



Charles Meisl, Oscar Moore and George Saunders with their M.G. just before the start of the Rally.

Monte Carlo log-book

by
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TIME passes slowly when one waits for adventure to begin. Finally though it is 4.30 p.m. on Thursday the 18th January, a ring at my door and there is Oscar and there is George with the 1½-litre green MG, roof rack and all, loaded to the gunwales.

Since we are starting from Monte Carlo itself, we take, of course, all our luggage with us, also, as none of the three men in the team are midgets, accommodation in this small car is a bit cramped. But we reach Monte Carlo in good time and spirits.

Sunshine, orange trees, palms, perfect spring weather. We must be crazy to leave this enchanting and hospitable coast so soon again. The hotel at Monte Carlo is reached about 4 p.m. on Sunday—the speedometer shows 1,530 km. from London (1 mile is 1.6 km.). That evening, a council of war is held. We decide in view of the excessive weight of the car to leave behind most of our snow gear, one extra spare wheel and a lot of our spares, otherwise we fear the car will not be fast enough to maintain its required average, because of weight. Monday morning sees the car and crew at the famous Auto Riviera where the technical check-over takes place. Radiator, engine and wheels are marked with

paint to prevent any exchange en route. UMG 350 is washed, plugs are cleaned, and we go out on a test run after having adjusted the carburation. Now we seem to have lost use of one of the horns. The zealous car-washer has overdone his job and filled one of them with water, which has not improved it. Oscar has a few pungent things to say about French car-washers. The evening is spent in tidying the inside of the car, sorting out those things which we consider indispensable. An early night is indicated.

We know our chances are small ; we are in the second category—1,100-1,500 c.c. Our car is 1,250 c.c. and we have to contend with the extraordinary fast and light Simca 1,220 c.c. and 1,400 c.c. types—the Jowett-Jupiter 2 seater of 1,500 c.c., some specially-prepared Fiats, and so on. We will do our best of course and anyway we are having fun.

The day of the start of the Rally dawns bright and sunny. We finish sorting out the inside of the car, the maps, documents, money and all those bits and pieces essential to maximum comfort and easy driving. After lunch, another small rest and at 3.15 on Tuesday, January 23, the car and crew is put into position outside the Monte Carlo Sporting club ; a short interview by Monte Carlo radio, the minutes tick by, amid bustle and excitement and we are off at last at 3.55 p.m.

We pass through Nice at 70 k.p.h. enthusiastically waved on by the police ! Passage Control at Grasse holds us up only a minute or so and we are off, climbing a series of mountain passes—touch wood no plug trouble so far. The engine seems to revel in being pushed very hard and we are giving it the gun in second and third gear. We pass through low cloud but the road is dry. No. 100, a French Peugeot who left three minutes after us, is sitting on our tail, and seems to like it. About 40 km. before getting into Digne, now that darkness has fallen, I can see other competitors climbing the pass both above and below us. Their

headlights, the patches of snow by the side of the road and the glare of our own headlights make a dramatic pattern. Oscar is driving, George is navigating and I am off-duty, scribbling these notes. We check in at Digne at 7.06 p.m., having changed a troublesome plug en route. We leave at 7.28 p.m. our scheduled time, en route to Grenoble. Now I am driving and soon we climb the steep slopes of the Col du Bayard. There are small patches of ice which need watching, but otherwise it is an easy run. Grenoble—and now on the straight long roads to Chambéry. We stop for food before clocking in at the control, the skipper again complaining of a gnawing pain, indicating lack of food. On and on, eventless and effortless we speed to Geneva. Passage Control holds us up here for a minute or so, then on to Berne. We were not even stopped at the Swiss frontier for car and personal papers ; a glance at the Rally plate of the slowing car and we are waved on. George is driving at a steady 70-80 k.p.h., Oscar vainly trying to sleep in the back. Navigation is very easy here because of the first-class signposts and Swiss roads. The control at Berne is reached in good time and it takes me 15 minutes here to send a short telegram home at the cost of losing my breakfast. It is now just before dawn on Wednesday morning and these are the most difficult hours. Powers of concentration are at their lowest. Rising mists and damp roads make driving fairly difficult. We encounter patches of fog which cut down visibility to 100 yds. We refuel before crossing into France again and are trying to make up lost time driving in fog, to enable us to get a decent breakfast at the control in Strasburg, our next control. George is now pushing the kilometer needle round to 110 and soon the sun is rising and the spirits too. Strasburg breakfast is quite an astonishing thing—a fat steak each, chips, salad and Russian tea. We also have time here to wash, top-up the battery, check the oil level before our next Control at Luxem-

bourg. The run is a very easy and fast one in the early morning traffic and we have more than two hours in hand before we have to check in at the Control, so we pull up at a garage which Oscar knows and have our brakes adjusted, plugs cleaned and blank-off half the radiator. We think that owing to over-cooling, the mixture does not vaporise readily enough, causing wetting of the plugs. Luxembourg Control checks us in and out and, after a quick run over indifferent roads to Liege, we check in at the Control there and use a spare half-hour for a much-needed shave and wash.

