

SAHARA

TESTED





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Between October and December, 1958, a

Standard Atlas journeyed 10,000 miles from

Cape Town to Tangier via the Sahara Desert.

This is the story of that epic journey.

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The 10,000-mile journey of the Atlas



The French truck drivers were astonished

Mad dogs . . .

TOWARDS the end of November, 1958, the rough dust-covered drivers of the French trans-Saharan trucks were astonished to see a convoy of small cars, led by a small 'bus, heading north for the open spaces of the Sahara Desert.

From the security provided by their lofty driving cabs, by their 150 h.p. diesel engines, and by a ground clearance which stood above the small cars, they warned the convoy of the dangers of desert travel. Among themselves they muttered, no doubt, about "mad dogs and Englishmen"—or the French equivalent.

The convoy was, however, no band of adventurers seeking publicity, but a team of Standard experimental engineers secretly seeking to prove the Triumph Herald on the worst roads in the world. They were led by a Standard Atlas prototype carrying twenty hundredweight of stores, spares and tools—including a complete welding outfit—an overload of ten hundredweight. Thus loaded, its 948 c.c. engine hauled it over 10,000 miles under the most gruelling road and climatic conditions imaginable.

When the Gallant Little Band—as it was known at Coventry—entered the French Sahara, it had already covered 7,500 miles of

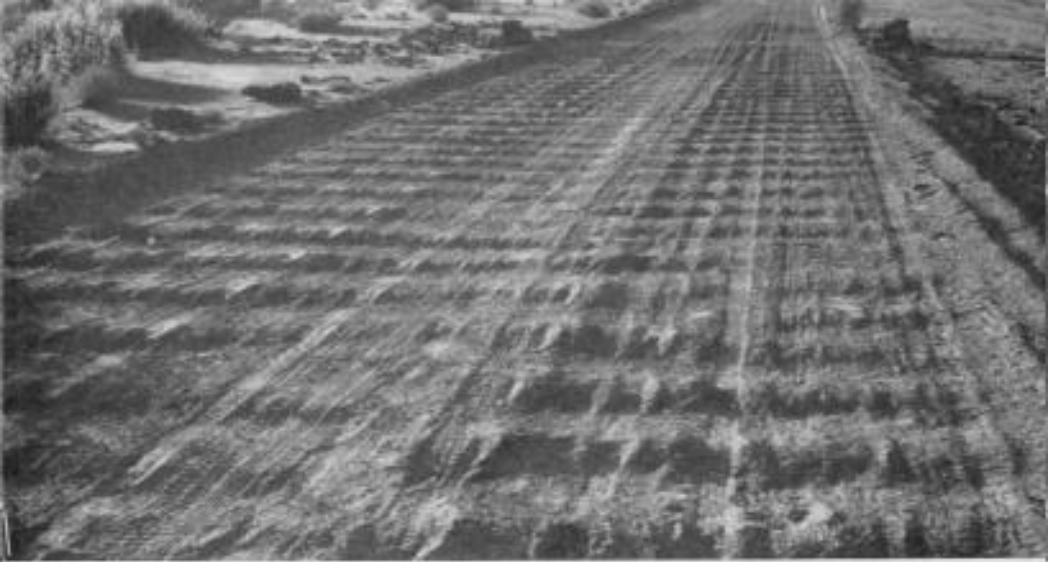
African roads from Capetown. The term "roads" is relative. In the words of John Lloyd, leader of the team, in a report back to Coventry, they were for the most part "the type of cart track that one would refuse to take a car down in England".

Some were boulder strewn, pot-holed, crossed by eighteen-inch deep gulleys and, in many places, washed away to the bare rock. Others displayed for mile after mile the peculiar wash-board corrugations formed on dirt roads by the passage of sprung vehicles. And always there was dust and heat—dust often ten inches deep, and heat producing cab temperatures up to 110°F. The only respite from the dust was afforded by monsoon rains—which turned the dust to deep mud.

A great deal of time was spent running in mountainous regions—climbing escarpments, skirting lava-strewn volcanoes, and sliding up jungle-clothed gradients. Consequently, for days on end, the Atlas was thoroughly tested on full throttle in its lower gears. On one occasion a hundred 1 in 6 gradients were climbed in succession in one day. And many times every day the overloaded Atlas was called upon to pull the smaller vehicles back on to the road, or tow them out of sill-deep dust or mud.

