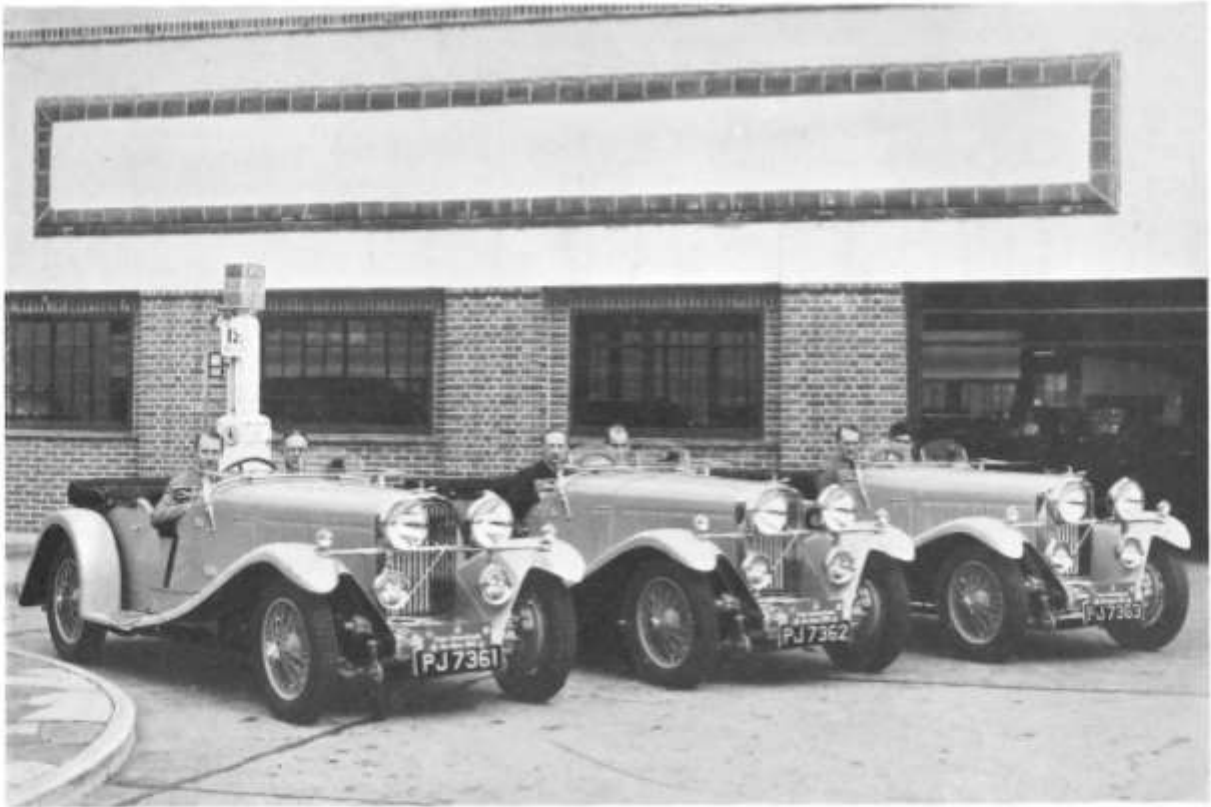


CONQUEST OF THE ALPS.



BY TALBOT.

CONQUEST OF THE ALPS



The winning Talbots and their drivers:

The Hon. Brian Lewis

T. E. Rose-Richards

Norman Garrad

CONQUEST OF THE ALPS!

HOW THE TALBOT PROVED ITSELF IN THE WORLD'S
MOST STRENUOUS MOTOR TEST
THE INTERNATIONAL ALPINE TRIAL OF 1932



THE Coup des Alpes—the Team Prize in the International Alpine Trial—takes some winning. It is awarded for the best performance by a team of three cars in the most severe motor trial of the world. To ensure

Until August, 1932, when three standard Talbot four-seaters came through the test with flying colours, winning the Coup des Alpes without losing a single mark, no team had ever come through this gruelling run with an absolutely clean score. What



*The two drivers of the leading Talbot
Hon. Brian Lewis and A. W. Fox*

victory, each car in the team must complete six days of rough mountain going at high speed without losing a single mark, either on the score of reliability or for failing to adhere to a strict time schedule.

is more, the International Alpine Trial had never before, in its long history, been won by a British team, although in the year 1913 three 40.50 Rolls-Royce cars put up, what was, in those days, an outstanding performance, only two losing marks, in a

"starting from cold" test in the early morning.

