

NUMBER ONE

Romance of the First Born in the M.G. Magnette Family

NOW and again the world of motor racing produces a car destined to unusual adventure. It was for such a machine that, at two o'clock in the morning, thousands of enthusiastic Italians waited in an avenue, gazing down a smooth, black road which shone glassily under the stark light of brilliant arc lamps. The spectators were held back by ropes and planking stretched between flag-poles set at the edge of the highway, and the ceaseless, high-pitched drone of their voices maintained an atmosphere of tension and expectation.

Officials hovered beneath a banner strung high above the road, its chequered edging silhouetted against the shadowy trees. Ever and again they looked to where a slender arch straddled the avenue, so placed that it formed an entrance from the deep darkness of the countryside beyond the town.

Without warning a brilliant glare burst from the black distance, rushing towards the arch. The grouped officials broke up. The standing crowds swayed, and above the noise of their stirring came the blare of a trumpet sounding a long-drawn call, while the blaze of white light rushed nearer. As the trumpet-note died it was echoed by the growing roar of a racing car travelling under full throttle.

Its head lamps caught the arch, silvering the structure's sides. They revealed the animated crowd, lit the scattering officials, and caught the stretched banner as the dark shape of the machine dived through the opening and pitched down the centre of the road. A flag fell in the moment that the car roared beneath the banner, then brakes went on, and men ran from all directions towards the slowing machine.

Proud Bearer of the Union Jack

Beneath its dusty flanks showed the green of England's racing colour. The Union Jack was painted on the bonnet, and on the curve of the scuttle was the Italian flag. Behind the wheel sat Captain G. E. T. Eyston, with Count Lurani huddled at his side, both cramped and stiff. In eighteen hours they had covered one thousand and twenty-four miles, and were the first to finish the course for the 1933 Mille Miglia. They had broken all records for 1,100 c.c. machines, and the car they drove was the first of all racing Magnettes.

Such was the *début* of a machine which had been built in record time, and had then journeyed to Italy during twelve stormy days, surrounded by boxes in a vessel laden

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Magnette No. 1 in the Mille Miglia

with china clay. By all precedent a car erected so rapidly, and of new design, should have been subjected to the trials and errors of a dozen events before it ran first past the chequered flag. Yet in its first race it achieved victory in its class, which is unusual.

The crowds swarmed close while Eyston and Lurani were lifted out, and the Italians remained staring at the *vettura inglese* while other cars came in. They left it only when Tazio Nuvolari raced across the finishing line, but they might have remained could they have known that the future was to link Nuvolari with this dusty green machine.

When the crowd had gone the M.G. Magnette was rolled away, returning to the factory to be prepared for the International Trophy at Brooklands. It was driven in this event by Mrs. T. H. Wisdom, who had shown her skill with other machines, including the giant Leyland Thomas. The 1,087 c.c. machine now responded under her hands. It ran faultlessly,

stopping only once for fuel and a wheel change, touching 106 m.p.h. down the railway straight, and slipping handily through the turns, aided by its preselector gear box; the car was unique in the fact that it was the first road-racing machine ever to be given this fitment. The slim, black-overalled woman ran the machine into third place, ending a splendid event.

Other Drivers Interested

Mechanics returned the Magnette to the works, and for a month it was used by visiting drivers who wanted to get the feel of this new type of car. It served them on the roads around the factory, and, once or twice, showed its paces on the open track, lapping happily at 110 m.p.h., until George Eyston decided to test its prowess at Shelsley Walsh.

For the first time it met trouble. On the journey down, where the road was narrow, Eyston came fast through a curve to find the way barred by a car backing out of an orchard. The Magnette slowed, but not enough; it dented the tail of the baulking machine and bent its own front axle.

The car went back for repairs, and was soon again demonstrating its capabilities, persuading many to ownership of cars that were duplicates of itself, lacking only its growing tradition. June trailed away, and Eyston entered the machine for the Mannin Beg in the Isle of Man, a race which was something different from anything that the car had yet encountered. *Continued overleaf.*

INTO BATTLE



It was an event through house-hemmed streets, with sand-bags to protect spectators and shop windows, with a dozen abrupt corners and endless bends, with tramlines to offer hazards. When the flag fell Eyston let others make the pace, yet lapped only seven-tenths of a mile an hour slower than the leader. Three cars had fallen out before he began to open up; then, on his seventh lap, the engine faltered and went dead. The camshaft drive had fractured.

The car came home again, a little disgraced. It had done good work, but, it seemed, its work was ended. The grueling of the Mille Miglia had, perhaps, taken too great a toll, and it seemed unwise again to trust its reliability in a race. Mechanics used it for running fast errands, and it was now employed for demonstration only when no newer Midget was available.

Nuvolari as its Driver

It stood by while other machines were made ready for the Tourist Trophy race. At times it suffered the indignity of journeying to obtain parts that were needed for these cars, of which it was the forerunner. Then, in the midst of the preparations, news came that Nuvolari wanted a wheel for the T.T., and Eyston suggested offering him a Midget. There was no machine available except the now worn-looking Number One, but there was fine history behind the car and it might respond in the hands of so fine a driver.

Work on the machine—which had descended to a factory hack—was begun at a time when the rest entered for the Belfast race were almost ready. It had less preparation than any, but it looked in fine trim when it came to the line, bearing No. 17, and rightful leader of the four Midgets which had been entered. Nuvolari had not

handled the car before he began practice, and he had never raced with a machine carrying a preselector gear box, but his practice laps were very fast, and he said that he liked the car long before he came to the starting line.

From the fall of the flag Nuvolari began tucking other machines behind his tail, and at the end of half an hour broke his class record with 77.6 m.p.h. After that he put his foot down, and, touching 115 m.p.h. along the straight to Comber, lowered his own record on three successive laps, climbing up to third place. He followed Freddy Dixon's Riley, until Dixon lost time through his exhaust pipe coming loose, on which the Midget again smashed the record on three consecutive laps, snatching the lead which H. C. Hamilton's M.G. Midget had held from the start.

Still the car's speed mounted. Man and machine formed a perfect combination, and Nuvolari broke the lap record yet again when he came round at 81 m.p.h. Two laps later he put up his fastest time, clocking 10 min. 4 sec.—a lap at 81.42 m.p.h. Then, 'as if to prove that this was no chance performance, the machine duplicated the effort next time round, and, at the end of the following lap, Nuvolari came home victor of the fastest Tourist Trophy race ever run.

The car had broken its class lap record eleven times, and had shown its mettle by finishing the long race at its highest speed.

Italy, Brooklands, Ulster

It had led the rest home in Italy's greatest event, it had taken third place in the International Trophy, and now it had won the finest race the British Isles had ever seen, handled by a man whom many believe to be the world's greatest driver.

THE 1933 TOURIST TROPHY

Driven by no less than the legendary Tazio Nuvolari, with Alec Hounslow of M.G.s as his riding mechanic, a supercharged Magnette won the 1933 Tourist Trophy, 12th in the series, - with H.C. Hamilton's supercharged 750 c.c. Midget in second place, only 40 seconds behind, the issue being in doubt right up to the last minute. But for a delay during one of his pit stops, Hamilton should have won. The race was run on handicap, a supercharged 750 c.c. car being credited with three 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile laps before the start, and an unblown 1,100 with two.

