A Woman's Exciting Ride in a Racing Motor-car

By Harriet Quimby

HATS off to the driver of a racing-car! He is a braver man than the majority of us credit him with being. It is one thing to be a looker-on and to gasp as the bulk of vitalized steel and iron flashes by so quickly that you cannot even distinguish the face of the driver, and it is likewise simple to be the melodramatic heroine of an occasion and to ride in a car that is flying along at eighty or ninety miles an hour, almost a third faster than the fastest express train; but to take the wheel of this whirring demon of iron and explosives and fire, endowed with a strength of one hundred and twenty horse-power, and to steer it up and down grade and around corners over a rough course, and finally slow down to safety again, is another matter—a matter which requires qualities quite apart from the recklessness with which the driver of a racer is generally credited.

Recklessness has never yet won a race, although it has smashed countless machines and killed drivers by the score. It is a combination of courage, caution, and good judgment with a dash of fearlessness that manufacturers are looking for to drive their cars over a course to the winning post. The progressive march of the automobile impresses us when we look up the records and find that it was only a sixty-horse-power car, with a capacity of but eighty to eighty-five miles an hour, which was driven by Fournier, when in 1901 he won the great race over the course between Paris and Berlin. In this year of 1906 the majority of late-model touring-cars designed for pleasure alone are equipped with engines of fifty horse-power, and they are capable of making sixty or seventy miles an hour, while the racers of to-day run up to one hundred and twenty horse-power, and come near to doubling that pace.

Just now the eyes of the motoring world, both in this country and abroad, are focused on the Vanderbilt course on Long Island, over which one of the greatest races ever run in America will take place on the sixth of October. The course has undergone treatment, including a coating of crude oil which was sprinkled in a straight path down the centre, and which gradually spread and laid the dust and packed the loose dirt into a comparatively hard surface. One by one the various machines which will compete have appeared on the scene, and each is installed in its own plant with a crew of mechanicians and chauffeurs, and also the chosen drivers, who are the leading men of the hour in more senses of the word than one. Even the man who manufactures the machine, and who is helping to finance the race, takes a back seat for the time being, and kotows to the driver who will do everything toward maintaining the established make of an old company, or will compel the world to accept the products of a new one. The fact that a firm generally bestows anywhere from five to ten thousand dollars upon the driver who wins the race proves the worth to the company of his effort to win. Fournier received from his firm $10,000 for winning the James Gordon Bennett race.

Through the courtesy of Mr. A. E. Schaaf, manager of the company that build the Pope-Toledo car, a crew of mechanicians, and, last, but not least, a driver who thought twice before he gave his consent, the writer was permitted not only to approach and pat one of the closely guarded iron flyers of 120 horsepower which will compete in the race, but she was also allowed actually to sit in it, and to hang on for dear life while Herbert Lytle, its driver, put it through its paces.

To Mr. Schaaf, as manager of the Pope Motor-car Company in Toledo, is due the credit of producing a car which has won fame in competition in the Vanderbilt Trial and Elimination races just passed. This achievement is the result of his extended trip and study abroad last year in the science of automobile building.

How and where the huge machines take their exercise and limber up, as it were, before a race, is a matter of interest to all motorists. Probably the farmers in and about Mineola and along the turnpike could tell an eloquent tale of how the machines exercise, for every morning these patient folk are out in force gathering up the débris of what were chickens, rabbits, dogs, etc., which had been old-fashioned enough to venture in the path of progress and for their foolhardiness had come to an untimely end. But, as we have not their story, the scene is here recorded as it appeared to the writer on the early morning of the speed test, which was very like any one of the mornings along the Jericho roads for a full six weeks preceding the day of the race. Putting yourself in her place, this is your early morning experience with a motor-racer.

It is two o'clock as your touring-car leaves Long Island City, and a half-hour later you turn into the road leading to the course. The way is fairly clear except for the procession of sleepy drivers with their loads of garden truck drawn by equally sleepy horses wending at a snail's pace cityward. As they come down the hill they look like a sailor's description of a sea-serpent, and aside from the steady tramp of hoofed feet they are as silent. The mounted police, and even the much-dreaded bicycle "cops," have folded their tents, and, with the exception of one or two autos trailing along with a few enthusiasts who wish to witness the speed test, the turnpike is yours. The chauffeur driving your car has secret ambitions,

and on a straight stretch he suddenly speeds up to sixty, and would go a trifle better, but for a crazy valve somewhere in the engine which causes an occasional miss; but even with that drawback it seems only a minute before you have reached the plant at Bull's Head headquarters, and are inspecting the racer which looks dangerous to you, even as it stands motionless.

