TRANS-AFRICAN ROAD SURVEY - *PRACTICAL MOTORIST JAN 1939*

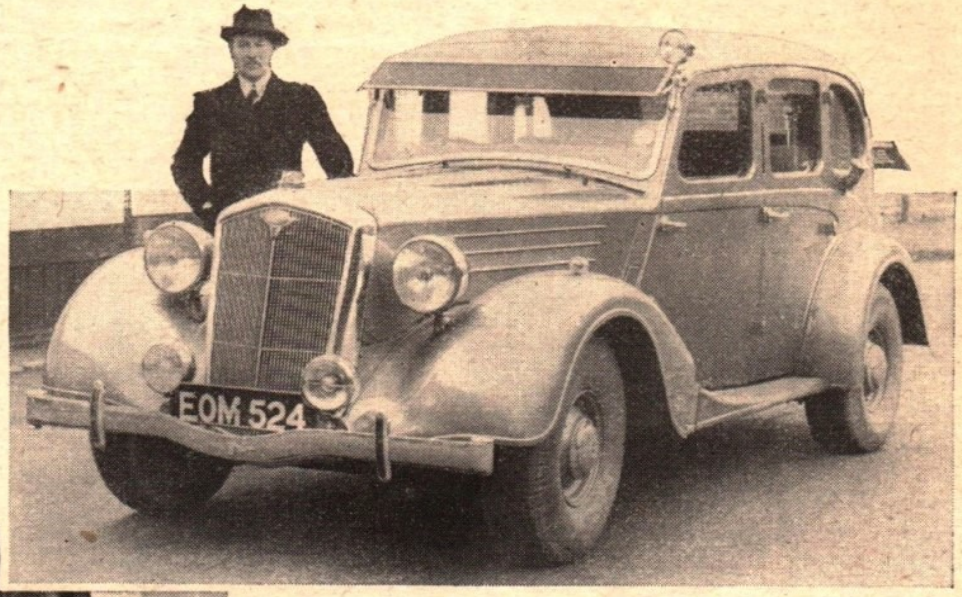
Trans-African Road Survey

An Interesting 10,000-Mile Continental Expedition With A New Wolseley "18/85"

ON December 23rd Mr. H. E. Symons, the well-known trans-continental motorist, set out on another motoring expedition which is more ambitious than anything he has attempted before.

Driving a new Wolseley 18/85 h.p. saloon and accompanied by Mr. H. B. Browning, Mr. Symons left Folkestone to begin what will probably be the most arduous and exacting trip of its kind yet undertaken.

Mr. H. E. Symons' already extensive knowledge of African roads and desert travel has been his main incentive in undertaking this hazardous journey, an object of which is to make an African motor-road survey which will help to establish a definite all-the-year-round route to the Cape. It should add considerably to the data available as to the possibility of road travel by mechanised armies to the ex-German African Colonies.



(Above) Mr. H. E. Symons, with the "18/85" Wolseley which he is using for the trip.

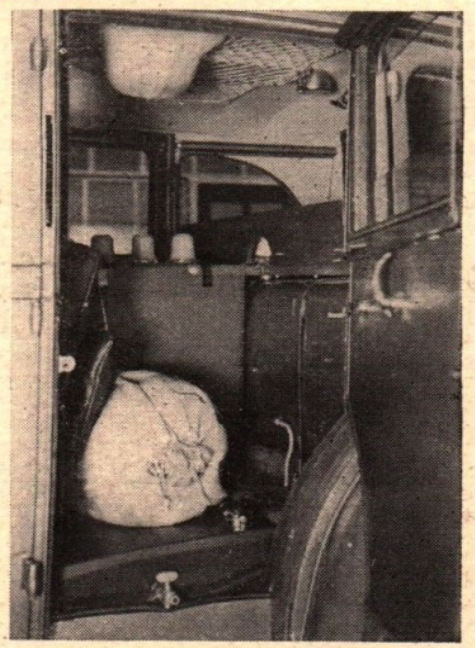
(Left) Fresh water is carried in two five-gallon tanks in the floor of the car.

