

PAINTED FOR "THE AUTOCAR" BY F. GORDON CROSBY

### METEORS OF ROAD AND TRACK.

No. 17—In the 1921 French Grand Prix race, the first of the series held after the War, the 3-litre Duesenberg scored a great victory, this being the first time an American car had won a European classic race. The Duesenberg, driven by Jimmy Murphy, is rounding the right-angle turn at Mulsanne, the scene of many disasters on the famous Le Mans circuit. The average speed for the distance of 321 miles was 78.1 m.p.h.

# WHEN AMERICA WON

IN 1921 the Grand Prix was an event entirely different from any that had been run before under the same name. For one thing, there had been the War since the last race of the series, and no one who passed through those four unreal—or too real, take it as you will—years, can ever be quite the same again. For another, there were the memories of that great race in 1914, when Lautenschlager's Mercedes won, a race that now seems symbolical in all but its magnificent ending, while dimly on the horizon, barely perceptible, as it were, rose the shadow of the Great Catastrophe.

On this occasion—in 1921—there were gathered together on the Le Mans circuit the drivers of three nations, of three only. Of the men who had driven in the 1914 epic one of the greatest would handle the racing wheel no more, for Georges Boillot had fought with the same magnificent courage with which he had driven, and, fighting, had died. His brother André was now driving a Talbot-Darracq.

There was something a little strange about the cars, too. The Ballots, maybe, were ready, yet, if so, only just; the combined team of Talbot-Darracq, Talbot, and Sunbeam, eight cars that differed only in radiator and colours, were in such state that there was no hope of getting some ready, and for the others very little hope. The Mathis, a 1,500 c.c. midget among the big three-litres, which themselves were yet drastically smaller than the pre-War cars, was just a matter of rumour, and only the Duesenberg team was in fair shape.

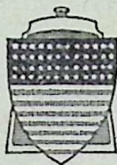
That team, the first genuinely American set of racing cars to reach the Continent since the old Gordon-Bennett race, had troubles of its own. The cars were beautiful, but they were built for the track; the personnel was excellent, but had had little road-racing experience. Only in organisation was it thoroughly ahead of its rivals. Curiously enough, the team obtained the garage which once housed Szisz's victorious Renault, Murphy's car being actually in the winning Renault's place. Since then another victor, the Bentley, in another race, the Grand Prix d'Endurance, has issued from that spot.

## Frantic Last Minute Efforts.

Two days before the race the majority of the S.T.D. team had to be scratched, and then, at the last moment, some of the cars were allowed to run. Quite how these cars were got ready beggars imagination. Men worked for hours on one, and then, when it was being hastily painted by the light of a lantern, it was discovered that the driver, Zborowski, could not sit in the seat, and that the front brake shoes had been removed. In addition, Goux, of the Ballot team, had injured one hand badly, and Inghibert, who was injured during practice, had been replaced by Dubonnet in the Duesenberg team.

No one knew which to choose—non-skid or plain tyres—since the weather was entirely uncertain. There was another change from the races of yore. The course was a very short triangular circuit near the old town of Le Mans, shorter than any used hitherto, so that there were

**Jimmy Murphy, who Won the 1921 Grand Prix on a Straight Eight Duesenberg, is the Subject of the Coloured Plate in this Issue.**



no long intervals for the crowd to wait—all the time car followed car on the heels of car.

At the start, ominously, there were thirteen cars lined up in pairs and a singleton. Each pair was started from before the grandstand at half-minute intervals, by an official with a huge flag, and at once

the pace became terrific. De Palma's Ballot led at an average of 78 m.p.h. on the first lap; Boyer's Duesenberg averaged exactly the same, while Murphy's Duesenberg and Chassagne's Ballot tied for second place. This great duel, Duesenberg versus Ballot, was the key of the whole race, for almost at once the Talbot-Darracqs and Talbots had trouble.

In the second lap Murphy led with the Duesenberg, running wonderfully, though a trifle wild at Mulsanne and Arnage, both offside turns to the driver seated on the right. Murphy's Duesenberg is seen at Mulsanne in the coloured plate in this issue. In seven rounds Chassagne went up to second place, passing Boyer, and hanging grimly to Murphy. At the twelfth lap Murphy went to the pits for a quick refill and Chassagne took the lead, imperturbable, never hustled.

Behind, Boyer and Murphy did all they could, and then—tragedy!—Chassagne came slowly in to the pits with fuel pouring from the Ballot's tail—the tank, hit by the axle, had burst. At once Boyer's Duesenberg leapt just ahead of Murphy's, but De Palma and Goux took up the battle for Ballot. On the twentieth lap, when Murphy led and Boyer's Duesenberg was out with a broken connecting-rod, Guyot's Duesenberg, in second place, had first De Palma and then Goux at his rear wheels.

## The Hail of Stones.

But the battle was not yet over. The circuit had been torn to pieces by the speed and by the cornering, torn until the corners were as a sea beach, and a hail of stones, deadly as bullets, shot up astern of each car. Two mechanics were stunned, and it is a wonder that no one was more badly hurt, for some of the stones had the impetus of over 80 m.p.h. Murphy, signalled to slow down, disobeyed, knowing, as the *chef d'équipe* did not, that his car's radiator was leaking badly; Guyot's clutch slipped madly at every change up, De Palma's Ballot's fuel tank was leaking, and at any moment the tyres, cut to pieces by the stones, might fail.