To ask questions is a woman's prerogative, and on this occasion you do not neglect it, and by this means, among other interesting things, you learn that this particular racer has a chrome nickel-steel frame, and that the machine weighs twenty-two hundred and four pounds. This is the limit for racers, and, like jockeys, racing-cars are all weighed in and duly stamped before they enter on the day of the race. "Gasoline? Thirty gallons in that tank, and it will carry two hundred and fifty miles—the faster a car goes the less gas it uses." The splash system of oiling keeps the machine lubricated, a system which is like four pairs of hands splashing oil constantly on either side of the machinery. On the day of the race both the gasoline and the lubricating oil are kept in tanks, which are sealed and guarded to prevent trickery in the way of adding water, which would soon put the car out of commission. Of course "all is fair," etc., but from experience it has been found safer to guard the fuel.

There are four speeds, the first being twenty-five miles an hour, and the fourth sends the car up to a hundred and over. Near the top of the engine to the right are four forbidding exhaust pipes projecting a foot from the car. When the machine is speeding these pipes throw off air and smoke with a force sufficient to blow the hat from a man's head should he be within six feet of the car. Although the cars are not supposed to be on the course before five o'clock in the morning, it is not at all unusual to hear at any time after twelve from four to six puffing monsters dashing along the country roads at a mile a minute.

"So you are going to ride in the racer?" says Herbert Lytle, who had reluctantly consented to take a chance at killing a journalist. "Afraid?" asked Bert Dingley, who won in the elimination race last year over the Vanderbilt course, and who will ride with Lytle this year in the race. "No—not afraid?—stand eighty miles an hour? What—a hundred! Well, tuck your skirts well around you, and put on this duster and goggles, for the machine throws up dust and oil," a fact which you will experience later, when, after the thirty-mile spin, your face is a study in oil splashes of varying colors and sizes. Mr. Lytle is very careful about flowing drapery, for he had one experience in Paris when the Countess Lamiere had begged a ride, and she clambered in, wearing a thousand-dollars' worth of lace gown, some of which trailed down, got caught in the whirring wheels, and all but pulled the wearer out of the car.

Any one familiar with an auto knows what it is to crank up. Well, to crank up a racer takes the combined strength of three men, and when finally the engine turns, the explosions sound like a Chinese high-binder fray with fifty pistols popping at once. "It is back firing," you venture, and are laughed at for your wisdom. But never having seen a racer before, you are not supposed to know that they all make a sputtering and cracking like disappointed demons. A racer is heard miles before it is seen.

At last you are off, with headlights glowing like two full moons and sending a search for a block ahead. It is weird to a degree as you sweep along comparatively easy until you come to the course. You whiz past a cemetery and you feel queerish, for it is as dark and as silent as death except for the spitfire of an engine cracking and throbbing and leaping under you. The trees loom up like dark clouds, and even commonplace posts take on fantastic shapes. Thousands of bugs, attracted by your headlights, are whirring along in a small army just ahead of you, and you recall your reading of Dante, especially as another machine is heard bellowing along and its great eyes appear like a flash of lightning and are gone. You have reached the course, and you brace your feet and hold with both hands to the narrow seat, as you watch Lytle bend low over the wheel, one hand gripping the controller and the other on the steering gear. He is not nervous, for, after all, this is only a speed test, and he has entered and won two genuine races, besides winning honors at the American eliminating Vanderbilt race last year. He is not nervous, but there is a certain tension—there's no mistaking that. Through your goggles you look at him equally goggled and appearing in the darkness as uncanny as the machine he is driving sounds.

You are now going at about seventy miles an hour, and you feel the swift currents of air produced by the mad flight of the machine. Thump—what was that? "A spirit has slapped me in the face," you shout to Lytle. "Bug," he shouts back, and you think he is slangy, until you feel another and another, and still more. Thick and fast they come against you like a shower of rocks, and you find that they are really bugs which have been attracted by the headlights and have been overtaken by the flight of the car. These bugs nearly pound the life out of you during that ride. There is something ahead—merciful saints! you are going straight into it—but by the time you catch your breath you are a mile past. It was, after all, only a vegetable wagon, whose sleeping driver had allowed

the horses to stray to the wrong side of the road. Again something—and with the driver you lean far forward as from the rail of a ship, vainly hoping to make out the vague object looming before you in the gloom. There is not only a great desire, but also a great need, to see, for the driver's eyes and his high-strung nerves are all that are between you and death. You have a faint notion that you are dreaming, and that you will wake up to see the walls of your room.

