

## FIRST EVER ACROSS THE HIMALAYAS BY MOTOR TRANSPORT



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**I**t was and is still believed most of us that earliest record of motor transport having Surmounted the Great Himalaya Range was made by a couple of Honey Staurt tanks and few weapon carriers of the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Cavalry supporting the Infantry in storming of the 11,500 high Zojila Pass in relief of the Leh operation on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1948.

In reality the earliest record of motor transport of having not only surmounting but also having crossed the great Himalaya Range was made by half tracks of the Trans Asiatic Harardt-Cintrogen Expedition in crossing the 14,000 ft high Burzil and other passes between Srinagar and Gilgit and beyond in 1931.

In an era of glorious expeditions there was hardly any more splendid expedition undertaken than the 1931-32 Trans Asiatic Harardt ... Exp. sponsored by National Geographic and undertaken by Harardt with his French team. During early 1920's Harardt had traversed the Sahara in his half track

vehicles designed by Andre Citroen . On April 4th 1931 with seven specially designed cintrogen half tracks Harardt set off from **Beirut** in **Lebanon** in an attempt to reach yellow sea by roughly following the route of MorocoPolo's journey seven centuries earlier. The expedition was supposed to cross the Asia from **Beirut** to **Beijing** ,avoiding the Pamirs through Soviet Turkish republics in one set of half tracks, but Soviet refusal to permit the expedition through their territory the expedition had to be divided ; one set of seven half tracks assembled on east coast of China and moved westwards and



another set of seven half tracks moved from Meditterianen through **Lebnon,Syria, Iraq,Iran, Afghanistan** to **Srinagar** in India covering a **distance of 5,580 kms from Bierut to Srinagar in 81 days between April 4<sup>th</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> June 1931.**

The half tracks performed very well in deserts as well as river crossings on their own power . Despite expert opinion at Srinagar that the expedition with its halftracks will never be able to make up to Gilgit., the expedition left Srinagar on Trans Himalayan journey on 12th July 1931 with only two of its half tracks supplemented by ponies,/mules and porters for transportation of equipment, including spares for vehicles, fuel, supplies and other things. Going was very smooth for the half tracks between **Srinagar to Gurez** ,but beyond Gurez lot of difficulties were met with in ascending the **Burzil Pass** in waist deep snow and in talus and scree covered slopes on the north face of the Himalayas; especially between **Godoi and Bunji** where fresh landslides and rock falls had eliminated the track. At places the half tracks were hauled with ropes to prevent side slipping. At places the half tracks were dismantled and carried in parts on porters over small bridges and badly damaged portions of

the tracks. One of the cars near **Astor** was got stranded on its front wheels and right track while the road under the left track collapsed was retrieved almost by a miracle. Beyond **Gilgit** between **Nomal and Chalt** , with the time left at the disposal of the expedition and limit of having reached the limit of motorble tracks the half tracks were abandoned and expedition proceeded with ponies, mules the only means of practicable transport after crossing the Karakorom Range. The expedition used 60 double humped camels,80 ponies/mules and in due course of time reached **Kashgar (Kasi)** in Sinkiang(modern Xinjiang) on 19th September 1931.The journey eastwards was continued in half tracks of the China group which met them on 24th October and reached Beijing on 12th Feb 1932.. The expedition eventually traveled to Veitnam unfortunately losing its leader George Harardt at Hongkong due to pneumonia.

By **M.M.Munshi**