

GIRO DI SICILIA

PALERMO, April 5th.

THE island of Sicily is not big by European standards, but in spite of this the motoring activity is enormous and the Tour of Sicily, for touring and sports cars, held on Sunday, April 4th, began a very full calendar of events. The Tour of Sicily is run on the same lines as the infamous Mille Miglia, which is to say that competitors start at minute intervals and cover one lap of the course, with time checks at various points. With the exception of a short stretch, about one-third of the way round, the course follows the coast line of the island and measures 1,080 kilometres from start to finish, both these points being outside the headquarters of the A.C. di Palermo, in the centre of that city. As with the Mille Miglia the Sicilian race is run on the normal highways, and every effort is made to keep them closed to normal traffic, but level crossings may well cause a competitor to lose a few seconds, as the train services on the island do not cease.

For the competitors the event is one of the more important for those living on the island in Palermo, Messina, Catania and so on, while for Italians from the mainland it is used as a practice run for the more arduous Mille Miglia. Lancia, Ferrari, Maserati and Osca, in the sports class, entered works cars, and Fiat and Alfa-Romeo in the touring class, the rest of the 137 starters being private owners. The list of runners ranged from standard Fiat 500 coupés, to works Ferraris, through a variety of standard saloons of various sizes, Gran Turismo models, and home-brewed sports cars. The first baby Fiat left at one minute past midnight on Saturday, April 3rd, from a raised wooden ramp, brilliantly floodlit, to the accompaniment of a fusillade of fireworks and as it buzzed away through the main square of Palermo and up the wide Avenue leading out of the town, the next baby Fiat mounted the wooden starting ramp. As each new class began to leave a further display of fireworks would be shot up into the air and with the sports classes the noise of open exhausts began to make Palermo vibrate. Each car bore its starting time as the number and Carini, a hot favourite in the Touring Internazionale group, driving a 1,900 Alfa-Romeo T.I. saloon, number 154, left at precisely 1.54 a.m. Of the 30 starters in the 750-c.c. to 1,100-c.c. class for series touring cars to T.I. specification, all but three were the new 1,100 Fiats that made such a brilliant first appearance in last year's Mille Miglia. Since that date Fiats have produced a special version known as the T.V. model, which stands for Touring Veloce, and compares with our own Ford Zodiac and Zephyr as to the standard differences. In addition, the T.V.s had numerous special items, such as Borani alloy wire wheels, central gear-levers instead of column changers, improved exhaust systems, larger fuel tanks fitted with efficient venting, rev.-counters, and racing-type seats, many of them having the rear windows blanked off to prevent glare during the hours of darkness, should they be followed by another competitor. Mancini was driving a factory-prepared T.V. Fiat that was equipped with everything, including a pair of Marchal spotlights at 45 deg. to show the way round sharp hairpins, and opening the throttle suddenly in bottom gear on this car produced violent wheelspin on a dry road from a "standard" 1,100-c.c. saloon.

The 750-c.c. sports class produced a wide variety of Fiat-based Specials, some brilliant, some pathetic, but all of minimum height and weight and such that even a Lotus-Austin would have looked ungainly beside them. With the 1,100-c.c. sports class came the more exciting machinery such as the beautifully finished Oscas, the Stanguellini's, with twin-o.h.c. four-cylinder engines, Fiat-based Erminis, with twin-o.h.c. heads and four carburettors, Abarths, Zagatos and Cisitalias. After the Gran Turismo group of Lancia Aurelias, Alfa Romeo Sprints and 8V Fiats, the yelling and shouting of the crowds rose to new heights when the 2-litre sports category started, the first one being an A6G Maserati fitted with the most beautiful little Farina coupé body and driven by a local man, Gravina. As the engine was taken up to 7,000 r.p.m. in all the gears up the main street of Palermo the rest of the class were warming up and the time was 3.25 a.m. Four more A6G Maseratis went away three driven by local men and the fourth by Luigi Musso, a possible winner. Also in this class Franco Cortese had a works twelve-cylinder 2-litre Ferrari and Guilo Cabianca a 1,500-c.c. Osca. One unfortunate local with a Lancia Aprilia Special blew his head-gasket as he approached the starting line. While this group were getting under way the over 2-litre class could be seen gathering in the gloom beyond the floodlit area and very impressive it looked; four Type