The decision to enter a team of Talbots for the 1932 Alpine Trial was reached suddenly, on the day entries closed. There was thus no possibility of preparing special cars for the trial. Three standard "105" model 21 h.p. Talbot chassis were taken straight off the assembly line at Barlby Road, and sent to the Hendon works of Van den Plas (England), Ltd., for fitting four-seater sports bodies. On the date of entering, the timber for the body frames had not even been cut out.

A bare fortnight elapsed between the decision to enter for the Alpine Trial and the delivery of the cars, complete in every detail, registered, insured and ready for the road.

Twenty-four hours later the three pale-green Talbots purred on to the quayside at Dover, ready for the Great Adventure.

It was a "sporting decision," but not exactly a rash one. Clement Talbot, Ltd., the manufacturers of Talbot cars, have a racing experience extending back to the dawn of motoring. Before the War hardly a week passed without some fresh laurels being added to the name of Talbot. The builders of "London's Own Car" recognised the value of road and track racing as a means of testing their products and improving their design. A 25 h.p. Talbot, as far back as 1912, was the first car in the world to cover 100 miles in one hour.

After the War the Talbot racing tradition was kept up by Mr. Andrew Robertson, the General Manager and his staff, following strictly a policy that no "freak" cars should ever be entered, but always standard models. The unbeatable 1½-litre Talbots

of the early post-War period were followed by the splendid 3-litre racers of to-day. When the decision to try for the Alpine Cup in 1932 was reached there was good reason for confidence that the Talbots, at any rate, would not let British motoring prestige down; that they would "put up a good show."

Mr. Arthur Fox, Director of Fox and Nichols, Ltd., Tolworth Service Station, Surbiton (who had had charge of the Talbot racing teams for some years), made the first suggestion. Mr. Andrew Robertson at once agreed that it could be done, and should be done. Cordial support came from Messrs. Warwick Wright, Ltd., the well-known Talbot distributors, who volunteered to purchase the three chassis. Messrs. Van den Plas (England), Ltd., were wonderfully expeditious with the coachwork. Mr. Georges Roesch, the talented chief designer of the Talbot, gave final advice on the equipment and the last careful look-over was given by Mr. George Day, the head tester, who has grown grey in the service of Talbots.

The "crew" consisted of three drivers, who drove for the entire distance, two mechanics and Mr. Fox, the "Skipper." The Hon. Brian Lewis and Mr. T. E. Rose-Richards, who have won so many fine records for Talbot, were selected to drive the first two cars; the third was entrusted to Mr. Norman Garrad, who shared with Mr. H. E. Symons (of the *Motor*) the credit of getting the Talbot so successfully through the 1931 Alpine Trial. The other members of the staff were Messrs. Wilcockson and Playford, of Fox and Nichols' staff, both experienced racing mechanics.

Until the Friday when they crossed to France, the Talbots had been hardly on

the road. The quick run down to Dover was the first opportunity the drivers had of getting the "feel" of their mounts.



Hon. Brian Lewis's Talbot being loaded on s.s. "Forde" at Dover

Followed the 1½ hours crossing of the Channel aboard s.s. "Forde" (Townsend Brothers Ferries Ltd. special car carrier), a leisurely lunch at Calais, and the start of the long trek across Europe to Munich, the capital of Bavaria, the starting-point for the International Alpine Trial.

Cruising steadily at only a little over 60 m.p.h., for the engines were still being "run-in," the three cars crowded 50 to 55 miles into every hour: a tribute alike to the acceleration and stamina of the Talbot and the wonderfully engineered, dead-straight highways of France.