It is beginning to get light, and more machines appear on the course. So far you have only been going at from sixty to eighty miles an hour, but now that it is light, Lytle says that he means to speed up a bit. You make a discovery that right before the driver's eyes, under the wheel, is the register of the speedometer, and this races back and forth, recording the varying speeds of the machine as it takes the curves and strikes the highway. To the left of the speed register are a half-dozen little oil tubes which, being made of glass, look like so many bottles standing up in a row, and through them you see the oil dripping at the rate of eight drops a minute. Fascinated now, you forget the scenery of flying posts, and all thoughts of a wreck are lost in your interest in the register. Lytle watches the register, too, as he drives. It is creeping up—click goes the lever into third speed, and you read seventy, five, eighty, five. You try to catch your hat which the rushing air has loosened under your tightly-tied veil, and you succeed only in getting your arm half way up; the rush of air is stronger than you are; you clutch wildly to regain your hold on the strap and let your hat go, which it does down the road as your veil loosens and floats out on the wind.

A curve and a sharp angle—there are thirteen curves on the course—you slow down to about fifty, and the car careens virtually on one wheel, and the whole machine seems lifted up in the air and comes down to earth again with a jump. You are so busy with the register, your hat, and the corner that you did not hear the lever click into fourth speed, but you feel the car leap—zip!—for the fraction of a minute you are going at a trifle over a hundred miles an hour. You think, if indeed you think at all, that if it goes much faster you will topple right over, but soon you begin to slow down, seventy, sixty, fifty. Why, you seem to actually crawl along at fifty an hour, and although every nerve in your body is quivering and you have just enough strength to hang on to the strap, you manage to shout an answer to Lytle, who asks with exquisite sarcasm, at the top of his voice, "Was that fast enough?" and you enjoy the satisfaction of seeing him nearly fall over with surprise as you fire back, "'Twasn't very fast; can't you make one hundred and twenty?"

But it isn't true—it was fast, faster than you in your very wildest dreams had ever experienced, and if truth be told, you wonder how you managed to stick on, and you turn and look with a new and respectful interest at the boyish young chap, with a pink-and-white face showing between the mud and oil spots and the dimple in his chin, who had dared to speed up to the hundred mark and past it, and who expects to go still faster on the day of the great race.

Do you realize what it means to travel at the rate of one hundred miles an hour? Only twenty miles more and you would be going at two miles a minute. But you have not yet finished; you are up to seventy again when another racer comes tearing along and Lytle swerves his car to the right. He has detected a false note in the medley of noises made by the two cars. Quick as a flash he has slowed down and has run off to the side, and a second later you are both out, looking with frightened eyes at the driver who had been hurled over the fence far into the potato patch, and who immediately rises and walks toward his car, which is now only a pile of scrap iron. You and Lytle begin to question him. "Steering gear went wrong; lucky not to have been killed," he remarks. He is unhurt, and he coolly offers to assist you into your car. The smashing of the machine and the close call on his life is only an incident in the history of a racing-car driver.

You and Lytle are ready to start again, but you are unable to move that crank. Both men and you join your strength in the tug-of-war, which the machine repeatedly wins. You sit down and wait. Finally a truck wagon comes along, the driver is awakened and made to lend a hand, and soon you are

on the road again. You are beginning to like it, and think that you will never be able to enjoy ordinary going at the law-prescribed rate of eight and ten miles an hour, and you feel a great sympathy for all the poor arrested chauffeurs. It is quite light now and all the chickens, dogs, etc., begin to appear along the road. Before long you begin to marvel at a certain psychological force which impels these various living creatures, not only chickens and dogs, but humans as well, to want to cross the road when a racer is flying along with death in its path.

