



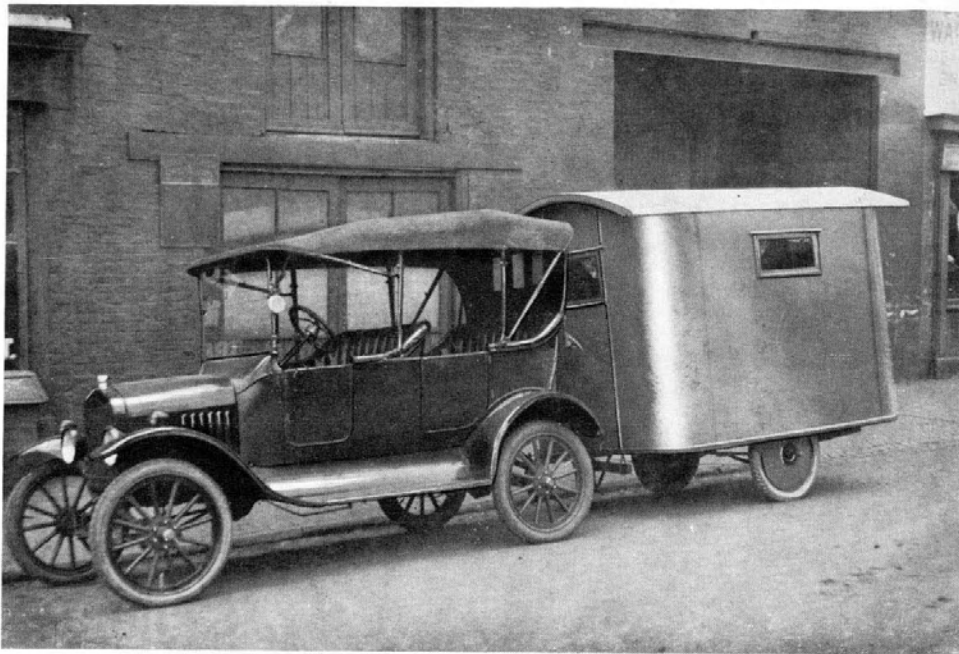
ECCLES

Fifty years of leadership

1919 · 1969



Firm foundations



Outside the Eccles works in 1921, the first of the round-ended caravans.

When men fall to talking about the fifty years of the trailer caravan, Eccles is the name that comes first to their minds. What or who was Eccles? Very few people know. Nor does it now matter. Eccles was merely the owner of a ramshackle business in Birmingham taken over by W A Riley and his son W J (Bill Riley) when they formed Eccles Transport Ltd in March 1919. What it now stands for every caravanner knows.

Riley Senior had been interested in the motor caravan idea since 1913. His son, inspired by trailer ambulances used in the Great War, saw a bigger future in the trailer type. Within a few months they had extended from transport

into caravans, and prototypes of both kinds were shown in late 1919. This first trailer caravan was bought by Lady Rhondda, the leading figure in South Wales finance, industry, mining, shipbuilding, etc.

Real production was slow off the mark, but in 1922 Eccles, with a programme of 50 vans, went into the Motor Show at its White City overflow, and they have been in every relevant national exhibition since. It was at the 1922 Show that they appointed their first dealers. This pioneering vigour continued. They introduced overrun braking and fought a crucial test case on its legality. Bill Riley fought successfully to raise the trailer speed limit from 20 to 30 mph. Eccles were the

first to take up serious advertising and marketing of caravans. They published a practical handbook. They sold to the nobility, Indian maharajahs, industry and charitable organisations. An Eccles caravan made a sensational entry in the Monte Carlo Rally of 1932, starting from Glasgow and successfully finishing. In 1934 an Eccles crossed Europe and North Africa to reach the Sahara.

Already, breaking away from the square-ended designs derived from horse caravans, and producing shapely streamlined forms, they had become the first manufacturers, as distinct from craft builders. They were equipped to make their own steel chassis. Their woodworking machinery was unrivalled. By 1935 they were operating real production lines and making furniture in batches. Before the War they pioneered Britain's present export success by their sales in France and elsewhere.

