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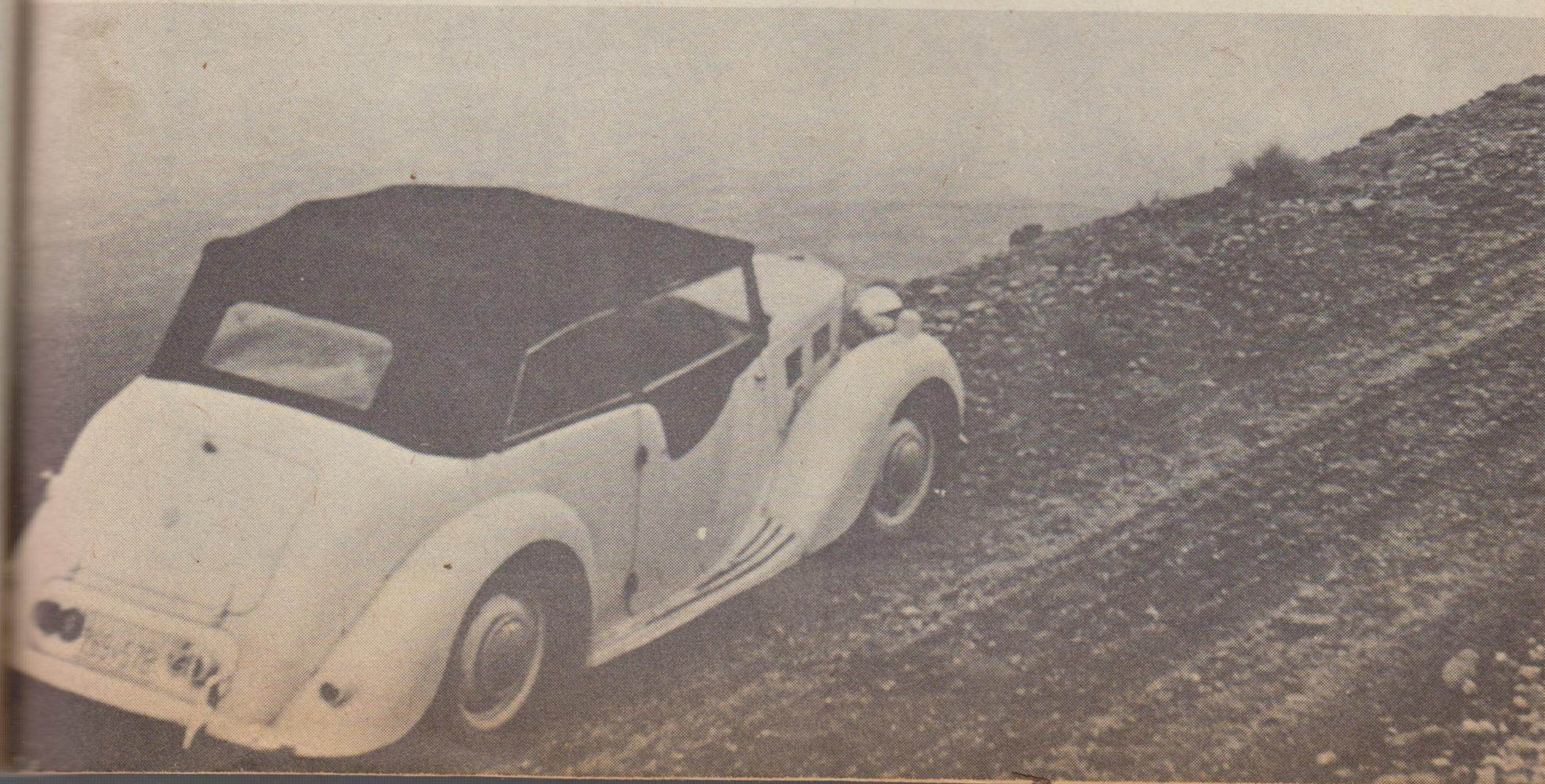
AN INTREPID Y-TYPE

A 21-year-old MG Y is just fine for highway touring, but when you start "bush-bashing" on the donkey tracks of a remote Mexican volcano, it's a different matter . . . as Gerd Ledermann and his friends found out.

