

## THE AUTOMOBILE

**A**UTOMOBILISM is in winter quarters, but not sleeping. No sensational innovations are in immediate prospect, and none are looked for until the season of frost and snow shall have passed. Whether then anything is likely to transpire to cause a radical change in the public's attitude remains a matter of conjecture. None either affirms or denies.

The general verdict upon automobilism seems to run about as follows: "A little too new for utility, a trifle too exacting for pleasure, a shade too crude for elegance, but coming in the right direction, and, altogether, an interesting movement of Titanic promise, and affording even at present an excellent diversion for persons of liberal, aggressive temperament and generous purse."

**A**LL who attended the shows so far held bore home new impressions, and felt a new ability to tell the chaff from the wheat; but it is not easy to summarize what the effect will be of that subtle reciprocation between "the trade" and the public which takes place at exhibitions, and shapes opinions in both directions. Yet, a few points seem to have been decided upon.

"Too slab-sided!" This criticism of automobile carriage-bodies has carried weight, and there will be more curves in woodwork hereafter; less of the box effect.

"Those 'bicycle wheels' don't look right with that heavy carriage!" Wheels will be heavier in appearance and, probably, mostly made of wood. They will also be larger proportionately to the size of the vehicle, both front and rear.

"Does not accomplish enough for its weight and cost!" Size and weight of electric carriages are tending downwards; so far mainly in the public's desires; but, no doubt, manufacturers are taking note of it. For steam vehicles the tendency of constructors is in the opposite direction; but the public is passive.

There is an unsatisfied longing for something radically new in the contours, colors and whole, so to say, physiognomy of all automobiles—something to make us feel that we are receiving a completely new addition to the list of good things in life, and not merely being enabled to get along without one of the old things—the horse—which we have really never wished to lose.

The gain in efficiency of locomotion—always disputed—seems of a nature too negative to fully satisfy so long as the new vehicles are not possessed of an individuality entirely their own; in fact, it seems a loss rather than a gain from a sentimental and artistic point of view. The only way to obtain adequate compensation for the loss of a cherished sentiment or artistic satisfaction is to fill the void with a completely new one. And everybody feels that this can only be done by designing the mechanical pleasure vehicle as a thing of striking individual style, conveying a vivid artistic

impression of power, speed and companion-ship.

**I**N this respect comparatively little has been done. Among gasoline vehicles there are departures from ordinary carriage style bold, numerous and conspicuous enough to be worthy of notice, and a quota of the public seem to appreciate these new outlines quite keenly, even though in many instances they are the compulsory result of a mechanical necessity rather than an artistic choice. There may be reason to expect freer play for fancy and originality of design also in the vehicles driven by other forms of power.

Naturally, the public has no advice to offer on construction matters, but the industry is profiting by the lessons administered to the trade at the shows and elsewhere. More painstaking measures are the vogue, and makeshifts are falling into disrepute in construction as in design. The carriage is gaining on the motorcycle; the motorcycle is developing into a little carriage. Machinery completely exposed to view or completely hidden—either makes converts. In steam vehicles automatic regulation of the engine is carried to its last sequence, but so is the opposite idea which abolishes the automatic features entirely.

Division of opinion is "making headway, and thus the road is being paved for the great diversity in styles of automobiles, which is unavoidable and desirable, because it is necessary for the application of the automobile principle to a great variety of vehicle work. Being carriage and horse combined, the automobile must exemplify not only the variety in present carriage styles, but also the variety in horses.

It seems finally to be understood that the test of business efficiency must be the decisive one for automobilism and the only safe foundation for the evolution of the pleasure carriage.

**L**OCAL automobile clubs are being organized at a rate that reminds one of the formation of automobile manufacturing companies one year ago. The latter have mostly vanished or subsided for lack of something tangible and practicable to be manufactured. Those that remain are straining their resources in order to increase their productive facilities and meet the demand which seems certain to grow out of club activity. Being most easily organized for rapid production, the steam vehicle branch has the best of this situation. The machinery it needs is in the market beforehand.

A carriage operated with liquid air has made its first public appearance. It runs; and it looks outwardly like a steam vehicle, the engine being also similar, but its utility for automobile purposes belongs to a remote future. For street-car service or similar work over fixed routes the liquid air may, however, prove a formidable competitor of other forms of stored power.

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