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AMERICAN PROGRESS IN AUTOMOBILISM.

By Henry Jackson Howard.

THE progress of the automobile toward general popularity in America has been by easy stages. Three years ago, when the first article ever published on horseless carriages in this country appeared in the METROPOLITAN, the automobile was known only in the shape of a cumbersome, ungainly thing, a sort of combination of a hansom cab and a heavy truck, which was offered to the New York public as a means of conveyance. Those same cabs are doing service today, and they have, through prolonged acquaintance, outgrown their ungainliness and have become genuinely popular—so popular, I am informed, that the company which furnishes the electric cab service for the city of New York finds itself unable to supply the demand for conveyances and will be

compelled to double its equipment in order to meet the popular demand.

I mention the automobile as used as a public conveyance first because of the fact that although there has been a steady growth in automobilism as a pleasure-giving recreation, it has been only within the past year that Americans have given it that consideration which has lifted it out of the category of temporary fads. In such matters we Americans are naturally inclined to follow the example of our people of wealth, and the adoption of the automobile by residents of Newport, the maintenance of one or more of the self-propelled vehicles by prominent men in New York society, to say nothing of the persistent work of the promoters employed by various concerns engaged in the manufacture of



SOME HANDSOME EQUIPAGES OWNED BY MEMBERS OF THE AUTOMOBILE CLUB.



VEHICLES OF ALL KINDS—THE STREET
CAB MOST CONSPICUOUS



A LIGHT STEAM CARRIAGE.

and proved that American manufacturers have not failed to profit in the beginning from a movement which some are bold enough to assert will revolutionize methods of locomotion.

In this club run some fifty vehicles of various patterns and makes took part. There were handsome traps, light road wagons, cumbersome-looking vehicles of French manufacture, light runabouts and pretty phaetons, and the more familiar types of coupés and hansoms. The run was in no sense a test of the endurance qualities of the machines, but the fact that not more than two breakdowns occurred made it quite evident that any of the machines were equal to the test of general use as road vehicles. While there was a decided appearance of stability about the machines of foreign make, I must admit a prejudice in favor of those of American manufacture, in which symmetry was not lost at the expense of giving space to motive power. Inasmuch as frequent tests have shown the American automobiles equal to the requirements of general roadwork, I

automobiles, have brought about the present popularity of the machine carriages. The influences here cited, never losing sight of the promoter, brought about the formation of the Automobile Club of America, the first club run of which took place on November 4th of last year and furnished much of the material used in the illustration of this article. This club run gave no adequate idea of the extent of the use of automobiles, but it did give to the public an idea of the variety of vehicles that have come into popularity,



A RACE ON FIFTH AVENUE—A STYLISH CARRIAGE.

venture the prediction that they will find the highest favor with American enthusiasts.

From this initial club run we must infer that up to the present electricity is the popular motive power, and that most American automobilists favor short runs rather than tours, that find favor with the French. There is no question of the reliability of electricity as a motive power, but the necessity for frequent renewals of the supply makes it inferior as a means of locomotion for long distances. The automobile tourist—for he will be a fixture in America as he is abroad—will use a steam or gasoline motor for long runs. He will find them cheaper and he will be able to carry in his vehicle the necessary power for any ordinary run. With the city automobilist, however, electricity will continue in favor, because a vehicle equipped for the use of that power is more easily handled and the power may be replenished at pleasure. Besides, the driver of an electric vehicle will not be required to have that general know-

ledge of mechanics absolutely essential to the successful handling of a steam carriage.

So much for the showing of the pleasure vehicles. The popularity of the cab service furnished in New York City has led other cities to follow the example set here. In Philadelphia and Chicago electric cabs have found general favor and companies furnishing the service have prospered. The business has spread, and a company has been formed to furnish a service in Honolulu, and a steam vehicle of American make is carrying the United States



mails in the new province of Porto Rico. The inadequacy of the New York service, alluded to at the beginning of this article, is shown by the fact that the company during the month of October was unable to meet 1,200 calls for cabs sent to the office of the organization. The fact that these vehicles enter into direct competition with the hansoms propelled by horses, and are preferred in a general street business, is an indication that they are to become the legitimate successors of the day cabs and night hawks of the big

an increase was warranted by the popular demand. To show what the demand is expected to be in the future, it is only necessary to state that the company has recently placed an order with the two largest manufacturers of electrically-propelled carriages for 2,000 automobiles of most approved types to be delivered in the next two years. Evidently the capitalists who are interested in the enterprise are of the opinion that the field of city transportation is to be filled hereafter by the horseless vehicle.



A STYLISH ELECTRIC TRAP AND A LIGHT WAGON PROPELLED BY THE SAME POWER.

cities. The average cab rider, no matter how great his love for horse-flesh, will not prefer it to the newer mode of conveyance that spares overworked animals and furnishes quicker transportation.

