



Spit and Polish

NEWSLETTER OF THE VETERAN CAR CLUB OF AUSTRALIA (N.S.W.)

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EDITORIAL

Your first Newsletter was produced in the most hurried fashion and, as a result, it contained a few errors and omissions. I hope that a more stable routine of production will now follow. Please forward any notices and news as early as possible, so that time is available for sufficient study before the script is submitted for duplication.

In this edition, we are particularly indebted to George Roberts for his interesting article of the account of Francis Birtles' journey across Australia in a Model "T" Ford. This is an Australian motoring classic, and I have no doubt that it will receive considerable interest both interstate and overseas.

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ACROSS AUSTRALIA IN A MODEL "T" FORD

A journey by FRANCIS BIRTLES from the
Gulf of Carpentaria to Port Phillip Bay -
August to December, 1913.

To all Veteran Car Enthusiasts and to motorists as a whole, this, the authentic story of "Francis Birtles", crossing of Australia from North to South, a distance of 3,500 miles in a model "T" Ford and taken verbatim from his diary will I believe hold their interest as an epic of man's love of adventure and spirit of daring, traditional from the earliest ages.

In Francis Birtles, Australia possessed a native born who by birth was an explorer, whose native land in all its natural beauty and antiquity was the shrine he worshipped. The hardships, the dangers, the struggles, bodily pain, hunger, thirst, solitude - these were but the means whereby he was enabled to know his beloved country as no others knew it at that time. Of food he got nature's supply with the canopy of the stars over his head at night. Not content with having twice encircled its coastline on his cycle and previously crossed from east to west in a single cylinder "Brush", this story relates only to the journey which was the forerunner of a number in which he "criss-crossed" the continent per medium of his model "T" Ford and later with Oldsmobile and Bean cars.

More than one third of the journey from Burketown in the Gulf of Carpentaria to Melbourne was entirely devoid of roads, yet the distance of 3,500 miles was covered in the remarkable time of 21 days, an average of approximately 166 miles per day. The fact that the car was driven from Charters Towers, north-west to Burketown to commence the journey south, an additional 1,500 miles under equally arduous conditions further added to the conspicuous achievement.

The following dates and transcriptions are Birtles' own words, being extracts from his diary, and printed without alteration.

AUGUST 12, 1913 - Left Charters Towers and Prairie for a pioneer motor journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria, thence right across Australia from Burketown to Melbourne. Selected a "Ford", as being both light, powerful and flexible.

AUGUST 14 - Following few days ploughing through sand plains. Very hot, but did not have much time to notice the heat, as I was kept busy stump dodging. Anyone in search of a new excitement might try stump dodging in a motor. It is a pastime guaranteed to give more thrills than any other.

AUGUST 17 - Going down a steep mountain side, breaks on, big bough fastened on behind. Rope broke, car sliding down steep pinch, with rear wheels locked. Put reverse clutch in, at same time advancing throttle. Very busy steering, back wheels started to grip on wash out gravelly descent. Arrived at bottom, my knees "knocking" badly.

AUGUST 18 - Crossing a clay pan the crust suddenly gave way, car bogged up to the springs. Put cocconut matting down, car promptly sank that aid deep down into the shiny mud. Decided to lighten the car by unpacking the "furniture", and carry this to a sandy bank a mile distant. Tried to dig the mud away from the wheels; it was so gluey that each shovelful had to be dug off the spade, for which purpose "hands and claws" were the handiest. Process long and tedious. Fastened a rope to a telegraph pole, and attached the after end to the back wheel cap of the car. Set engine at top speed - there was a great whirring sound - two fountains of slush were thrown high into the air by the back wheels - and the telegraph post came up by the "roots". Going cautiously, engine still working strongly, I got out and helped with two saplings, shifted car to a more desirable position. Then it immediately tried to bury itself again. For hours, in the intense heat, worried by salt dust, and eyes being chewed out by flies, until late in the afternoon, got clear. Water supply giving out. Camped at a "gilgi" (small waterhole), but not to rest.

The flies were unbearable; they got into my eyes, buzzed in my ears, crawled down the back of my neck, committed suicide in the tea, and insisted on forming part of my meal. My bulldog "Wowser" jumping frantically, and evidently wishing that he could get his famous grip on the small tormentors.