After reaching in 1936-38 a quality of finish today seen only in a few ultra-expensive hand-built cars, they anticipated the great popularity of the touring caravan, changed their policy, and went in for 'popular' models, of sound quality at undreamt-of low prices, achieved by unprecedented batch production. After the interruption of the war, they were among the first to resume production and the first to erect caravans from pre-fabricated, jig-built side wall, end and roof units. In factory layout, understanding of industrial processes, and costing, they were far in advance of their competitors, while the distinction, practicality and reliability of their models made

them the favourites of those discriminating judges, the Clubmen.

Though Eccles eventually lost their place as the biggest makers, they continued to demonstrate a highly successful blend of tradition and forward thinking. When Bill Riley, disheartened by the death of his only son, sold out in 1960 and Eccles joined Sprite as the basis of what later became Caravans International, he handed on a business of a standing and solidity unsurpassed in this field. Under Mr Sam Alper of Sprite, and the team of capable men that he has always been able to gather around him, a face lift was immediately prescribed for the range, because sales had already started to slip. Following the day of the elegant lantern-roofed models such as the Enchantress, design has been dominated by production simplicity while eye appeal to the customer lagged behind competing makes.

The Alper touch was radical. The new, Newmarket Eccles soon appeared with its distinctive inward sloping end walls and big, rectangular front bay window. The side walls were distinguished with an inset colour panel, varying from model to model.

Meanwhile, the Sprite group, as the Newmarket combine was called after Eccles joined the family, ran into financial difficulties as resources were stretched to the limit. In this period, from the end of 1960 to the beginning of 1962, there is little doubt that the revitalised Eccles line contributed to the healthy rebound to full strength.

The export market was more systematically developed and the distinctive Eccles shape began to

appear in many parts of Europe. Eccles were in the forefront of development of various plastic materials for caravan use. Alongside a distinctly Scandinavian furniture style, Eccles began to use cool-looking but durable pvc leathercloth on the walls and bulkheads. Then came a notable step when the company began to experi-

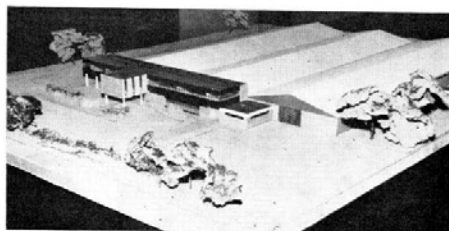
be reproduced in moments, weighing only a few ounces, thanks to developments for modern lightweight Eccles tourers.

In 1966 the Queen's Award for Industry was instituted. Eccles, with their partners Sprite, became the only caravan manufacturers to be granted this accolade—for export achievement.



The 1969 Eccles Emerald. (Below) The factory for the seventies.

ment with vacuum-formed sheet plastics of one kind and another; first small items such as soap dishes, cutlery drawers and cup racks were made. Before long, the sophisticated Eccles plastic department was not only producing complete bay-window carcasses in one seamless piece, and gas locker fronts and tops, but they made roof lights for other CI manufacturers and contracted to form background scenery for television studios. Intricate Regency carved doors could



At the time of their Golden Jubilee, Eccles production ranks joint second among touring caravans in the United Kingdom. Nearly half goes for export to almost every country in the world.

Design & construction

'In introducing the trailer motor caravan, the patentees and manufacturers have aimed at putting on the market something so mobile that it can travel with safety at the speed of an average touring car, so light that a small-powered car can pull it, and at the same time of sufficient strength to withstand the wear and tear consequent on bad road surfaces.'

Autocar, 29 November 1919



'Flow-line' production was re-introduced after 1945. These are Enterprises.

The road surfaces have been improved since these early days of trailer caravanning, but the Eccles' aim has not changed. Safety, reliability, and comfort have been the cornerstones of Eccles design and construction techniques for every one of those fifty eventful years.

Even the very first caravan produced reflected the soundness of these basic principles coupled with the progressive ideas of the designer. The body was constructed of galvanised sheet steel, soft-soldered at the joints, screwed to a wooden framework which was reinforced within iron uprights. The sides were lined with three-ply polished mahogany and the ceiling was white enamelled.

Insulation was not forgotten and the wall cavity was fitted with 'a non-conducting material', a layer of felt. Ventilators at either end were specially contrived to be weather-proof under all conditions. The body was built on to a steel chassis fitted with pneumatic tyred wheels and corner steadies. The coupling was an Eccles patent, a long cantilever spring device strong enough to absorb all road shock.

