



Arrival at Land's End

"End to End" by Steam Car

JOHN O'GROATS
TO LAND'S END
IN 1900

By St. John C. Nixon

THE long journey from "End-to-End" has, to my knowledge, only once been performed on a steam-driven car. It was completed by an old and close friend of mine, the late Hubert W. Egerton (the founder of Mann Egerton and Co. Ltd.), whose full description of this trip, which was both perilous, and exhausting almost past belief, lies before me as I write. Egerton passed away some two years ago, and my respect for him can be gauged from the fact that it was he who first taught me to drive a motor car in January 1900—precisely 54 years ago. He was indeed a dear fellow, and I cannot do better than give his account of this great adventure, in the depth of winter, in his own words:

"The most adventurous journey I ever made was from John O'Groats to Land's End in mid-winter, ending on December 23rd, 1900, at the Land's End Hotel, eight days before the close of last century. This journey was done on the really rather joy-like locomobile steam car built in America. The vertical boiler was 14 in. in diameter and approximately the same height and was fitted with 300 one-half-inch bore copper tubes; the shell of the boiler owed its strength chiefly to the several layers of steel pianoforte wire which were wound round it. One could raise steam in about five minutes from lighting up, but the trouble was that it would consume much more steam than it could produce, at anything like the speed desirable, so that a burst of speed

had to be followed by a long wait until the pressure was restored again (normal working pressure was 250 lb. to the square inch).

"To drive a locomobile steam car was a very wearisome business because of the enormous number of things one had to perform before one could start, and at the conclusion of each stage of 20 miles, and finally before one could put it away for the night! One consumed rather more than a gallon of water per mile, which meant that I had to pick up, pour into the tank and evaporate, over five tons weight of water on the "End-to-End" journey of 900 miles. If one had to dump the fire and go in search of water, one had to improvise a fire on the roadside in order to heat a device known as the torch which, when red-hot and connected to the petrol supply pipe, supplied the heat required to vaporise the petrol when starting from cold.

Lubrication Problem

"Pressure of 70 lb. to the petrol tank had to be supplied by an ordinary tyre pump vigorously applied at frequent intervals. To oil the engine, one had to take an oil can, such as is used on a sewing machine, and lubricate: Each of the two ball-bearing big-ends; each of the two main bearings; each pair of slide bars and cross-head; each pair of ball-bearing eccentrics; central driving chain and sprocket; various smaller mechanisms such as the lever driven from the cross-head which operated the somewhat inadequate water pump.

"I had only driven a steam car for less than 300 miles when I became convinced that this oiling arrangement was hopeless. I therefore rigged up a brass tank holding about a gallon of oil, into the bottom of which I fitted six taps which I could turn on and off, through which oil could be squirted into the path travelled by the big-ends as they revolved in the open. Fully 90 per cent. of this oil went straight on to the road, but the odd ten per cent. did useful work.

As regards petrol consumption, I was assured by the chief engineer of the Locomobile Company that I could rely on 16 m.p.g., so being a canny soul, I based my calculations on exactly half this, and even then, I had the mortification of running out of petrol on one occasion and had to do the worst part of the journey absolutely alone, as I sent my assistant forward by train to fix up supplies. This terrible journey over the Grampians in the dark, I shall never forget.

"I refused absolutely to undertake the trip on the miserable single-tube tyres fitted. They were of the hosepipe variety, and these I exchanged for Dunlops which gave no trouble at all.

Breakdown

"I think it was somewhere near Preston that we heard ominous noises coming from the rear axle, which proved to be a broken cup and balls in the outside main bearing of the near-side rear wheel. I found that I had omitted to bring with me a special tool for removing a broken cup, and so was faced with the alternative of giving up the expedition or going on without the ball-bearing.

"I decided on the latter, so after

'bunging' the axle-tube full of grease, I replaced the wheel and tried to forget all about it; had I examined the axle, I would probably not have proceeded more than another mile or so! For approximately 600 miles the axle revolved on the edge of the damaged cup, and when we arrived home, the

car running away. This was the worst of the whole trip, and I shall never forget the sense of relief from strain which came with the dawn, and the knowledge that we were approaching the end of our journey.

"One other trouble which beset me all through the long trip was

darkness wore on, on this eleventh and last night of our adventure, I was finding it more and more difficult to keep awake. At about 3 a.m. I realised that I must take a rest or face the almost certain risk of falling asleep.

"I tried everything to shake off the deadly drowsiness, but I was forced to shut off steam and sleep for ten minutes. After my companion had woken me up, I got down from my lofty driving seat and plunged my head into a stream of icy water at the roadside, which had an immediate effect. After covering the last part of the journey from Penzance, and arriving at Land's End, I went in search of a photographer, and some of the photographs shown are the result. Our daily average was about 75 miles, and I cannot find words to describe the hardships we suffered, owing largely to the weather which was the worst experienced in Scotland for a great many years."

That is Egerton's story of this remarkable adventure. The "End-to-End" journey has never been repeated on a steam car, as far as I know. One amusing fact remains to be told. A day or two after his return to London, I received the



The start from John O' Groats

Right: After it was all over

axle was rather more than half cut through.

"Both of us suffered severely from exposure to long periods of the intense cold, and at one point, I had to dismantle the fire-box and fit a new burner, which occupied several hours by the road-side, in the teeth of a blizzard.

" Brake Consumption "

"As regards brakes, I caused much mirth at the Locomobile factory when I demanded three spare brake bands; the last of my spares gave out before entering Cornwall and from that point onwards, I had to rely solely on the reversing lever which needed very careful handling to avoid snapping the one driving chain. This was not much bigger than an ordinary cycle chain and was shockingly inadequate for the work it had to perform. I took several spare chains with me, but I used up all my supply.

"It was very anxious work descending steep hills in pitch darkness and knowing that if the chain did snap, nothing could prevent the



caused by the failure of the cross-head-driven water pump to supply the water to the boiler in sufficient quantities. I had foreseen this and so had cut a slot in the floor-boards and had fixed the handle of the auxiliary hand-pump in such a position that I could work it as I drove along. As the hours of

following post-card from him :
 " From End to End I've been at last, and home again once more. And now I have a chance to sleep, by Gad but won't I snore ! Some trouble I have had of course and often used the oiler. But in spite of all, my dear old boy, I've never bust the boiler."