250 Ferrari coupés, the new 3-litre V12 cars, three open models of the same type, an XK120 Jaguar, with special modifications, looking a bit out of place, Taruffi with a 3.3-litre V6 Lancia open model, and Umberto Maglioli with the fierce-looking 4.9-litre V12 Ferrari. The big Ferrari was number 400 and the last to leave, at 4 a.m.; in overall dimensions it was more compact than the previous 4.1-litre Ferraris, had de Dion rear axle, with the gearbox in unit with the differential, the Grand Prix 4½-litre type brakes and three double-choke Weber carburettors for its twelve-cylinders. All the electrics were mounted on the bulk-head inside the cockpit, a large reserve oil tank took up most of the passenger leg-room, the driver had padding mounted on steel brackets to protect his knees and legs from such things as the hand-brake on the right and the remote gear control on the left and there were clips for jacks, wheel hammers, an enormous fire-extinguisher and even a Rudge hub-puller. As the Sicilian course was very rough and winding, with few long straights such as in the Mille Miglia, Maglioli had a big task in front of him, for both he and Taruffi who started at 3.55 a.m. would have to overtake most of the cars in front of them. As the sound of the 4.9 Ferrari died away into the distance the people of Palermo went home to bed to await the return of the competitors some 12 hours later.

After the last car had left I drove over the mountains to the centre of Sicily in time to meet the competitors on their way through to the time check at Enna, before plunging down to the coast again at Gela. Most of the small cars had already passed and even Carini, with the Alfa-Romeo saloon, had gone, but the faster cars were due, the time being 7 a.m. Observing from a hillside one had a view of the cars appearing out of the valley, twisting and turning along a contour line, round the end of the valley, along my side and over a higher brow in the distance, the whole peace of the Sicilian scene being broken by the howl of exhausts and the scream of tyres. Taking time readings as each car passed my point, I was soon able to get a clear picture of the progress of the race and, in addition, stopwatch timings over one section that was in view proved interesting. Already many cars had dropped out and others were limping along. Gravina, with the Maserati coupé, had struck a concrete wall with some force, writing the car off and injuring himself and his passenger; Wesley, with a Dyna-Panhard coupé, was leading the 750-c.c. sports cars; and De Fillipis the 1,100-c.c. class with his Osca, though Siracusa in a Stanguellini was only 6 min. behind him. In the 2-litre class Cabianca was driving superbly in his 1½-litre Osca, taking 33 sec. to cover my observed section, while Musso was only ½ min. behind him and took 35.5 sec. over the same stretch of road. The Osca clearly held the road better than the Maserati, the latter weaving badly under braking, and these two were way ahead of the rest of the class. A long time later Cortese appeared going very fast in his works Ferrari, which was severely battered both back and front, obviously having lost a great deal of time due to the crash. Barely had the Osca and Maserati gone through than Taruffi appeared, driving quietly and smoothly and obviously taking things



OVER THE RAILS.—Two of the remarkable 1,100-c.c. Fiats cornering fast at a level-crossing during the Circuit of Sicily.

easy, his time over my section of road being 33 sec. At the previous control he had been signalled that he was 15 min. in front of Maglioli, but this was a mistake and three minutes after he went by me the big Ferrari arrived, taking only 31 sec. for the timed stretch and going extremely well, leading on general classification and in the class. At the Enna control, while he was refuelling, Taruffi saw the Ferrari arrive just behind him, which not only surprised him but made him really hurry as far as his next signalling station, two-thirds of the way round the course, at Messina. He need not have hurried so much, for while trying to keep up with the flying Lancia Maglioli over-did it on a corner, only 12 kilometres after Enna, and turned the Ferrari upside down, fortunately without damage to himself or his passenger.