The interior was full of luxury and labour-saving devices. Two specially sprung seats became 6ft 6in long beds at night and bedding was stored away in a damp-proof locker. There was ventilated food storage and cooking was done on a paraffin stove mounted in a fire-

proof compartment.

Toilet arrangements included a tip-up lavatory basin and a fitted toilet cabinet complete with mirror. Other storage space was plentiful, some fitted for crockery and kitchen utensils.

Compare that wonderful product from a back kitchen in a Bir-

fitted with independent suspension, and big drum brakes are controlled through an internationally approved hydraulic coupling which can incorporate an electrically operated reversing device.

The interior includes a fitted carpet, a complete kitchen unit plus a refrigerator if required,



Eccles make their own vacuum formed plastic components for caravans.

tingham suburb with any one of the luxury range of tourers from the streamlined production lines in Newmarket fifty years later.

The main exterior is of light-weight but strong sheet aluminium, factory joined and completely waterproof, fitted to a jib-assembled hardwood frame and lined with interior panels of pre-finished, wipe-clean hardboard. The bay windows mounts are of heavy duty plastic moulded in Eccles' own vacuum forming plant.

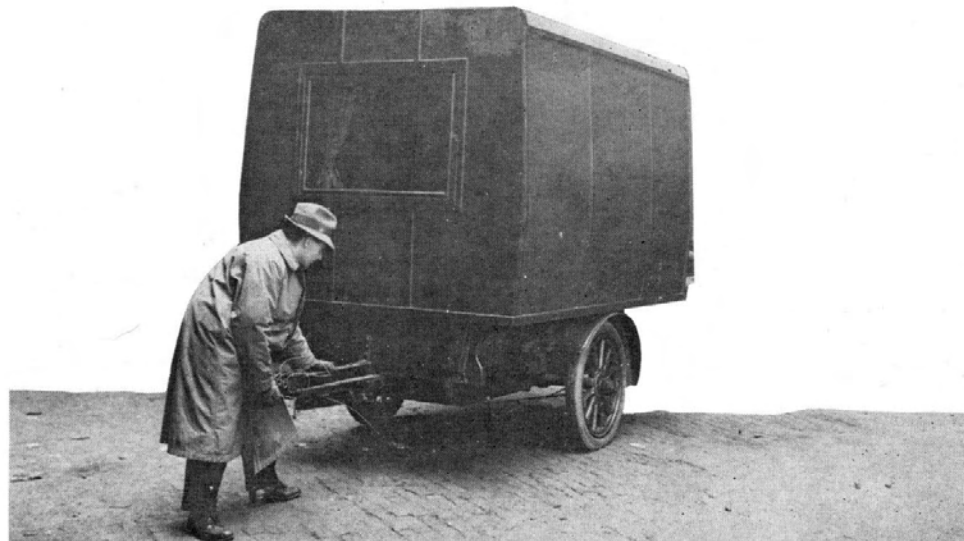
Insulation of walls, roof, and floor is by glass-fibre and Eccles' patent 'Pelmavent' window fittings are the basis of a highly efficient ventilation system.

The all-steel chassis is now

masses of wardrobe and general storage space, and seating/sleeping arrangements on comfortable deep foam. All models except the smallest have a toilet room which is specially lined so that it may be used as a shower cubicle.

The accent, despite the progress of fifty years, is still on safety, reliability, and comfort. The materials have changed, the assembly of them is now a modern technique of works study and methods along production lines, the fittings are more practical and the decor is fashionable. But the thought and experience of the Eccles designers, indeed of caravan designers everywhere, owes much to the old masters of 1919.

On the road



The Eccles trailer caravan

An Attachment Primarily Designed for Pleasure but for which Great Use is likely to be found for Medical and Dental Purposes in Widely Scattered Communities.
Reprinted from *THE AUTOCAR*,
20 March 1920.

Considerable interest is at present being shown in motor caravanning, and, owing to the difficulty of securing accommodation, it is likely that this health-giving way of spending a holiday will be very popular this summer. The man of moderate means is well catered for by the well equipped caravan here described.

The Eccles trailer caravan is constructed on a separate chassis with pneumatic tyres on detachable wheels, and attached to an ordinary touring car by a patented shock-absorbing cantilever coupling. A car of 12 hp has been found to possess ample power to pull this trailer over some of the most mountainous roads in Great Bri-



tain. The caravan is constructed of rolled sheet steel, strongly soldered at the seams, and it is lined with oak or other suitable wood with an intermediate layer of non-conducting material.

