

The Most Sensational Motor Ride.

KILPATRICK'S RUSH DOWN A CHUTE.

BY WINSTON SPENCER.



AMERICA is the land of sensationalism. The man, or for that matter the woman either, in work or amusement who can create a sensation is idolized by the crowd. Especially is this the case with regard to recreation. The more daring, risky, and novel the achievement, the more enthusiastic plaudits does it receive from the general public. This spirit of daredevilry is responsible for the widespread popularity of Mr. Charles Kilpatrick, famous for his remarkable and intrepid accomplishments upon the bicycle.

Kilpatrick's feats are rendered all the more striking from the fact that he has only one leg. Several years ago he had the misfortune to have his right leg so badly crushed under a railway train that it had to be amputated near the thigh. Yet apparently he does not miss the member to any great extent, since he is as agile on his solitary leg as the majority of those who still retain their two limbs.

He first leaped into notoriety ten years ago by riding down the steps of the west side of the Capitol at Washington upon a safety bicycle, as the result of a wager. Other intrepid cyclists had previously ridden down the steps upon the east front, but even the

most daring of these aspirants to fame declined to repeat the achievement upon the west front, owing to the exceptional steepness of the steps. Still this fact had no terrors for Kilpatrick, and he descended them mounted upon an ordinary safety bicycle without incurring any mishap. This feat had never been accomplished before and has never been emulated since.

The success of this attempt prompted Kilpatrick to repeat the performance for the edification of the general public. The ride

down the Capitol steps had been achieved by clandestine means, since, had the authorities gleaned any information of the fact, they would have promptly prevented Kilpatrick from rushing to what was apparently certain destruction. Consequently only the parties to the wager were privileged to witness the event. Kilpatrick returned to New York, constructed a long flight of steps similar to those at Washington, and rode down them twice a

day before large audiences at the Madison Square Gardens.

The event was a tremendous success, and Kilpatrick became known as the most daring cyclist in the world. He toured all through the States, and subsequently visited South Africa, where his performance created



MR. CHARLES KILPATRICK ON HIS MOTOR-CAR.
From a Photo.

as great a *furor* as it had in his own country.

When he returned home Messrs. Forepaugh and Sells, the well-known circus proprietors, desired a striking sensational act with which to open this year's season in New York, and they inquired whether Kilpatrick could supply them with such a turn. At first the cyclist was at a loss to devise some novelty, since he did not wish to repeat his cycling performance. He wanted to give his fellow-citizens something novel, startling, and up-to-date. Suddenly he thought of the automobile, and decided to utilize this latest means of locomotion for creating a sensation. He went to the circus managers and laid before them his scheme. It was this. He would erect a long chute placed at a sharp angle stretching from the ground just wide enough to admit the automobile, would race up this, turn his machine round at the top, and then rush down again at full speed. The idea was warmly welcomed by the managers, and Kilpatrick immediately set to work to have the chute constructed.

This structure was extremely massive and heavy in character. It was about 140ft. in length by 5ft. in width. The chute was constructed in three sections to facilitate transport and to enable the structure to be accommodated upon the railroad cars, since the projector contemplates repeating the performance in other cities.

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The flooring of the incline consisted of boards laid transversely upon heavy beams, securely braced and bolted together to obviate any possibility of the erection collapsing and dashing the intrepid rider to the ground. The chute was only 6in. in excess of the width of the car, leaving a space of 3in. upon either side to allow for steering-way. It will thus be recognised that the steering lever required a steady, iron hand to hold it, since even a little deviation from the straight course would have thrown the vehicle off the track, to which no protecting rails were placed at the sides. The track was not prepared in any way to retard the pace of the automobile in its descent, but a little powdered resin was distributed upon the boards to prevent the wheels from slipping as much as possible.

The automobile employed by Kilpatrick was of the conventional type made by the Mobile Company of America. It was not built specially for the undertaking, but supplied direct from the stock-room. The vehicle is of the steam

type, with gasoline as fuel. The machine weighs 750lb. The nominal steam pressure is 160lb. to the square inch, but for this particular purpose owing to the stiff gradient to be climbed the steam pressure was increased a little.

Kilpatrick purchased two machines, one being kept in reserve in case of a breakdown to the other. This particular type of machine



KILPATRICK RIDING DOWN THE CHUTE ON A CYCLE.
From a Photo.

is easy and convenient to control, since a reversing lever fitted to the side serves to set the vehicle either for forward or backward motion, while a similar small lever placed upon the same side controls the power. The steering is actuated by a lever placed in front of the driver and the powerful brake is applied by the foot.