Considering that the Talbots were brand new cars, none of the team would have been surprised had it been necessary to do a certain amount of work on them at Munich, adjusting this or tightening that. But the first seven or eight hundred miles across France and Germany had left no trace: a wash and polish was all the cars needed, apart from the checking over, as a precautionary measure, of the valve-clearances, brakes and petrol feed.

Consequently, the cars were handed over to the controllers of the Trial on the afternoon of the Tuesday prior to the start. The crew then went off to



The Talbot team in a village on the way to Munich

enjoy themselves, confident that, at the touch of the starter-buttons, the engines would start at "zero-hour"—4.0 a.m. on Thursday, 28th July.

THE TRIAL BEGINS



The engines *did* start instantly, in spite of having been left a day and a half, parked in the open, unprotected from the rain that fell during the night.

It began to rain again just as the first cars were sent off, but even this could not damp the high spirits of the Talbot crews. The

speed of $27\frac{1}{2}$ m.p.h. scheduled for their class.

Crossing the frontier into Austria was but a matter of seconds, showing what Customs officers can do when they choose. A few minutes later came the grand old town of Salzburg, dominated by its great



Talbots about to be "scrutineered" at Munich

slippery streets of Munich, however, had a decidedly sobering influence, and they crept cautiously out of the town, not taking any chances.

The first fifty or sixty miles in the early morning light, with the weather steadily improving, made easy going. Although the road was winding and narrow, the Talbots found that they had an hour and a half to spare after having averaged the

castle; almost immediately climbing up through the fir-trees, the Talbots found themselves among those steep craggy mountains which, for the last two hours, they had seen in the distance, half hidden in the clouds, towering up from the plain.

The Tauernhöhe gave the drivers a taste of what motoring is like in the Austrian Alps, where the roads (apart from their rough, dusty surfaces) are not unlike some

of those in Scotland, and the gradients honest-to-goodness climbs of the 1 in 5 order, but far, far longer than anything we have at home.

This first "Alp" was climbed by the Talbots mostly on third and second gears, the cars sweeping round the curves with a certain joyousness that communicated itself to the drivers. One advantage of being in a team, among the large cars, is that, if you have sufficient speed you can outstrip your rivals, reaching the more difficult sections first and thus making certain of a clear run on most of the mountain passes. With their speed and, far more important, their perfect braking and road-holding, the Talbots, in spite of having to start each day behind six other cars leaving at one-minute intervals, were very often in the lead.

At the Katschberg, reckoned to be the steepest and most terrifying main-road mountain pass in Europe, the three British cars kept their positions easily, grappling with the notorious gradient in a way that astonished the hundreds of keen Continental motorists who lined the hillside. Rather like a staircase, with gradients of 1 in 6 or so, alternating with sharp climbs of 1 in $3\frac{1}{4}$, the Katschberg rises through the forest for about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The pass makes up in steepness what it lacks in length. The summit is nearly 6,000 ft. above sea-level.

Even on the very steepest sections, where first gear had to be engaged for a short distance, the Talbots were maintaining 25 m.p.h. A remarkable speed, this, considering that many cars with engines of equal size or larger failed to reach the summit non-stop!

With a feeling that the worst for that day was over, the Talbots swung over the

top and zig-zagged down the almost equally steep southern side of the Pass, the powerful brakes checking the car gently but positively for each sharp turn. Mile after mile of potholes, bumps, an unending fog of dust, and the Central European summer heat, made the run to the Italian frontier, near Armbach, something of an ordeal for most competitors; but the Talbot drivers too far ahead to be troubled by anybody else's dust, sped smoothly along, a quarter of a mile or so apart, accomplishing the 353 miles run without real fatigue.

When, at Vipiteno, they cut sharply off to the left and started up the last mountain pass of the day, the Giovo, they would have had a friendly "scrap" up the 12-mile climb had not team discipline forbidden. With the excellent lock, for which the Talbot is famous, they swung round hairpin after hairpin, travelling really fast up the "straights" between. So much time had they in hand when they reached the pleasant hotel near the 7,000 ft. mark, that they were able to afford a halt for refreshment before zig-zagging up the last few hundred feet among the barren, rocky peaks and plunging down the very difficult descent into Merano.

