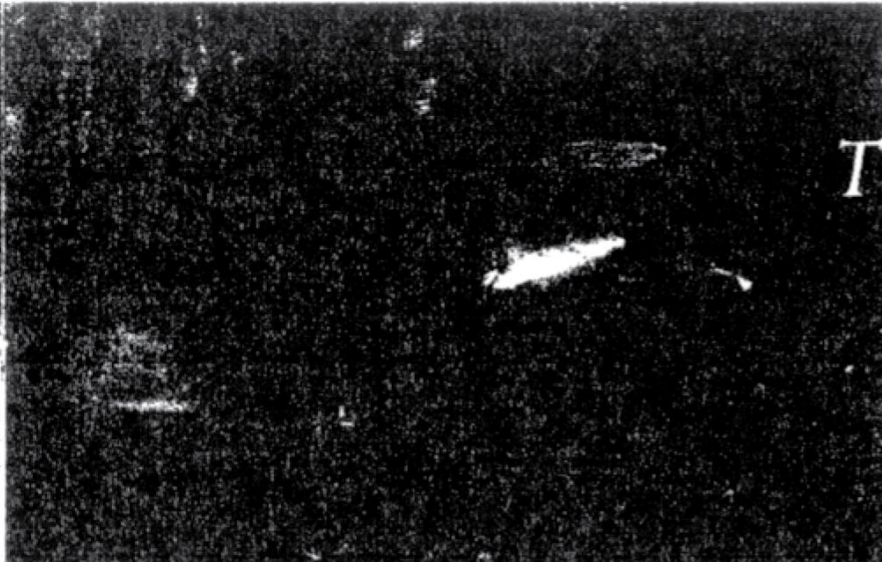


They Stopped



NIGHT SPOT.—A beech wood near Orleans was one of the sites for overnight camping, the 1925 Morris being used as a guy-rope stay for the tent. Barclay takes advantage of the opportunity to mend a puncture.

THE Heroic Age of motoring, to most people, means the early 1900s, when cars were huge and their drivers wore shaggy coats. This being so, a historian, if asked to name the "toughest" long-distance journey, would probably cite the New York to Paris race (1908), or the Peking to Paris event held in the previous year. Those were two very fine achievements. Carried out in the glare of publicity, they put motoring "on the map" for thousands who had not seen a car, and they proved, in case later generations should doubt it, that the Edwardian car of large horsepower was a truly "go anywhere" vehicle: in fact they carried on the business of worldwide publicity from the point where Mr. Glidden in his globe-encircling British Napier had left off. But the crews of the American Thomas Flyer and of the Italian Itala which were victorious in those events enjoyed full "works" support, and were extremely fully prepared. Nothing *ex tempore* or casual—and of course, none the worse for that. Very few of the competitors—"almost none," one might say—had found their cars under a haystack, or bought them for only £10.

That is where the drive from London to the Equator by Ian Barclay and Bruce Gilbert-Smith this year departed so far from the protocol. Their car was found under some straw, and Barclay bought it for a tanner, in the twenty-fifth year of its age. "Immediate delivery" was the cry when he saw that "bull-nose" bonnet sticking out from a pile of straw; Barclay, aged twenty-one, wanted a car very much, and when, studying farming at Cirencester, he spotted this one in a barn, he bought the thing right away. It was the work of a moment to throw away

the remains of a hay-sweep which the Morris had once had to push, and fit a new magneto. From then on, the Bull-nose never looked back. Its engine proved thoroughly sound; it was easy to start, and—modern manufacturers note—it had never required a re-bore. A few weeks later Barclay drove to Copenhagen, via Holland and Germany. He found his 1925 Morris most economical on oil and petrol,

and absolutely reliable. In short a very good vehicle for touring.