By this means an equable temperature is assured, and all rattling and drumming of the metal when passing over bad roads are obviated. Interchangeable Sankey steel wheels are mounted on strong hubs with internal-expanding brakes, which are connected by a flexible coupling to the side brake of the car. It will be noticed that the wheels are sprung, and they are also shod with pneumatic tyres of the same size as used on the back wheels of Ford cars.

A feature which deserves special attention is the patented coupling, which consists essentially of a long cantilever spring and is tested to absorb a far greater shock than is likely to be experienced on the road. When detached from the car, the caravan is maintained in a horizontal position by means of three legs, which can be instantly lowered, while, should the caravan

be exposed to violent winds, guy ropes may be attached to rings fitted on the four corners.

Externally the finish is dark green with a stone-coloured roof, while the interior is of polished wood with a white enamelled ceiling. Sleeping accommodation is provided for two people, and in the day-time the beds are converted into comfortable seats. Cooking is accomplished by means of a paraffin gas stove in a special fireproof receptacle, and the cooking utensils of stout aluminium are ranged in a locker immediately above the stove. A tip-up lavatory basin is provided with a toilet mirror and small lockers for toilet accessories. Lockers are also conveniently arranged for clothes, food, boots, bedding, and the other small accessories of a camping-out holiday.

A folding table is provided. We understand that certain Overseas Governments are greatly interested in these caravans, and that it is likely that a number will be put into use as travelling medical and dental surgeries in different sparsely inhabited districts.

The Eccles Opal

Distinctive styling of new body shape/four-berth, no toilet layout/quality materials throughout/excellent towing but excessively heavy noseweight/underfloor insulation standard/full winterising options available. Reprinted from *The Caravan*, November 1968.

The arrival on the caravan scene of the new Eccles Opal, a distinctive and perhaps even controversially-styled ten-footer, is an exciting development for it is the first really new body shape to have emerged from Newmarket for seven years. Eccles and Sprite new models during this time have merely been variations on an old theme.

Basic interior and specification details, however, have only altered slightly from last year's GT 308 model. Among the main new features are a single dinette in place of the settee and a Fibreglass-insulated floor as a standard fitting. The B & B Beta IV hydraulic coupling is also standard.

In its basic form the Opal retails at £349 but to this one can add the following factory-fitted extras: foot pump (£8 10s), double glazing (£13 2s), RA10 refrigerator (£34), gas point (£2 10s) and flued gas heater (£26) which can bring the price up to £429.

The Opal's distinctive shape has been achieved by the use of

RECOMMENDED PRICE £349

MAKER: Eccles Caravans Limited, Fordham Road, Newmarket, Suffolk

DIMENSIONS

Length body <i>net</i>	...	...	...	10ft 1in
<i>overall</i>	...	...	...	10ft 2in
<i>shipping</i>	...	...	...	13ft 4in
<i>interior</i>	...	...	...	9ft 10in
Width <i>overall</i>	...	...	...	6ft 6in
<i>interior</i>	...	...	...	6ft 1½in
Height <i>overall</i>	...	...	...	7ft 9½in
Max headroom	...	...	...	6ft 2in
Floor height	...	...	...	16½in
Window sill height <i>front</i>	...	...	...	45½in
<i>rear</i>	...	...	...	45½in
Height to centre of coupling ball for level ride	...	...	...	17in
Weight <i>ex-works</i>	...	...	...	10cwt
<i>as tested</i>	...	...	...	10½cwt
Maker's recommended noseweight	...	...	...	112-168lb

pressed end panels and a pressed, three section roof with a double curvature. The three panels are fully interlocked and have sealing material in the joints. The smart black thermoplastic exterior end window hoods, rectangular rear light clusters and 'wood grain' plastic waistband add to the Opal's already striking appearance. Styling has even had its effect on the grab handles which are neat and extremely functional in design.

New feature for '69 are the anodised window frames, fitted with quick-action catches in place of the old drawbolt fixings. A combined gutter and awning rail is fitted to the nearside of the van and a drawbar carrier for two gas bottles is fitted as standard.

The interior of the Opal has a Scandinavian look about it. The two-toned beige and sienna-green upholstery blends well with the washable vinyl-covered walls and Daniella teak-veneered furniture. Flame coloured curtains add to the effect.

