MOTOR TRANSPORT ON A SUGAR PLANTATION.

By G. P. LADLAU.

I have pleasure in submitting to you details pertaining to my experience of Motor transport on a sugar plantation.

In 1926, I allowed myself to be persuaded to purchase an "International" heavy-duty motor truck to undertake work where oxen and mule transport was right out of the question, but before placing the truck into commission it was necessary for me to plan a field road system. By doing this, I was able to take the truck direct to the cutters. Thus, right at the beginning of my entrance into the field of motor transport, I was able to reduce the loading of my cane to a single operation.

As you will appreciate, gentlemen, the saving by obviating the need for double loading during an average cane season and with the possibility of taking off, say, 4,000 tons of cane, will amount to a considerable sum.

At the end of my first season of using motor transport I was naturally interested to ascertain the cost of this then new mode of cane hauling. Taking into consideration insurance, taxes, oil, petrol, wages, depreciation and interest on capital, and transporting over a distance of 4½ miles loaded and 4½ miles return empty, and carrying approximately 3¾ tons, my cost worked out at 3/- per ton, which decided me to purchase another "International" heavy-duty truck for the 1927 season.

From this period, and, as previously mentioned under conditions where these lorries have to work, oxen and mule transport is definitely out of the question, I worked both these trucks delivering 35 tons daily, equalling about 78 miles per day, averaging 39 miles per truck per day, carrying approximately 3¾ tons per load at a cost of 11/3 per trip, or 4d. per ton per mile.

Therefore, gentlemen, you will appreciate the fact that no salesmanship was required, when in 1930, I purchased my third "International" motor truck, and I am happy to be in a position to place on record that my cost of transporting cane by motor transport over a period of seven seasons, and including every penny of outlay and expense, has cost me over the aforementioned distances, 3/- per ton.

In passing, I mention that I am now using three lorries with two drivers, delivering 52 tons daily, making my daily average now 117 miles. Apart from the speed and mobile qualities and consistency of motor transport as against ox and mule transport, there is a saving of acreage generally reserved for grazing which naturally can be turned into good cane lands. In my opinion, motor transport on a sugar cane plantation is by far the most practical means of cane haulage, and constitutes a real asset to the cane belt, and I think this was well borne out by those planters who were unfortunate enough to experience cane fires last season, and were it not for the fact that motor transport was available, many hundreds of tons of cane would have been lost to us.

Naturally, the make of truck must be left to individual taste. Personally, I must express myself satisfied with my choice, as each of the lorries I have mentioned has done and is still doing yeoman service.

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CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ladlau has given us a practical paper which should lead to quite a lot of discussion among the Planters present.

Mr. ASKEW: Are you on the tramline?

Mr. LADLAU: No!

Mr. ASKEW: At Umhlali the Millers are charging 1/6d. per ton for carting from the farms to the mill. But you have not got those railage facilities apparently.

Mr. LADLAU: I expected such a question about the 1/6d. Let me tell you I have used oxen, mules, and tramline. I used the tramline to which Mr. Askew refers. When you say that the cost of that tramline is 1/6d. you omit to say that it is the price that the Milling Company charges you for the use of its main track. In addition you have to supply your feeders to connect with that main track, and not only supply your portable tramline but in many cases a wagon and team of mules or oxen to get to your portable track. When you add the whole lot together it is not far short of the 3/- I mention.

Mr. ASKEW: It all depends on the tonnage carried over the line. Two to three years ago they wanted to charge us 3/6d. and they have now reduced it down to 1/6d. because the tonnage has increased. I have tried to work out these figures of yours before because I thought of going in for traction like that, but I found I could not touch it.

Mr. LADLAU: This is the cost right from the feet of the cutters and includes everything. When you use a tramline the Company makes a flat rate over the line—not the line you have to use to connect on that line. You have to buy your own plant to get to that tramline. Now what is the cost of getting your cane to that tramline? Is the 1/6d. you are being charged to-day the cost of

running that line? I say it is not. It might be in some cases and in others it costs a jolly sight more. It may be due to this sort of thing that their charges are being made. If we can show that the transport of cane can be done cheaper than it has been in the past it will have that effect. To-day you have a flat rate charged whereas in the past there were varying charges. In some cases the cost may be less than 1/6d. but in a good many cases it must be more than 1/6d. I have not mentioned tramline transport in my paper. I have mentioned oxen and mules.

Mr. BOOTH: May I ask Mr. Ladlau how many road miles of Government road he traverses in getting to his siding, with special reference to motor depreciation?

Mr. LADLAU: About 1¼ miles, that is a double trip of 2½ miles out of the 9.

Mr. PALAIRET: I think Mr. Ladlau has given us a very interesting start, just enough to whet the appetite. I always understood Mr. Ladlau had a 3-ton lorry. I would like to know how his figure is made up. For instance if you want to calculate what your cost would be on a definite mileage one needs to know how much is depreciation, what is the approximate maintenance figure on the average over the year, petrol consumption, and so on. Then there is another point—working it out at 12 miles an hour loaded and 15 miles an hour coming back, allowing 5 trips a day gives three quarters of an hour loading interval, or if it is only 10 miles loaded and 12 miles coming back it still gives over half an hour loading, but I should imagine the loading would be considerably shorter. I am sorry that Mr. Dent is not here as he has been trying it this year and has kept very accurate figures. He has been trying a system of articulated trailer with the lorry and I believe it has given excellent results.

Mr. LADLAU: When I tell you that I have included every item of expenditure here I mean it, and I am quite prepared for any Auditor to go into the figures. Depreciation in the first year I tried to make 25% but the Income Tax people would not allow it and they reduced it to 20%. The people supplying the machine told me it was guaranteed for four years. I have had one for seven years now. I could not tell you the total repair bill offhand but it is in my books. Last year my repair bill was £325, petrol £450, depreciation, insurance and taxes in addition. Two of them are 3-ton machines but they have a 50% margin. If I could keep these lorries employed for twelve months in the year instead of eight the cost would be lower, because the licences, depreciation, and insurance are all for twelve months. During the off-season I sometimes use one or two for a month or so on road-making, and what they earn in that way is credited to the cane account and it lessens the cost. If I carried cane for twelve months instead of eight the cost would be much less.