On the last lap but two Guyot stopped, tried to remedy clutch slip, changed two wheels, and then took an age in getting the hot engine to restart. The mechanic collapsed, was replaced by the veteran Duray, present as a spectator, and somehow the car was got going, having fallen from second to sixth place.

In the last lap but one Murphy stopped, changed a wheel, kept his engine running furiously, and moved off. A lap later, with one flat tyre, for the first time in a classic Continental race, the white and blue American car came home a victor, and, what is more, deserved its success, having averaged 78.1 m.p.h. for 321 miles. Guinness and Segrave, who had trouble after trouble with tyres until at last the stock of spares gave out.

door, four-light fabric-covered saloon has ample room for five passengers, as the main seat is 4ft. 2in. wide, and can, therefore, accommodate three persons. It is particularly comfortable for two, as it has large side arm-rests and a folding arm-rest in the centre. Although the overall height of the car is only 5ft. 10in., the head room from floorboards to roof lining is 3ft. 8in.

Bearing in mind the size of the chassis and body in relation to the engine capacity, one does not expect a particularly high performance, but the car is deceptive in this respect, for the maximum speeds obtained on the various gears render it quite lively either in flat or in hilly country. The acceleration figures obtained are also good, and one soon realises that the smooth and quiet running of the engine deceive one as to speed.

There is, too, ample power on hills. A hill of 1 in 10, for example, can be surmounted on top at between 35 and 40 m.p.h., and on a hill of 1 in 6 the speed did not fall below 20 m.p.h. on second gear.

#### Using the Gears.

The driver who prefers to change gear as little as possible will find that on this car few changes are absolutely essential, but at the same time the driver who is not averse from using his gears will naturally obtain a more mettlesome performance; the gear change is easy, provided that one pauses a little in changing up and double declutches in changing down.

First gear should be required only for starting away on a steep hill; it is practically an emergency gear. One may find a little awkwardness until one becomes used to the car, inasmuch as one passes through first gear to reach the reverse gear position. As there is no actual reverse stop one may, when engaging first gear, move the lever a little too far into a neutral position between first and reverse. The quietness of the gear box on the indirect ratios is a point which those who prefer a saloon car will much appreciate.

Excellent steering is a feature of the car, and in this respect credit is due to the flexible spring hanger at the rear of the off-side front spring and to the placing of the shackles at the forward ends. The result is that the

steering, even on very rough surfaces, shows no sign of wobble, and no shock is transmitted to the steering wheel. The car holds the road well whatever the conditions of surface and speed may be, and the long half-elliptic springs and hydraulic shock absorbers give very comfortable riding.

An unusual point is the arrangement of the brakes, for the pedal operates through a Dewandre servo mechanism on the front wheels and on the transmission, while the hand lever operates the rear wheel brakes only. Internal expanding shoes are used for the five brakes thus given, and the adjusting screw for the large transmission brake projects through the centre of the floorboards of the front compartment. Unfortunately wet roads made it impossible to estimate the full worth of the brakes, but they are undoubtedly powerful, while being smooth and progressive in action.

#### Admirably Full Equipment.

The model tested is known as the Greyhound saloon, and its equipment includes Triplex glass throughout, chromium plating, a boa constrictor horn, Eural horn control and traffic indicator, stainless steel buffers, and a Greyhound mascot. Glass louvres are, it should be noted, fitted above the windows in the four wide doors, so that even in wet weather the windows can be opened for ventilation without rain blowing in. Other special fittings are a double windscreen wiper, a spot light mounted above the screen in the centre and easily controlled by the driver's left hand, a fog lamp mounted on the centre of the tie-bar which unites the head lamps, and a large luggage trunk, which also carries golf clubs.

The instrument board carries quite a number of gauges and switches, but all of them are useful rather than ornamental. Thus, the fuses are grouped together on the near side, and there are, in addition, a revolution counter, Nivex petrol gauge, speedometer, ammeter, oil gauge, radiator thermometer, clock, air control and choke for the carburetter, instrument lamp, petrol tap, ignition switch controlling magneto and coil, lamp switch, control switch for the two-note horn, starter switch, and an ash-tray and cigar lighter.

## INFORMATION WANTED.

### *What do Some of the Strange Signals Encountered Really Mean?*

I AM beginning to think that, in motor-ing circles, secret organisations exist of which I am not aware. Is it possible that there are "orders" or "fraternities" offering certain big advantages to motorists, and yet I am debarred from joining because I am ignorant of the manner of going about the matter? I itch to know all about them, how to become a member, what are the entrance fees, and whether I am eligible.

My imagination runs riot. Are these clubs for "downing" the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or are they interested in some spirit which can both be poured into the tank as well as in the mouth? Are the members sworn to exterminate something or somebody, or do they pursue some great ideal for the regeneration of mankind?

I give it up, I can obtain no information. It is all as secret as the grave, only twice have I directly asked persons whom I took to be members and they were both



very rude. So evidently I have not acquired the password or I am not of the type required in the society.

Still, one must admit that it is intriguing to observe these mysterious and secret signs made at one from the windows of passing cars. Only this week, in a car that met me, the driver (quite a respectable-looking man in a bowler hat) extended his arm and half closed his hand three times, and last week a pretty girl made a sweeping movement with the arm ending with the first finger pointing to where heaven is.

A Sunday or two ago a man in an open car gave a sort of left-handed salute which surprised me so much that I almost rammed him. Then he shouted out some words in a language with which I am not familiar. Can you wonder that I want to know all about it? Will someone give me the tip privately, and if there is anything worth taking up in it, I will send my subscription right away.

J. L.