During the next few months the Bull-nose became part of the local fauna wherever Barclay happened to be, and although strangers might find its Early English (no, to say Perpendicular) lines quaint in this era of bloated pressed tin, its owner's friends and relations soon took it entirely for granted. The Morris was simply "Ian's car"—except on formal and state occasions, when sometimes it became "That car of Ian's!"

Early in March of last year Ian Barclay decided to emigrate. A friend had the same idea, and the pair agreed to join forces.

They would take the car, of course; in fact it would be rather fun to travel overland in the Oxford; there's nothing like motoring as a means of seeing the country. Having decided which, Ian Barclay and Bruce Gilbert-Smith picked a date some five weeks ahead, which was optimistic—but as someone remarked, if you don't take time by the forelock and the bull by the nose, you never get anywhere, or thereabouts. And, of course, they made it. There were innumerable visas and passport permits to get, forms (1,000 off) to fill up, injections and vaccinations to suffer, and spare parts to acquire. Spares for a 1925 Oxford are something you find if you know where to go; a tropical-rain-proof tent is more simple, as you merely get someone to make it.

On the way down to Dover it rained. Darkness fell with a dismal splash, the dynamo would not charge, and the sparking-plugs went on short time. Despite a theatrical precedent, things were not "all right on the night": the party called on some friends, missed the boat, and slept in a bus-shelter to make sure of crossing next morning. After that it was foggy, and the boat-trip took nearly all day.

The road from Dunkirk to Paris, Barclay later told people in Cairo, was one of the worst he had so far encountered: a testimonial that the Bull-nose would gladly



THE STRAITS of Dover and of Gibraltar were the only places on the journey where the car was not travelling on its wheels. Above is a scene during the latter crossing.



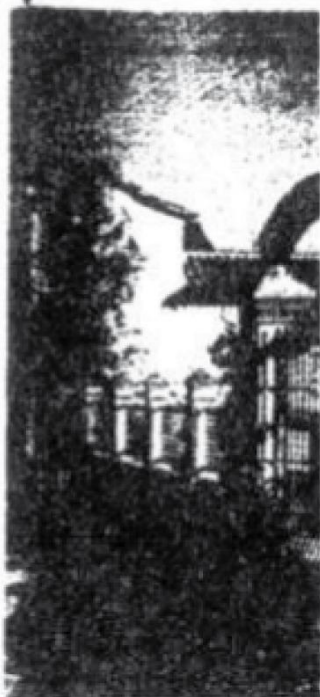
at Nothing

The Story of Ian Barclay
and His Bull-nosed Morris,
Related by D. B. TUBBS

PART I



A BLINDING mid-day sun made it hot going on the first stage of the Eastern Desert, not far from Suez.