Leaving this mountain section I then motored northwards across country to meet the course on the final section some 50 kilometres before Palermo, this time at a level crossing where the road came down a hillside, did an Ess-bend over the level-crossing and then wound away up another hill and along the cliff tops. Only a matter of minutes after arriving at this point the first car appeared down the hill, travelling at its maximum, and it was Mancini with the works Fiat 1,100 saloon. Its stability through the sharp Ess of the level-crossing was fantastic and soon after more of these incredible Fiat saloons appeared, all just as fast through the crossing. The time was now nearly 1 p.m. on Sunday afternoon and until after 4 p.m. cars came by at irregular intervals, sometimes alone, sometimes in pairs, and occasionally a fast one would catch a slow one as they approached the level-crossing. This railway crossing provided great interest for the public and a large crowd of locals, local being anything up to 15 miles, gathered to watch the final stages of this arduous event. As each of the class leaders appeared the Sicilian crowd gave them a cheer, being in full command of the order of the race even though it meant doing some quick arithmetic to take the starting time from the passage time. Three times during the afternoon trains appeared and immediately the marshals, who were a mixture of railway officials, soldiers and police, leapt into action, lowering the crossing gates for the minimum of time and waving any approaching car to slow down. On one occasion it was clearly going to be touch and go as to whether train or Fiat 1,100 would reach the crossing first, as they were approaching from opposite directions, so one man with a flag went up to a bend in the line to keep an eye on the train, another kept an eye on the approaching car and the rest manned the barriers. By a brilliant piece of flag signalling the car won the event and scuttled through as the train appeared round the corner, to pass with the road safely closed to wheeled traffic as the railway regulations insist upon. Taruffi was now well in the lead of the whole event and went through with plenty to spare, but even so he was setting up a new race record. However, the outstanding man of the day was Piero Carini with the 1,900 Alfa-Romeo saloon, for he was still going at a terrific pace and was second in the general classification, his cornering after more than 1,000 kilometres still being terrific. Since last seeing the cars, near Enna, Cabianca had fallen by the wayside, leaving Musso comfortably in charge of the 2-litre class, and Maglioli had crashed, so that Taruffi's nearest class rival was a local boy more than an hour behind, and amongst the 1,100s Siracusa had made up more than four minutes on the previous leader, De Fillipis.

One by one the cars arrived at Palermo, up the via Roma and into the main square, while the final times were put up on the huge scoreboard at the start-and-finish line. After driving for nearly 10½ hours Taruffi had scored a well-deserved victory for Lancia, while Carini was second, having beaten four 3-litre Ferraris and a 2-litre sports Maserati with his family saloon (to T.I. specification). The Frenchman Cotton, with a Dyna-Panhard saloon, beat all the Italians in the small class, Mancini led home fifteen Fiat 1,100s in his class, Carini won his touring class by nearly half an hour, Siracusa won the 1,100-c.c. sports class for Stanguellini, and Musso the 2-litre class for Maserati, and a close study of the appended times and speeds makes very interesting reading when correlated to the type of car. With such a following for this type of racing it is not surprising that Italy can make such remarkable production cars. As an after-race essay some time was devoted to the search for a British car with which to compete in any of the standard categories and the result was a complete blank.

At 6 p.m. the roads were opened again and the 50 kilometres back to Palermo witnessed the fiercest public road-race for many a year. Your correspondent's Lancia Aprilia was stressed very hard to vindicate the honour of Lancia and England and succumbed only to a 1,900 Fiat that must have been driven by Fangio and a Lancia Aurelia probably driven by Ascari. The standard of driving was of a very high order and firmly supports my theories as to why Italy produces so many world champions.

		Results:	
TOUR OF SICILY (April 4th).		1,080 Kilometres.	Hot and Dry.
General Classification :			
1st :	P. Taruffi (Lancia 3.3-litre) ...	10 hr. 24 min. 37 sec.	103.743 k.p.h.*
2nd :	P. Carini (Alfa-Romeo 1,900) ...	11 hr. 22 min. 14 sec.	94.704 k.p.h.
3rd :	G. Gerini (Ferrari 3-litre—coupe) ...	11 hr. 25 min. 41 sec.	94.504 k.p.h.
4th :	L. Musso (Maserati A6G 2-litre) ...	11 hr. 27 min. 20 sec.	94.412 k.p.h.
5th :	G. Musitelli (Ferrari 3-litre—open) ...	11 hr. 30 min. 49 sec.	93.845 k.p.h.
6th :	S. Pezzoli (Ferrari 3-litre—open) ...	11 hr. 41 min. 18 sec.	92.399 k.p.h.
Series Touring, 750 c.c. :			
1st :	L. Cotton (Dyna-Panhard) ...	14 hr. 4 min. 42 sec.	76.712 k.p.h.
Series Touring, 1,300 c.c. :			
1st :	M. Mancini (Fiat 1,100 T.V.) ...	12 hr. 21 min. 54 sec.	87.343 k.p.h.
Series Touring, over 1,300 c.c. :			
1st :	P. Carini (Alfa-Romeo 1,900 T.I.) ...	11 hr. 22 min. 14 sec.	94.704 k.p.h.
Gran Turismo, 1,300 c.c. :			
1st :	Ciolfi (Fiat 1,100-Farina) ...	12 hr. 5 min. 29 sec.	89.318 k.p.h.
Gran Turismo, 2,000 c.c. :			
1st :	Leto di Priolo (Fiat 8V) ...	11 hr. 59 min. 47 sec.	90.100 k.p.h.
Gran Turismo, over 2,000 c.c. :			
1st :	P. Fleres (Lancia Aurelia 2½-litre) ...	11 hr. 58 min. 58 sec.	90.130 k.p.h.
Sports, 750 c.c. :			
1st :	Zappala (Giaur) ...	13 hr. 31 min. 32 sec.	79.849 k.p.h.
Sports 1,100 c.c. :			
1st :	Siracusa (Stanguellini) ...	12 hr. 7 min. 5 sec.	89.123 k.p.h.
Sports, 2,000 c.c. :			
1st :	L. Musso (Maserati A6G) ...	11 hr. 27 min. 20 sec.	94.412 k.p.h.
Sports, over 2,000 c.c. :			
1st :	P. Taruffi (Lancia 3.3-litre) ...	10 hr. 24 min. 37 sec.	103.743 k.p.h.