Off again at 6.28 p.m. guided by a T.D MG driven by the local MG distributors who have kindly offered any help they might give. The Dutch frontier is crossed, again without formalities, and we are on the long straight roads lined with trees. Venlo Control comes and goes and we run into the most beautiful and hospitable Control at Amsterdam. Nuffields' Dutch representative has made arrangements to have the car greased and gives us a very fine meal. Off again at midnight and now we're leaning on those Dexedrine tablets. We are beginning to get tired. One and a half days and one and a half nights have been spent on the road already. Everywhere in Holland there are cheering people by the side of the roads, in spite of the late hour. Officials and police are extremely helpful. Control at the Hague is reached and left again and we follow an exceedingly fast motor-cycle patrol which guides us out of the town towards the Belgium frontier. An eventless run to the Brussels Control, which is reached early enough to enable us to have a quick meal in an all-night cafe. The Belgium/French frontier is crossed near Mons and another enormous breakfast is eaten in a cafe near Reims, prior to checking in. The skipper is a great one for keeping his strength up through food and I am wholeheartedly supporting him. At Reims control the traditional glass of champagne is offered

to us and we leave being filmed by the Shell Film unit.

Paris is reached in the lunch-hour traffic on Thursday and the control situated at the magnificent "Action Automobile" in the Avenue d'Iena is seething with a mass of onlookers and friends of competitors. These latter have a very hard job getting through the crush to the actual control itself. Here we are given another parcel of food and bottles—the fourth so far. The little bottles needless to say, are for consumption *after* the Rally. Down again on N.7 until we fork right for Bourges. Before getting there however, we stop by the roadside for a quick picnic and to organize the bits and parcels which have accumulated in the rear of the car and which make it rather a mess. Other competitors pass at high velocity thinking that only the mad English would bother to have a roadside picnic whilst on a Rally. The Bourges Control is nothing less than exceptional. The warmest of welcomes, the beautiful Town Hall for resting, running buffet, charming people.

As we are again well within our time, we refuel, clean our lamp-glasses as night is beginning to fall, and check everything over. Quick enquiry at Clermont Control reveals that there is no snow between there and Valence. A sigh of relief, as this is a very difficult section. At 8.34 p.m. on Thursday the Road Book is handed to us and Oscar guides the car out on to the road to Le Puy. At first there is no great difficulty here, only up and down hill straights. Oscar is driving fast now to make up time between the twisty sections before Le Puy, the speedometer needle seldom below 70 k.p.h. It is pitch dark and the moon has not yet put in an appearance. We are checking on our running average continually, and find that so far we have been running at 65 k.p.h. for some three quarters of an hour—good show. Oscar handles the little car really beautifully. As we are nearing the difficult bit, a little ice appears

in patches but nothing to worry about. All our lamps are on and fortunately we meet little traffic, the locals seemingly thinking that they had better stop at home and avoid the fast-running Rally cars. In spite of the cold weather, every little now and then a small cluster of spectators without cars seem to appear from nowhere in the glare of our lights. Now the road begins to twist and turn and the straight's vanish. Up hill and down dale, Oscar is working like a beaver swinging the MG round bends, pumping the gear lever, yet all beautifully smoothly in spite of tiredness. Le Puy passage control is reached and I take over, all within a minute. Now we are again climbing. The Col du Pertuis is 3,600 ft. up and in spite of the cold outside, driving is making me feel quite hot. Tiredness is beginning to make itself really felt now, and it is an effort to drive really smoothly and quickly.