An experienced driver warned Brian Lewis, the leader of the Talbot drivers, that it would take an hour and a half to get down to the foot of the Pass on the Merano side. Without taking the slightest risk, all three Talbots made the descent in 40 minutes!

The Talbot team got through the hard first day's run of 353 miles without having lost a single mark, but already six cars of famous makes had been unable to stand the rigours of the run and had retired, while three others had lost points for failing to maintain the high average speeds imposed.

An average of $27\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour may not seem very great to those whose motoring experience has been gained on our splendid English roads or the long, straight highways of France. But try to keep it up for over 250 miles through the heart of the Dolomites, tackling pass after pass, where the road climbs in giddy spirals and crazy zigzags sometimes for 20 miles on end! So close did the famous Dolomite passes crowd upon one another that none, how-

fyng. The unique structure of the surrounding peaks and crags, half-hidden by huge cumulus clouds, gave it an almost fairy-like beauty.

Next, the Falzarego, another "grueller," with a descent of sweeping curves and loose hairpin bends amid the rank grass far above the tree-line.

The cars rolled swiftly through Cortina d'Ampezzo, making up time again on the



N. Garrad (Talbot) breasting the summit of the Katschberg (1-in-3 gradient)

ever fast their cars, had more than a few minutes in hand while actually in the mountains.

Some of these passes were distinctly "sporting." The Sella, for instance, reaches 7,277 ft. and, as it is being reconstructed, there are no retaining walls. The surface is awful and the drops tremendous. Then there is the Pordoi, higher still, equally twisty but not quite so terri-

wider roads of the valleys. At Belluno, the mid-way control, no one dared go near enough to find out exactly where the timekeepers sat, so the Talbots hid in the sparse shade of some plane trees while their drivers got thirstier and thirstier!

Had they but known it, there was a "Pratts" filling station and a large café situated well before the control. As it was, they were filling up at another depot

two or three miles outside the town when a slight argument arose over the petrol coupons issued by the "Standard" (Pratts) organisation.

The man in charge of the depot refused to accept these after the first car had been filled up, and Fox was just going to send the other cars on to look for another garage when the Fords and Wanderers came tearing back, a sure sign that there was no other filling station in sight. So the other two cars were filled up quickly and moved off down the road, leaving their rivals busy pouring in "Esso."

And so on to Feltre through a country side typically Italian over part of the classic route of the "Mille Miglia," or Thousand Miles Race. Here the public shouted its welcome to the green Talbots, remembering the car of this make that ran so splendidly in their national event a few months before.

It was only a few miles off the "Alpine" course that Brian Lewis had his famous crash in the 1,000 miles race—the first and only time he has ever been off the road in a race. Deceived by the failure of one headlamp on a sharp, loose-surfaced bend, he drove "over the edge" and crashed into a boulder-strewn ravine 12 ft. deep.

The inhabitants of the nearest village came out in a body, at 4 a.m., and sportingly hoisted the car back on to the road, when Lewis was able to continue in the race. A wonderful demonstration of Talbot strength and endurance!

There followed the Rolle and Costalunga passes, still amid superb scenery, towering around the 6,000-ft. mark: hard going, corners without number, steep gradients. . .

It was in this section that one of the Talbot teams' chief rivals, the Wanderer

trio, nearly lost hope of winning through. One of their number, skidding into the ditch on a corner, lost so much time that it was only by frenzied driving that he rejoined his team-mates just in time to enter the final control with them.

It was here, too, that the seeds were sown which were to result in the elimination of one Ford on the following day.

Owing to their long start, the Fords were generally running three or four miles ahead of the Talbot team. This day Brian Lewis rounded a bend to find the trio of Cologne-built "Vee-eights" just ahead. Before they realised that he was there, Lewis had passed all three, and Fox, looking back, saw the leading Ford detach itself from the squadron and set off in pursuit.