The equipment of the New York company controlling the electric cabs of the city was originally limited to a few of the old type of vehicles, but the organization has kept pace with all of the improvements of the inventors and has added to the number of vehicles as

Up to the present the manufacture of horseless vehicles has been in the hands of a few firms in the various large cities of the country, but there is every prospect that the adoption of gasoline motors for the work of propelling the carriages will to a very great extent revolutionize the trade in general, and factories heretofore engaged in the making of vehicles of other kinds will be bidders for future orders for automobiles. A prominent carriage manufacturer from a Western city remarked



PREPARING FOR RETURN RUN BY THE AUTOMOBILE CLUB.

the other day that every carriage maker in the country was engaged in the perfection of some sort of self-propelling vehicle. Some of these will, of course, reach the stage where they will be put on the market. Others, naturally, are doomed to be nothing more than seven-day wonders in the towns and hamlets where they are constructed. It will be a more or less easy matter, however, for many of the carriage makers to change the nature of the output from vehicles with shafts to others with motors. Already a number of large factories are turning out complete motors, special wheels and other parts for use in the making of automobiles. It will be a simple matter then for the carriage builder to fill all orders and at the same time do very little of the work in his own establishment. All of the parts being furnished by the wholesaler and manufacturer of specialties, all that will remain for the builder to do will be to assemble and adjust the working parts of the machine.

Aside from the men who are experimenting, and those who claim that their machines have passed the experimental stage but are not on the market, there

are only a dozen concerns actually engaged in the manufacture of automobiles. It is encouraging to those who are confident enough to predict that the horse will be only a museum freak before the end of the next century, that



THE GASOLINE MOTOR CYCLE.



MOTOR CARRIAGES STILL EXCITE CURIOSITY—A LIGHT WAGON—
A DELIVERY VEHICLE.

these establishments are unable to fill the orders that they are receiving for vehicles. A prominent member of a firm engaged in the trade recently stated that all of the well-known factories have orders ahead sufficient to prevent them from taking others until late in the spring of this year. This looks as if we are to be a horseless people in a very short time, if the same demand keeps up; but we are comforted by the example of the bicycle in the hope that we are not to lose our horses altogether. Automobilmism is sure to be a fixture, but the horse will hold its own for many a year to come.

The perfection of horseless locomotion has engaged the services of numerous inventors for a number of years past, and the work of the French people in this line has been discounted by that of American workers, if the records of the Patent Office are taken as a guide to activity of American inventive genius. During the early months of the year just passed there have been no less than fifty patents granted to inventors of electric and steam vehicles. There is no telling where this activity will end. It is to be hoped that it will result in the perfection of the machines, and that we will be able to show the French and other European manufacturers that we have not lost our cunning, and that in a

new field we are as potent as we have been heretofore in others. The display of automobiles at the Paris Exposition this year will be a test that will prove or disprove all of the boasted advantages of the machines of French manufacture.

While America has taken readily to the innovation of horseless cabs and is making the lighter pleasure vehicles popular in every part of the country, there has been no rush to make a revolution in the means of transporting heavy loads. There is considerable talk of building trucks that will cost less than five cents a mile to operate, but very few of them are in use. There are in New York City perhaps a hundred horseless delivery wagons, but all, or nearly all, of them are in use for light work. A company was formed over a year ago to use compressed air as a motive power for a system of trucks to do all of the heavy business of the metropolis. Up to the present time not one of the trucks has appeared in the streets, either carrying a load or without one. There are, I believe, a number of heavy vehicles in use in Chicago and a number also in St. Louis. It is claimed for these that they can be operated at a cost not exceeding three cents a mile. If this be true it is strange that the use of them has not become more general. New York merchants are looking for just such a cash-saving system for all lines of business. If it is in existence it is



A HEAVY TRAP—LINE-UP OF AUTOMOBILE RUN—
LIGHTER VEHICLES.

very strange that it has not reached the greatest city in the country.

In one respect American manufacturers have given the greatest encouragement to the automobile. This is in the placing of prices within the reach of people not superlatively wealthy, but nevertheless inclined toward novelties in sports and recreation. The French machines, of course, carry a tariff duty; but even if that were taken off, the automobiles of foreign make are more costly than those of American manufacture. This is not surprising when we reflect that in all other mechanical manufactures we are in the lead. Even if we should find that French patterns are more desirable than ours, we will probably make them at home and pay royalties to French inventors, and gain by the bargain.

Of horseless vehicles now on the market those using electricity as a motive power are the most costly. The average price of an electric carriage of any pattern is in the neighborhood of one thousand dollars, while the more elaborate ones range upward in price from that figure to something like twenty-five hundred dollars. In fact,

there is no limitation when style is added to efficiency. The average price of the steam carriages of American make now on the market is about eight hundred dollars. Some light traps are sold at six hundred dollars, and some of these vehicles are said to be perfectly satisfactory. A new company, backed by English capital, just formed, is expected to accomplish much in the cheapening of horseless vehicles, and it is predicted that a good carriage will be obtainable two years from this time at a price not exceeding three hundred dollars, while the range will not equal, as a rule, that of a vehicle of the same type and an ordinary road horse.

Of the lighter automobiles we have not had any too many nor yet too few. Automobilmism is sure to be one of the great diversions of the future. It is diverting and it is wholesome. Through the agency of such organizations as the Automobile Club of America and the other clubs that are sure to be organized in all of the great cities, the fad, as some are so bold as to call it at present, will develop into what cycling has been for many years past.



A SPEED RIVAL OF THE "L" TRAIN.