While the construction of the chute was in progress Kilpatrick was rehearsing for his act upon the steep hills in the suburbs of Tarrytown and Sing Sing. Notwithstanding the steepness of the hills in this district, none approached the angle of the chute. Still, this practising served to enable him to become acquainted with the vehicle, and to maintain a firm hold of the steering lever so that the car travelled in a straight course down the plane. He also, as shown in the illustration, rode down the chute on his bicycle.

Kilpatrick entered the ring seated in his car and slowly rode round to the foot of the chute. Then, setting the course of his machine, he backed a few feet in order to obtain the necessary start.

The power lever was thrown over, and with a whizz he rushed up the inclined plane at full speed, the escaping steam, under the high pressure that was being exerted in order to propel the car, hissing like an ascending rocket. In a few seconds he had gained the platform at the summit of the chute, and nimbly sprang out of the vehicle and turned it round preparatory to the descent. The ascent had been impressive, but the downward run was far more so. With one hand firmly grasping the

steering gear, the other hand placed on the power lever, his foot near the brake, in case some unforeseen accident should occur and render it necessary to bring the car to a standstill, and with his eye fixed upon the bottom of the plane, the daring rider slowly started. Once the whole body of the car had passed over the crown of the incline it rapidly gained momentum, and plunged downwards with terrific velocity. When a few feet distant from the bottom the momentum was so great that the machine on one or two occasions swerved slightly

and skidded sideways. Only a narrow three inches on either side of the car preserved it from destruction. Had the rider lost his presence of mind, or slightly moved the steering handle, the motor-car would have left the track and precipitated its daring rider to instant death. It speaks volumes for Kilpatrick's presence of mind, nerve, and judgment to say that the vehicle, both in its upward and downward journeys, scarcely deflected from the straight line.

Kilpatrick has earned a reputation for

intrepidity, but he assured me that riding down this narrow plane in this car was a far greater tax upon his nerves than riding down the steps upon his safety bicycle. In the latter case the only danger to be feared was the collapse of the cycle underneath him, but since it was strongly and rigidly built he entertained no apprehensions on this score. With the automobile circumstances were widely different; the mechanism of a vehicle of this description is composed of so



THE MOTOR-CAR ASCENDING THE CHUTE.
From a Photo.

many intricate parts, the failure of any one of which might prove disastrous. Then again there was the weight of the car to take into consideration. This alone was sufficient to hurl it down the incline at a terrific pace.

Kilpatrick had never ridden up this plane previous to the first performance. On this occasion a catastrophe was narrowly averted. He travelled up the incline, and the moment the front wheels had reached the platform at the top he shut off steam. The result was that the heaviest portion of the machine, including himself, still remained upon the incline, and immediately it began to run backwards. The situation was grasped by his brother and two other assistants who were waiting at the top, and they rushed forward and just managed to haul the machine to safety in the nick of time. A second later it would have rushed backwards down the chute, and no application of the brake could have stopped it, so that it would have been dashed to pieces at the bottom or else fallen over the side.

From an evanescent point of view it does not appear to be a great feat to travel up the plane, but it must be remembered that the exceptional steepness of the gradient was a severe strain upon the driving capacity of the engine. The nearest escape Kilpatrick experienced was on the occasion upon which he was riding up the incline, when, about half-way up,

the lever failed and the car rushed violently down backwards. Kilpatrick was nonplussed for the moment, but he instantly regained his presence of mind and firmly held the steering lever. The car had attained such velocity that the brake at first failed to act, and it was only brought to a standstill two or three inches away from the wall of the arena.

On another occasion when he reached the platform at the top of a building, owing to momentary pre-occupation, he omitted to shut off the steam, with the result that he crashed into the masonry wall of the building. But these have been the only misadventures that he has suffered, though he informed me that he would soon ride down the steps at the Capitol a dozen times to every single descent he made in his automobile down this sharp chute. One night a young lady, ambitious to experience the sensation of whizzing down the track at lightning speed, accompanied Kilpatrick on his trip, but the excursion was sufficiently exhilarating to

deter her from repeating the ride. The fact that only three inches on either side of the car protected her from eternity was too much for her. Probably the majority of spectators would pronounce the performance as a foolhardy feat. Such may be the case, but as an exemplification of iron nerves, cool judgment, and level-headedness the achievement would be difficult to excel.



THE MOTOR-CAR RUSHING DOWN THE CHUTE.
From a Photo.