

THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

wondering all the while how a fellow whom I once regarded as perfectly sane, could ever get that way. And that was my mood, I must confess, when I made my maiden appearance as an automobile race starter!

My baptism was anything but a grueling ordeal compared to my latter-day job. Somewhat to my astonishment, I had something to start, and I sent the contestants away in a pall of smoke. There were moments, however when I feared I'd have nothing to finish, for the steam died down as the contenders hit the back stretch, and snails were fast by comparison. Then, just as I was about to call it a day, the crawling steamers suddenly came to life, and rolled down the turn into the home stretch with electrifying bursts of speed—speed that registered around thirty-five miles an hour!

Thirty-five miles an hour! Compare that with the records of today—Bill Cummings' average of 104.863 miles per hour for 500 miles, made in 1934 at Indianapolis, and Sir Malcolm Campbell's 304.311 miles an hour over the Utah Salt Flats in 1935—and you have a most illuminating gauge of the development that has been made in the automobile since the 20th Century sneaked around the corner.

In these days of high-speed tracks and record smashing races, distance is so utterly humbled that few persons realize what such averages as these really mean. Perhaps I can reduce them to a common, or touring denominator. The highway between Washington, D. C., and New York City measures approximately 250 miles. At the time-defying clip in which Sir Malcolm drove over the Daytona sand in 1934, he could have left the White House at noon and checked in at Times Square before 1 o'clock, after a trick of less than an hour behind the steering wheel. I've spent

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that much time trying to find a parking space along the Great White Way!

When Milton, Hartz, De Paolo and the rest of the speedway fraternity have the accelerator touching the floor board, they're rolling at a 140-mile-an-hour average or better. This means that they're putting 208 feet behind them every second. Two hundred and eight feet is about half of an ordinary city block, while a second is nothing more than a finger-snap. Which is my notion of traveling in defiance of all laws of gravity and human endurance.

If you ever come into contact, either directly or indirectly, with a racing car when it's rolling at such speeds, you'd stamp the racing driver as the most fearless of men. I've had such experiences, and I'm ready to hand them all the glory that's due them. But I want them to be a trifle more careful of me in the future. I'm getting along in years and my heart isn't as strong as it was in my youth.

Tommy Milton put thirty-nine more gray hairs on my head and spoiled a perfectly good pair of shoes for me in the December race at Culver City in 1924. Sweeping down the home stretch at 140 miles an hour, Tommy's car rolled over the tip of my shoe. For a second I thought that I had sat down in the electric chair at Sing Sing and the executioner had turned on the current, and for the next five minutes my whole body was a-tingle. Ever since then I've watched my step, my instep, and all the rest of my pedal extremities.

Culver City seems to have been one of my jinx tracks, for in the March race the following year, Harry Hartz spoiled me of a possession more priceless than pearls—if we are to believe the denigrific advertisements.

The cars had only a few more laps to go, and I had