

# They Rode The Rails In An Auto

OLD TIME race car enthusiasts may recall 1916 as the year the Indianapolis "500" was a 300-mile race won by Dario Resta, averaging an astounding 84 miles per hour in a Peugeot.

No one had yet heard of Juan Fangio, Sterling Moss or Jim Clark but it was a big year automotively. It was the year a Panama Canal motor car inspector became the first man to drive across the Isthmus. From the Pacific to the Atlantic by car in just 1 day.

The great event was duly recorded with a 3-page, illustrated article in the August, 1916, issue of *Motor* magazine.

Samuel Grier, Jr., had for years aspired to be the first motorist to cross the Isthmus, probably from the time he arrived in Panama in 1906 from the United States where he had done considerable automotive machine work. Upon reaching the Isthmus, he went to work as a machinist in the Gorgona shops and in 1912 became the motor-man of the "Yellow Peril," the official inspection car of Chief Engineer Col. George W. Goethals, during Canal construction days.

Grier, accompanied by R. M. McKenna and Grier's bull pup Marnique, had to drive his 1912 Haynes on the bed of the Panama Railroad as far as he could because there was no road spanning the entire distance at the time. More than 23 jolting miles of the trip was made on the track itself.

It was 6:25 a.m. when he dipped the rear wheels of his car into the Pacific; then he proceeded from Panama City to the Canal Zone roads, passing through Ancon and Corozal. The first stop was at Pedro Miguel, a junction point on the railroad. The main line went to Colon and the branch line to the west side of the Canal by means of a pontoon bridge, going to the com-



The "Go-Go" boys of 1916—Samuel Grier and his companion, R. M. McKenna, set out for their ocean-to-ocean auto trip across the Isthmus. Here they are shown in Ancon at the beginning of the feat which was accomplished by using the Panama Railroad bed for part of the way.

munities of Culebra, Empire and Las Cascadas.

From Pedro Miguel, Grier drove along the east bank of the Canal on a road which had recently been finished. Near Paraiso, the road led up and over Gold Hill, the highest hill on the Isthmus and from which they could look across to Culebra on the other side of the Canal. The road from Gold Hill narrowed sharply so that for some 3 miles it was almost impossible for two cars to pass.

Approximately 2 miles before Gamboa, Grier had to leave the road and move to the railroad bed where he was handed the train order "Haynes Special Number 6," which controlled him while he was on the right-of-way.

From this point, it was a continuous series of jouncing and bumping over ties, tie plates, spikes, ballast bridges and switches—all 23 miles to Gatun. From time to time he had to leave the track to make way for the Transcontinental Limited.

Small crowds gathered at the villages along the way for most of the natives who had not been to the terminal cities had never seen an auto. And to see the Haynes thumping along the railroad was a strange sight, indeed.

Gatun was reached at 6 p.m. and from there Grier drove to Colon. The front wheels of the Haynes splattered the Atlantic waters at 6:25 p.m., just 12 hours after the rear wheels tasted the Pacific. The 47-mile ocean-to-ocean trip was made without any mechanical problems; not even a flat tire.

Grier became the first foreman and later general foreman of what was then known as the Animal and Motor Transportation Division. He was made superintendent of the division in 1935, remaining in that position until his retirement in 1945. He retired to Florida where he later died.

His widow lives with his daughter, Miss Margaret Grier, who recently was appointed to head the county probation department of Orange County, Calif. A son, Robert, is a leader machinist in the Maintenance Division.



Samuel Grier, driving the 1912 Haynes, had to leave the railroad track several times to give the right-of-way to the Transcontinental Limited.



An automobile bouncing along on the railroad track was a curious sight indeed! People gathered along the line to cheer Grier and McKenna on their Pacific-to-Atlantic journey.