MOTOR SPORT Conducts a Severe Test of a Popular High-Performance Car

OVER THE WELSH ROUGH STUFF WITH A COUPÉ ALLARD

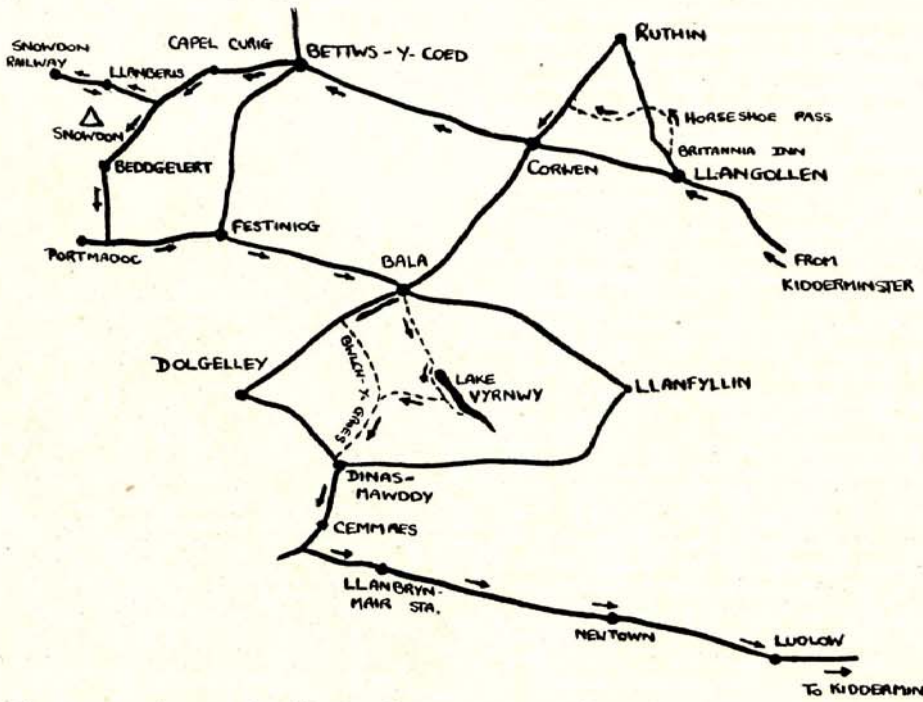
LAST year MOTOR SPORT tested a "Competition"-model Allard two-seater, this year the coupé model came up for test. This set us a poser, for the Allard has won such a reputation for itself as a practical, go-anywhere high-performance car that how to give it anything like real work to do was a difficult problem. Even before we set eyes on the grey coupé we were to borrow for a few days we knew that here was a car that would be perfectly at home over a trials course, yet one which, by reason of its excellent braking and immense powers of acceleration, together with its 85-90 m.p.h. maximum speed, would pack a very decent number of miles into each hour's motoring on British roads. Moreover, we were aware that this was a car that truthfully needs no gearbox other than for starting, being capable of negotiating even town-traffic on its highest ratio. How then, with so versatile a performance, could we put the Allard through its paces and discover whether there was anything it really disliked?

Having regard to the fact that fitness-for-export is the criterion by which all British cars are now judged, we decided that prolonged motoring up rough-surfaced gradients would best suit our purpose and serve our readers. And, short of taking the Allard across the seas, Wales seemed the place at which to aim.