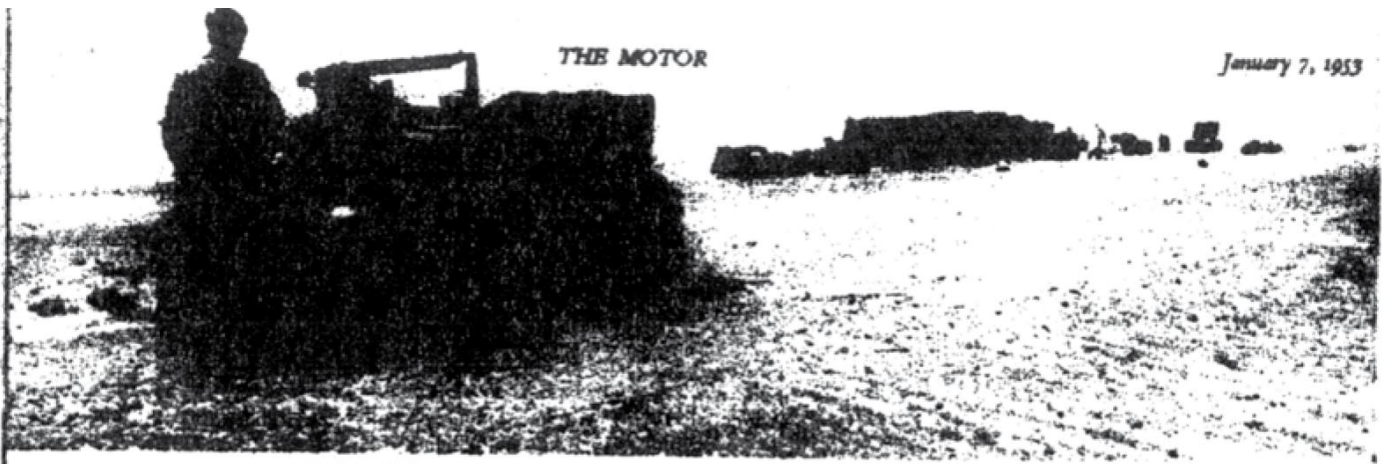
endorse. The car was heavily laden, and the springs were not up to the weight. A rear spring collapsed four times before reaching Paris, two days later. Each time this happened the crew jettisoned some of their kit—here a map-board, here the third spare tyre, and so on, gradually lightening the load; but in Paris they took a day off to fit extra leaves in the back springs. This job was done down a side street, with the Morris jacked up on jerricans. Precarious but effective; and in celebration of this thoroughly Parisian repair, the Oxford did 280 miles next day starting at 11.30 via Orleans for Limoges. To celebrate the good roads, the machine ran beautifully

BRIGHT DAY.—
There was strong sunshine in Granada, Spain, but the distant mountains were white

and all went well until they had almost reached Biarritz.

After breaking camp and cruising for a couple of hours at a steady 40 m.p.h., the crew heard a loud knock in the engine which sounded like a big-end. There was nothing for it but to push the car clear of the road, and remove the sump there and then. This proved a rather long job, and it was dark before they finally got it off and discovered the cause of the knocking, which was not due to bearings at all, but simply to the starting-handle pin, which had worked loose in the crankshaft and was tapping against the crank-case. A tap with a hammer put this right, but while the sump was off Barclay and his companion had a look at the big-ends and removed a few of the shims. This made the engine much quieter, and they crossed into Spain the next day.

"We were impressed mostly in Spain" (to use Ian Barclay's own words) "by the cheerfulness of the people, in spite of their extreme poverty, the beauty of the country and the bad surface of the roads. We came across very few cars. The popular means of transport seems to be the donkey; one tiny donkey often being loaded not only



THE WASTELAND.—Panting with the heat, the bull-nose gets her radiator topped-up near Stax.

They Stopped at Nothing - - Contd.

with two passengers, but also a great deal of luggage.

"The journey through Spain via San Antonio, Madrid and Granada took three days. For two nights we camped in the Sierras. There was snow on the mountains all around and the temperature dropped to well below freezing during the early morning, so it was decided to press on and try to reach Malaga on the Mediterranean as soon as possible. The last part of the journey was dangerous. The road passes over the last range of Sierras and then drops 5,000 feet in a distance of a few kilometres. All this had to be traversed using very dim sidelights only—and these eventually faded out completely.

"There were drops of hundreds of feet—not only on one side of the road, but frequently on both; and no moon to prevent our going over the edge. But the temperature rose rapidly as we neared the sea, and it was with a certain amount of relief that we reached a camping site overlooking Malaga and the Mediterranean. The coastal road round to Gibraltar was delightful, and most pleasant for bathing. We stayed in a cheap hotel for the first night in Gib, and were introduced the following morning to Mr. Davis, manager of the Shell Co., who was most kind to us, putting us up at their quay-side offices and placing two mechanics at our disposal while we were staying there. All along the route, people have shown great interest in the car; but on the quay at Gib the number of people we met who had 'owned one in '24,' or who enquired 'Has she got the Hotchkiss engine?' was incredible."

