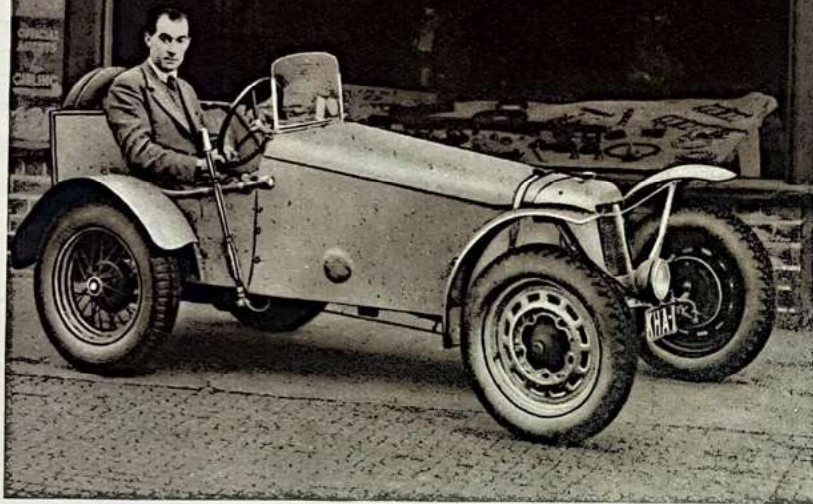


The Wharton



Although the seat in this, the Mark II version of the Wharton Special, is six inches lower than it was in the car's original form, driver visibility is still of an order that a hansom cabby might envy.

ONE of the endearing things about the trials game has always been this: know-how counts for so much more than treasure. If a man lacks the former he can be heir to all the coffee in Brazil and it avails him nought. It was, however, a relatively recent discovery that two other commodities, viz., copious b.h.p. and hyper-sprightly power-weight ratios, do not in themselves possess the sovereign virtues formerly ascribed to them.

What, then, is the ideal trials car—the machine to inflict counter-heartbreak on Breakheart? In a word, or two at the outside, it is the Wharton Special, or the best copy of it that ingenuity can devise. The Wharton, subject of this analysis, which recently topped off a phenomenal "take" of trials awards with the R.A.C. Championship Trophy itself, has been the inspiration of a nationwide outbreak of inculpable counterfeit. You may contend that the Wharton isn't a sports car and that therefore it doesn't belong here at all, and that is a view which it might be difficult to laugh off categorically, because the untrained eye only just recognizes it as a car; but licence may surely be begged for a vehicle that so consistently has the top of the heap to itself in an important and flourishing branch of motor sport.

Genesis of KHA 1 goes back to the early winter of 1946. Ken Wharton, its constructor, after a preliminary study of the problems involved, came to the

facia furnishings, left to right, are: oil pressure gauge, lighting and ignition switch, petrol contents gauge and speedometer. Note the huge outside hand brake, operating on all wheels.

conclusion that the essential desiderata were these: compactness, good clearance, moderate overall weight, the disposal of most of that weight where it would work its passage best (i.e., aft), a giraffe's-eye view of the road wheels and potential obstacles, and a willing, flexible engine.

The adaptation job from which the "Mark 1" Wharton emerged was started on a Monday and finished the following Friday. Recipe:—Take one Austin Seven light van, remove the light van part, substitute a punnet-like structure of wood to serve as a body, proceed to Gloucester trial, and win Thomas Trophy