AUGUST 20 - Raining, bogged several times. Chopped away a number of trees which had fallen across the track. This day was introduced to a new smell. Met an Afghan camel party. Anyone who does not know the camel cannot imagine the "rich" perfume resulting from a combination of camel and motor. (Car runs well on this "rich mixture"). Camels were in a single file, led by a "nose line" fastened into nostril, and thence fastened on to the leading animal's tail.

Great commotion. Camels tugging at each other's tail, some disappearing over the sky line, others doing their best to kick each other's "loading" off. "Ghans" hoosting and cursing everything, from the dried up brown earth, to the brassy blue skies. "Camels are not afraid of anything." This bush motto evidently out of date.

AUGUST 21 - Strong westerly gale blowing, ground drying up. Good claypan flats of scalded country. (Scrub, grass, etc., killed off after a sudden shower of rain, then hot tropical sun kills all vegetation).

Some sport chasing animals. Scientific investigations into the speeds of various animals. Reckoned that the dingo can travel twenty-five miles an hour, and keep up the pace. Wild dogs go about twenty miles an hour, but they are great dodgers, and will not keep a straight track. An emu tested for speed did a final sprint of something like thirty miles an hour.

A few others were:

Kangaroos - Fifteen miles an hour, and they can maintain that speed over long distances.

Wild Pigs - A steady dog trot of ten miles an hour, on a short run in cool weather 20 miles per hour.

Organ Grinding Lizards sprint twelve miles per hour for twenty yards.

Blue-tongue Lizards - Unable to wait long enough to test, but calculate that they travel at the rate of about one mile per day if they are in a great hurry.

Supply of cotton waste lost. Using the dog's hair as a substitute on which to wipe my oily hands.

AUGUST 26 - Following overland telegraph line. Hundreds of cockatoos perched on wires, some upside down, screeching in acrobatic delight. Picked up a freshly killed turkey, with its neck broken owing to its having struck the wires in its flight. Dined on roast turkey, a la mode!

AUGUST 27 - Battling across big sandy creeks. Cutting a road through thick scrubs. Washed my only pair of trousers in a rockhole about the size and shape of a bucket. All the time dingoes were slinking about in the background, waiting a chance to slake their thirst. A dingo will stalk the water when he is suspicious. First he will approach to within a safe distance, crouch down, and watch for half an hour or so. Then he will advance another fifty yards or so, and await further developments. And so the procedure continues till he finds it safe to drink. If you fire at them they will scamper in all directions, only to return again as soon as they have recovered from their fright.

Car running mechanically perfect, averaging 25 miles to gallon of benzine.

AUGUST 30 - Discovered new brand of mosquito. This "skeeter" has three one-eighth inch spikes, one on port side, one on starboard, and one at the stern. Length of monster over all, one and half inches.

SEPTEMBER 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 - Following the Flinders River down to the coast. Very heavy sandy creeks. Some half a mile wide. Had to build a road across with a foundation of bough saplings and scrub.

Made a valuable discovery for crossing sandy river beds. Taking off the mud guards and running boards to give greater clearance. Procedure. Then got some long sacks, fill these lightly with grass, and fasten on with rope to the tyres. Go gently down the steep banks; on reaching the sand put in low gear very gently, accelerate slowly, watching back wheels do not skid. The car will waddle across in fine style. If much of this heavy work has to be carried out, especially under a hot sun, it will pay to run out the usual Ford light oil and put in a heavy oil. The difference in lubricating oils is remarkable. An unsuitable engine oil will entirely upset the running. Most petrol spirits are good. More power being lost over unsuitable engine lubricants.

SEPTEMBER 10 - Went out hunting wild pigs aboard the car. Chased and caught a young porker. Put him in bottom of car (back seat). Attempted to chase an old boar; he stood his ground, gnashing his big grinders. Ford came to a full stop. Shot at him with a 22 calibre repeater. Bolted into some long grass. I dismounted and followed him. Dennis got away by crossing a crocodile swamp. Returned to car, promising myself a pork supper. Pork supper had got out and disappeared over the skyline. Luck out.