Inside, the Opal is very similar to the GT 308 model which it re-

places except that a single dinette with hook-on table is fitted in place of last year's settee single, reverting by popular demand to the layout of the 1967 model. With the table in the bed position the leg protrudes back into the living area and can catch an unwary toe. The Tygan stretcher bunk which fits snugly over the dinette is conveniently stored during the day against the end wall behind the day seats.

The double dinette at the rear end converts into a good six foot long double bed. The test crew found the 5in Evalan Dunlopream foam mattresses comfortable although they did appear to be too resilient at first. The rear bedding locker lids are divided and hinged away from the wall to provide easy access with the mattresses stood on edge. The front bedding lockers have removable lids.

The wardrobe, right of the stable door, is shelved and has adequate hanging space. Provision is made at the base of the wardrobe for a flued gas heater. Through ventilation in the van is provided for by a covered gauze vent in the wardrobe floor. Air is let into the van via a $\frac{1}{4}$ in gap running the length of the wardrobe's base.

Roof storage space is provided by a full-length locker above the double dinette which has sliding doors—rather like a Japanese trinket box. The arrangement consists of three sliding panels with handles on the outer two. When either of them is moved to an open position the centre section moves with them, allowing a larger opening than would be possible with two doors.

The front curtains were damp when we picked up the van, presumably from its delivery tow the previous day. The window seals appeared excellent and although we had no rain during the time we had the van to put our theory to the test, we suspect that in very heavy rain a small amount finds its way through the vent over the front window.

Kitchen layout is conventional and is virtually the same as last year's GT 308 model. Main storage space consists of two large shelved cupboards each with its own useful bottle well. The cupboard under the deep sink unit will take an RA10 refrigerator. The injection-moulded sink and drainer is designed to accept a telescopic spout and a foot pump is an optional extra. There is no obvious position for the stowage of a water carrier. A nest of three drawers takes up the remainder of the space in the middle of the unit and the drawers are designed so as not to come adrift on tow. The top one holds a removable vacuum-formed cutlery tray.

A large divided roof locker with bottom-hinged doors accommodates the vacuum-formed crockery holder which is removable for cleaning. The bottom of the right hand locker has a removable plastic plug to facilitate cleaning—a thoughtful touch. The melamine sink top is similar to that used on Sprite (Eccles' Newmarket stablemate) models, which enables it to pivot horizontally through 180 degrees so no work surface is lost. The top can also be raised vertically if the work surface is not required or if the dinette seat is to be

used. On the test van the sink top could not be extended to its fullest position because the table top obstructed its passage of travel. Eccles are checking the clearance between these items on production models to ensure that they do not foul each other.

The plastic press-button cupboard handles are functional in design and seem to do their job fairly well, in spite of the fact that on the test van the catches were fitted with only one screw. But, on looking at a random batch of Opals at the factory we found the catches had been correctly fitted. The hinged lid to the Dudley hot-plate is kept in a vertical position by a shaped aluminium splash shield. To raise the shield it has to be bent each time to clear the turn-buckle—not a very satisfactory arrangement. Both kitchen unit and table tops are faced in heat-resistant melamine.

A solitary gas light, fitted to the right of the hotplate, provides sufficient light only for the double dinette end, leaving the rest of the van in comparative darkness. The kitchen roof locker cuts off most of the direct light from the sink. Many manufacturers accept that one gas light in a small van is sufficient. A useful six watt courtesy light is fitted over the kitchen sink.

Attractive cotton-print curtains slide easily on the nylon hooks which are attached to plastic covered wire strainers. Although there is no overlap, the curtains are full and generously cut and do not take up a set. Wire strainers hold the bottoms of the end curtains against the sloping front and rear walls—a practical touch. The carpet is well fitted.

Flat-out round our test track at 65 to 70 mph in a slight cross-wind, the Opal, behind our editorial Cortina GT, showed little sign of any instability. We tried in vain to make the van break away on the sharp bends but the Opal shrugged it off without the slightest sign of handling vices. View through is good.

