

# What I think of the Major -

*Wherein a well-known motoring journalist expresses a candid opinion of the new 14 h.p. model, after an extended tour under varying conditions of weather, country and highway*

By  
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WHEN one finds a car which offers pretty well all the essential luxuries of the most expensive types, with a road performance which must satisfy the great mass of even exigent users, and can only find one or two trivial points to criticise, one metaphorically takes off one's hat to that car and its makers.

Particularly so, you must agree, if you happen to be an old motorist like myself, grown rather cynical with much testing of cars during more years than it is pleasant to recall.

But none the less the Morris Major, in its newest guise, compels me to raise my hat.

## Last Year's Model

What manner of car is this? Last season the Major appeared, created an excellent impression, filled a niche, even if it did not create a vogue. This season, however, the car must, I think, create a vogue, for the very good reason that the newcomer possesses all the good features of the older one and has had certain legitimately criticised points altered, improved or eliminated.

The first Major suffered, to my way of thinking, from a certain narrowness of body, from too small diameter a steering wheel, from not too handy controls. The newcomer has almost more than ample space in the saloon. Fat people may ride side by side in front without elbow clicking. There is a lot of leg space. The front seats slide back and forth at a touch. Three can find pleasure when abreast on the back seat. The interior is light, there is a real window at the rear. Visibility for the driver is perfect. You



The new Morris Major in a Surrey by-way.

need not hoist indicators with red, blue or green knobs—according to taste—to tell you where your near-side wing lies. It is there to be seen. Yet you are not perched up; you sit in complete comfort and security.

If you want to change a wheel or make a roadside adjustment you do not disturb a soul with gropings for tools. They are *all* under the bonnet, in full view. You can get at *all* of them whichever side you lift the bonnet. You do not have to grope anywhere.

The car is quiet and fast—very fast if needed—and beautifully sprung. It has steering of the lightest, yet directional control is never absent—nor does it *feel* absent—a matter of importance.

This, then, is the newcomer which anyone may have for two hundred and fifteen pounds, all complete with

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sliding roof. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating: let us go out on the road and put the Major through its paces.

You get in, at a touch of the finger on a little lever you can slide the driver's seat back or forward till you get exactly the right leg reach. Let go the lever and the seat stays "put." The same with the passenger. You both feel completely at home. This means much for safe conduct of the car. You will like the feel of the big diameter thin-rimmed steering wheel, devoid of dish, and elegant to the eye. You each have a spacious, cloth-lined cubby hole—you for your smokes and gloves,



The roomy rear seat offers ample accommodation for three passengers.

Next you will find the change speed lever and the brake lever do not have to be groped for; the designers have thoughtfully put them exactly where your left hand insensibly feels for them. This is important, because it is not necessary to move the body at all to change gear or apply the hand brake, and anyone who drives far in a day knows how infernally tiring it is to have to lift oneself forward from the waist every time a lever must be moved.

**Let us Away**

Well, here we are at the wheel, ready to start the engine. Here, again, there is no groping with the toe for the starter button. Oh! not at all. On the Major the button is placed almost between the seats, within

easy reach of the left hand, and the starter is fingertip controlled, like everything else except the brake, clutch and accelerator pedals.

If you are so disposed, the 14 h.p. six-cylinder engine will move you off without shock or judder on second. Directly the wheels are revolving you may change into third, and rapidly thereafter into fourth, or top.

The gearbox on the Major is, in my judgment, the real outstanding feature of the car. I do not know if anyone *could* make a noisy change, but I doubt it. It is so ridiculously easy, at any speeds, to do it quietly.



The whole tool kit is accommodated handsly under the dash, while the pump, jack and wheel brace have individual clips of their own.

madame for her bag. On the top of the steering wheel is finger-tip control for the spark and for the dip and switch of the headlamps.

Right in front of you are two little knobs for mixture control and for carburetter enrichment for starting from cold. It does not matter much if you are so forgetful as to shut off the strangler effect after starting up; the control is spring-loaded and returns of its own accord to the normal position. I like this simple little device, because "wet fuel" caused by shutting off the air supply to the carburetter is bad for cylinders, and some of us are so dreadfully careless about leaving the strangler in operation too long.



This three-quarter view, which shows the handsome new radiator with chromium finished shutters to advantage, was taken at the memorial which marks the Battle of Chalgrove Field, near Watlington, Oxfordshire.

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The clutch is as near perfection as a clutch can be. Clutch spin from cold is definitely impossible; the plates are mechanically separated. No matter how cold and gummy the oil in the gearbox may be, if you depress the clutch pedal the plates just have to disengage. This is highly important on a cold morning, and makes for absurdly easy gear changing.

Third speed is of the helical pinion type, popularly known as a silent third. I have never met an example of a silent third, because silence is really a term inadmissible in mechanics. But the note from the third speed on the Major is nothing but a tiny hum, rather pleasant and comforting to the ear. On the third gear, in traffic for instance, you will not be aware that you have changed gear, and as acceleration is quite out of the ordinary on this ratio, and a comfortable 40 is at your command, the silent third of the Major robs traffic driving of all its boredom.

**A Useful Ratio**

As an indication of the car's powers on this third speed, I took a Major saloon up the *old* Dashwood Hill on it. I hit the bottom of the hill at about 40, and crested the top at 27. This is a very good performance for a 14 h.p. car. The new road can be climbed all the way on top, with the speed never below 35. I do not know the flat-out speed of the Major. All I can say is that on a favourable stretch of the High Wycombe-Oxford road I did not take

long to push the needle over the 60 mark; approximately a mile a minute bottled up in that engine. Most people this will not interest, but what will please them is that the Major saloon showed me that silent, comfortable cruising is there for the asking, all day, at at least 45 m.p.h.

**Superlative Braking**

Last year I covered over twenty thousand miles on one of the earliest produced Morris-Oxford Sixes with a coupé body. I am not so silly as to say that that car never needed any attention—what car does not, from time to time? But one component of its make-up required none whatever. This was the brake system. Like the present Major, the brakes were hydraulic Lockheeds. At fifteen thousand miles I had them taken down to have a look at the shoes. No measurable wear was found and they were put back. They were as powerful when I parted with the car as when new. Early in the car's life I bought a tin of Lockheed brake fluid. At regular intervals I took the filler-cap off the master cylinder to examine the level. It never varied, and I still have that tin.

The brakes on the new Major are just like those on my old Oxford. Light to operate, smooth and powerful in action, and, best of all, owing to their automatic compensation, usable hard on a wet surface without tail wag. Comparatively few drivers of today are really skilful when an emergency comes, and the provision of a brake set which brakes the car without breaking the occupants is a real contribution to Safety First. The Major possesses this feature.



ANOTHER SORT OF TRAFFIC JAM.—That traffic congestion is not confined to the road is graphically illustrated in this photograph, which shows the canal at Nieuwport, Belgium. The photo was sent by a Morris Major owner on tour, who declares that this solid mass of shipping took hours to extricate.