Evening - Plague of frogs. Frogs hopping over and under everything. One big fellow is booming from under the engine bonnet, and one is peering at me from under the edge of the mudguard. Another one has started up the leg of my trousers. +++-???-!!!

In addition there are mosquitoes. Millions of them. I am convinced that where insect pests abound no great art or philosophy can develop. How can one pursue a train of thought or carve a sonnet while every exposed part is being worried by pesky, persistent, poisonous pin pricks, and each hand is engaged in "squash, squash"?

SEPTEMBER 12 - Sport on the road incidents. One came through sitting on a leaking tin of benzine whilst having lunch in the sun. It revived memories of the mustard plasters of childhood. Camped three days.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1913 - Two thirteens. Socks, straps, and my only pair of trousers missing this morning. Looked at dog enquiringly. He seemed to be sleeping innocently; but on making some pointed remarks, he awoke suddenly, and sprinted for the horizon. Later on he returned and deposited some old

bones and mouldy cowhide on my blanket, by way of payment for the things he had taken.

During the night the faithful dog brought into camp some birds which I had shot and lost some days ago. A bad case of "chickens coming home to roost". Odour fearful. Weather very hot.

SEPTEMBER 14 - Hunting rock wallabies for fresh meat. In one place crawled along a cliff ledge with a sheer drop of 200 feet, and met five small "cattish faced" wallabies. Cornered. Pushed them over the edge with my rifle. Descended. Found three. Cut off their tails. Soup for dinner.

Evening - Centipede in bed. Mob of horses with bells on gathered around campfire smoke. This to evade the stinging sandflies. Music not appreciated. In the morning I found the dog eating the last of the candles.

SEPTEMBER 15 - Track leading along the top of the cliffs with a drop of 300 feet only a foot away, the back wheels skidding on the bad surface. Splendid views of low-lying coastal Gulf country. Descended over washed-out boulder strewn creek bed. Engine pulling badly. Guessed change of atmosphere cause. Adjusted carburettor jet. Car smoking a lot owing to steep descent and oil running forward to two front cylinders.

SEPTEMBER 17 - Bad attack of malaria fever. Drank four gallons of water to-day. Nerves shaky. Talking loudly. Dog underneath car, shivering. Poor beggar. My only friend, with the serious pessimistic expression of a wet blanket, and reproving side glances whenever a curse arose; hence his name "Wowser". Took him out and patted him. Very hot. Began to wonder in a dull kind of way as to whether I had been transferred to Hades. Lay down in cheese cloth net. "Wowser" whining uneasily. Let him come inside the net with me. Took a big dose of quinine, and slept, waking up in the middle of the night with brains wonderfully clear. Feel as though the greatest problems could be easily solved. Got out of net. Stood up, ground rose up and hit me. So it felt. Crawled back into net, feeling sickly hunger. Chewed some damper. Woke up better, but very weak. Shot a cockatoo, and boiled him.

SEPTEMBER 20 - Arrived Gulf tidal waters. Investigated a big fish trap. The trap is about ten feet square, netted above and at sides, with a doorway 5 by 2 feet and leading into this are netting fences, branching out in various directions. The tide, 20 feet high, covers the trap, and retreating, leaves an assortment of finny creatures inside. Put on bathing costume, and waded into this trap while the water was 3 feet deep. Yelled as something big rubbed against my leg, water too muddy to see what it was. Soon after discovered that it was a stingaree, with a 7 feet tail, and a 10 inch poison barb. Made a scramble for the netted post. The tide was going out, and the catch could be seen, turtle as big as a round table, kingfish, a shovel-nose shark, an enormous mangrove crab with bone crushing claws, and scores of tropical fish - spikey, thorny, puffed up, all eyes or all mouth, gasping or grunting, and looking truly wicked. In a corner was a 6 foot sea snake, with sharp fangs, and a young 3 foot alligator. I had wandered innocently barelegged into this peaceful gathering. Anyhow, that evening I had fried turtle for tea. Judging by the sample, I should say that very much mixed bathing should be a popular pastime here, when this place becomes a popular seaside resort.

