

Some Automobile Men Favor Pleasanter Sounding Horns

The raucous, menacing tones of the present automobile horn will vanish from our streets if agitation against them gains its point. Almost every newspaper prints letters from impatient pedestrians who maintain that the strident clamor of the horn is responsible for accidents, because drivers are so startled that they precipitately dart in front of the approaching car.

"When I cross an avenue," said one who is not usually regarded as a peevish specimen, "and I hear a peevish yawn at my ear, I'm disturbed that I don't know which way I'm going. Let's have warnings, but all means, but why can't we have warnings which don't paralyze the nerves of the person warned?"

The movement for a less strident horn is endorsed by M. L. Hemminway, manager of the Motor and Accessory Manufacturers' association, an organization which counts among its members many of the leading makers of automobile horns.

"There is no doubt that the raucous horn is something of a danger," remarked Mr. Hemminway, "especially in the hands of an inexperienced or careless driver. Nor can the unpleasantness be charged entirely to the nerves of the person in the street. Only a little while ago, in Boston, I saw a woman so frightened by a sudden blast from a horn that she fainted as she crossed the street. I for one would be in favor of some concerted action to standardize the motor signal and to make it as pleasing to the ear as possible."

The voice of the auto horn seems to be changing. The old-fashioned "honk-honk" instrument operated by a rubber bulb has passed out of existence so far as pleasure cars are concerned, although it remains popular with motorcycleists. English manufacturers still exploit this horn, but no American manufacturer would think of offering it as part of his car's equipment. The hand-operated rucous vibrator is being superseded by a similar device attached to the motor or to the volume depends somewhat on the acuity of the ear and when the car is racing the sound is not disagreeable, although it is far from musical.

"We like the motor operated horn," said a chauffeur who has been driving automobiles for many years, "because it's fool-proof. Maybe I'm a crank, but there's one thing gets me sore it's to have the kids—young and old—blow an accurate horn when the car's standing still. They can't play with a horn that works only when the power's on, and that's why I'm strong for it."