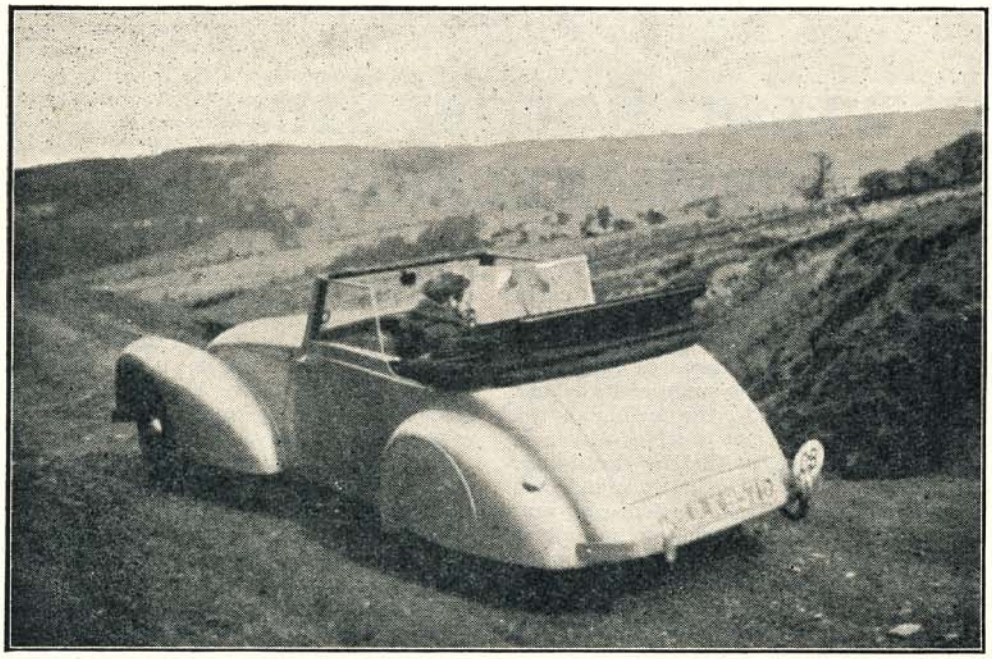
Accordingly, we set out from Southern England three-up, early, very early, one Saturday morning with Llangollen as the immediate objective. The Allard made light work of this long main-road run, by reason of the detail, as well as major, good qualities with which it abounds. For example, the body, now a product of the Allard organisation, offered comfortable accommodation and ample weather protection. The coupé-top can be raised or lowered literally one-handed from inside the car and even when down, with the glass windows of each door wound up, draughts are effectively by-passed round the car's occupants. The bucket front-seats, their backs folding to provide access to the rear seat, are comfortable and very easily adjusted, while the pedals, telescopic steering column and Bluemel spring steering wheel are placed in exactly the right positions for effortless control. The rear seat is inclined to be cramped for two persons, but a single occupant can sit sideways in complete comfort. The sloping windscreen is set at an angle which obviates dazzle; we were, however, somewhat shocked to find that it cannot be opened for driving in fog. Apparently, when the required fittings are in easier supply, a fully opening screen will replace the present single-pane fixed version. Ample arm-room for the driver and a very good view of both front wings are other factors that reduce fatigue during long spells such as we proposed to take behind the Allard's wheel. An early morning frost, however, made lack of a screen demister rather evident.

As we drove fast through the night further good qualities endeared the car to us. At 30 m.p.h. the twin exhaust pipes emit a distinct burble which is a trifle irritating with the head up. But above this speed exhaust sound dies away and one cruises in silence at any speed up to the car's maximum, albeit at night the wing-recessed lamps made anything over 60 m.p.h. something of a strain—the modern trend of small, shallow head lamps set low within the wings sets lamp manufacturers a pretty problem and one they have not yet completely solved. The anti-dazzle switch is conveniently located in the steering wheel centre, together with the switch for the self-cancelling direction indicators. While on the subject of speed, we made no attempt to time this Allard, or even to check its speedometer, for with no Brooklands, no Donington, and the Air Ministry determined to put even disused airfields out of bounds, such a task is no easy one. However, along one short piece of road the speedometer showed 81 m.p.h., on another occasion over 90 m.p.h., while 30 and 50 m.p.h. were attainable on the gears. Normally, of course, there is no need to use anything like these speeds to maintain high averages, as the Allard will accelerate strongly in top gear from 25 m.p.h. onwards, while even if bottom and second gears are used only up to 15 and 40 m.p.h., respectively, acceleration still comes into the category of "immense." At the other extreme, the top-gear performance *really is* extraordinary, it being possible to come down to 10 m.p.h. or less on this 4.1 to 1 ratio and then accelerate smoothly (and after 25 m.p.h. very rapidly) away.