SEPTEMBER 23 - Camped on a freshwater river. A crocodile crawled out on to a sandbank in the middle of the stream; big barramundi in his jaws. Fired a bullet at him; he dropped the fish and dived into the water. I swam across, towed my future meal to the camp, grilled about 8 lb. of it for tea, salted the rest. Sweet dreams.

SEPTEMBER 25 - Shot an iguana for lunch. Strange reptile, can climb a tree, dig a burrow, swim a creek, dive like a fish, sprint his hundred yards in six and a half, swallow anything, from an unopened tin of jam to a discarded sock, lay eggs in the hot sand (which the dingo promptly unearths), and can fight like several demons.

SEPTEMBER 26 - Blacks coming in for a big "corroboree", wallabies roasted brown, a la natural, tucked underneath the gins' arms. Started to show fight, various tribes standing behind trees, shaking spears and jabbering wildly.

SEPTEMBER 27 - Travelling along a cattle track, overtook a wild bull going down to water. He kept running ahead. I could not get past. Suddenly he stopped short, dropped his head, and charged. Ran off track, dodged, got past. Did not have time to look behind. Beat him easily on the "straight".

SEPTEMBER 28 - Heat intense. In tropical Australia. "Tophetical Australia"?

SEPTEMBER 29 - In camp. Flies bad. Crawled into mosquito net, lay there half asleep. Suddenly a purring grunt made me quietly and quickly grab my rifle. Through the blue of the cheesecloth netting I could see a grey body. Pushing the rifle muzzle close to it, and without sighting, I pulled trigger. A rush and a scramble, feathers flying in all directions, and I grabbed a badly wounded turkey.

OCTOBER 4 - Travelling across big plains, very tussocky. Skylines and horizons very plentiful here, not managed to "run" them down, though.

OCTOBER 28 - At Burketown.

NOVEMBER 7 - Celebrated my birthday. Beer strike on. Had to liven up on fresh water, which I brought in from the Nicholson River, 15 miles away. Publicans had locked up their water tanks. No other fresh water on hand. Very dry district. Drought on.

NOVEMBER 10 - Beer strike over. "Pubs." won.

NOVEMBER 11, 20, 25 - Numerous adventures, alligator shooting, netting shark fishing, hunting out on plains with the motor car. Inhabitants good "sports".

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Burketown, 24th November, 1913:- "Travelled fifteen hundred miles with my Ford car, no mechanical troubles, will leave Gulf next week for Port Phillip Bay."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 3 - Set out from Burketown for Melbourne 3000 miles away, across the Continent. Felt lonely and hopeless. No spare parts. Feeling weary and tired; the effects of malaria. Carrying Christmas goods and mails to outback stations. Country too dry for the mail horses to travel. Saw a big alligator lying asleep with his head resting on a dead cow, which had bogged on the river bank. Put a 22 bullet into his eye. Tremendous splashing and churning up of tidal mud and slush.

Ford car engine running with a splendid deep undertone as of distant thunder. Sweet music, best on earth, "yea" even better than the voice of one's best beloved.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Cloncurry, 4th December, 1913:- "Arrived Cloncurry this afternoon in record time, leaving for Hughenden, Ford car going well."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 7 - Rushing steep "gullies". Hair-raising game. Grades of 1 in 3 quarter of a mile long, taken at top speed, sometimes with a few inches to spare. Big breakaways on both sides. Case of "go or bust". Dodging logs, stumps, and trees. Rushed a big sandy river, the Fullarton. Car buried up to running boards. Broke up all benzine cases, jacked each wheel up, put boards underneath. Got out all blankets, kit, etc., and laid out on sand. Even my coat I laid out a la Sir Walter Raleigh style, finally to cover over a weak spot my cap and shirt was used. (Scrub and grass could not be obtained.) Three hours hard work under a blazing sun had given me a 40 h.p. thirst, which I endeavoured to quench with a bottle of strong ship's limejuice, neat. My waterbag was empty. Two benzine tins full of vile smelling and muddy water were aboard, but this was for emergencies.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Hughenden, 8th December, 1913:- "Arrived Hughenden, averaging two hundred miles daily over mountain ranges, sandy creeks, boggy plains, from recent

