

# THE AUTOMOBILE

**A**LTHOUGH progress in motor vehicle construction is made every day, somewhere, it remains true, as yet, that there is more automobilism in the air than on the roads, more on paper than in the factories.

Automobiles and "automobilers" that are making records on race-tracks with specially built machines, are demonstrating the intensity of a fancy more than its justification; but there is no evidence that the progress of the year 1900 has, so far, given birth to any vehicle capable of arousing a hard-headed, utilitarian sort of enthusiasm in its owner.

Yet there is no doubt advancement is made, a little here and a little there, in a hundred places. But each designer holds on to his own with jealous care, and what with legal patent prohibition and shop secrecy, it takes a long time to leaven the whole internecine fraternity of automobile builders with the progress of its individual members.

The composite of their brains might probably to-day construct the vehicle which would convince the most doubtful Thomas of the virtues of the automobile in all of its three principal types, and of the superiority of each one in its particular field over horse-traction.

But composite brain-work is as far from realization in mechanics as in politics. Meanwhile, a great deal of satisfaction may be obtained from the less perfect automobiles that are produced by efforts that appear purely individual, inspired but not taught as are the designers by holding their "ears to the ground" over which automobiles are rolling.

**T**HE sport of automobilism seems to drift farther away every day from that other aspect of the motor-vehicle movement which bears upon the part automobiles will play in the economy and pleasures of the nation. Its undercurrent is rarely the true spirit of sport, which only loves display of individual faculties for the sake of their further development. But it is, first of all, the commercial instinct, and, secondly, a none too intelligent thirst for a genteel sort of notoriety. The race-track sport of automobilism at the present moment is largely an accident, due to the recollection of what the cycle sport did for the cycle industry. The features that produce high speed are frequently directly antagonistic to general utility.

Still, the ruling majority will undoubtedly continue to look upon automobile races as a worthy addition to sporting events, and those who realize that the racing is premature can do nothing better than how to the facts of the fashion, appreciative of the popular interest which

the track events contribute to the movement in general.

The recent races at Guttenberg, N. J.; Chicago, Ill., and Trenton, N. J., in all cases gave victory to vehicles which could not be seriously considered available for any but speeding purposes, and demonstrated the need of vigorous and incisive action by a governing body to check the riotous prevalence of commercial influences.

Of the steam vehicles alone could it be truly said that they were adapted for ordinary travel, as well as high speeds on a smoothed surface.

**W**ITH reference to the steam vehicles, the experience of the past half-year has brought out sharply two questions: Will it be possible to find a suitable disposition of the comparatively bulky engines, boiler and tanks, so as to give the vehicles, in addition, some carrying capacity? And will the public in general meet the constructors half-way, by acquiring the knowledge of engineering needed for operating them successfully and obviating too-frequent repairs? The degree of knowledge and skill demanded is not excessive, but its possession is peremptory.

It has become a mooted question whether the wide use of steam vehicles would or would not be facilitated by resorting to a somewhat heavier construction than that—the lightest of all automobiles—by which it was first introduced to the public's favorable notice.

Many designers are leaning toward a general strengthening of parts as an offset to the carelessness of users, but by this policy one of the most catching points in the attractiveness of the steam automobile, as it has been evolved in the United States, must be partially sacrificed.

While the electric carriage is constantly proving and improving its adaptedness for certain lines of city work, its limited freedom of movement takes it every day more distinctly out of the field of sport, pure and simple. A recognized element in urban and suburban transportation, and capable of the highest speeds, if built specially for such, it opens all new vistas for those who are looking to automobilism for a broadening of their means for enjoying the fulness of living.

**T**HE gasoline vehicle, on the other hand, crude in comparison and tricky when operated by any but highly experienced chauffeurs, is captivating the fancy of all who love to dwell on future possibilities, and an immense amount of work is going on in hundreds of workshops with a view to realizing the expectations that twine around the main principle of its construction.