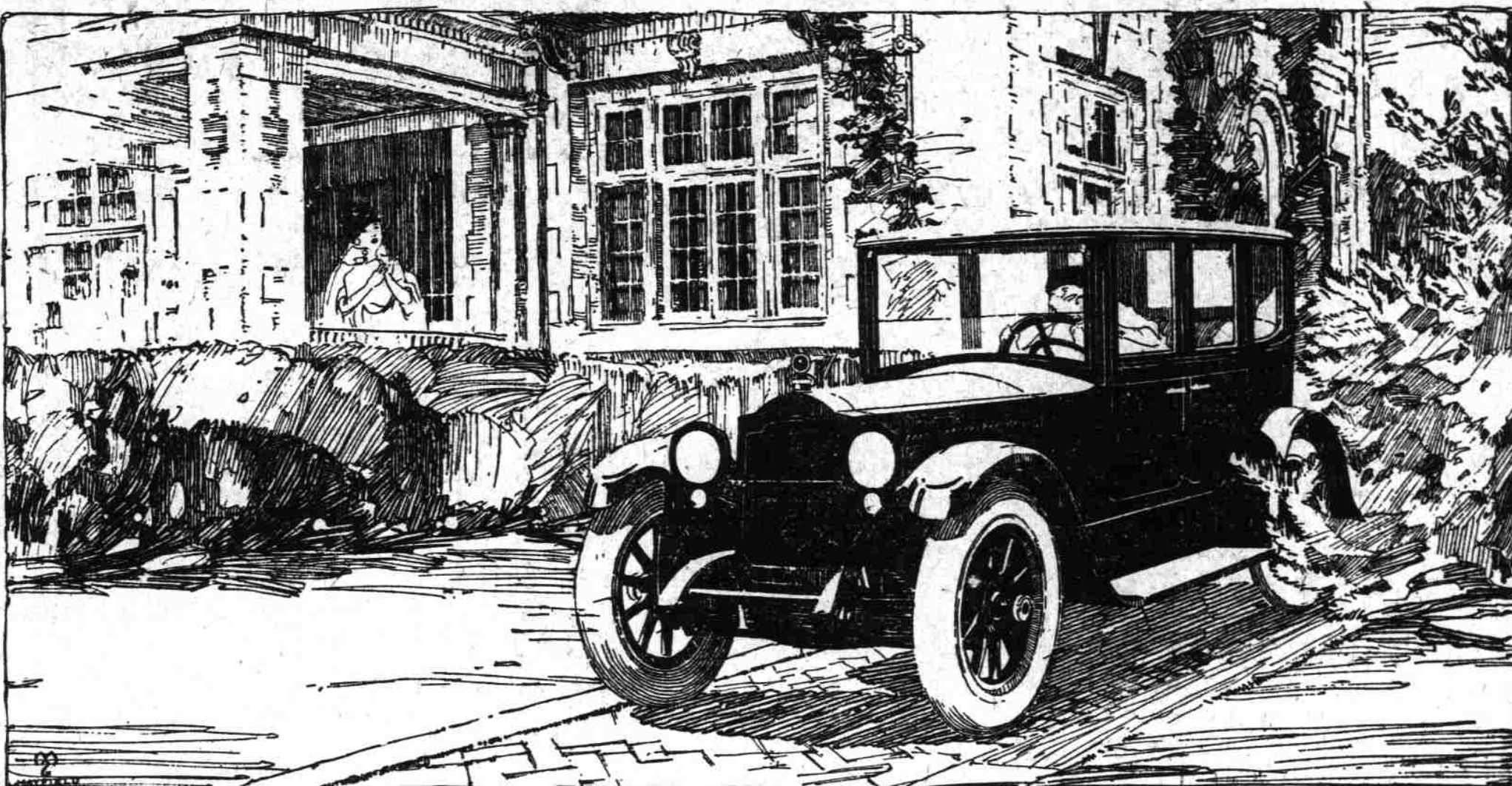
There have been several attempts to provide a musical horn, most of which, however, have met with little success. Several years ago an enterprising concern put on the market a horn which blew an accurate chord in musical tones. The novelty of the device brought it a fleeting popularity, but soon sales declined and the harmony horn disappeared. Mr. Hemminway attributes the non-success to the fact that the chord had no note of warning in it.

A recent addition to the field is the "explosion whistle," which is placed on a cylinder head and is operated by the explosion of the motor. At high pressure a piercing shriek is emitted, but at low pressure a soft, beguiling sound is said to be available. This horn may be had with a three-tone chimes arrangement and it may win favor with the musically inclined motorist.

"The fright of the pedestrian isn't the only factor to be considered," suggested M. Lincoln Schuster, Mr. Hemminway's assistant. "As a music lover I'm interested in hearing something less grating. The auto horn is one of the most unpleasant sounds of the city, and it would be a good idea if it could be made to give a standard, agreeable tone. By the way, if they consider only the warning element, why doesn't some one devise a speaking horn? A phonographic attachment that said 'Look out!' wouldn't be bad at all. Here's a suggestion for the public: Why not a horn with three shifts—first, a gentle admonition, then a command, and then—"

"And then," added Mr. Hemminway, "a good round, reverberating oath. That would create instant attention. But, seriously, if every one got together to standardize the sound of auto horns so that every one would recognize the warning at first hearing it would be a fine thing, not only for the public but for the manufacturers as well."

Well—the commonest and most raucous sounding horn in use at present did good service in the trenches as a gas alarm; the reformers should remember this and give their evil its due.



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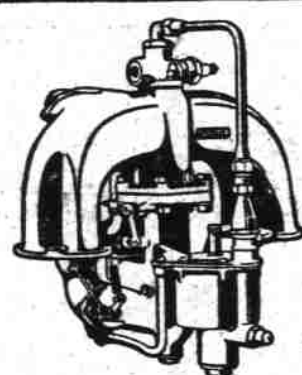
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Make Gas From Straw; Engineers Discover Method To Use Waste

A gas which is obtained by the destructive distillation of wheat, oats, and rye straws is now being produced upon a small scale at the experimental farm of the United States department of agriculture at Arlington, Va. Although an automobile has been operated with the new combustible, and it has been used for illuminating purposes as well as for cooking, the possibilities of straw gas are not yet fully determined, the department says.

