

The Runabout in South Dakota.

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South Dakota, with its broad stretches of level prairie and its splendid highways, both natural and improved, offers an unusually appropriate field for the runabout or light automobile and, considering the newness of the country, an astonishingly large number of this class of machines is in use throughout the State.

A symposium of interviews with doctors, real estate agents, contractors, traveling salesmen, rural mail carriers and others, reveals that the one advantage that stands out to mark the superiority of the runabout over the horse and carriage is almost entirely a matter of saving time. This saving of time is not alone apparent in the superior speed of the machine over the animal, but also in hitching up, unhitching, watering, feeding and giving rest to a horse, all of which are constant annoyances to one who uses the old method of getting over the country. There is also the uncertainty incident to the vagaries of the animal, and business and professional men make no small matter of the reliability of the automobile, which gives them greater freedom from the petty annoyances that detract from their capacity for business.

THE BANKER.

A country banker, who has had long experience with the various duties that accompany the pursuit of his business in a new country, speaks very enthusiastically of his experience in substituting the runabout for the horse. He said:

"As a country banker I do a large and diversified collecting business, and a large part of this work carries me into the rural districts. The clerical force in my bank is necessarily limited, and I find it inconvenient to spare a man from the bank to make long drives into the country to make collections for machinery firms and other supply houses. When I used a horse and buggy for this country driving it was necessary to have a man out during almost every afternoon of the fall season, when most of the collections are made, and frequently the collector would be unable to drive back to town the same day, and I

would have to reckon with the additional expense and loss of time incident to remaining out in the country over night, and driving back the next day.

"After I purchased a runabout there was a decided saving in time, expense and inconvenience. I would have the auto ready at the bank door at the close of business in the afternoon, and jumping in, I would speed away 10, 20 or more miles into the country, see my man, and return in the twilight or dark. The machine would not require the attention on arriving at home that I would have to give to a horse, and I could have my supper and still have the evening left for work or rest.

"The advantages of the runabout in my business are so apparent that I would not go back to the horse and buggy under any consideration. During one busy season I hired an extra automobile for use after banking hours, as I found it more profitable to send out two men at that time than to spare one from the bank all day.

"An important part of our work is clerking sales. There are always farmers selling out and moving to some other part of the country. They hold big sales and the bank takes charge of them and passes on the paper that is given in exchange for stock, machinery, grain, etc., as the sales are seldom for cash. It will not do to leave this important credit work to an inexperienced man, and I usually clerk the sales myself. I send a man in my runabout to distribute handbills advertising the sales all over the country, and I use the machine in going to and from the sales, at a great saving of time and energy."

THE REAL ESTATE DEALER.

By far the larger amount of the time of a real estate dealer in a farming State like South Dakota is taken up in showing prospective purchasers over the country. Frequently a party of a dozen or more come from Eastern States on specially arranged home seekers' excursions, and they must be taken care of by the dealer. Real estate men in this State are using the runabout consistently for this purpose. Members of

the party are taken in different directions. It is not good policy to take a large load of purchasers at one time, and the real estate dealer is much more likely to make a sale if he takes one or two men to see just the kind of a farm they are looking for, and gives them his personal attention. Here is where the runabout gets in some of its best work.

Garages are maintained in some of the smaller towns that are dependent largely upon the real estate men for their existence. A real estate firm may have one or two machines, but there are times when they have use for more. When they have a prospect of making a deal they are not niggardly about paying for the use of an automobile and a driver for a day's run. One real estate dealer said:

"I would rather have one prospective purchaser and take him out alone in a smart little runabout than to have two and take them out in a cumbersome and slow-moving livery rig. A customer is flattered and complimented by being taken out in an automobile. Besides that, there is a comfortable and prosperous note in the steady roll of the exhaust and the easy, gliding motion of the runabout that makes the occupant of the machine feel at peace with the world. After a spin over the country at a pretty fast clip I find that my customers are in a better mood to close a deal than at any other time."

THE DOCTOR.

Of all the South Dakota business and professional men who have expressed themselves in favor of the runabout instead of the horse, none are more enthusiastic or positive in their statements than the physicians. Most of those whose practice is not extremely large have dispensed altogether with the inevitable hired man or driver who is a necessary part of the establishment of every physician who depends upon horseflesh to take him to and from the homes of his patients. The cities have more physicians than the towns alone can support. All of them depend largely upon the country practice for their livelihood. When they drive horses they must have the best, with considerable speed and endurance. It is not uncommon for a physician to purchase a new horse every year, disposing of one of his old ones to a livery stable. Not many horses can keep up the pace that is required of them by a doctor with a large country practice for more than two years. It will be seen that in this there is a large item of expense.

The runabout, on the contrary, not only keeps it up but positively thrives on the speedy trips. Some of the older doctors, who have driven horses for twenty or thirty years, professed great scorn for the "chug-chug" machines which some of the younger members of the profession commenced to use several years ago. These old doctors may now be seen spinning along in runabouts of their own. Their prejudices were overcome in a very short time after a few jolts like the following:

Mrs. Dash, wife of a wealthy farmer was taken suddenly ill with an acute complaint. Her daughter hurried to the telephone which now connects all the prosperous farms with the city systems.

"I suppose you want Dr. Blank, Ma?"

"Oh, no," says Mrs. Dash between groans. "I can't wait for him. Call Dr. Bright, he has an automobile."

After an illness of two weeks, Mrs. Dash recovers and comes to town, meeting Dr. Blank on the street.

"I hear you have been ill, Mrs. Dash," says the doctor, stiffly.

"Yes, doctor, and I knew you wouldn't like it, my employing Dr. Bright, but I was taken so sudden, and was in such terrible pain, I had to have help right quick, and you know Dr. Bright has an automobile. Why, he pulled into our yard in less'n a half hour after my daughter called him up, and you know it's twelve miles from our place to town."

Dr. Blank looked thoughtful, and a short time afterward was noticed talking to an automobile dealer and inquiring the prices on light runabouts.

A UNANIMOUS VERDICT.

There are other business and professional men who use the light runabout in their work, but the banker, the real estate dealer and the physician use by far the larger number in this section of the country. A great many are used for pleasure alone, but outside of the three above named classes, the prosperous South Dakota farmer is perhaps the best patron of the dealer in runabouts. His machine is of inestimable value to him in the busy season when it is necessary to come to town for repairs or supplies. Taking them all together, the verdict of those who have substituted the runabout for the horse in South Dakota is unanimous. Not one of them has been heard to mention a single particular in which the old method of travel on country roads is superior to the new, the modern, the quicker and the altogether more satisfactory use of the automobile.