Snow and Fog

Crossing the channel from Folkestone and traversing the European section to Marseilles, the expedition had to combat typical Monte Carlo Rally conditions, their route going over the snow-covered mountains of Central France, following the fog-bound Rhone Valley. After crossing the Mediterranean by the fastest Trans-atlantique Co.'s steamer and disembarking at Algiers, the crew begin their journey again, entering the formidable Sahara desert at Laghouat. Mr. Symons will have need of all his desert travel technique on his dash to Kano in Nigeria. From Kano the route lies from West to East across the heart of equatorial Africa. At Nairobi, Mr. Symons and Mr. Browning will have completed 6,000 miles, leaving 4,000 miles to go before they reach the Cape.

Swamped Tanganyika

From this point onward the difficulties will become still greater. The heavy rains have already started in Rhodesia and Tanganyika, flooding the river valleys for miles and turning the country into one gigantic swamp. The crew will have to depend on their own resources as to choice of route, no simple task when many of the "roads" are, at the best of times, mere tracks through jungle or bush.



The bag contains a special wire track for use on difficult ground. The 32-gallon petrol tank can also be seen.

In order to undertake such a gruelling journey, the car had to be specially fitted and some rearrangement was necessary, though in all other respects it is similar to the standard-model Wolseley of its class.

Some of the special features are of exceptional interest and warrant description in detail. It is clear that on a long run in a tropical climate, heat and sunlight represent a problem which must be worked out with the utmost care if time is not to be lost. To cut down to a minimum the effect of heat the car has been finished in polychromatic slate grey, the interior being trimmed in a special shade of restful green.

The roof is painted white, which least absorbs heat. There is a sliding sunshine roof which, when open, leaves a mosquito-proof wire net across the aperture—a useful precaution for tropical travel since it enables the occupants to sleep with all the windows up and the roof open without fear of these pests.

Combating Glare

Glare is another potential trouble-maker for which allowance has been made in the form of a green glass visor which shades the windscreen and which is easily adjustable for rake from the driver's and passenger's seats. At the bottom of the windscreen are two green celluloid stick-on visors. These can be raised or lowered at will and their purpose is to minimise glare reflected from the sand or from the bonnet. To protect their eyes, the drivers are carrying antiseptic eye-lotion and eyebath in the door pocket. Blinds are fitted to all windows and may be adjusted to any position to counteract the oblique rays of a rising or setting sun.

Special Tyres

During the trip Mr. Symon's car will have to negotiate desert sand, badly rutted and broken road surfaces and stony river courses. Special road wheel equipment was therefore essential. This consists of large extra-low-pressure 9 x 13 Dunlop tyres. Puncture-sealing fluid has been injected to obviate any stoppages due to punctures. Incidentally, the five wheels and tyres which

(*Continued overleaf*)

(*Continued from previous page*)

(**Above**) **Spare chains and inner tubes are carried in a locker in the offside front wing.**

(**Right**) **Both driver's and passenger's seats can be folded down to make full-length beds**

the car carries weigh altogether over four cwt.

But the surface difficulties do not end here. Snow may be encountered in Africa in the Atlas Mountains. Soft patches of desert sand and the mud of districts where the rains are in progress are all of them impeding factors against which provision must be made. In places where the desert surface is extremely soft, there is always the possibility of the wheels sinking axle-deep. For use in such an emergency two expanded-metal channels are carried across the top of the boot. The method of use is to slip them under the rear wheels and thus permit a firmer hold.

Portable "Roads"

Frequently large stretches of soft sand occur, and to carry the car over these a length of wire track is carried. This track, which is very flexible in all directions, has been specially obtained from the French military authorities in Algiers, where it is in general use among their mobile units.

Chains, for service should the car stick in mud, are also part of the equipment, and are housed in a locker in the offside front wing.

For fording rivers and crossing flooded areas the electrical equipment is made waterproof by the fitting of oiled-silk covers, whilst a length of flexible pipe can, if necessary, be fitted to the exhaust pipe.

The European section is the fastest on the route and to facilitate fast cornering on this section the 32-gallon petrol tank has been mounted amidships. An ingenious feature of the car which may be mentioned here is the extensive louvering in the top of the bonnet. This prevents the windscreen from freezing while the car is in high altitudes—twice the route runs at a height of 9,000 ft.—and keeps the engine cool in the tropical regions.

Water and Petrol Supplies

Two five-gallon water tanks are also carried inside the body. These are placed one at each end of a padded bulkhead which reaches from the petrol tank to the back of the driver's and passenger's seats. The seats, constructed in Dunlopillo, are made in three sections. By unbuckling a strap they can be unfolded to form flat, comfortable beds.