Desert Ordeal

At Goa the edge of the Sahara was marked by a gradual diminishing of the scrub-like vegetation and an increase in the prevalence of sand. A day later no pretence was made to call the track a road. The route to be followed was marked by deep ruts in the sand made by heavy trucks, which clung to the oil drum markers planted at five-kilometre intervals in the desert. For the most part, the heavily-laden Atlas used the track, continuously sand-ploughing the ridge between the two ruts, but the smaller cars were forced to find their own route on the smoother sand beside. This called for a special driving technique of charging at full throttle any patches of soft sand that could not be skirted, in the hopes that the vehicles would get through with their own momentum. Inevitably, this led to many boggings, and called for the services of the Atlas to extricate the cars. The peak was reached with twenty-four such operations in one day.



Above : Typical suspension-testing corrugations encountered for mile after mile

Right : Cart tracks down which one would refuse to take a car in England



An overload of ten hundredweight including a complete welding outfit



It was anticipated that the relatively flat Sahara route would provide some relief from the day-long operation at full throttle. But this proved to be an illusion. The soft sand clinging to the wheels demanded the low gears and full throttle settings required for steep gradients. And the illusion of uphill travel was completed for the drivers by the feeling that the vehicles were forever climbing out of a bowl to the rim of the horizon.

The ordeal of the 948 c.c. Atlas engine was increased by the temperature which rose each day, as the centre of the desert was approached. Eventually, the natural cooling of the engine had to be supplemented by switching on the heater and heater blower ! The ordeal was partially transferred to the drivers, who suffered from air temperatures around the feet of 147°F. !

Well tested

As the northern limits of the Sahara were reached at the beginning of December, the day temperatures began to fall to those of a hot English summer, and in the foothills of the Atlas mountains the story of the Sahara testing of the Standard Atlas virtually ends. From there to Tangier the only hazards were provided by the Algerian rebels, and by French military convoys which compelled the Gallant Little Band to drive at breakneck (or should we say breakspring) speeds over dirt roads and corrugations.

For the record, the only troubles experienced with the Standard Atlas throughout the whole 10,000 miles were some overheating, a rock-damaged exhaust system, a mud-filled rear brake drum, and a throttle once stuck wide open with sand—although this was hardly noticed ! None of these would have been experienced in the majority of the Standard markets in the world. But, needless to say, since the Atlas's return from Africa, steps have been taken to ensure that they will now not occur anywhere.

For the whole of the test an overall oil consumption of 4,000 miles per gallon was recorded and a fuel consumption range of 18 to 26 miles per gallon. Detailed inspection in the Experimental Department workshops at the end of the test showed no structural weaknesses, although some underbody damage had



Above : In mid-Sahara, cab temperatures of 147°F. were experienced.

Left : Oil drums marked the desert route at five-kilometre intervals.

Below : Deeply rutted tracks in the sand. The Atlas sand-ploughed the ridge; the smaller vehicles chose their own routes.





Jungle meeting on the steep slopes of the Mountains of the Moon in the Belgian Congo

understandably occurred. The rugged 948 c.c. Standard engine showed no appreciable signs of wear and was rebuilt with all its original components.

Previous to the African test the Atlas had, of course, been thoroughly tested on the Motor Industries Research Association (M.I.R.A.) Proving Ground at Lindley, on which all British vehicles are tested, and which is devised to simulate any road conditions in the world. To illustrate the value of the African test to the road-worthiness of the Atlas, let us again quote John Lloyd from a report he sent to Coventry from Mitwaba in the Belgian Congo. He says : "If you can visualise the Lindley corrugated track rolled into the pavé track and dust tunnel, with the cross-country track thrown in for good measure, you have the lot" !

As a postscript, this particular Atlas has now been back in service for a year with the same engine, and will shortly be accompanying a geological expedition to Norway. Such is its versatility and endurance.

ATLAS – always the best

Whether it's bread, milk, people, or frozen fish, whatever the load Atlas is *always* the answer. Atlas has everything: easier maintenance, taxi-turning, greatest load space, low loading level, high headroom, sliding or hinged cab doors. Wherever you look, there's an Atlas doing better, faster, more economical work. For instance...



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