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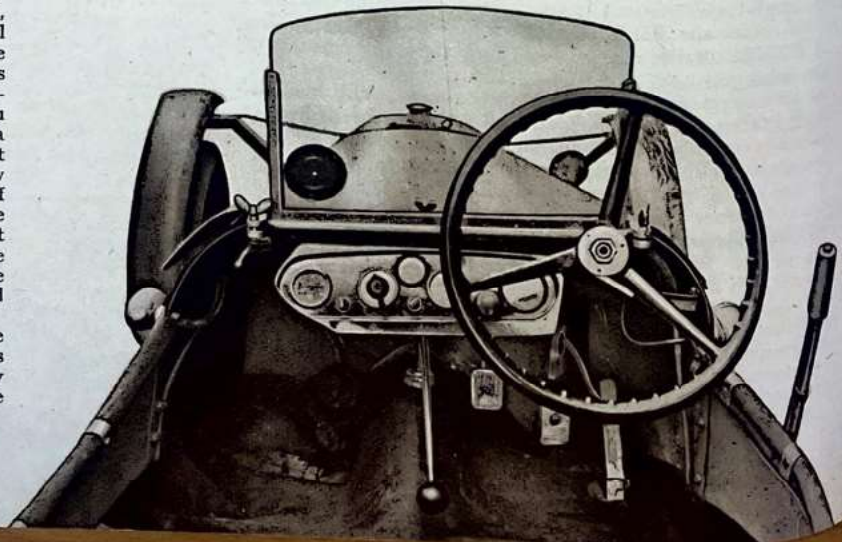
(best performance up to 1,100 c.c.). Subsequent modifications, graftings-on, deletions and development processes, all adding up to the contemporary or Mark II version, have been spread over the period starting immediately after that 1946 Gloucester trial and continu-

ing down to the present day. For verbal economy this article disregards the chronology and omits the dates of these developments. And here it is appropriate to mention that although the Wharton, in common with nearly all successful trials cars of today, bears a distinctly skeleton-at-the-concours aspect, Ken is by no means a confirmed exponent of wattle-and-daub engineering; he regards his special as a laboratory, a ferrous guinea-pig, not less than a pot-winner, and as such, of course, it must be in a fit state for the incorporation of successive brain-hurricanes. To pretty it up would be to defeat the ends of non-stop empiricism.

Two Carburettors

The earliest major modification was the installation of a Ford Ten engine in place of the Austin, which, although a gourmand for work, hadn't quite the cubic centimetres that it takes. For most of its life, apart from having its compression raised to 7.1 to 1 and dourer valve springs fitted, this unit has been standard in design and materials, although not entirely so in swept volume. A fairly recent substitution is that of twin S.U. carburettors for the single standard instrument. These were made up specially by S.U.; they do not increase the power output, which is approximately 38 b.h.p., so it would be inapposite to apply the term power-bulge to the lateral bonnet gaitre which houses them, but they do give cooler running. Phenomenal fuel economy, incidentally, is an attribute of the Wharton: something of the order of 45 m.p.g. driving hard on the road—which means cruising at 60 to 65. Maximum speed with the 5.41 to 1 axle ratio is a little over 70 m.p.h.

The engine, coupled to a Ford Eight gear box and driving Austin wire wheels through Austin transmission, has proved amazingly durable, and still, after some



15,000 miles, has its original bearings; replacements in this department, in fact, have been confined to a set of exhaust valves and a distributor.

Soon after the adoption of the Ford engine a front axle of the same origin was acquired and cunningly clewed up

of the engine and seats by 4in and 6in respectively, leaving the ground clearance (determined by the front axle) unchanged at 6in; and (c) the jettisoning of wooden carrosserie in favour of the aluminium shell, mostly 20 G, seen in the accompanying pictures.

