

Ye Olde Plum News

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CARS AND DRIVING

PLUM'S OWN EXPERIENCES

Wodehouse wrote in his diary (1906): *Bought a motor for £450 from Seymor Hicks (nov. 17) Lord help me!* It was a Darracq and he used all his savings. Jasen tells: 'After a rudimentary and rather hasty driving lesson from Hicks, Plum felt competent to make full use of his latest acquisition by setting out in solitary state for Emsworth. It was a pleasant drive, and he felt happily in control of his destiny as he sat behind the wheel and nosed towards home. He did all the things he was supposed to do, and the car responded perfectly to his directions. Only one incident marred the otherwise flawless performance of man and machine. Just outside Emsworth, Plum drove straight into a hedge. ... Unhurt and only slightly shaken, Plum found himself not only in a hedge but also in a quandary. ... So Plum did what any reasonable man would have done in similar circumstances. Clambering out of the car, he walked to the local railway station and boarded a train for London. He never went back to pick up the car, and never drove again.' (David Jasen: P. G. Wodehouse A Portrait of a Master, 1975)



A Darracq two-seater from 1904. 8 hp engine.

Phelps regards this as a myth, another 'nicely rounded story', told by Wodehouse. Phelps argues: Wodehouse would not be so foolish as to drive until he felt he had an adequate grasp of the art and he drove the first seventy-five miles without mishap. Furthermore it is highly improbable that Wodehouse, always careful with the money in his early days, was as foolish as he claimed and spent all his savings on it. (Barry Phelps: P. G. Wodehouse, Man and Myth, 1992)

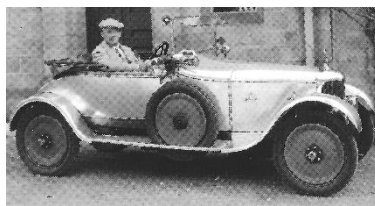
Plum liked to create myths and good stories, also about himself! 'Never drove again' sounded well! He contradicts this in letters to friends.

Yes, I drive my own car. Very hot stuff. In all sorts of traffic. (Letter to Bill Townend, Febr 28, 1920).

I went away of Thursday for a motor-tour, Ethel and Nora being in France. I took in Stonehenge and finished up at Emsworth for the sports. (Letter to Bill Townend, June 27, 1922).

It must be 35 years since I drove and I doubt if I would have the nerve to do it today... When we were first married we had a little Chevrolet two-seater, and I think that's what we want now. (Letter to Sheran Cazalet, May 25, 1952)

Phelps: 'He probably gave up driving not long after that his eyesight and the traffic got worse.'



Plum in Ian Hay's car, 1928

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AUTHOR AS DRIVER

I had been Boko's passenger on a previous occasion, and it was not an experience one would wish to repeat. Put an author in the driver's seat of a car, and his natural goofiness seems to become intensified. Not only did Boko persistently overtake on blind corners, but he did it with a dreamy, faraway look in his eyes, telling me the plot of his next novel the while and not infrequently removing both hands from the wheel in order to drive home some dramatic point with gestures. (Joy in the morning, 1946)

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BOBBIE WICKHAM AS DRIVER

'I had an accident coming down here,' proceeded Miss Wickham, absorbed in her own story and paying small attention to his. 'An idiot of a man driving a dray let me run into him. My car was all smashed up. I couldn't get away for hours, and then I had to come down on a train that stopped at every station. (The Awful Gladness of a Mater, 1925)

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HIDINGPLACE

At this point the door of the cab opened, and the girl in brown jumped in. 'I'm so sorry,' she said breathlessly, 'but would you mind hiding me, please.' George hid her. ... 'A young lady just got into your cab,' said the stout young man. 'Surely not?' said George.... 'I've been in the cab all the time, and I should have noticed it.' (A Damsel in Distress, 1919)

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TO SLEEP IN

Bertie had found his house occupied by a girl and had to spend the night somewhere else. *I climbed*

into the car and, leaning back, endeavoured to compose myself for sleep.... As two-seaters go, I had always found mine fairly comfortable, but then I had never before tried to get the eight hours in it, and you would be surprised at the number of knobs and protuberances which seem suddenly to sprout out of a car's upholstery when you seek to convert it into a bed. (Thank You, Jeeves, 1934)

Bertie had deposited his drunken uncle, Lord Worplesdon in the back seat of Boko Fittleworth's car. *Driving away from the East Wibley Town Hall at the conclusion of the recent festivities, Boko must inadvertently have taken Uncle Percy with him ... even an author, I felt - and I think with justice - ought to have had the sense to glance through his car before he locked it up for the night, to make sure there weren't any sleeping magnates dozing in the back seat.* (Joy in the Morning, 1946)

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STATUS SYMBOL

It was a good car as cars went, but it paled into insignificance beside the superlative Rolls which had been parked a little farther along the drive. The five-thousand-guinea car belonged to Tipton Plimsoll. ... let me tell you that when he blew in the day before yesterday he was at the wheel of a Rolls Royce and waving an eight-thousand pound necklace, a little gift for Vee which he had picked up in London. (Galahad at Blandings, 1965)

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PROBLEMS

The sun shone in the sky: the birds tootled in the hedgerows, the engine of the two-seater hummed smoothly. And then, fairly suddenly, I became aware that the engine was not humming so smoothly. It had begun to knock. And then there was a sizzling noise, and steam began to creep out of the top of the radiator-cap. Joe made one or two remarks concerning the man at the hotel who had forgotten to put water in the radiator. (The Level Business Head, 1926)

The two-seater, usually as reliable as an Arab steed, developed some sort of pox or sickness half-way through the journey, with the result that the time schedule was shot to pieces. (The Mating Season 1949)

The Dex-Mayo, that voracious car, consumed a gallon of petrol for every ten miles it covered. And for a gallon of petrol they extorted from you nowadays the hideous sum of one shilling and sixpence halfpenny. (Money for Nothing, 1928)

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