Two exterior fillers are fitted to the petrol tank, and these can be locked to prevent tampering. The spare wheel is carried in the luggage boot, and above the tank on a very roomy shelf there is a dustproof twill flap with straps for securing loose clothing and odds and ends. Above the spare wheel in the luggage compartment two travelling cases are built in side by side, lengthwise. The cases are sufficiently large to take trousers, flat, folded once.

Immediately below the luggage locker is another locker which would ordinarily contain the spare wheel. This has been filled with fitted drawers for carrying foodstuffs and other stores where they will be easily accessible. The lid of the boot forms an ideal table for cooking and preparing meals.

A two-gallon tank for spare oil is carried underneath the bonnet, and bolted to the side of the exhaust system is a small cylinder for carrying a tin of soup. The route has been marked out so that ferries coincide with mealtimes. A few miles before reaching a ferry a tin of soup is inserted in this clever heater.

Extensive Equipment

There are two bowl-type petrol fillers with a switch permitting an instant change-over to be made. There is a float-reading petrol gauge on the tank itself and a dip-stick, both calibrated in English and metric systems.

Built into the nearside front wing is a large tank which is connected to the radiator overflow to prevent loss of water. Should the radiator boil, the water flows into this auxiliary tank and is automatically syphoned back again when the radiator cools.

Pith helmets are carried in two straps fitted to the roof. A very powerful search-light for picking out alternative routes at night is mounted on the screen pillar, where it can easily be reached by the passenger. A built-in wireless set, compass, barometer, altimeter and interior thermometer are all included in the equipment

Plug points for a special Lucas inspection lamp are fitted at five centres—in the boot, in the food locker, at two points on the dash, and under the bonnet—so that the car can be examined at night from all angles. A detachable camping light with a hook on top for external use is fixed inside on a ball joint. As the car is brand new its running-in during the journey is being assisted by the use of Duckhams's "Adcoids."

Other features in the equipment are as follow: Three quart thermos flasks for keeping drinks cool, on bulkhead by the petrol tank; top and bottom radiator temperature indicator on panel; screen defroster carried for use in Europe; spare plugs and a change-over coil; a vapour-type fire extinguisher; first-aid outfit; two bulb-carrying cases on dash; special arrangements for filling primus from container in dash; special springs are incorporated, and spare springs are carried.

The total laden weight of the car with two up will be well over two tons.

THE MONTE CARLO RALLY

That the optimism shown by the organisers of the Monte Carlo Rally was justified is clearly shown by the list of entries.

This list shows that, in spite of the troublous situation in Europe, which has prevented practically all Germans and Italians from entering, there are nearly 120 drivers, together with about 250 passengers who, at considerable expense to themselves, do not hesitate to take part in a competition which affects most countries in Europe. Nearly all the crack European long-distance drivers have entered and a tremendous effort has been made by Britain to respond to the challenge for supremacy made by the motor industries of other countries.

Of the 15 countries entered, Britain holds first place in point of numbers with 36 entries, Holland and France tie for second place with 26 each.

The winner of the last rally, the Dutchman, Bakker Schut, starts from Tallinn, whilst another important Dutch entrant, Dr. Sprenger Van Eijk, who won the 1929 rally, starts from Athens. Formidable as is the Dutch entry it is, however, the French who look like being our most dangerous rivals. Three past winners, Trevoux, Quinlin and Lahaye-Quatresous and two former winners of the trophy for ladies, Mme Rouault, last year's winner, and Mlle Lamberjack, who was twice in the winning team, have all entered and also racing drivers such as Paul and Gordini. Mme Rouault, Trevoux, Quinlin, Lahaye-Quatresous, Paul, Gordini start from Athens, Melle Lamberjack from Tallinn.

With regard to cars, of which there are three classes, about 65 per-cent. of competitors have chosen high-powered ones, many with a cylinder volume exceeding 4 litres.

Britain is also making a bold bid for the ladies' cup, which is awarded to the highest-placed woman competitor with no male passenger on board the car. There are 10 feminine crews competing for this cup, five of them being British. They are Mrs. Wisdom, Miss Wilby, Miss Rowan Hamilton, Miss Amy Johnson, Mrs. MacEvoy and Mrs. Vaughan.