To cross the Straits of Gibraltar to Tangier takes about two hours by boat. On arrival the voyagers struck a snag—bureaucratic rather than marine. Oscar Wilde once defined a cynic as "a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing"; but the Tangerine customs officials can never have read their Wilde, because they got the quotation all wrong. They could value the Morris Oxford, but they would not credit its price. No car, they maintained, was worth so little as ten pounds sterling; anything "runnable" was worth at least ten times that amount. So either Monsieur Barclay must put down a Customs Deposit, or find someone to alter the Carnet. Even in so-called Free Ports, lucre raises its ugly head! Finally the Touring Club sent a man down, and the papers were changed for the better.

Northern Africa offers some very delightful motoring, but it must not be thought that the weather is always good—at least in early May. The party were greeted with heavy rains in Tangier; and it was still raining when they left two days later after staying with friends. They set out for Tunis on a Wednesday afternoon, and crossed into Spanish Morocco that evening, where it deluged with rain all night. The country is wild and mountainous—as one would expect of the Barbary Coast—but the party met none of those fierce peoples known to the inaccurate historian as Riff-raff, and pressed on without mechanical hindrance to reach French Morocco the following night.

The French zone is very fertile, and not nearly so poor as the Spanish. To young Farmer Barclay's surprise they drove through vast plains covered in cornfields—an enormous acreage of wheat, some of it being gathered by combine harvesters. As they reached Algeria the weather improved and the country became really lovely, with more cornfields, orange groves, and the vineyards which supply much of the Frenchman's *vin ordinaire*. The Oxford then took the *corniche* road, passing through vast forests of cork-oak and much more mountainous country, with superb views between Oran and Algiers, where they arrived on the Saturday night.

On the Boil

There were certain bits of *corniche* which the Oxford liked somewhat less. The road between Bougie and Philippeville is most beautiful as it winds and undulates around the coast, bordered on the one side by steep mountains and on the other by the Mediterranean, but while the crew were admiring the country, the car was forced to complain. It was here, climbing a very long steep hill at the hottest time of the day, that the engine boiled for the first time; then, just outside Bore (where, in the 1930s a Grand Prix used to be held) a back spring suddenly broke. And so, to quote Barclay again, "we removed all the luggage from that side of the car and

carried on until we found a camping place where we replaced the leaf the following morning, watched by a crowd of interested Arabs."

The 1,600 mile journey from Tangier to Tunis was accomplished in six days—which everyone agreed was good going. Here the Oxford and its crew slept apart, Barclay and Gilbert-Smith putting

THE FIRST TIME she boiled—in Algeria. Steam issues from the radiator that gave this model its name.



They Stopped at Nothing - Contd.

up at a house in the Arab quarter, where they were extremely comfortably housed, and the car staying some way away because of the narrowness of the streets.

For the next three days of the journey there was a strong following wind. The road to Sfax is well-surfaced, and practically straight all the way; the vegetation grows less and less as it approaches Sousse, and the donkey gives way to the camel as a popular beast of burden. Soon, between Sousse and Sfax, the travellers were driving over their first real stretch of desert. Beyond Sfax, the surface of the road deteriorated, and the country on the way to Tripoli was completely desolate. Tripoli seemed impressively clean under British influence, and the old Morris drew crowds at each parking-place, but the sign-posting proved pretty poor, and it was some time before the road to Benghazi disclosed itself, rough, pot-holed, war-torn and littered with second-hand military bric-a-brac left over from the Libyan campaigns. "Desert Highway," though an excellent name for a film, is a poor description of the roads as they are at the moment; many bridges are still down, and deep pot-holes gape through the surface where the tarmac has worn away. It helped, when covering these stretches, to let some of the pressure out of the Oxford's front tyre. Things did not improve until the Egyptian frontier was reached at Soflum.