thunderstorms, Ford going without any pause travelling via Barcaldine post office."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 9 - Met a mob of cattle out "storm hunting". They were led by an old bull; behind him they stretched out in single column, head to tail, for a distance of about five miles. The dust which drifted to leeward gave the appearance of a big grass fire approaching. The beasts seemed to be thirsty and tired, with nostrils almost touching the ground. They determinedly kept to the track, which would lead them to the high tablelands, 50 miles away, where rain had most likely fallen. The old bull leader's instinct would not fail.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Tambo, 10th December, 1913:- "Arrived Tambo, lightning set plain on fire, car surrounded middle of night, moved camp in a hurry, heat intense, Ford still going strong, heavy bogs."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 11, 12 - Speeding across the plains of Western Queensland. Race against time, as I must keep a promise made three years ago that I would be in time for an appointment in Melbourne Christmas Eve.

DECEMBER 13 - Made three hundred miles to-day.

DECEMBER 14 - Had to lay up in Longreach. Delirious with fever all day and night.

DECEMBER 15 - Too weak to crank car. Got a man to start her for me. Went away out of my course to dodge a sandy creek. Gradually feeling better.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Baan Baa, N.S.W., 15th December, 1913:- "Arrived Boggabri, passed through heavy thunderstorm, been ill malaria, Ford making fast trip."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 17 - Had a good feed to-day. Lived without eating, drinking water for three days. Fever starved.

DECEMBER 18 - Crossed Queensland - N.S.W. border after following the Maranoa down.

DECEMBER 19 - Arrived at Moree. Had a race with a big English car. Dodging in and out amongst the gum trees. Shipping seas of dust. Got past. Beat him on the 50 mile run. Spoke to owner afterwards. He was surprised at "the little cheap car" running away from his "thousand pounder".

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Sydney, 20th December, 1913:- "Arrived Sydney four fifteen p.m., car in perfect order, absolutely no troubles whatever."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 20 - Arrived Sydney. Averaged 150 miles a day from the Gulf of Carpentaria.

DECEMBER 21 - Cleaned carbon out of engine. Tightened up big end bearings.

DECEMBER 22 - Left for Melbourne.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Albury, 22nd December, 1913:- "Arrived Albury, Ford going exceptionally well and fast, expect arrive Melbourne to-morrow."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 23 - Camped for night on top of Pretty Sally's Hill, outside Melbourne. Blowing a gale of wind, and raining heavily.

The following telegram was received from Birtles, dated Rialto, Melbourne, 23rd December, 1913:- "Completed pioneer journey across Australia,

arriving Melbourne three weeks out, averaging one hundred fifty miles a day, carried no spare parts. Ford requires no overhaul."

(Signed) Birtles.

DECEMBER 24 - Arrived Melbourne, completed journey. Went home to have a good sleep. Slept for 20 hours. Kept my appointment.

Thus ending the first journey ever undertaken by Motor Car across the Continent of Australia, from the Gulf of Carpentaria on the North to Port Phillip Bay on the South.

- by Geo. A. Roberts.
16th January, 1962.

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MONTHLY MEETING

The first Monthly Meeting for this year was held on 28th June, 1962. The new Office-Bearers had an opportunity to face the multitude. The essential business was conducted as usual and a preview of planned events was given by Ron Craze. He also offered some entertainment and advice on the subject of 'getting familiar'. The Meeting concluded with the presentation of Trophies and Medallions from the Wollongong Rally by Mr. L. Jones of H.C. Sleigh.

After the Meeting, we were privileged to have a talk on fuels by Mr. B. Sheaffe and on lubrication by Mr. K. Strachan. They had so much information to impart that it was difficult to absorb it all. Interesting technical data on lubricants and grease was provided by the courtesy of H.C. Sleigh. Many of us appreciated this printed information to add to our private collections. Unfortunately, the hour became too late to give many enthusiasts the opportunity they desired to submit questions. I think many of us would like to talk much more about the petroleum and lubricants used in the Edwardian era. The Club was most privileged to hear Mr. Sheaffe and Mr. Strachan.

