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The Snowmobile

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THE year 1928 saw the construction of the first Chalet at Charlotte's Pass, and from that time on, it became essential that some form of mechanical transport be obtained to ensure continuity of supplies during the winter months. From 1928 to 1930, supplies were taken in, early in the winter, by bullock team. During the rest of the season, snow porters skied in and out with mail and other "essentials."

In 1930, the first Citroen Kegress was purchased, a small half-track vehicle, with wheels in front for steering on which a pair of skis were fitted for snow operations. This vehicle was very difficult to control when negotiating sidings. It was superseded in 1936 by a larger improved Citroen. Apart from being hard to control, these vehicles had defective track designs which were

prone to "icing up" and "throwing." This vehicle was followed by a track tractor which did service till the closing of the Chalet in 1942, and again when the Chalet was opened in 1945.

Towards the close of winter 1946, the N.S.W. Government Tourist Bureau purchased from disposals at Bandiana, two T.24 Light Cargo Carriers in a very questionable condition. The object of this purchase was to try out the suitability of these war-time vehicles in the Kosciusko area, as the then present method of winter transport—a converted caterpillar tractor—was much too slow and was quite useless under deep soft snow conditions.

The first question the skier invariably asks is "What's its speed?" Then, "How's it climb?" "Will it go up the Slam?" "Will

it travel over all types of snow?" "How many to the gallon will it do?" "Is it true that the tracks come off?" "Are they cold to travel in?" And the old sober-sides says "How long will they last?"

Yes, they are speedy, on good hard snow, speeds up to 35 m.p.h can be obtained, but a good average speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour is recommended by the manufacturers, as high speed considerably shortens the life of the track gear and undercarriage. The only snow likely to stop the M.29 C. is very deep powder of the type that balls up and freezes in the track.

The "How many to the gallon" query governs the price charged for a trip to the Chalet, for they average five miles per gallon. Under ideal top-gear conditions, the best performance is seven miles per gallon.

Yes, the tracks can come off and, for that reason, the men chosen to drive these units are schooled in the same manner as a pilot. Some of the "musts" they have to learn are:—the feel of the machine, how to approach difficult sidings, have a good idea what is under the snow, creeks, rocks, etc. Practically all track trouble occurs when negotiating sidings in the early winter or late in the season when the snow bridges are falling in and the road must be followed.

They are quite cosy inside, for the heat dissipated by the engine and exhaust is

passed through a central duct and warms the passenger compartment, as it also does the driver's compartment.

"How long will they last?" Well, I'll ask you one—"How long will your car or truck last?" My estimate is ten years or longer if given regular maintenance, and arrangements are made for the production of undercarriage and track parts as they are heavy on track gear. This is definitely expendable and a complete new set is required each year or season.

The following is the technical description of an M.29 Cargo Carrier:—

The Cargo M.29C is a full track laying vehicle, designed for use over difficult terrain. The vehicle is powered with a liquid cooled six cylinder engine located at the front centre of the hull. The engine fly-wheel is connected to the planetary two-speed driving axle at the rear of the vehicle by means of a single plate clutch, a conventional transmission and a propeller shaft with two needle-bearing type universal joints. The vehicle is fully suppressed for radio installation (which makes it ideal for rescue operations in the Kosciusko area).

The vehicle is powered with a six cylinder L head, liquid cooled engine, developing at sea level 75 h.p., at 3800 revs per minute, falling off to 55 h.p. at 5000 feet. This motor is the current model Studebaker car engine.