The Talbot driver, being in no hurry, was inclined to let it go by, but the skipper, Arthur Fox, said: "No! Let's give him a run for his money and see what sort of stuff these Fords are made of!"

The green car accelerated. So did the dark blue two-seater behind. The Talbot went faster still, skidding round blind corners on the brinks of precipices, sending up showers of stones and dust. Sometimes the Ford was right on its tail, sometimes a hundred yards behind. It was as exciting as any race.

But presently, when a gust of wind blew away the dust, the occupants of the Talbot saw that the road behind was empty as far as the eye could see. The leading Ford, driven by Sporkhorst, had met with trouble.

The three Talbots reached the outskirts of Merano in time for a rough meal at a vine-covered *albergo*, after which they checked in once again, at the same place,

with an absolutely clean score. But the number of their competitors who were equally fortunate was steadily diminishing.

One of the team must have picked up a nail just as the garage was entered the previous night, for on the Saturday morning, when the driver of each car wanted every minute he could get, so as

He speedily found the trouble : owing to the great heat of the previous afternoon, the Talbots were very hot when they were put away. On most days the cars were parked in the open, but on this occasion a large garage, consisting of about a hundred little lock-ups, was requisitioned. Owing to the sun beating down upon it, the lock-up where Lewis's car was placed was



*"At Belluno" . . . The Talbots hid in the sparse shade of some plane trees
(By kind permission of the "MOTOR.")*

to have a good start at the Stelvio, it limped out of the control, a flat tyre flapping on the rim. How that driver blessed the speed and road-holding of his car as, after changing a wheel, he set off at full speed to catch his team-mates !

Very worried, too, were Fox and Brian Lewis, who found that their engine would not start ! Fortunately, they were allowed to push the car out on to the road, where Wilcockson was awaiting them.

like an oven, and the heat had vaporised all the petrol in the float chamber !

This shows how valuable minutes may be lost from the most trivial causes.

The Stelvio is the highest main road in Europe, its summit over 9,000 ft. above sea-level. Up this formidable pass, with its 49 acute hairpin bends and a multitude of easier corners, the cars were timed over a distance of 18 kilometres—about 12 miles—and had to average 20 m.p.h.

This the Talbots did easily, Brian Lewis in the excellent time of 25 mins. 48 $\frac{2}{3}$ secs., Rose-Richards in 27 mins. 40 secs., and Garrad in 29 mins. 17 secs. (unofficially timed).

With a few exceptions, most of the large cars had to reverse on several of the hairpins and few of the small cars except those "Made in Britain" could keep up the requisite speed. So the Talbots, rounding every hairpin with feet to spare, were well ahead as they breasted the summit, where snow lay deep at the road-side. Up the Stelvio they had an epic battle with the Wanderers, which were faster, thanks to a lower first gear, in getting away after rounding the hairpin bends, but slower whenever the Talbot drivers were able to engage second gear.

One of the opposing teams was out of it now; Sporkhorst, the leader of the Ford "Vee-Eight" team, came to an abrupt stop soon after entering the timed section on the Stelvio, and was not seen again.

There were almost as many hairpin bends to be tackled on the descent of the far side of the Pass, and the road thereafter was none too easy, so that what with the ascent of the Bernina Pass, narrow and dusty, coming just before the Pontresina "mid-day" control, even the Talbots did not have too much time to spare.

A sort of "loop" north of St. Moritz took the cars over the Fluelen (7,835 ft.) and the Julien Passes (7,503 ft.). These, with the extremely narrow roads between them, the number of blind corners, and the entire absence of "road-sense" from the mental make-up of the Swiss peasant, meant "hell-for-leather" driving for the whole time, until St. Moritz was reached and the day's run ended. The fact that the Swiss postal coaches have the right to

the "inside" of the road meant that the drivers in the trial had to be prepared, without warning, to drive over to the opposite side of the road.