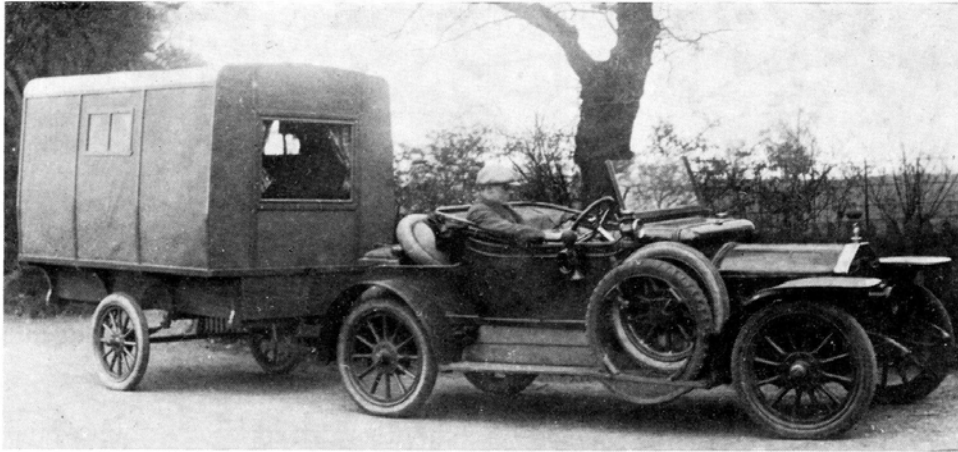
A little surprising was the apparent effort needed to achieve and sustain 65mph on the track towing the Opal. The body contours would seem to rule out a high drag factor but the rear end wall creates a considerable vacuum behind the van as was shown by the road spray splashes which went right to the top of the rear wall.

Brakes on the Opal were well adjusted and with the standard Beta IV coupling we recorded an impressive outfit deceleration of 84 per cent of G.

Ex-works noseweight of the Opal is 112lb and with two gas bottles, one full and one half full, on the drawbar carrier the scales registered 150lb. Eccles recommend a noseweight of between 1 and 1½ cwt but this seems excessively high for a van of this size. BMC Hydrolastic cars, many of which would seem to be 'naturals' to tow this van, might well be ruled out if users stick to BMC's recommended 100lb noseweight limit.

We were very impressed with the Opal, impressed both by its tastefully clean and distinctive exterior and interior styling and by the standard of workmanship not often found in a mass produced unit. In fact one would have to go a long way to find a tourer with these qualities at this particular price tag.

Famous models



1919 The first Eccles trailer caravan was exhibited at a garage near the Motor Show in that year and the first buyer was Sybil, Dowager Viscountess Rhondda from South Wales.



1925 The Jacobean was an early luxury model with the lantern roof which became an Eccles hall-mark.

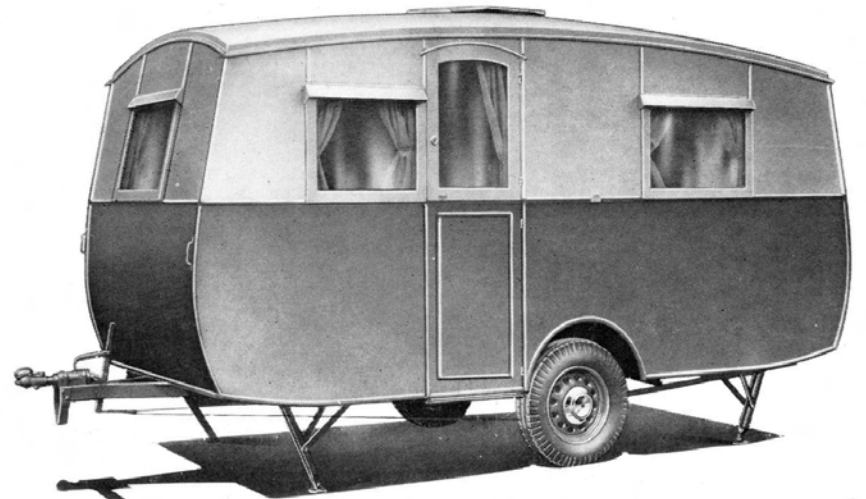
One of the first post-war models was a 15ft Enterprise built on "Flow-line" assembly lines.



1929 Until then Eccles had concentrated on small trailers. This is the first of the large light-weight 'vans.



1935 A streamlined lantern roof model, the Road Nymph was many years ahead of its competitors.





1948 The 14ft Alert proved to be the most popular model of its age. Eccles sold over 1,500 in the next five years.



1958 Still ahead of competitors, Eccles gave the Bounty an aerodynamic shape still seen on many roads.

Encouraging caravanning as an all-year-round hobby, Eccles introduced the Sapphire Winter Sports.