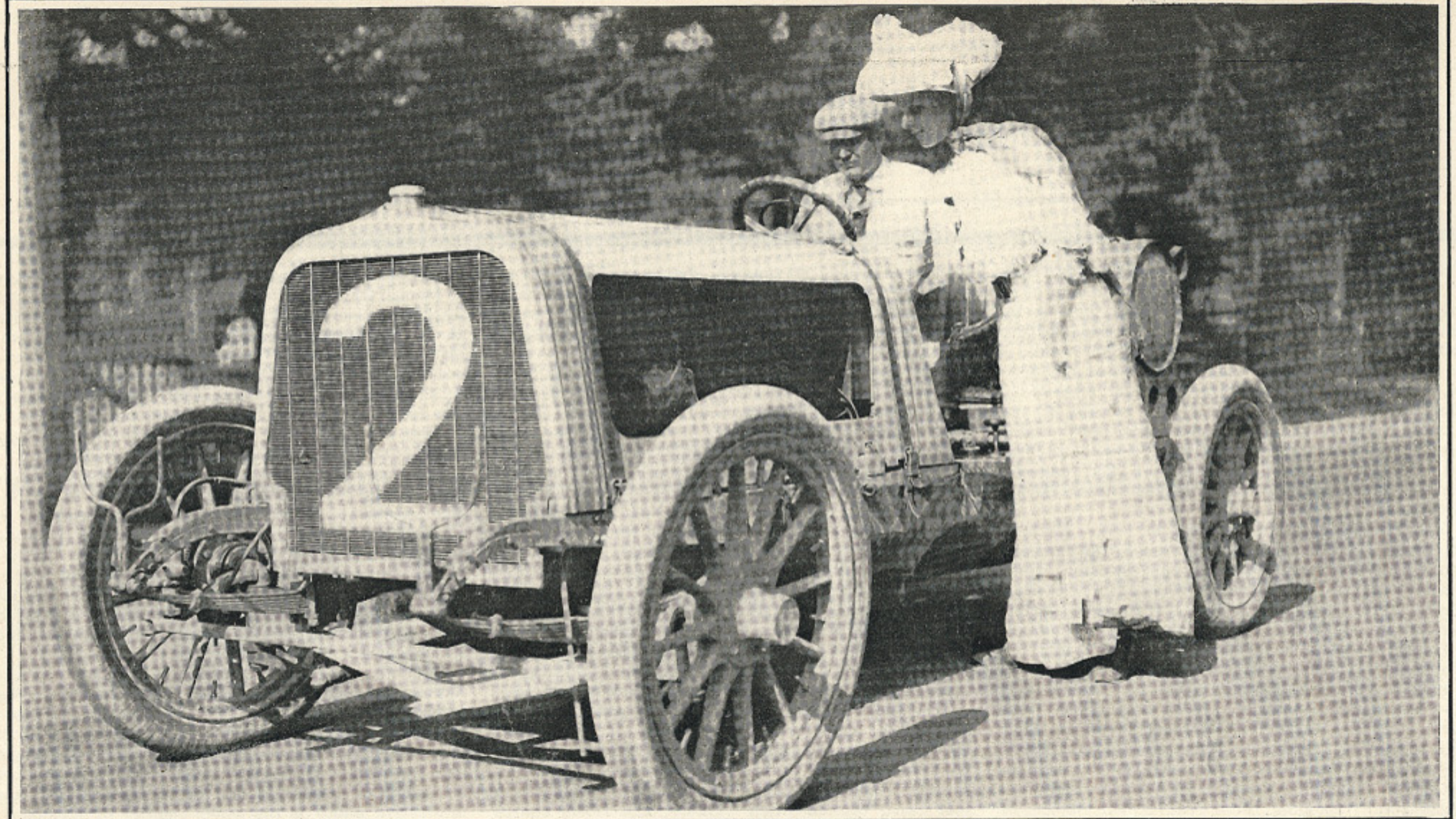
A silly hen—and the fact that you have already unavoidably killed at least a dozen has put you into this train of thought—is contentedly scratching on the side, when, with no apparent reason, she walks leisurely out and stands right in the middle of the road, deliberating whether she will cross or not. By the time she has made up her mind she has been crushed to atoms. A child may sit by the side of the road or lie under a tree watching an ant-hill for hours, but the minute a dangerous racer appears down the road, that boy has a tremendous desire to get on the other side, and ten chances to one he will make a run for it.

This unexplainable phase of human nature is by no means confined to children. It is shared by every degree of adult age, and is one of the things that turn the hair of the drivers gray. To be sure, even at top speed, a machine can he brought to a standstill at one hundred feet, but it means that the machine may be smashed to smithereens and the driver pitched over the wheel into the road by the sudden clapping on of brakes.

After you have reached the plant again and have received the congratulations of the half-frightened group which has been speculating about your safe return, you make some inquiries concerning the dangers hovering near a racing-car. Tire trouble is the worst, for if at high speed a front tire goes flat the car will swerve and run amuck. The deflation of a rear-wheel tire is less dangerous. Tires becoming hot is another great trouble, and to obviate this on the day of the race pails containing ice-water are stationed at intervals along the course, and at these stations the machines

are slowly driven, the water being then thrown on the tires to cool them. One of the greatest advantages of the Ormond racing course is that the hard sand is damp and cool, and the tires never become hot when racing over it.

You are glad enough to start for home again, but you will remember for many a day how it seems to fly, and you wonder if next year's racers will be able to accomplish as much even in the way of speed and general equipment.