The other factors which impressed and satisfied us on this long run to Llangollen were the Allard's truly excellent steering and road-holding and its very efficient brakes. A lot is written and spoken nowadays about under and over-steer, but we confess we use such terms with caution, because it seems to us that a car may exhibit one quality on one type of bend, but just the opposite on a different form of corner, and that the speed at which bends are taken, even surface irregularities, may affect the issue. But with the Allard there is no doubt but that its general tendency is to under-steer, in the sense that it possesses the most desirable factor of control a fast car can have. This understeer, however, is not pronounced, and, particularly when a sharp bend in one direction is followed immediately by one in the opposite direction, the car swings through them with a beautifully balanced feel and a minimum of plus or minus steering effect. It is heavy steering, with strong return-action in the modern "spring-loaded" manner and it holds the car "in" round bends no matter what the speed. No return kick is conveyed to the wheel, although the movement of the road wheels can sometimes



The route used to test the Allard. It may suggest a "basic" tour for those who intend to pool several months' petrol ration for one run, after June 1st.



"*A pause was made to consult maps.*" *The Allard coupe at the commencement of* MOTOR SPORT'S *strenuous test in the Welsh mountains.*

be felt; the column, while not entirely rigid, does not move excessively. The car holds its "line" well down long straights, although a slight tendency to wander was sometimes experienced. Coupled with this excellent steering is road-holding of a very high order, no roll being experienced on fast bends, tyres never protesting, so that the Allard is a pleasure to corner and we saved much time thereby.

As to the brakes, these deserve the highest praise. They are light, progressive in action, really powerful and do not pull the car one way or the other. Somehow they work more "firmly" than is customary with hydraulic actuation, yet are entirely smooth in their retardation. They were also completely silent save for a very occasional squeal which, were we not hyper-critical of every aspect of a test-car, would not justify comment. Such brakes are a credit to Lockheed and a valuable asset on a car of the Allard's capabilities. A minor criticism is that, well as the pedals are placed, heel-and-toe manipulation for double de-clutching isn't possible. To return to our long drive, as sleep overcame the front-seat passenger, he found it possible to stretch out in comfort, for the leg room provided could hardly be greater. And so we arrived at Llangollen.

Lowering the head, for the scenery was too good to miss, and the rear quarters *do* constitute rather a blind-spot for the driver, we prepared to commence our self-imposed trial. Here it may be said that the Allard was no newcomer to this sort of thing, as Sydney Allard himself had used it for a fast Continental trip, four-up, in connection with the Geneva Show, while another Pressman had used the car for a strenuous journey to the Brussels Show. It seemed just possible that a car so hard-used would find the worst that Wales could offer too much for it—but in that we were to be happily disillusioned.

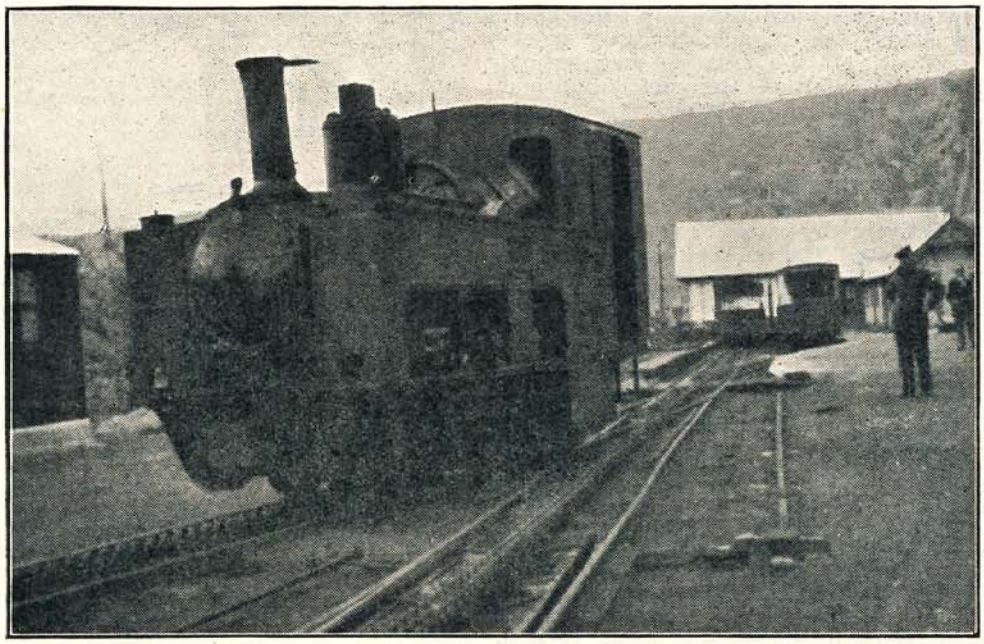
First, we turned right to Ruthin, off the Horse Shoe Pass by-pass, at the Britannia Inn. This rough climb proved child's play to the Allard, but offered us a very nice view rearward. Crossing the main road at the top, a pause was made to consult maps, and then we lowered ourselves down through the slate pits to A5, appreciative of the good visibility from the driving seat as we negotiated these narrow, twisting tracks.