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OMISSIONS

It was mentioned in the Report on the Wollongong Rally last issue that three entrants came from Queensland. They were:-

- Dave Feitchner - Cadillac
- Ross Guthrie - Napier
- Robert Guthrie - Sunbeam

Dave Feitchner in his Cadillac was second in the Rally. A very praiseworthy performance after such a long trip to the Starting Point. 'Spit and Polish' apologises for not acknowledging his fine effort. We congratulate them for their attendance and success.

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MISCELLANEOUS

The Club extends its congratulations to Newton Goldman who has recently completed his Medical Course, and is now in residence at the Canterbury District Hospital. It is likely that the Wolseley will need some mothballs this year.

Len Masser and Jack Smith recently visited Edd. Yabsleys and wife at Kempsey. He is working on his rear entrance Tonneau DeDion with great enthusiasm. It should not be long before the final result will be seen, and it is described by Len as 'marvellous'. Their weekend visit was a most enjoyable one.

A 1903 single cylinder Model A Cadillac (from Tasmania) has joined the Moss Stable at Ryde. It will probably be the piece de resistance of the Moss collection.

There are indications that the A.C.T. members are seeking to remain a sub-group within the parent organisation. It would appear as though the Southerners are moving faster towards forming a sub-group than the Northerners.

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PREVIEW OF EVENTS.

The Events Committee outlined their programme for the next year. The details have still to be finalised, but broadly, it is as follows:-

JULY	A Social in the Amenities Room.
AUGUST	Picnic swot day and Gymkhana. An extra event will be at Warwick Farm at the invitation of the Australian Automobile Racing Company.
SEPTEMBER	The Brighton Run.
OCTOBER	Waratah Festival on October 6th. The official Club Charity outing which will be at the Prince Henry Hospital. The Newcastle Run may be on the 8-hour weekend.
NOVEMBER	A short run is planned in a day especially for the ladies and children. This day will be combined with the official registration inspection.
DECEMBER	Christmas Dinner.
JANUARY	The 175th Anniversary of Australia will be celebrated this month, and a suitable run, with a shorter course for the smaller cars and a longer one for the larger cars, is planned. The Club anticipates co-operating with the official celebrations occurring at this time. This promises to be a most interesting and important event. Central Coast members are also keen to have a rally again this month.
FEBRUARY	A short run to the seaside.
MARCH	Wollongong Rally and the Annual Ball.
APRIL	A one-day run with lunch at a roadhouse.
MAY	Probably another Commonwealth Bank Rally.
JUNE	Time for hibernation and restoration.

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WANTED AND FOR SALE

- WANTED:
1. Hunter Thomas of Georgetown seeks information on a four cylinder Grant car.
(Editor's note: I will try to collect and prepare an article on Body styles, but it would not be ready for at least two issues.)
 2. Charles Mort (address below), is seeking a Carburettor 9 h.p. Pattern No. 2 DeDion; Lucas 'King of the Road' Brass Tail Light; Brake and Gear Lever for 1905 Model Z DeDion.
 3. A steering wheel for a 1911 Austin is wanted by the Editor. Also screw top for a water tank on a Rushmore Gas Generator.

FOR SALE: 1914 16.20 Wolseley. The motor car is mechanically O.K., complete with C.A.V. lamps., etc.; 4 new tyres and tubes. Wheels reconditioned. Spare Radiator. 4.880 x 120 Rudge Whitworth wheels also available. Boxes of spare parts including 4 extra doors in good condition; trumpet horn. Price open to best offer over £325. Finance can be arranged if necessary.

Apply: David Larking,
19 Arthur Street,
BAULKHAM HILLS.

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FOR EXCHANGE

Carburettor 8 h.p. Pattern No. 1 DeDion.

Transmission Parts 1903 DeDion.

Engine complete 1907 Twin 10 h.p. DeDion with water pump and clutch.

Various wooden wheels and beaded edge rims.

Sidelights and headlamps.

Two differential joints early Model T Ford.

Other Model T Ford transmission parts.

Hub caps - Maxwell, Napier, DeDion, F.N., NAG and several Knighton and Holley carburettors.

Apply: Charles Mort,
2 McBride Avenue,
HUNTERS HILL.

Other Clubs, please copy.

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