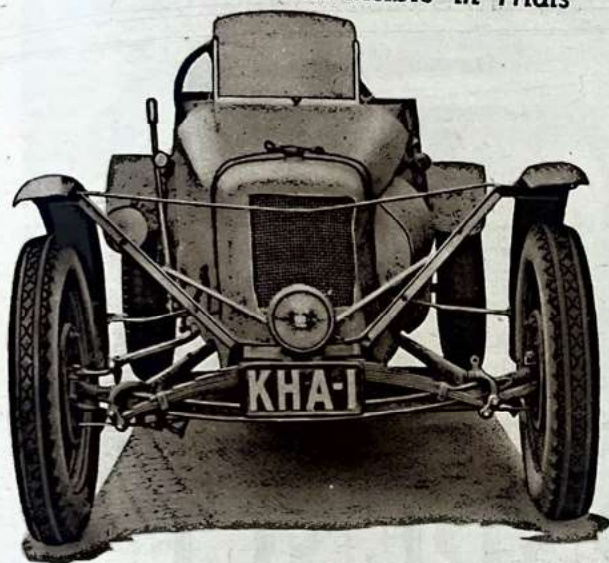
The point to note about the contemporary body is that, unlike the older one, it follows the line of the converging chassis members right forward to the exiguous radiator, which came off Wharton's sprint car. With such a lay-

"spares" Wharton regularly carries on trials. His half-shafts are of a grade of steel which 38 h.p. isn't likely to (and doesn't) sunder, and consequently no spare ones are carried.

Front and rear tyre sizes are respectively 4.50 by 17in and 5.50 by 16in, the former encompassing normal Ford wheels with the dish-covers left off. At a rough guess Ken would say the weight is shared in the ratio of 60 per cent rear to 40 front, although what the actual weight is he doesn't know; lead ballast slabs, nested in a slot-like hold behind the squab, account for 2 cwt of the total, whatever it is, these serving not only as aids to traction but also as dampers-out of axle hysteria during special tests. The enormous outdoor hand-brake lever observable in the photographs works on all four Girlings and has a fly-off action, the requirements of the law being met by a supplementary pull-on hand-brake, with ratchet operation, indoors.

Special

A Combination of Austin and Ford Which has Proved
Invincible in Trials



Thin end of the wedge-shaped Wharton, showing the Ford axle and postage-stamp radiator. Only once in some 55 competitions has this car failed to win an award.

with the Austin steering box and column, the latter having a somewhat "Midland Red" rake to bring the wheel where the driver wanted it. In what may be called the half-timbered edition of KHA 1, the seat was deliberately elevated to a quite conspicuous height by a massive thwartships baulk of wood, giving the effect of a crow's-nest rather than a cockpit.

This year, however, the whole machine has been transformed in appearance, and quite largely in behaviour, by (a) the adoption of Marles steering, before which the front end was a little self-opinionated under certain sets of stressful conditions; (b) the lowering

out, as may be imagined, the bonnet fits the engine like a tram driver's glove. Despite the drastic seat-lowering mentioned above, the car as a whole still has a markedly up-at-heel look, partly, perhaps, an optical illusion fostered by the pronounced slope of the bonnet top. A special elongated header tank, extending back almost to the cylinder head, mates with the tiny radiator, and a gallon can of water is one of the few

Scant Comfort

"Indoors" is, of course, a courtesy title because there aren't any doors. Modern trials terrain is incompatible with high standards of comfort and, as Ken and his sister Jean would freely admit (she is the only other driver to have handled it competitively), KHA 1 is no *chaise longue*. There are no side screens or hood, but the screen, hijacked from an Army Morris truck, protects a good deal more than the solar plexus at upwards of fifty, though you might not think it.

As a general purpose vehicle the Wharton performs well and in fog the owner wouldn't trade it for a tram and a Veray pistol. The student can decide for himself how much of Ken's extraordinary success in trials—which, remember, includes winning the 1947 Blackpool Rally, a type of competition quite outside the ordinary run of Wharton motoring—can be ascribed to the car and how much to the driver's undoubted virtuosity. As to the latter, it should be borne in mind that the modern type of small trials car, which this Special typifies, lacks the bulldozing qualities which the exponents of V8-based machines find so invaluable in coping with quasi immovable objects. D. M.

A comparatively recent addition to the Wharton Special is the lateral "goitre" concealing twin S.U. carburettors. These S.U.s result in cooler running but do not appreciably affect performance otherwise.