The main-road-run to Bettws-y-coed was a rapid one, the surface and corners excellent in the extreme. Indeed, we formed a very favourable impression of Welsh roads, but would have missed the guidance of "cats-eyes" at night. Ahead, the mountains showed, snow-tipped against a blue sky. Although, thus early, holiday makers and hikers, not to mention cyclists, were much in evidence, we had no difficulty in obtaining lunch at Bettws-y-coed, during which crowds formed in admiring groups round the car. Without being ultra-streamlined, the Allard has a very appealing modern, well-balanced outline.

Refreshed, we continued to Capel Curig, the scenery becoming more impressive every mile, and drove up Dyffryn Valley, past its twin lakes, the long hump of Moel Siabod on our left, the Glyders, higher and rougher, on our right. Soon we came upon that lonely farm, and the power-house of its amateur-built hydro-electric set, which is the subject of Thomas Firbank's excellent book, "I Bought a Mountain." Turning right we went on as far as Snowdon Railway Station, where we were allowed to photograph "Enid," the 1895 0-4-2 rack-and pinion Swiss-built tank-loco which, like our Allard, understands the meaning of hill-storming!

Returning from Snowdon, pausing for flocks of sheep met on the road, we went next along the Llanberis Pass, turning right to Beddgelert, proceeding towards Tremadog, then turning left, north-westerly, to Ffestiniog. From here a 19-mile run through very desolate country took us to Bala—the sort of country where one would be ill-advised to run out of petrol, either in car or aeroplane. The Allard's 19-gallon tank ensured against that, and just as we were beginning to wonder how far we should be able to motor without sign of civilisation, two cottages and a railway viaduct came in sight. Even so, some 14 miles of barren country had been traversed; although the road surface was excellent, few roads in England or Wales can be more isolated; only by recalling an evening before the war, near John o' Groats with a 4¼-litre Bentley, could we remember making a longer run out of touch with man and his handiwork.

In Bala we turned right, and then left over a single-track railway, passing the edge of the great lake, where two of the



"*Enid,*" *the Swiss-built 2 ft. 7½ in. gauge tank-loco of the Snowdon Mountain Tramway, which was built in* 1895. *Our Allard had something in common with it as a climber, but whereas "Enid" is assisted by a rack and pinion mechanism, we relied on our Dunlops!*

party learned of the declaration of war in 1939. A direct climb brought us to Lake Vyrnwy, where we skirted the west bank of the lake and then turned right up what was a mere grass-grown farm-track. Up and up, on and on led this ascent. For a time the going was merely rough, so rough that an exhaust pipe occasionally fouled a boulder in spite of a 9-inch ground clearance, and the rear axle "bottomed" protestingly. Then pools of water intruded and the gradient increased, until the Allard, a smooth tyre on its off-side rear wheel, spun to a standstill. We let it roll back, the passengers got out, and the writer played "trials-driver" up the slippery slope, the tail swinging wildly on a rock outcrop by a farm wall, the rear wheels spinning furiously under a well-open throttle. In this manner the ascent was nearly mastered and finally bricks and corrugated iron laid beneath the rear wheels enabled level ground to be reached. Through all this revving and pulling under load the V8 engine showed no loss of power or that disinclination to restart so often experienced under such distressing circumstances; it did not even *smell* hot and its temperature merely went up to 180 degrees F. from the normal 120 degrees F. The clutch, too, stood up admirably and never felt "soggy."

