

Is The Jeep Here to Stay?

Can it invade peacetime markets? Will it replace the tractor? How much will it cost? Here are the answers

By FRANCIS FENN

(As told to Berton Braley)

THE war has made the world jeep-conscious. Enthusiastic forecasters, anticipating a roaring demand for this rugged little blitz-buggy, are busy predicting a booming peacetime future for it. Practically everyone wants to own a jeep, they claim. And they envision it bouncing along post-war roads as a versatile substitute for horses, tractors, trucks, delivery cars, station wagons, power units, and, in some cases, even the family automobile.

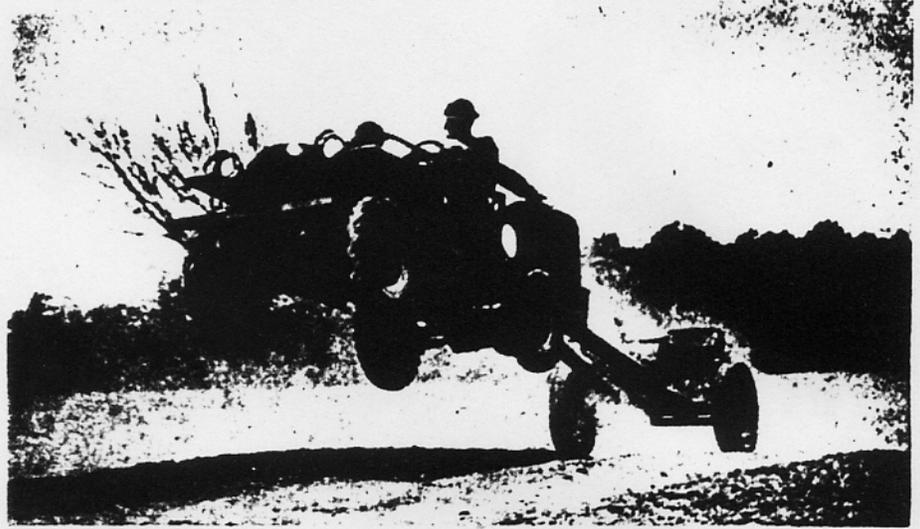
As president of the American Bantam Car Co. I saw the jeep develop—from a hunch to a blueprint, from a blueprint to a test car, and from that to mass production. I not only saw this development; I was a part of it. Along with Army engineers and our own staff of experts in the midget car field, I helped sweat out the designs, mull over the models and delete the bugs from the original jeeps. I bumped and bounced and skipped in the first ones that hit the grit, one of which is now in the Smithsonian Institute as the oldest surviving jeep.

I can understand your desire to own and drive a jeep when you see movies of it high-hurdling desert dunes and jungle barricades, and practically climbing trees after Jap snipers. It's the toughest, liveliest, cockiest and most concentrated quintessence of internal combustion energy ever put on four wheels. I can even see the woman's viewpoint when she wants to own a jeep because it's cute.

TOO MUCH BALLYHOO?

The jeep is all of these things in war, except, perhaps, cute. As a blitz-buggy and a victory vehicle it's tops. And I'm for it. But I don't like to see it ballyhooed for what it isn't, and wasn't intended to be.

In the first place, the jeep isn't any substitute for the family car, even if the family car is still a model T. You may get quite a kick out of seeing it do kangaroo capers in movie shorts, but that's nothing compared to the kick it gives you in the spine when it



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lights. The shock absorbers on a jeep are the passengers. It isn't a family car because there isn't room for a large family, nor even room for the legs of a small one. It may spare you worry about children opening the doors and falling out, because there aren't any doors, nor any windows. This has a certain appeal for the fresh-air fiend, but after he finds he's compelled to be a fresh-dust fiend as well, he won't like it. And you can be sure your wife won't like it. That "cute" jeep will give her acute pains in the neck—and that's no mere figure of speech.

The jeep, in a manner of speaking, has a top. It's a sheet of canvas that flaps and flops and billows, and if it's raining it collects various pools in its many depressions and deluges you with the whole collection each time you hit a bump. Its flap-happy top, its cramped quarters and its aerial acrobatics are minor peccadilloes to a reconnaissance quartette of GI's dodging over shell-pocked terrain; but these are hardly qualities that make for comfort in a family car. After the novelty wears off, the family—especially the feminine section—is going to begin thinking of how it looks, how they look in it, and how it rides. And the odds are high that they're going to decide it looks like a mighty

little war chariot and mighty little else.

Your wife and daughter may ride in it to a party or a dress dinner once, as a curiosity stunt. But after they discover what its springs do to their spines and its all-draft ventilation does to their gala garb, there's little chance of them using it to drive to church, or a wedding, or any other social function. Yet those are the places women want to go in a family car. So the distaff side of the family is pretty well out of the jeep picture.

NOT BUILT FOR STYLE

As for the male of the home, can you picture him driving to his office or a directors' meeting in a jeep? Whether clad in a cutaway or the conventional blue serge, how do you think he'd look with his knees knocking his chin and his hat being bopped down over his ears every time he hit the top?

But perhaps you see the jeep as a cheap, tough, handy little car to run around in, or to hit for the woods in, with your hunting stuff and fishing gear. This is a job it can do, but not too well. In the first place, for a car its size the jeep isn't cheap. It costs the Army around \$1,000. It would cost you about \$1,200. You can buy 125 horsepower, 100 smooth miles an hour

and a lot of looks and luxury for that in a family car. The jeep has from 60 to 70 horsepower and its top speed is around 70 miles an hour. And it's definitely not smooth. With your \$1,200 conventional car you get a lot of storage-room, too. Put two men and two suit cases in a jeep and you have to tie your fishing tackle on behind. And while the jeep will go places and do things on trails the regular car would shy at, you'll want safety belts for yourselves, and the cans of evaporated milk you take along will be butter. Remember when the model T was called a "rattling good car?" The jeep makes it look like a balloon-tired super-sixteen on a velvet highway.