An hour later, Oscar takes over again as my reactions have been slowing and it would be dangerous to continue in this way. Finally we can see the lights of Valence in the distance and we are up on schedule, so we refuel again. We adjust the headlights so that they spread more light to both sides of the road otherwise it is difficult to judge corners in the inky wet blackness. A plug is changed and we report at Valence to leave once more after a quick cup of coffee at 1.44 a.m. Friday, our last morning on the road. Oscar is also beginning to feel the effects of this long run and George takes over for a short spell. Soon we leave the main road and fork left at the little village of Fiancey, and press on to Crest, Die and the 3,500 ft. Col de Cabre. There are



End of the journey, Meisl looks in need of a shave. His driver knows he wants one and strokes the stubble.

frequent patches of sheet ice and high speed is fairly uncomfortable. Gap control is reached in good time and we can relax a little as the next station is a little less mountain-infested.

Before our next control at Digne we refill the car with Belgian fuel which we have brought in a jerrycan. We soon found however that the engine does not now take kindly to it in spite of previously running well on it. Acceleration seems to suffer and there is a distinct fluffing when picking-up from low revs. No time to do anything about it except to change yet two more plugs and hope for the best. Digne to Grasse with a succession of five mountain passes has always been the biggest toll-taker in the rally. We are told at Digne that the rain which has been teeming down for a while now means snow and ice further on. "Press on quickly" is the motto now and Oscar does turn the taps on. (The French have a delightful expression for this "to pull heavily on the string"). We are not far from Digne, yet the snow begins in earnest, mixed with slush at first. As we climb the snowstorm gets thicker, visibility is bad and the surface worse. Soon

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we pass cars by the roadside fitting chains. Chiron and the blue Delahaye, one of the official Talbot Works cars, and others. A quick consultation and we decide to continue with lowered tyre pressure but not to waste time fitting chains. The car is sliding about a bit now and the crew is not sleepy any more. There are one or two anxious moments when it appears that the car will not manage to round the bend, but it does with Oscars' excellent driving and a few inches to spare! Here Oscar produces another sample of his dry humour—"a lot of peril about tonight isn't there?" We treat him to a few encouraging words and now the difficulties of the surface are increased by the fact that competitors are close on each others' heels and it is virtually impossible to pass unless one wishes to take really grave risks. Now we are behind a Norwegian Citroën who moves rather slowly. It takes us a good while to pass him and it has made us lose at least five minutes. We are being overtaken by one of the wonderful small Renaults painted bright orange, entered by a Dutchman. The 750 c.c. Renault streaks away from us at an incredible speed with its little Austin-Seven-size engine obviously working hard. A check on the trip recorder and the stop watch show that we are five minutes behind time schedule.

This is the point when a few risks must be taken and Oscar drives with inspiration, but the car and crew are getting a little tired and the added friction from the rather deflated tyres simply will not allow us to exceed 90 km. or so even downhill. Just before Castellane we are being energetically signalled by two people to slow down for a corner, and sure enough two enormous snow-ploughs are coming up. We can just pass them and pity the others who will have the dickens of a job to get round them; yet those after us will have the advantage of swept roads and a faster passage. The kind people

who have waved us to slow down later in Monte Carlo turn out to be John Cooper of the *Autocar* and the staff photographer;—we are really grateful to them.

After Castellane things are a little easier especially as the dawn is breaking, but we are behind that inexorable schedule and we know now that we will lose marks. A final dash down the hairpins to Grasse, our wind-horn clearing the road with its ear-shattering blast. Here is the control and I sprint across the road to get the book signed. I collide with an official whilst doing so which causes much merriment among the onlookers. Thirteen minutes late is the sad tale here—130 marks lost and this means that we are not amongst the first fifty who will do the Regularity Run next Sunday. We are disappointed, but it cannot be helped.

Now follows the dash through Nice and into Monte Carlo, over roads fairly thick with morning traffic. Again our Gabriel's horn clears the roads effectively and most road users are decent enough to let the Rally cars pass. Through Nice and the famous Promenade de Anglais at 100 k.p.h. and then a right turn on to the Monte Carlo road. The time is 9.52 a.m. on Friday and we stop at the final control. We have done about 3,300 kms. since 3.55 p.m. on Tuesday and we are justifiably weary, dirty and dishevelled, but in spite of this, there is a sense of achievement, lateness or not.

Without being allowed to get out of the car, we continue about 500 yds. to take the acceleration and braking test. This is accomplished in 29.9 sec. as against the best time put up so far by the large cars of 24 odd secs. Now we sign off which is a lengthy procedure, take our hand luggage and the car is driven to the Parc Fermé to await tomorrows' technical inspection. A light lunch and we fall into bed. The 21st Monte Carlo Rally in this year of Grace 1951 is over. Yet more lessons have been learnt, perhaps to be incorporated in next years' attempt.

Final result: 163rd in general classification out of 340 starters; 49th in Class 2.

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