

The Motor Car Industry

EVERY few days something happens to call the attention of the thinking men to the tremendous growth of the motor car industry. Fifteen years ago an automobile was a toy. Ten years ago it had been so far perfected that far-seeing business men had become interested in the business. Since that time thousands of engineers the world over have devoted their time and intellect to the building and perfecting of motor cars, trucks and tractors so that now almost every man, woman or child knows something about the gasoline driven vehicle.

Automobiles and trucks, to say nothing of motorcycles, have become so common on the streets and roads that they have ceased to attract any particular attention. But even with all this there are few people who realize to what an extent this industry has already grown.

As near as figures can be gathered according to the leading motor magazines whose authority is not questioned, there is in present use practically a million and a half automobiles and the amount of money invested in this enormous number of machines could hardly be estimated. Probably fifteen hundred dollars as an average first cost would be low, but this amount totals more than the entire production of gold since Columbus discovered America.

The Automobile Trade Journal in a recent issue, makes an estimate in its editorial column that the amount of money spent this year, 1914, for pleasure machines alone, will be six hundred and ninety million dollars, and this takes no account of trucks or tractors. This is almost seven dollars per capita for every man, woman and child under the American flag. It is surely a wonderful business to be built up in practically ten years.

The same authority goes on to state that at least one hundred and fifty million dollars of this enormous sum is being expended this year for light, cheap cars, of the class represented by the Ford, and it is interesting in this connection to follow out the reason for this great demand for cheap cars. Primarily the small light car is not a pleasure car, for while there are thousands of them sold for that purpose, they are rather an all-purpose car designed for business uses and utilized for pleasure incidentally. The cheap, light cars like the Ford, Metz, Hup

and the small studebaker and Buick have built up their business because there was a demand for the cheap car. This has been especially true of the Ford, which was the first cheap automobile made that was a real automobile. The result has been that they are expecting to turn out 300,000 cars this present year.

This movement, or the development of this industry, is along the lines of evolution. All business is built up in response to a demand, otherwise it would not be a staple business. Probably no one thing has caused as much study and thought as the question of rapid individual transportation. It was this that built the bicycle, then the safety and then the automobile, but after the automobile had been mechanically perfected the tendency in price was up instead of down, so that the poor man or woman was little better off than before until the cheap automobile came into use. This is the feature that creates the demand for a still cheaper car and that will build up the cycle car industry even faster, in the opinion of most authorities, than the automobile business itself has been built up. The cycle car business will in no way affect the general automobile business—it is a new branch of the industry.

The fact that there is a demand, and an enormous demand for cycle cars, is fully borne out by the statement that there are already nearly thirty factories in the East, all of them being offered all of the business they want, and one of the latest in the first four months has sold 6,000 cars. These little cars sell in the East at \$250, and up until the establishment of the Elbert Motor Car Company in Seattle there have been no factories on the Pacific Coast. The new company is building a car that sells for \$295, and is receiving inquiries for cars and for agencies from such widespread sources and of such a character that they are firm in the belief that they are going to be offered a tremendous volume of business.

The geographical position should give the local factory first call on the business of the far East, much of which has heretofore been handled in Europe, and much of which is new business. Naturally the European manufacturers are at the present time unable to deliver the goods, and there are very few of them that manufacture narrow tread cars.

The narrow tread car seems to be absolutely essential for the Chinese and Japanese trade, principally because they must follow narrow trails. The car must be cheap in first cost, low in upkeep, simple in construction and have sufficient power to go anywhere there is a fair road.

There does not seem to be any limit to the business that can be built up by a factory on this coast. Many authorities are firm in the belief that the light car business will within five years equal the present volume of the entire industry.

This does not seem unreasonable when we take into consideration the fact that there are over 100,000,000 people under the American flag. Certainly not all of them could own even a cheap automobile, but that many people will count for more than 25,000,000 families, and surely one out of each five families could afford a motor car that only costs \$300 and can be operated at an expense no greater than street car fare. We have then five million possible customers, or more than three times as many as there are motor cars of all descriptions now in use. Figuring on a basis of \$300 per car we come back to the figures forecasted in the Automobile Trade Journal.

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