THIRST OF A CAMEL

As for gas and oil—the jeep has the thirst of a camel after a seven days' drought! And it doesn't wait seven days to develop it. Sure, that four-wheel drive pulls you through and out of almost anything, but you pay for it at each gas stop as the jeep pants up with its tongue out. It wasn't built to conserve fuel—it was built to concentrate a lot of power in a small, tough package, and does it. But in peacetime, and on all but mountain crags and lumber trails, how often do you need that kind of power at that kind of gas and oil consumption?

I've read a number of stories and heard a good deal of talk about the jeep as a pick-up truck and a tractor, as well as a power-house for the whole farm. All these things a jeep can be. If there were no other automotive equipment available, the jeep could pinch-hit at almost any job on the farm. But let's see how its efficiency compares with the machines for which it is proposed as a general substitute. As a truck the jeep's pulling power and weight-carrying ability are astonishing. But unless fitted with a special body—which would cost money and not be too capacious at that—it wouldn't hold a quarter of the load of a half-ton truck, and would use twice the fuel hauling it.

The Department of Agriculture has found that the jeep will pull about the same load as a rubber-tired tractor of approximately the same size and weight and of less cost. But the jeep uses 50% more gas and oil in doing it, and as its engine works at twice the speed it would wear out a lot faster. It can pull a plow, harrow, cultivator, grain drill, mower or rake.

But the driver of a tractor sits at the rear, where he can reach the controls of the implement he is using. The jeep driver sits in front, and there has to be a second man in the rear seat to handle the controls of the other machine. That means twice the manpower, and manpower on a farm is scarce.

In loading hay the jeep is still more of a manpower spendthrift. It can be used to tow a haywagon—only a haywagon requires several men to pitch hay upon it. Hence few modern farms use haywagons. Instead, a buck-rake pushed by a tractor scoops up the hay as it goes along and unloads it in the barn—with one man doing the whole job. The jeep is no substitute for that.

In a pinch the jeep can be used as a mobile power-plant, if you add a belt and pulley system for transmitting power from the jacked-up wheels. But a small gasoline engine on a dolly can do the same job better and at a fraction of the cost, or you can buy a tractor attachment that will also function at lesser expense. My own experiments have convinced me that *the jeep is simply not a practical substitute for any up-to-date farm implement or vehicle*. So in spite of the fact that I'm one of the men responsible for the creation of the jeep, I haven't one on my own farm. The jeep was designed for running the enemy ragged, not for running farm machinery.

ROUGH ON TIRES

There are a few other things that the jeep isn't—as a peacetime car. It isn't easy on rubber. It has to have six and eight-ply truck tires and, in addition to riding rough on them, it is rough on them. You're not going to roll 25,000 miles on a set as you do with the old jalopy.

While tough, the jeep's durability hasn't yet had a true test. In military service it can be driven to death—and then thrown away, if it isn't knocked out by a shell in the meantime. But as designed today, I doubt if it can go galumphing along gaily for a long term of years like a regular truck, pleasure car or station wagon.

Then I don't think there are any peacetime possibilities for the jeep? Certainly I do. Jeeps would be useful in delivering mail on rural routes where roads are bad, or where there aren't any. They'd make good cars for prospectors, sheep herders, and cowmen on roadless ranges and desert expanses. They'd be handy for telephone

linemen and pipeline inspectors. In short, they'd be swell as a substitute for foot leather and horse shoes in places where the jeep is the only vehicle that *could* substitute. And they'll also fulfill the yen of youth for bounding adventure on and off the highways. The kids won't care how high it leaps or how hard it hits. Their muscles and their spirits supply all the resilience necessary.

CAN BE IMPROVED

But I still maintain that the limitations of the jeep as an all-purpose car are more numerous than its advantages. I don't say it can't be or won't be developed into a car that will satisfy every reasonable demand for performance, economy and comfort. But I do say that as it is, it doesn't and can't live up to the glamorous ballyhoo that has been spread about it as the answer to every car fan's prayer. And to those GI's who want one anyhow, because they've learned to love the jeep in the Army, and to the kids of 16 to 60 who say, "We heard you, so what? I wanna own a jeep." I'm afraid I've got to say, "O.K.," but what makes you think you're going to get one?" Eventually you will, but as I see it, not right after the war.

Estimates are that so far not more than a half million jeeps have been manufactured. You can pretty well figure that at least 150,000 of these have been worn out or smashed up. Because it's the most useful of military vehicles, the Army and Navy are going to retain at least another 150,000 for use in occupied countries and home-front posts.

I don't see how there can be, after the Armistice, more than 100,000 jeeps available for civilian purchase. That isn't going to supply a very large proportion of the 28,000,000 car owners, nearly all of whom are waiting breathlessly for a chance at a new car. Of course, if the demand is ravenous enough, the manufacturers will probably fill it. But for all the miracles of conversion to war, and the miraculous speed with which we'll probably reconvert—and even allowing for the fact that jeep assembly lines are ready—it's going to be quite a while before you get yours.

All I'm suggesting is that when, as, and if your dream of owning one becomes a reality, the real jeep won't be what the ballyhooers have dreamed up about it.