In order to determine the exact commercial value of the gas, David J. Price, engineer in charge of the new office of development work, a subdivision of the bureau of chemistry designed to help commercial and industrial concerns to use new processes and discoveries developed in the bureau, has placed H. E. Roethe, Jr., in charge of a series of production tests with the experimental apparatus at Arlington.

The work can be carried on but slowly owing to the limited funds available at present, but it is planned to do much that will determine the quantity and nature of the gas that may be obtained from wheat, oats, barley, rye and rice straws, and from cornstalks, sorgho, and other vegetable matter usually burned as waste.

Extend Experiments
If the results of these tests warrant further investigation the experiments will be extended to the problem of plant equipment for producing the gas on a scale sufficient to allow the farmer to supply light and heat for his house, power for stationary engines, and, possibly, for his tractor from a small individual outfit. If a suitable engine can be constructed so that the farmer's initial cost will be small it seems likely that the straw gas may have a certain economic value in the sections of the country where the raw material from which the gas is made is now considered as waste and burned or left to rot on the fields. In some sections of the country the straw is used as fertilizer, but in the west and northwest there is an unlimited supply of the material available for conversion into light and fuel for the farm home.

While it has been possible to operate an automobile with straw gas and it is known that 50 pounds of straw will produce about 300 cubic feet of gas—amount sufficient to drive a light motor 15 miles—the problem of reducing the gas to liquid form or condensing it sufficiently to allow it to be carried conveniently is an essential

one that must be solved before straw gas can be considered as a possible motor fuel. This will be another of the tasks taken up by the engineers in the development division.

Process Not New
Straw gas is not a new thing. The present process was developed by George Harrison, a Canadian engineer at Moosejaw, in 1914, who later operated on the project with Professor MacLaurin, of the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada. The university, in conjunction with the United States department of agriculture, exhibited a straw gas equipment at the exposition of chemical industries in New York City during the fall of 1918. This equipment was later purchased and improved by the department. The Canadian investigators succeeded in operating an automobile with the product. However, the fuel supply was carried in a large flexible bag on the top of the car—a method of doubtful practicability.

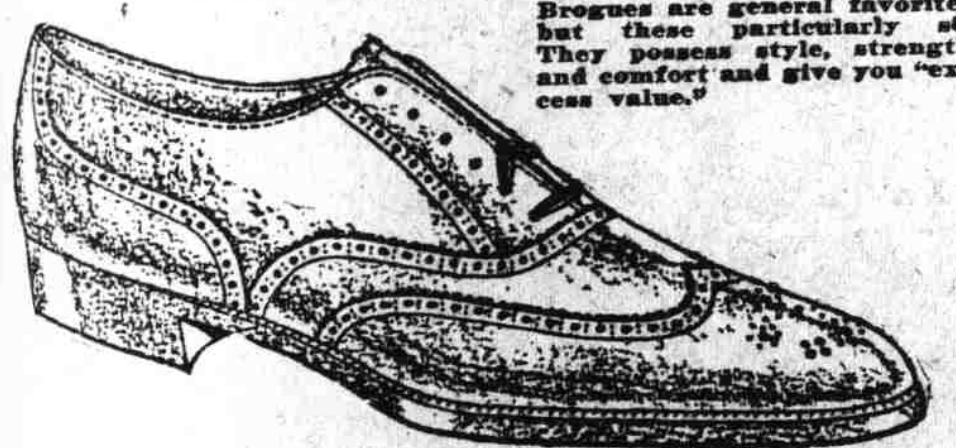
Several valuable by-products are obtained in the manufacture of the gas. Carbon residue suitable for manufacturing lamp black of exceptionally fine quality is one. This residue also contains certain amounts of potash, phosphates, and nitrogenous compounds which give it fertilizing value. The tar and ammoniacal liquids resulting from the process, aside from their value as disinfectants and preservatives, may prove useful in the dye industry. If the engineers succeed in perfecting the present apparatus and in reducing the cost of production there is no doubt that straw gas will have an important commercial future.

A warning paragraph often saves a chapter of explanation.

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