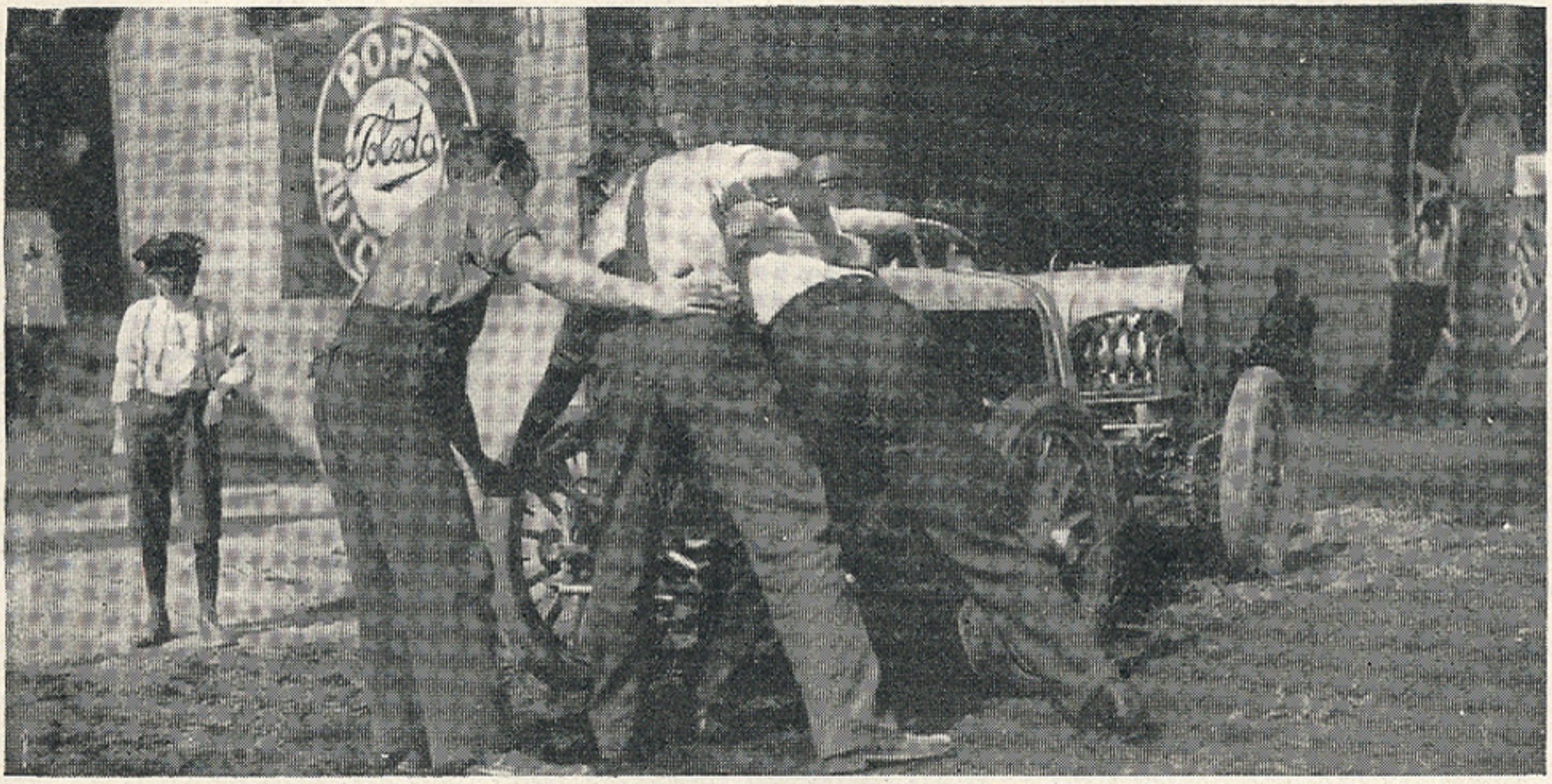


HER INTRODUCTION TO THE SPACE-ANNIHILATOR IN WHICH SHE MADE THE TRIP.

DONNING GOGGLES AND A DUSTER AS A PROTECTION AGAINST THE DUST AND OIL OF THE ROAD.

A WOMAN'S THRILLING RIDE IN A VANDERBILT CUP-RACER.

BORNE ALONG AT A SPEED OF NINETY MILES AN HOUR IN A 120-HORSE-POWER POPE-TOLEDO, WHICH SHE AFTERWARD LEARNS TO DRIVE HERSELF.—*Photographs by A. E. Dunn.*



THE COMBINED EFFORTS OF THREE MEN ARE NEEDED TO CRANK-UP THE RACING-MACHINE.

THE RETURN FROM THE LIGHTNING RIDE IN WHICH THE LADY LOST HER HAT.