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## Report From Britain, 3 May 1950

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REPORT FROM BRITAIN  
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Aberdeen, Scotland  
May 3, 1950

Our little pipe dream has dissolved in the clear, cold light of reality. For ten days the family has been indulging in a friendly but no-holds-barred discussion as to whether we should pour our remaining resources into the purchase of a British automobile. Stimulated by local stories of the success of the all-British car show in New York and the gaudy prospect of motoring over England this summer, we have been talking with car owners and have given each model the once-over as we saw it on the streets.

Though not one of us knows more about an auto than to call a mechanic when it stops, we have been kicking around such names as Austin, Sunbeam-Talbot, Morris, Rover, Jaguar, Vanguard, Super Snipe, Minx, and even Rollis Royce, until they seem as familiar as Ford, Plymouth, Buick, and Packard. Dutch swears that no British car has enough room for her long legs; Frankie, who can spot an American make half a mile away through a snowstorm, thinks British lines are antiquated; Billy is too exuberantly patriotic to contemplate the purchase of any foreign car; Betty couldn't care less about our grave problem; and the old man anticipates not having to pay the purchase tax and taking advantage of devaluation. Of course, we all envisage a triumphal return to the South with an obviously British motor as the proper backdrop for our acquired accents.

Thinking that we could swing the deal on a relatively low-priced job, we began to compare British and American cars and at once ran into international difficulties more complicated than a tariff schedule. The "hypoid final drive," "low periodicity coil springs," "Solenoid button control on facia," "power unit of 4086 c.c.," and "rust-proofed by Bonderizing process" just about had us on the ropes, though we soon determined the meaning of bonnet, windscreen, and luggage boot. The horse power of the cars we looked at runs from 10 to 27 (which apparently has no connection with our braking horse power), and the engine sizes go up to three and a half litres, whatever that might signify.

Amateurs that we are, we finally came to the conclusion that a four-cylinder Humber Hawk might compare somewhat favorably with our late beloved Plymouth, and the British list price of \$1750 gave it the appearance of a bargain. But when we wrote the Rootes Export Division, we

were told that we should communicate with the New York office and that freight, insurance, and import duties, etc. (we don't have the slightest idea what etc. stands for) would bring the price up to \$2473. We were assured that delivery would be forthcoming in two months. Sixty days is akin to instantaneous over here but would be fatal in our case. Well, anyway, we won't have to be worrying about where we're going to get spare parts when our dream car breaks down on Mississippi roads a couple of years hence.

I don't want to leave the impression that British cars are inferior to ours. In some ways they are decidedly better. In Britain, petrol consumption, maneuverability, and longevity are more important than at home. Frequent fog may dictate the short space between the steering wheel and the windshield. We have ridden in dozens of cars which are ten, fifteen, and twenty years old and still going strong. The Rolls Royce in which I had my smashup last fall must have been constructed about the turn of the century. Of course, the Britisher nurses his car more carefully than he does a member of his family, while the American thinks of its trade-in value from the day he buys it.

We have met numerous people who have been on dealers' lists for cars since the end of the war, and who may be still waiting another five years from now. When his prize does come in, its price is upped from a third to one-half by means of the purchasing tax. And, unless he uses the vehicle in his business, the purchaser gets only enough petrol for ninety miles travel a month. This week the price of gas has been jacked up another dime a gallon. Such is life in an austerity ridden country.

I'm sure there isn't much of a tariff on British cars coming into the United States. Why there should be any is more than I can see. If the British surpassed their own wildest expectations they would snatch only one percent of the American market. Even if they did acquire a few dollars in this fashion, the money would be spent to buy desperately needed cotton and tobacco from our abundant surpluses. It does look, though, as if Americans were beginning to learn some of the economic facts of life regarding the relationship between creditor nations and the tariff, -- facts which should have soaked in a generation or two ago.

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