8
Cost per mile, 2½d.	

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