

Nairn Transport



A KORERO Interview

GERALD AND Norman Nairn were well known in Blenheim, where their father, Dr. Nairn, was in practice for many years. In the days when communications throughout the district were primitive, Dr. Nairn earned the gratitude of many a sick person by his willingness to turn out in all weathers over roads bad or non-existent. Before the last war the two Nairn brothers were in partnership in a motor-cycle business in Blenheim. Norman Nairn, who was in England, enlisted after the outbreak of war, and Gerald went away with the 10th Canterbury Regiment. The brothers later met in Palestine. They were there when hostilities ended, and decided to stay in Palestine in business. They received financial backing from a Syrian, and formed the Nassar-Nairn Co. At that time it was possible to buy Army transport—Fords for the most part—do up the vehicles, and sell them again at a large profit. Fords could be bought from Army stocks for £50 to £60, and resold on the civilian market in Palestine and Egypt for between £500 and £600. The business however, was not quite as Elysian as it appeared. The company lost money. It was plain that prospects in the motor business in Palestine were becoming progressively less rosy.

The brothers next became interested in transport services, and the Nairn Transport Co. was formed. The company operated a freight and passenger service on the route between Beirut-Haifa;

£8,000 was put up by a backer, who charged 15 per cent interest on the loan. Norman Nairn went to America to buy suitable cars, and returned with "steamers." The steam car was even then a fine vehicle, and had many advantages over the petrol-driven car. It was unfortunate that these were outweighed by disadvantages that soon became painfully evident. In many places there was no road at all between Haifa and Beirut, and the Nairns had to improvise a route. Near Acre the cars had to travel along the beach, making a straight dash when the waves receded, and swerving madly up the beach when an especially large one threatened to overwhelm the car. On inland stretches the road was often desert country, and the car would career wildly over the rocks and boulders which formed the surface. The early steam car had one serious failing. When driven hard it used to run its boiler dry. The Nairns' steam cars were no exception, and in time acquired a reputation. As a result, when the driver received warning of trouble from a sheet of flame from under the bonnet it was unnecessary to warn the passengers. They had already taken to the desert and were speeding to a safe distance in small clouds of dust.

As the roads improved, the company met with increasing competition on the route. This, and the trouble with their cars, decided the Nairns to strike out in a new direction. The steam cars were sold to Palestinian Jews with the company's