So severe had this section of the route proved that no fewer than 27 competitors lost marks during these 211 miles and the number of retirements was brought up to 11.

A day's rest followed an evening of merrymaking, when the Talbot team "got together" with their German rivals and exchanged experiences. On the sunny terrace of the Palace Hotel the drivers of the three "105's" were able to take stock of their progress to date, noting with satisfaction that in the first 818 miles of hard going, including the ascent of fifteen to twenty of the stiffest Alpine passes, the radiators had not needed anything except an occasional "topping up" with water and only a very small amount of oil had had to be added to the engines. The brakes, too, were as good as when the cars left London. Each morning, even when the cars had been parked all night in the cold mountain air, the engines had started instantly on the self-starter, except in the one instance already referred to at Merano.

A strong man enjoys a journey more as the difficulties to be overcome increase. So it was with the Talbot team, who found the wild, mountainous night section of the Trial the most enjoyable of the lot. Few motorists in their right senses would think of leaving St. Moritz at midnight, with a storm threatening, and climb straightway over the narrow, perilous, Bernina Pass in pitch darkness, to say nothing of tackling three or four other passes before daybreak.

Yet this is what the Alpine Trial competitors had to brave on the fourth stage of their journey.

The Bernina is 10 miles long and reaches an altitude of 7,644 ft. Clouds, mist and the inevitable curtain of dust added to the natural perils of the Pass. But the long penetrating beams of the big Rotax headlamps enabling the Talbot drivers to pick their way along the rough, narrow track, with a black bottomless pit yawning on their right. The Desmo "Safebeam" lamps, acting as auxiliaries, cast a spreading light round every hairpin bend.

tortuous that the drivers actually drove into their own dust after rounding each hairpin. They could see the white, dusty track gleaming in the starlight far below, its crazy convolutions crisscrossing the side of the mountain. Another member of one of the rival teams was nearly eliminated here, when his car, skidding in the dust, leapt over a precipice, only to land with a terrific crash on another bend of the road vertically below!



The Stelvio Road

The next ordeal was the Splugen Pass, crowned at 6,945 ft. by the Swiss and Italian Customs Houses. This ascent was one endless series of acute hairpin bends, so close together that it simply wasn't worth while changing up in between. The darkness made the bends much more difficult to negotiate, and the front wings seemed only to miss the rocky walls by inches.

The descent on the Swiss side was so

The last great Pass of the night was the San Bernardino, towering up to 6,782 ft., its loose and sandy hairpin bends half hidden by immense grey boulders.

When Stresa was reached at about 9.0 a.m. on the Monday morning, three more competitors had lost marks—a surprisingly small number, considering the difficulties of the 215-mile night section.

It was when Grenoble was reached, after

the fifth day's run of 320 miles, that the fatiguing nature of the Trial became evident. For one thing, there was heavy rain, which is always tiring. For another—it nearly gave everybody heart-failure—because the Little St. Bernard Pass, up which there was a six-mile timed hill climb, was churned into a mass of slimy mud, on which the cars slid sickeningly from side to side, so much wheelspin was experienced that it was touch-and-go whether any car could average 24 m.p.h. to the summit.

and out of *all* the Teams competing in the Alpine Trial, only two—the Talbots and the German Wanderers—were left with an unblemished record.

Rather an amusing episode occurred just before the control at La Thuile, at the foot of the Little St. Bernard. Fox went forward on foot to reconnoitre the position of the control officials and had just reached a restaurant when he was startled to see a man with a large blue flag emerge from the doorway.



Hon. Brian Lewis about to round a hairpin bend on the Stelvio

Thanks to the beautiful weight-distribution of the new "105" Talbot tourers, the three London-built cars gave their drivers less to worry about than most vehicles, but even so, the margin of safety at the summit did not amount to more than about a minute!

This pass proved the Waterloo of many who had covered the course, so far, without losing any marks. No fewer than 42 competitors were too slow on this section,

The team captain beat a hasty retreat but, plucking up courage, crept forward once more and discovered an underground passage leading, evidently, to the kitchens. Summoning his team, Fox led them past the astonished servants into the hotel, where they enjoyed an excellent meal unknown to the officials, who were eating in the next room!

