



As Told by Page Wilson,  
of Santa Barbara

A 5,000-MILE

## Jaunt Through Mexico

**M**EXICO is probably the last place on earth you expect to be touring in the near future. Nevertheless, my experience of driving a 1940 Austin Eight tourer from California to Mexico City and back, a total of 5,021 miles, including side trips, within four weeks, afforded me the opportunity to make observations perhaps of interest to the British motorist.

Originally, I planned to spend at least six months in Mexico, or I should not have undertaken such a strenuous journey in so small a car; for the road, while in remarkably good condition, is one of the most gruelling long-distance motor drives in the world. Although the trip is made each month by more than a thousand cars, most of them are of American make and of far greater horse-power. However, it is my opinion that a car the size of an Austin Eight has never before been subjected to so herculean a trial.

I purchased the car third-hand in 1945. Little work had been done on the motor, but, in anticipation of the long journey, I had the brakes relined, new bearings put in one front wheel, and the fuel pump rebuilt. Spare parts, consisting of connecting-rod bearing inserts, an exhaust valve, and head and manifold gaskets, were carried, although never used, for in the United States these replacements are not readily available except in the larger cities, such as New York, Los Angeles and Boston, where there is greater popularity for British cars. A breakdown occurring in the vast wastes of Mexico would be serious. Spare parts are non-existent, and, according to some of the motorists I talked with, the first tool a Mexican mechanic reaches for is a hammer.

The only trouble I encountered was due to my own negligence and should point a lesson to motorists everywhere. Not watching the water in my radiator, it boiled away completely—this on a particularly desolate and trackless stretch of road, while I was still in the tropic zone. I stupidly carried no reserve supply. A friendly

Mexican motorist pushed me some ten miles to an orange ranch where I was able to refill the radiator and continue.

At the border I had been forewarned of a petrol shortage in the interior, so I carried a 5-gallon reserve tank. When I arrived in Mexico City I found I had been correctly informed. There was a very real shortage, and I had to wait in long queues to have my tank filled—when I was fortunate enough to find a station that had petrol.

### Getting Round the Petrol Problem

Again a friendly Mexican, this time a libre (cab) driver, was of inestimable help. He taught me the trick of filling my tank in one station, driving around the corner and syphoning the contents into a reserve tank, then proceeding to another station for more petrol! However, within a week after my arrival in the capital, the Government put a stop to the shortage, announcing that a vicious black market had been broken.

For two reasons I broke the trip into relatively short runs, never driving at night. In the first place, travel in the United States is at a peak level, and unless the tourist stops around four or five in the afternoon, he runs the chance of not being able to secure hotel accommodation. And, secondly, in Mexico, the distances between towns are considerable, and as the country is quite primitive in spots, it is not desirable to drive after dark. The final leg of the journey down, from Valles, Mexico, at the bottom of the mountains guarding the capital city, is extremely dangerous to attempt at night because of the deadly tropical fogs that make the roads almost impassable.

The trip across the United States, from Los Angeles to the border, more than 1,000 miles, is an easy one, as the roads are good, and not more than a dozen times was it necessary to change to third gear.