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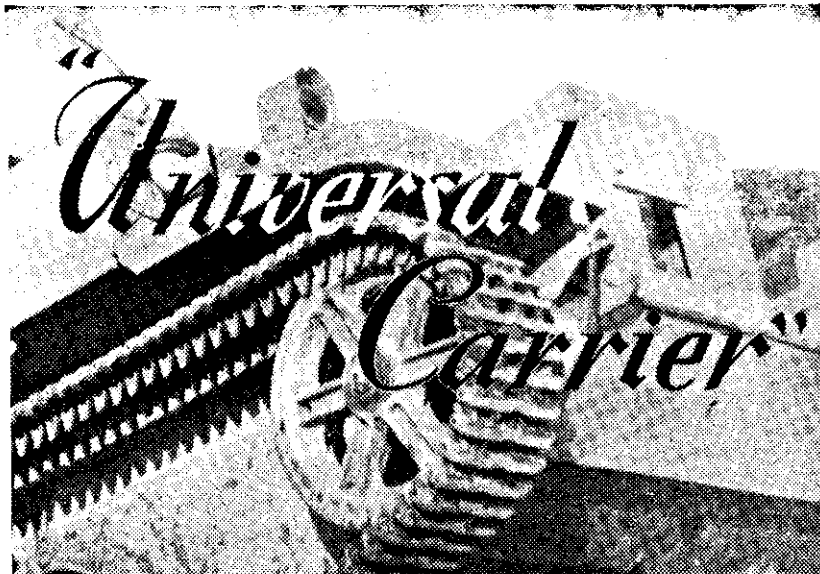
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THE sceptics said it couldn't be built in New Zealand, that it was too complicated a machine to turn out in any quantity in a country whose industry just hadn't reached the stage of being able to mass-produce a war vehicle embodying several hundred major parts and an almost equal number of special construction problems.

A few men, however, had confidence that the problems could be overcome. The vehicle had been made in Australia, and the engineers of a big industrial plant in New Zealand pledged their reputation that it could be built here. They set to work, and sure enough, it was not very long before the first New Zealand-made Universal Carrier (commonly but quite wrongly referred to as the Bren Gun Carrier) rolled off the assembly line.

There had been difficulties, certainly, but the sceptics had been answered. Apart from the power unit, it had been proved possible to build here, from the raw materials, one of the most complicated engines of war. And, incidentally, a step forward had been taken, or at least a beginning made, toward self sufficiency in the country's war effort.

"It Didn't Do Badly"

The first thing to do was test out that Universal Carrier; to discover its particular "bugs", if any; to see how it stood up to hard work under conditions it might be expected to face on the field; in brief, to find out what sort of a job it was. The plant's chief inspector and test driver took it over, bounced it over the roughest and toughest terrain he could find, stood it on its blunt nose and on its ugly tail end, charged obstacles, jumped it off the ground at high speeds until every weld must have been screaming with the strain. It didn't do badly.

Then Army experts gave it a few tests of their own, equally strenuous and with the same end in view. They reported favourably, made a few suggestions and then said to the management of the plant, in as many words, "O.K. Now let's see how many of them you can give us."

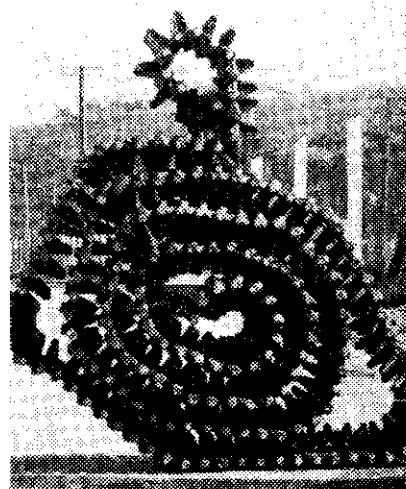
Assembly Line

That was the beginning of as tough an organisational job as this firm, or, for that matter, any other industry in

New Zealand, had ever faced! No time was lost. Down the length of a great, shadowy building, lit here and there by flood lights and welders' dazzling arcs, the key plant gave birth to an assembly line, a line patterned roughly on those in the automobile manufacturing plants of America. One difference is speed. The automobile on its assembly line moves forward at a slow but constant rate, never stopping until it is driven off for delivery to the seller. In this respect, the Universal Carrier assembly line has closer affiliations with aircraft production technique, the Carrier being moved forward in jumps by overhead hoist.

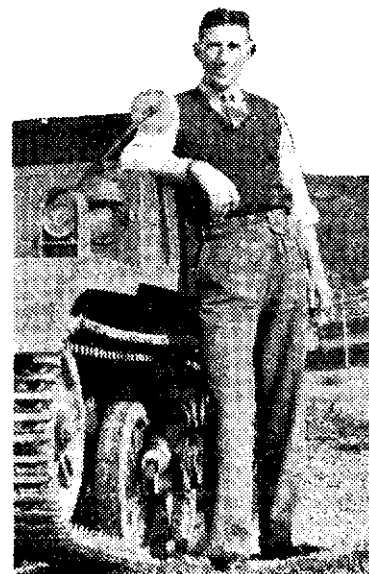
Theoretically, bullet proof plates and component parts go in at one end and the Universal Carrier leaves under its own power, at the other. But the complete picture must include factories and workshops all over New Zealand, working under pressure, each turning out a few—maybe only one—individual parts. From big city engineering shops to one-man workshops these factories all have their individual problems of supply and technique. A special grade of steel may be impossible to procure; the best grade available must be treated until it meets requirements. A necessary ingredient for the rubber used on the bogey wheels is in short supply; is there satisfactory local substitute?

(Continued on next page)



PUZZLE PICTURE: It is the long and heavy caterpillar track of a Universal Carrier, waiting to be fitted into position.

He Makes Them Jump!



JACK SPENCE (above), who is chief test driver and inspector at the New Zealand plant which makes Universal Carriers, has taken some pretty hard jolts in the course of his work. Not only does he drive a Carrier at high speed over rough ground, but one of his tests is to jump it anything from 12 to 15 feet through the air. It is a spectacular test, and one which he does not recommend to the average car driver.

Taking a long run, he quickly reaches a speed of well over 30 miles an hour, then hurtles off a low ramp. There is a full-throated roar from the engine, a flurry of flying stones and dirt as the Carrier poises a foot or two off the ground, and then a crash as it lands, nose up, and roars away. It is the sort of experience for which the Army driver, operating at high speed over rough ground, must be prepared at any moment.

The secret, says Mr. Spence, is to grab the steering wheel tightly and half stand up, taking all the jolt in your knees. The first time he jumped a Carrier, he hadn't worked this out, and he broke a small bone in his elbow and jarred every bone in his body.

The Carrier itself seems to thrive on this treatment, and will, in fact, stand up to almost anything. There is one story told of a vehicle of this type which fell over a 60-foot bank. There were three men in it, one of whom was thrown out and received minor injuries. The other two held on tightly, and although the Carrier turned over twice before coming to rest, they were unhurt, and the Carrier, battered a little, to be sure, went off under its own power.