* New record.

Stock-Car Racing Comes to England

THE stars, or rather the full moon, shone for "Digger" Pugh when he organised the first Stock-Car Meeting at New Cross Stadium on Good Friday evening. Every available inch of the place was filled (25,000 spectated) and crowds were left outside. Moreover, there was incident aplenty. One car fell on its side, another became poised on its roof on the outside of the course, the track became blocked with cars so that competitors still in motion had to take to the infield, wings and bumpers fell off, tyres punctured, but still they drove on, and C. J. Hamilton's De Soto coupé lapped cheerfully on three wheels. Moreover, Tanya Crouch in her Ford V8 saloon "Bandbox" beat all the men in her heat and nearly pushed her French rival, Mme. d'Orgeix, from the course.

No blood was spilt, and if this is the racing you like Pugh gives you it, even on a one-eighth-mile circuit. Car makes do not appear in the programme but they are mostly Fords and other Yanks, from J. Crabb's "heap" to the dolled-up cars of Rumbutt and Cliff Davis. An Army-type Humber, a Renault and a Buick also ran. The other heat winners were W. Camus (France), F. J. Parsons (Peckham) and J. W. Goody (Newington Butts). The final was a victory for C. d'Orgeix of France. The French drivers showed the technique of avoiding prangs where possible, and taking them as lightly as possible when they came and d'Orgeix skilfully motored half a lap in reverse after he had been spun round! Outstanding at the graft was Pozzoli, billed as a G.P. driver, but he retired with a damaged gearbox; Tanya Crouch also lost second gear before the final, in which she was pranged good and proper, thereafter sitting in her car for what must have seemed hours as others biffed and banged her about.

This is circus-stuff all right, yet skill is needed in dodging trouble and spinning a faster car off the course; low-g geared steering no doubt accounted for Tanya's arms working as Nuvolari's used to, but she *did* show mere males how it's done.

Suitable Fords for the job now cost about £40 but Cliff Davis paid £8 for his (before Valspar beautified it) and says it's "the best eight quid I've ever spent."

Lord Howe watched the racing and Stanley Sedgwick did a fine job keeping the lap score. Like having a ride on the Giant Racer at the fair, stock-car spectating is something many people will want to try once, and while this is so an adequate "gate" is assured. So far, the intrepid drivers do not seem to be compensated in fair proportion—d'Orgeix apparently took only £60. The crowd showed appreciation of the incidents and obviously, judging by their vocal efforts, Young America in the 20/- seats thinks "Digger's" fare is "just swell." Let me be honest—I wouldn't mind seeing some more myself and I wish I had a brace of V8 heaps for sale!—W. B.

[After an evening watching organised destruction I did a penance, staying out of bed until 3 a.m., assisting with two breakdowns on the Portsmouth Road, involving an A30 (gasket) and a P3 Rolls-Royce (ignition)!—ED.]

The Eastern Counties M.C. Felixstowe Rally has been transferred from May 22nd/23rd to May 29th/30th.