The next cessation of forward motion was the driver's fault entirely, for he clotulently let the off-side wheels fall into a deep moss-covered bog, when a perfectly good shale surface presented itself a little to the left. This episode, in such desolate surroundings, could well have proved serious, but the useful Allard screw-jack, which plugs beneath the chassis and lifts both wheels on one side clear of the ground together, enabled an artificial "road" to be built beneath the wheels with stones, after which the accommodating clutch and that admirable pulling power from zero r.p.m. got us back on to hard ground.

Thereafter this rough track, waterlogged in many places, and with deep rock ledges crossing its path, was an easy second-gear climb, using hardly any throttle. A car that can negotiate the back-of-beyond Welsh farm tracks and hill paths in this fashion should certainly have nothing to fear from the worst that overseas buyers demand. When deep water splashes were encountered we merely engaged bottom gear, came practically to a standstill as we lowered the front wheels into the water to avoid drenching the car's occupants, then opened up, when the immense power available would pull us through anything.

Soon after this temporary stoppage, when climbing a farm track to join Bwlch-y-Groes near its summit, the Allard's good low-speed torque got it away with a minimum of assistance. Note, by the position of the cottage, how the gradient falls away in the background!

The Allard approaching the rough stuff of North Wales, which it tackled manfully thanks to its 9 in. ground clearance, immense power and good weight distribution.

Here we may digress to comment on the gear-change. On another Allard which we tried, a longer remote lever was used, while that car had covered a big mileage, so that the lever movement was comparatively free and gear-changing relatively easy. On the car submitted for test all was well, synchro-mesh or double de-clutch, if the change wasn't hurried, but quick silent changes were almost impossible to effect, due to the stiff action of the remote-control and the fact that it tightened up even more while the car was accelerating hard. In many respects this is of little moment, especially in view of the splendid top-gear performance, but it spoils the long-range acceleration of a car which accelerates incredibly well in any gear. Moreover, the harsh treatment which follows seems to strain the gear selectors, for second gear repeatedly jumped-out on the over-run on the car we were driving. The gears are quiet but there is no safety catch for reverse; the clutch is on the heavy side and needs to be fully depressed, but is entirely positive in action. Thus it will be seen that criticism is confined to the gear-change and we hope to see something like the Ford "Pilot" steering-column change adopted for next year's Allards.

A successful ascent of our really tough test track saw us join the notorious Bwlch-y-Groes not far from its summit. The descent of this famous climb was another test of the Lockheed brakes, which functioned perfectly. Even the little handbrake, with its racing-type ratchet, would effectively retard the car on this gradient, but we were reminded that it is intended merely as a parking brake in having to reach rather far to the left to manipulate it.

At the foot of Bwlch we turned left to Dinas Mawddwy and pointed the

Allard's modern nose towards home, *via* Newton, Ludlow and Kidderminster, deviating to Birmingham for a midnight meal before tackling the long night run down into Hampshire. On that last run home the Allard showed no signs of its ordeal, save, perhaps, for a rattle or two from its hood sticks. We had punished it over a distance exceeding 500 miles, sparing it not at all, and it had come through without a falter. In all, MOTOR SPORT put in more than 900 miles' driving and the petrol consumption overall was 17-18 m.p.g., a most creditable figure, for the fan was in use (it is sufficiently high-set not to be an embarrassment in water splashes) and the engine had never attained a decent working temperature, allied to which the throttle was nearly always far from shut! Incidentally, in spite of the fuel-range of over 300 miles, the last two gallons or so are trapped until an extra fuel pump is switched on, providing a useful reserve.