1967



1968 Most popular of recent models is the 12ft 2-berth Topaz which includes a shower compartment.



Proving the product

'Quality testing' may sound like a phrase invented by an advertising agent to bemuse the public, but Eccles have always believed in proving the quality of their products in the most practical way.

1927 Police in Honiton, Devon, brought charges against several Eccles owners regarding the use of over-run brakes, a fitting devised and developed by the caravan company. Eccles were convinced that the braking system met all legal requirements and, on 6 October 1927, W J Riley gave the police a demonstration on Honiton Hill. After this and a lengthy hearing the Bench dismissed the charges and vindicated the Eccles company, but it was not until 1937 that legislation was introduced whereby overrun brakes received formal approval. In 1969 the vast majority of caravans produced throughout Britain and Europe are fitted with a development of that same system.

1932 The Monte Carlo Rally, one of the toughest events in the sporting calendar, was entered by Eccles in collaboration with the Hillman Motor Company. Starting from Glasgow, the outfit made a sensational run and finished sixth of the 35 British entries. Road and weather conditions were so bad that only 19 of the 35 reached Monte Carlo. In the whole rally the standard 4-berth Eccles/Hillman Wizard combination averaged 24

mph over 1,550 miles, finished 35th, and received a special award in the Concours de Confort. It was a convincing demonstration of the Eccles soundness of construction and safety at speed, and gave the company the distinction of being the first and probably the last entry with a caravan.

1934 Into the Sahara with a car and caravan is no mean feat even now. Thirty-five years ago such an expedition created world-wide publicity and a severe test of car, caravan, and the six-man crew. The Humber Company were about to introduce the de Normanville Safety Gear on certain of their cars but first wanted to test this new type of transmission under the most rugged conditions. It was fitted to a Humber Snipe which was hitched to a three-berth, lantern-roof Eccles. The three-ton outfit crossed Europe and for several weeks was driven through North Africa and over rough tracks in the Sahara Desert. After thousands of miles, during which the Eccles was used as a mobile hotel, the caravan's undergear was examined and found to be still in full working order.

1949 Determined to realise the full export potential of the British made caravan, Eccles took part in a number of overseas exhibitions. Their most ambitious sales drive took place in the United States



A successful braking test at Monte Carlo for the award winning 1932 outfit.

with an exhibit at the huge Chicago Fair. Soon, Eccles were exporting up to 15% of their output and special models such as the EIO were produced for this market.

1964 A Jensen CV8 saloon car towed a 14ft Eccles Moonstone at 97 mph in an officially timed test. Needless to say, the caravan was perfectly stable at high speed thus proving its suitability for fast towing abroad.

1966 Export achievements by Eccles and the sister company Sprite assumed such proportions that the work of both companies was recognised by the award of the highest honour they could receive—the Queen's Award to Industry. Export figures have con-

tinued to rise and Eccles now market between one third and one half their total production.

1967 Petrol consumption tends to mount when the family car is towing a caravan. To discover more about the effects of towing on various cars, Eccles and the Mobil company undertook a Mobil Economy Run using three vehicles. The petrol consumption for the three cars towing nearly their maximum limits averaged out about thirty-one per cent less miles per gallon although the difference was greatly reduced when towing at high speed.

1968 Two thousand miles of European roads in 42 hours—an average of 47.6 mph. That was the



The London to Rome outfit, the Mobil Economy Run, and the Sahara team.

open-road record set up by a prototype of the 10ft Eccles Opal towed by a little Triumph GT6 car. The prototype was fitted with a new aerodynamic roof shape which assisted speed and stability under all kinds of road and weather conditions.

1969 Before the new-for-1969 Opal was introduced to the public for the first time, it was decided to subject it to a test reminiscent of the Monte Carlo Rally entry of 1932. The exercise had to prove that the Eccles was completely roadworthy, could achieve high speeds and remain stable, could create no troubles for the driver and other road users, and would not be affected by adverse road and

weather conditions. It was also decided to prove to the British holidaymaker that the Mediterranean sun was not so far away—even with a caravan in tow. The test had a sensational result: one driver, 23-year-old Liz Firmin, drove an Alfa Romeo 1750 saloon towing the Opal from London to Rome (road distance 1188 miles) in just 23½ hours. The average speed for this officially timed non-stop drive was an amazing 50.06 mph despite rain, hail, and fog during much of the journey. Sections of the Autostrade in Italy produced an average of 71 mph including refuelling stops, and the highest speed recorded was 92 mph. Both the car and caravan were standard pro-





The Triumph GT6 towed the Opal 2,000 miles in 42 hours—average 47.6 mph.

duction models except for the high-speed tyres fitted to the Opal, an optional extra available to all buyers.

