

OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE . . .

And Some Don't

Even Fade Away,

Says

ALEC MENHINICK

The Kegresse deals with snowy slopes or heathland gullies with contemptuous ease, and despite its modest horse-power rating will haul man-size loads up remarkable gradients.



WHEN the weather was really bad in the wilds of West Wiltshire and even tractors bogged down, a strange beast crept out of the garage of Mr. Clements, in East Knoyle and waddled off to help the luckless victims of the elements. Heads turned as it moved sedately on its way, for this was no ordinary Thing and few, if any, had seen the like of it before, or would do so again, maybe.

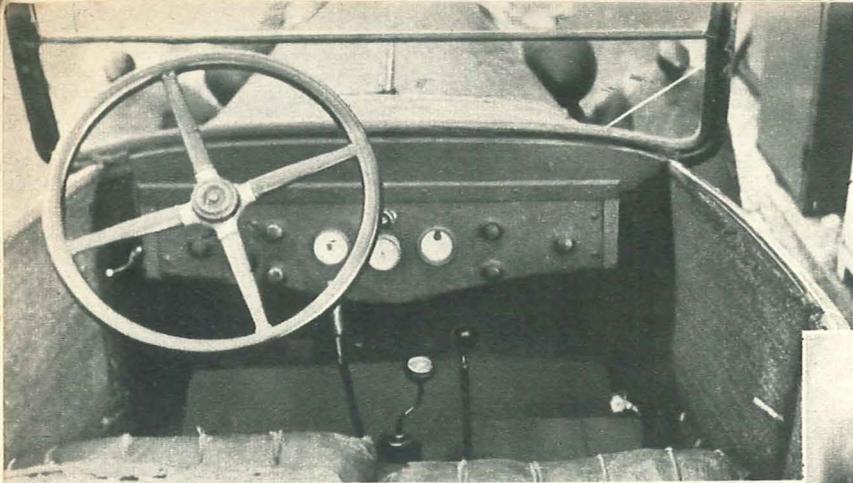
Rounding a bend in the road the driver of the beast saw the object of his excursion. At the bottom of a long and slimy slope a 3½-litre Jaguar lay belly-deep in mud and near it, with a wire hawser stretched between the two, was a heavy tractor, helpless, with mud up to its axles.

Without a pause the Thing was headed down the slope and turned about above the tractor. Another wire was passed. It seemed unbelievable that one small unit could hope to pull the two heavily bogged vehicles out of the mire but five minutes later all three were moving, ever so slowly, up that slippery grass slope. When they were safely back again on the road and the towing wire was unhitched the Citroën Kegresse, for such was the unorthodox vehicle, made a dignified and unruffled return to its lair, there to remain until something really worth while again called for its services.

It was this incident that interested me so much that one snowy day in last February's cold spell I asked Mr. Clements if he would take me out for an airing in this wonderful old-timer. Airing proved to be the right word, for it has an open "tourer" body and the East wind and snow combined to bring the mercury down to 27 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mr. Clements is an enthusiast for this old Citroën, the actual age of which is unknown. He told me that he had never seen a vehicle which could take on such heavy collar work and the time had yet to come when it would let him down on a towing job. When all else failed the Kegresse was called in.

Some readers will remember this famous Citroën half-track model when it hit the headlines in 1922-23 with the first crossings of the



Sparsely furnished and instrumented, the cockpit of the Kegresse contains the normal pedal controls, plus hand-brake, gear-lever and a lever to operate the two-speed final-drive gearing. The engine is a four-cylinder 1,453 c.c. side-valve unit, with ducted fan behind the radiator.

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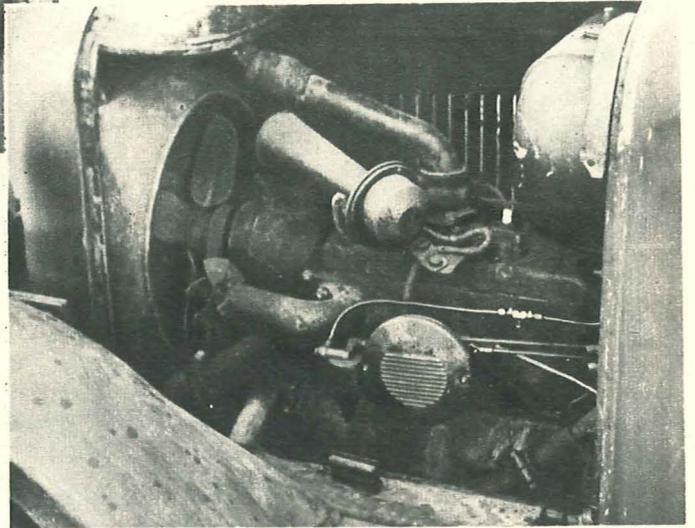
Sahara Desert by motor vehicles. Mr. Clements's particular vehicle was originally a French Army one and it is still in its original war-paint. Its first registered owner in this country was the Duke of Buccleuch at Drumlanrig Castle, Dumfries, where it was used as a shooting brake in the truest sense of the word. That was in 1926 and the Registration Book shows that it remained in the service of its distinguished owner until 1930.

From 1930 to 1936 there is a blank in its recorded history but the Kegresse first came to the notice of Mr. Clements when it was being used for hauling timber from the woods of Wiltshire. He coveted his neighbours' goods unashamedly but it was not until 1946 that his many attempts to buy it were eventually successful.

Since it came to live in East Knoyle the life of this fine old half-track has been no idle sinecure of a museum piece but that of a hard-working towing vehicle whenever conditions are too bad for the rest. It has never failed Mr. Clements and he has firmly declined the blandishments of would-be buyers.

The Kegresse is still in its original condition in all respects, with the exception of the front wheels, which are waiting to be replaced when the correct tyres can be obtained. Even the instruction book (in English) is in Mr. Clements' possession. In it the claim is made that the loads which can be handled are "On gradients not exceeding 8% . . . 5 tons. On gradients not exceeding 18% . . . 2½ tons. On gradients not exceeding 25% . . . 2 tons. On rails . . . 50 tons. On water (barge towing) . . . 1,000 tons." Mr. Clements, whose experience of the Citroen is confined to the land, is convinced that the claims are modest.

The four-cylinder side-valve engine is rated at only 11.4 h.p. (68×100), with a governor which limits its revs. to 2,300. An interesting feature is that the water impeller is fitted with a fan, placed behind and driven by the radiator fan.



Its speed varies in accord with the main fan and the arrangement works very well.

Two gear changes are provided, one being that of the normal three-speed gearbox and the other, operated by a separate lever, is a two-speed epicyclic in the driving pulleys. The steering is for left-hand drive.

We took the Kegresse out over the snow-covered hills, far from the beaten track. It was a delight to drive. No going was too bad for it (it still has its original rubber tracks) and in lowest gear, with the hand throttle set, its speed was so slow that it was possible to leave the driver's seat and prospect ahead, leaving the Kegresse to follow in its own time, like a well-trained dog. We did this several times and it never strayed from its straight course.

The steering was heavy and lacked self-centring action. One had to get used to the immediate deceleration when the clutch was depressed to change gear. Apart from this the Citroen was like a normal car to drive and more enjoyable than some I have tried. Its top speed is about 18 m.p.h. and its mechanical silence excellent.

After giving the old Citroen a no-holds-barred test which would have short-winded even a modern vehicle, I was "given furiously to think" on the subject of the progress we have made in the past 30-odd years.



Good ground clearance, little rear overhang, and flexibly-swinging rear tracks enable the car to tackle really rough country without grounding. Its rubber tracks also make it quite at home on normal roads.