All that remains is to sum up the details of this very excellent, extremely high-performance and versatile car. Its 3,622 c.c. V8 engine has painted cylinder heads and chromiumed water pipes and fittings. It is very reasonably accessible when the alligator bonnet is raised, although the oil filler is a thought far back for easy manipulation of an oil tin. The Ford clutch and gearbox are in unit with the engine, the gear ratios being 14.4, 6.95 and 4.11 to 1. Front independent suspension is by divided axle and transverse spring, rear suspension also by a transverse spring, this arrangement offering comfortable yet firm springing, pitching being more evident by the action of the lamp beams at night than by discomfort to the passengers. A Panhard-rod is no longer used. The Lockheed brakes have a drum diameter of 12 inches, and Dunlop 6.25-16 tyres are used. The Marles steering gear asks 2¼ turns lock to lock, and gives a 41 feet turning circle. On a compression-ratio of 6.12 to 1 the b.h.p. is 85 at 3,800 r.p.m. and the coupé weighs 26 cwt. unladen. Ignition is by Lucas coil.

The mahogany facia carries, l to r:—pull-out ash-tray; petrol reserve switch; combined oil gauge (to 60 lb./sq. in.) and water thermometer; ignition and lamp switch below; 100 m.p.h. speedometer with no trip; choke, reversing lamp switch and ignition lamp below; ammeter; panel lamp switch; fuel gauge marked ¼, ½, F; starter button and hand-throttle below. The horn-button, in the wheel centre, operates not-too-blatant twin horns, and the control for the dual screen wipers is on the screen base. The doors, hinged, alas, at the rear, open and shut well and the handles are well-placed, but the window winders are set rather too far back. Oil pressure was normally 20 lb./sq. in. The tail of the body contains a boot, the lid of which is locked by means of a carriage-key. The spare wheel is carried in the boot, so that only limited luggage space is available, unless it is carried, exposed, on the lid. The aforementioned carriage-key operates the neat lock for the rear wheel fairings, which are not too difficult to remove and refit when a wheel has to be changed and which do not suffer or fall off over rough country. The rear-view mirror incorporates a clock and gives a rather restricted view, especially if the head is down. A full-width, very deep shelf runs below the facia, on which small objects tend to hide. Entry and exit is particularly easy and the doors are pleasantly solid; the hood should be properly folded when being lowered or it tends to chafe. The equipment includes bumpers but no spot-lamp. In the modern manner the screen-wipers only function when the ignition is "on," but as the 12-volt electrical system of the Allard is fully up to its work, this is less of an anxiety than might sometimes be the case. The door pockets are of queer shape and rather shallow. There is a quick-action fuel filler in the near-side rear wing and dust-shields below the front wings. Dimensionally, the Allard has a wheelbase of 9 ft. 4 ins., a track of 4 ft. 8 ins. front and 4 ft. 10½ ins. rear, and measures 15 ft. 3 ins. by 5 ft. 11 ins. by 5 ft. 2 ins.

The Allard is such an outstanding car, and one so much in demand in our export markets, where its Ford-base is fully appreciated from the spares and servicing angle, that we are delighted to be able to publish such a comprehensive test-report of it.

Few cars combine such vivid performance with an ability to withstand trials conditions, and that the Allard possesses these qualities while being essentially a car of straightforward conception, simple to service, is largely the reason for its ready sale to all parts of the world. On a fast main road run it has few equals amongst present-day production cars, over a trials course it stands alone, yet it is also an up-to-the-minute town car able to win prizes in Continental "concours," and to motor around, if Madame wishes, using only the highest of its three ratios. You cannot ask fairer than that in a car costing, with purchase tax, £1,277 5s. Our lasting impression of the smart Allard coupé that we took up to Wales and back was that here is a car the manner-of-going of which is as good as a tonic for persons jaded by the controls and restrictions of the present day. If you want to know anything further about this refreshing car, apply to the Allard Motor Co., Ltd., 24-28, High Street, Clapham, London, S.W.4, for a catalogue, as enthusiasts the world over do by every post.—W. B.