Rally Success Through The Years

Ever since the epic Monte Carlo Rally of 1932, Eccles have been collecting rally awards too numerous to list here, though a few are worth special mention in this Golden Jubilee booklet.

Two first prizes and a special award came Eccles way at the *Autocar* Rally of 1932 and in the following year Eccles picked up

three first prizes in the RAC Caravan Rally. Also in 1933 a standard four-berth Eccles took the Premier Grand Prix in the Ostend Concours d'Elegance.

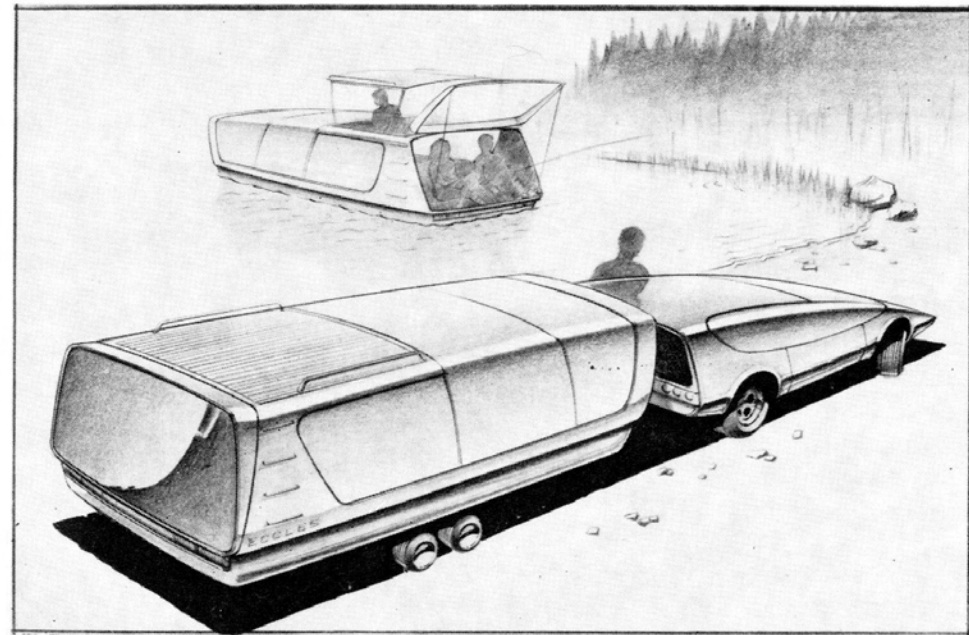
In the British Caravans Road Rally at Castle Combe in 1961, an Eccles Avenger towed by a Wolseley 15/60 took the National Caravan Council Challenge Bowl. In the 1963 event the coveted Concours d'Elegance prize went to an Eccles Sapphire which was judged to be the best in its class for good design and comfort.

1968 was a very good year for

Eccles entries in the Road Rally, for they won not only the George Hollingbery Memorial Challenge Cup with a Triumph 2000/GT308 combination, but also bagged the Esso Challenge Cup with a team of three similar outfits.

The Eccles programme of design, development, test, and the use of high quality production techniques will continue to bring rewards to add to a list of achievements unrivalled in the world of caravans.

What of the future?



In their fiftieth year, Eccles Caravans Limited still look ahead. They have retained the services of the world-famous Ogle Design Group to strengthen even further their claim to lead the world in the design and manufacture of high class,

safe, and comfortable caravans. This sketch of an amphibious Eccles is but one idea by Tom Karen of Ogle. Such a caravan may never be produced, or it may come when Eccles are preparing to celebrate their centenary, or sooner. . . .

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE

ECCLES

ECCLES CARAVANS LTD
PINES FACTORY, FORDHAM ROAD,
EXNING
NEWMARKET
SUFFOLK

Eccles Caravans Ltd acknowledge the help given in the preparation of the booklet by W M Whiteman, David Burgess Wise, *Autocar*, and *The Caravan*.