The famous Galibier Pass, reaching a height of 8,390 ft. and with a surface so

rough as to test springs and body strength to the utmost, was the climax of this hard day's run, besides which the Col du Lautaret seemed easy.

It was on the Galibier that Rose-Richards got the fright of his life. For hours he had heard no sound save the purr of his engine amid the silence of the mountains. Then suddenly there burst on his ears an appalling din. He crammed on his brakes and stopped just round a corner, where Lewis had stopped also. A moment later Garrad drew up, white with anxiety. Each feared that something awful had happened to his car.

Then they all burst out laughing, for the noise emanated from a pneumatic rock-drill employed by some road-menders, and quite unexpected up there!

A descent so long that it became positively boring led down into Grenoble, where the 11 hours of driving came to an end.

The last day's run, so far as the Talbot team was concerned, seemed "money for jam" up to the mid-way control at Bar-



Rose-Richards entering St. Moritz

celonnette. Good roads, easy gradients and no traffic enabled the team to get over two hours ahead of schedule.

But immediately afterwards came the Col d'Allos, one of the old French Alpine passes, and even the invincible Talbots found themselves dropping steadily and surely behind their $27\frac{1}{2}$ m.p.h. average.

Steep, narrow and winding, with but the broken, twisted remnants of a railing at rare intervals, between the travellers and drops of a thousand feet or more, the Col d'Allos winds its way, up and up, to a summit that

seems even higher than its 7,380 ft.

The "downhill" side of the pass was like a cart-track, inexpressibly bumpy, in places deeply rutted, abounding in hairpin bends. It was not, therefore, until Allos itself was reached that any speed could be indulged in and even then it was only safe for cars, like the Talbots, which had superlative brakes.

The last day was not to pass without its moment of anxiety. Soon after Allos, descending a pass, the back axle of the leading Talbot began to make itself heard.

Fox ordered an immediate halt, stopping the other two cars also, and insisted upon the level of the oil in the rear axles being "topped up." Apparently, under

foot to spare, every few minutes. So by the time it was completed the British Talbot team was well behind schedule, but made a splendid recovery by covering



Fox, Lewis, Garrad and Playford waiting to enter Stresa control

strenuous mountain conditions, the gear oil in the axle is actually used and so needs a little fresh lubricant occasionally. In ordinary use, of course, Talbot cars run

in one hour a distance that was scheduled to be covered in 1 hour 40 minutes !

Fortunately the next section, the Colle St. Michel, proved a pleasant pass with



Lunch in an Albergo

for thousands of miles without the need for adding any oil to the rear axles.

This task took some little time to perform on the narrow, dusty road, with other cars hurtling by, with less than a

sweeping curves and a wide, smooth surface. It was followed by a road that ran, as straight as a die, to Nice and then by the climb over La Turbie to Mentone and Ventimiglia.

For all that they had gone through, the Talbot drivers and mechanics felt amply rewarded when they entered Italy.

As they swept round curve after curve on the flower-decked Riviera road, with the blue Mediterranean sparkling on their right, peal upon peal of cheering rent the skies. Men, women and children lined the roads, clapping the three pale-green English cars. Soldiers and police stood at the salute. Bouquets of carnations were flung from balconies by laughing girls, to be caught deftly by the mechanics.

At last San Remo, the end of the Trial, was reached.

Next morning, early, a group of highly competent engineers examined the cars.

They switched on lamps, tested gears and brakes, examined axles and wings. Each of the three Talbots was in perfect condition. Not so much as a scratched wing to be seen !

And this after some 1,600 miles of strenuous Alpine driving, in which all replenishments, greasing, etc., had to be carried out *in running time only*.

Thus did the Talbot team carry through a great achievement for British motoring, all three cars going through the International Alpine Trial without having lost a single mark. For the first time since long before the War a British team had won the coveted trophy, and had brought to the notice of the whole world the quality of British motor engineering.