

The Adventurous Mr and Mrs Charles J. Glidden.

Mr and Mrs Charles Glidden were arguably the first global motorists. Crossing Canada by car in 1904 was one in a series of long-distance motoring adventures the Glidden's undertook, including travelling in Australia.

Charles Jasper Glidden was a self-made millionaire, he invented the telephone exchange and retired at age 43, enabling him to take up motoring. Intrigued by the successful Napier in the RAC's 1000-mile trial of 1900 he ordered a 4-cylinder Napier for his 1901 tour of Britain and France. Impressed with that car Glidden owned two more Napier's, a one for his 1902 tour of central and southern Europe, a 16 hp tourer that had won the Concours d' elegance at Crystal Palace in February 1902. After that tour he ordered a more powerful third car for driving through Europe, Scandinavia and the Arctic Circle in Sweden.

The third car was a 24 hp model, chain drive with 40-inch rear wheels, fitted with Mulliner coachwork to Glidden's own requirements for carrying luggage, tools, parts and extra tyres. Glidden took delivery of the vehicle in the UK in 1903 and it was this vehicle in which Glidden subsequently travelled twice round the world.

By March 1905 the Glidden's had reached Australia, having already toured over 223,000 miles and through 22 countries. At the end of their world-wide travelling some 3 years later they had driven over 4 continents and numerous islands, including Japan and Fiji, and 40 countries.

Whilst Australians were justifiably excited about the big local motoring event, the February 1905 Dunlop Motor Reliability Contest, that put some of our leading motorists and cars in our first ever interstate motoring competition, guess who was enjoying the spectacle? Mr and Mrs Glidden, who had motored into Sydney for the Start of the Contest. What a juxtaposition - our locals, excited about such a reliability contest from Sydney to Melbourne and how it would prove the reliability and value of the motor car, and on the sidelines, the Glidden's and their astoundingly well-travelled Napier.

Glidden kept details of all the roads they travelled on, from the Arctic circle to New Zealand's Southland and pretty much anywhere in between, rating them good to bad. Australian roads in 1905 didn't fair well in his ratings. The best road he travelled was Grand Trunk Road of India, 2300 miles long, from the frontier of Afghanistan to Calcutta, with a branch to Bombay, he noted it was broad and level nearly the whole distance. In Canada Glidden used custom made flanged wheels on the Napier than enabled him to use long stretches of the Canada Pacific railway, often at high speed.

The Napier was maintained in top running order by Napier company engineer Charles Thomas. A protégé of S F Edge, Thomas was one of Napier's best men. In 1906 Glidden publicly attributed the success of his tours to the design and quality of the Napier, the skills of the engineer who accompanied them, and that he did not force the car beyond reasonable limits of speed or distance.

By 1908 Thomas had chosen to forego more long trips and took over his father's motor garage in Sussex. The Glidden's, with the 1903 Napier completely re-furbished by the factory, and a new engineer, embarked on a final grand tour to Egypt, Palestine and Greece. In March 1908 they motored through the Holy Land and into Jerusalem. 1908 was also the year that Glidden became more involved with aviation and ballooning, and promoting those activities.

Jenny Fawbert ©
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Sept 1904. The Napier at a Canadian Pacific Station. City of Vancouver Archives. Online at <https://searcharchives.vancouver.ca/mr-and-mrs-charles-jasper-glidden-arrive-at-c-p-r-station>



The Glidden's and Charles Thomas on the southernmost road in the world at Bluff, New Zealand in 1905. Burke, Keast, 1896-1974 (1905-03-20). SUPPLEMENT TO THE AUSTRALASIAN PHOTOGRAPHIC REVIEW. (20 March 1905). Online at <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-462109650>