The MG on the track leading into the crater at 14,000 feet. The densely populated Valley of Toluca below, hidden by mist and haze.

IN the summer of 1968, my slightly antiquated but decidedly youthful-looking MG 'Y' type tourer (of '49 vintage) brought me safely and without much effort from Montreal to Mexico City. More than holding its own, it flitted through the erratic traffic of that fascinating metropolis, obviously feeling pleased with its performance and the invigorating atmosphere. It couldn't suspect what was in store for it within the next few days.

Just beyond Mexico City's surrounding mountain range lies the famous market town of Toluca. Every Friday it's a colorfully crowded





The very first MG to scale the slopes of Nevada de Toluca — and a conference by the local popu-

lace to decide how to dismantle and reroute this apparent messenger from the heavens.



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place, when the inhabitants of the nearby district pour in to sell, bargain, buy or just to have a good time. However, on this particular afternoon Peter, John and I did not stop to stroll about at leisure in the warm sunshine, as we had done on former visits. We were on our way to reach the top of Nevada de Toluca.

This extinct volcano, its twin peaks often shrouded in clouds but easily discernible on a clear day, provided a natural challenge.

The map indicated a secondary gravel road to the base of the mountain, marked as a National Park, and we could foresee no undue difficulties. But these soon became apparent. The choice of tracks and donkey trails was abundant and confusing.

We drove into several villages, hood down, with a puzzled look on our faces and unmistakably in need of directions. These were usually provided in detail, but varied according to the imagination, descriptive skill and enthusiasm of every helpful bystander: "See that church steeple straight ahead? Well, turn right just beyond it, then left after one block and straight up the hill," or, "Just follow those two donkeys across the plaza and up that little street. They'll stop at a corner; turn right there and keep straight on."

Yet we always ended up by turning back, when neither reverse gear nor a few pushing Indians were of any avail to overcome the steep inclines blocking our attempt to approach the mountain. It retained its lofty distance.

By sheer perseverance we eventually found the way, and as it darkened we started to climb above the valley. We passed through a few silent, slumbering villages on a mediocre track, but by

nine o'clock were convinced we were lost, as the peaks seemed to be all behind us. A camp was indicated. The rather cool night was disturbed by the back-firing and wheezing of passing trucks.

We soon realised that tomorrow was Friday — market day — and this track was the main transport route for the villages of the area.

A damp, uncomfortable morning with breakfast to match, a look at the fuel gauge — dependently low — and a rather vague notion of our whereabouts did not combine to spark much enthusiasm in us. A passing truck driver kindly provided 10 litres of petrol (1½ gals) and a consultation helped us to regain our bearings.

By noon we reached the 14,000 ft level. The winding trail emerged from the tree line and passed into barren, boulder-strewn country. The ground levelled so, assuming that we were just below the summit, we stopped to investigate. Grey and brown rock formations stretched high above us, their peaks invisible in the swirling mist. Our attempts to scale the cliffs were abandoned after climbing about 400 feet with no end in view. By mid-afternoon we found another route — and finally reached the edge of the crater.

A clear bottomless lake, about half-a-mile wide, lay motionless 1000 feet below us. Towering peaks on the opposite side, sheer faces of rock and snow-filled crags dwarfed us as we stood there trying to adjust our breathing to the rare atmosphere.

A steep incline sloped to the shores of the lake and we made the descent running, jumping and sliding in the soft lava ash. A roofless dwelling and metal crosses with inscriptions gave evidence of former habitation. Barrenness and silence engulfed us; not even the cry of a bird interrupted. It was an eerie place.

As we were ready to leave we met three Indians walking along a circular track leading into

(Continued on page 77)

As seats and spare wheel are tied to the back of a Mexican pack-horse, a blanket is put over the animal's head to prevent it taking fright at the sight of this unusual cargo.