Despite the political tension, the Oxford and its British crew were extraordinarily kindly received. They had counted on being able to cash a cheque at Soflum, to buy petrol and supplies, but they discovered to their dismay that there was no bank or hotel in the town. The nearest place was at Alexandria—240 miles away. But just when they were wondering whether to hitch-hike into Alex, cash a cheque and return for the car, or to retrace their wheel-tracks 100 miles to Tobruk, an Egyptian customs official came forward and most generously lent them £4, enabling them to reach Alex easily. At El Alamein they inspected the monuments to the Forward British Minefield and Forward German minefield of 1942, and looked at the acres and acres of derelict tanks and equipment still "awaiting disposal" there. From Alexandria to Cairo they took the desert road, and were impressed by the sight of the Pyramids as they approached them in the late evening.

Barclay, Gilbert-Smith and their Morris were in Egypt for some six weeks. Part of the time in Cairo, and part of it in Fayid, where they worked for the Cairo Motor Company, while trying to break through red tape. The Official Mind, apparently, was not impressed by the Morris in spite of all it had done. Even though the car was repainted (with green paint, overnight) and beat up some new Morris Minors in a rally put on by the R.A.P., the Official Mind stood firm. Government regulations said that all cars crossing the Sudan must be of more than 20 h.p. or equipped with four-wheel drive; that



VISTA.—This was the travellers' first view of Egypt, the sweeping Gulf of Soflum.

desert tyres were compulsory, and vehicles must be inspected for roadworthiness before leaving Egypt. As though that were not enough, the Sudan agent in Cairo received a cable from Khartoum: "Under no circumstances will such an old car be allowed to enter the country."

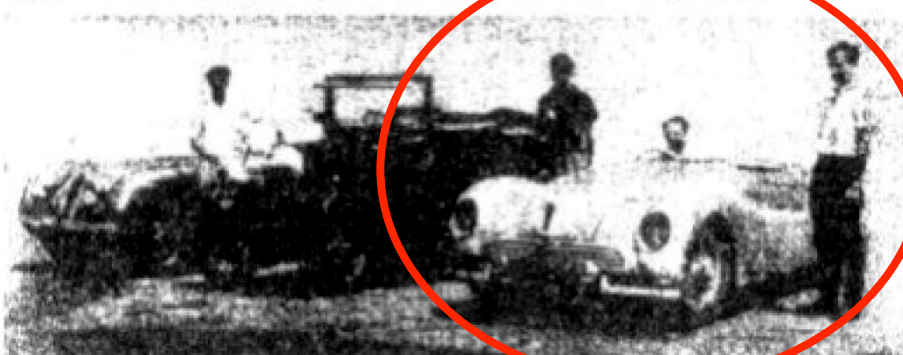
One of those situations which Bureaucracy loves to produce, the Oxford might not proceed, and its passengers, very soon, would have to leave, willy-nilly, because their visas were due to expire. For some time it looked as though sea travel was the only possibility left; but the fixed rate for a car from Suez to Port Sudan turned out to be £35—an incredibly large sum for the distance, and beyond the expedition's means. But at last an alternative appeared.

There was, it seems, a "road" running parallel with the Red Sea from Suez to Port Sudan, although no one thought very much of it. This route, said those in authority, was used only once every four years. It had never been crossed by vehicles except in convoy, and, so far as anyone knew, never by a normal touring car at all. And a pass (unobtainable) must be got.

As their visas were almost expiring, the travellers had a brain-wave. "Look," they said to the Police at Suez, "the Shell Company has a refinery at Port Taufik, and there are oil-fields at Râs Gharib. Surely, if Shell people can go to and fro, we should be able to, too." And so the party were given a pass to motor to Râs Gharib—and no farther. This was only 120 miles away, but at least it was a start.

And as the '25 Morris chuffed away from its first at Fayid, there were petrol-cans on board for a trip of 1,000 miles.

(To be Continued)



THE DAY after the car had been painted it was lined up in good company on Korkint airfield; here the Morris stands several hands higher than F./Lt. Protheroe's XK 120 and S./Ldr. Piper's Alfa.