

MILITARY MOTORING

“WHAT’LL be the badge for that?” asked Smithy.

We were talking of the new course of military motoring that is contemplated.

“Cross’ guns for marksman, cross’ flags for signaller, cross’ swords for instructor, cross’ choppers for pioneer,” mused Smithy.

“Cross pedestrians for military chauffeur,” said I humorously.

“Cross corpses, if I know anything about it,” said Smithy pessimistically.

“Some of the chaps I know who are goin’ in for motorin’ I wouldn’t trust with a clock-work p’rambulator.”

“As you say,” I began. “There——”

“Let alone motor-cars,” interrupted Smithy gloomily.

"Of course there are——"

"Let alone bloomin' motor-cars," repeated Smithy, with a knowing nod of his head.

"I suppose," he went on, "you don't happen to know Spud Murphy, of 'B'—he's doin' duty now, but he used to be groom-of-the-chambers to Major What's-his-name?"

I know hundreds of Spud Murphys; but I could not recall this particular one.

"You wouldn't think," said Smithy, impressively, "that a tin-eyed rooster with four years' service, a low down cellar-flapper from Islington that joined the Army to get away from the police, would 'ave the neck to apply for a job as shover to a choof-choof?"

"I should imagine," I remarked gently, "that the position of chauffeur requires——"

"Well," went on the indignant Smithy,

“this unmentionable person did. You know Uncle Bill?”

I owned up to an acquaintance with that very kindly young officer, Captain Umfreville, of Smithy's battalion.

“Uncle Bill,” said the irreverent soldier, “is one of the widest chaps in the regiment. There was a man in town who was agent for all kinds of motor-cars, but the one he was most fond of was a little thing he invented hisself. A four-orse power machine with bicycle wheels. He called it the ‘Ravin’ Jupiter,’ and it was one of them run-away-and-play-whilst-papa-mends-the-carburator sort of machjnes.

“Well, Uncle Bill turns up in barrack one day as large as life, sittin’ in a soft of bassinette and steam roller combined. He’d bought a ‘Ravin’ Jupiter,’ and, what’s more, he’d got it cheap.

"People used to laff, especially when it hurt somebody; but Uncle Bill knew a thing or two.

"A week afterwards he turned up with a 90-horse power Little Nipper, or Nipper Minor, or something of the sort.

"His 'Ravin' Jupiter' had gone wrong, and while it was bein' righted the maker had lent him this car.

"I can tell you," said Smithy, with a reminiscent grin, "that old Uncle Bill didn't use that 'Ravin' Jupiter' three times a year; mostly he was cuttin' round the country in the Nipper, or a Damyer, or a Poosher, wot was lent to him while the 'Ravin'' car was gettin' a new inside."

The artfulness of Captain Umfreville caused Smithy a few minutes' amusement.

Then he returned with a scowl to the enormities of the miserable Spud Murphy.

"Spud comes to me one day an' sez,
'I'm goin' to be Bill's shover.'

"'Bill's how much?' I sez.

"'Bill's choofer,' he sez.

"'Wot do you know about motor
cars?' I sez.

"'E larfs. 'Never you mind,' 'e sez;
'I've driv' an ingin before now,' 'e sez.

"'Beer ingin?' I sez.

"'No,' 'e sez, 'a real ingin at a sawmills.'

"So Spud got his job," Smithy went
on, "an' for a week he was messin' about
the parade ground doin' fancy work with
Uncle Bill sittin' by his side givin' in-
structions.

"We used to sit outside the canteen
and watch him and the officer.

"'E used to play on the thing with his
'ands and feet, and the tunes 'e got out
of it was extr'ord'nary. Bill was a
wonderful instructor.

"'Mark time on that blanky clutch,'

he'd yell, and Spud would put his foot on the brake-pedal.

" 'The other foot, you soor,' Bill'd shout, he 'avin' been in India with the other battalion.

" ' 'Arf right !' And Spud would give the steerin'-wheel a yank to the left, 'an' the language of the captain was a disgrace to his company.

" I tell you Spud perspired, but he persevered, too, and used to work in little bits he learnt at the sawmill, and one day he comes up to me as pleased as Punch, an' waves a bit o' blue paper.

" ' I've got me licence,' he sez.

" ' O,' sez Nobby Clark—a caution, he is—' I suppose they'll let you out without a chain now,' 'e says.

" ' Don't you be funny,' sez Spud ; ' I'm a licensed shover.'

" ' Wot's that ?' I sez, ' French for beer-can boy at a sawmills ?'

“Well, right enough, about a week after, me and a couple of chaps was walkin’ out in the country—it was a Sunday—when we ’eard a motor-car comin’ up behind.

“ ‘Hoomp! Hoomp! Hoomp!’

“Then, like a flash of dirty lightnin’, somethin’ dashed past in a cloud of dust, and there was me and the other chaps covered all over with muck, and a smell in the air like a paraffin stove.

“Bimeby,” resumed Smithy, “we comes up with a motor-car pulled up at the side of a road with somebody crawlin’ underneath.

“ ‘There’s only one man in the world that takes fourteen boots,’ sez Nobby, ‘and that’s Spud Murphy;’ so we pulls ’im out.

“ ‘Now, then, you men,’ sez Spud, doin’ the haughty act, ‘just leave me alone, will yer?’

“ ‘What’s up, Spud?’ I sez.

" 'The off 'ind cylinder 'as come into contact with the sparkin' plug,' sez Spud, as bold as brass.

" 'Sawmills,' sez Nobby Clark softly.

" 'Wot are you goin' to do?' I sez, and the other chaps started lookin' underneath too.

" 'I shall petrolize the trembler, and throw back the clutch into the ignition coil,' sez Spud, shuttin' 'is eyes and thinkin'.

" 'Sawmills,' sez Nobby Clark quite plainly.

" Spud give him a look, then dives underneath the car with a spanner, while me an' Nobby tried to see what made the fog'orn work.

" 'Oomph!'

" ' 'Ere,' sez Spud Murphy, underneath the car, 'just you leave that 'orn alone.'

" 'Oomph!'

" Spud wriggled out from the car with

a spanner in one 'and and a oilcan in the other.

"'E was red in the face, an' as wild as anything.

" ' Didn't I tell you to leave it alone ? ' e sez to Nobby.

" ' Sawnfills ! ' sez Nobby ; and that's why ' Spud ' it ' im."

Smithy heaved a sigh.

" Take my tip, don't you ever try to separate two chaps when one chap has a spanner in his 'and," he said, and continued :—

" Well, Spud lost 'is job, for a couple of red-caps * came up an' pinched 'im, an' the car 'ad to be dragged home by a fatigue party, and Uncle Bill drives his own car now ; he's fed up with military shovers, and won't 'ave another."

" How do you know ? " I asked curiously.

" I offered to drive for 'im," said Smithy modestly.

Military police.