

FAMOUS BRITISH TEST HILLS

No. 2—FINGLE BRIDGE

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ALTHOUGH used for some years past by several clubs, Fingle Bridge hill was for long included in the routes of the more difficult trials, such as the almost classic "Brighton to Beer" event run by the Brighton and Hove Motor Club.

It is hard to find, long, difficult and narrow. A serious blockage on the hill might cause a delay lasting several hours, in the case of a competition with a big entry. But efficient organization can minimise such risks and, in consequence, Fingle Bridge has now been adopted as a "regular" M.C.C. trials hill.

The usual method of approach is to drive from Exeter towards Moretonhampstead. About 6½ miles out of Exeter one bears right, through Dunsford, making for Drewsteignton. The road is narrow and hilly—a typical Devonshire lane, and follows, roughly, the lovely, winding valley of the Teign.

After the hamlet of Preston the road drops steeply, with a gradient of 1 in 6 or more, from 624ft. to 393ft. in a quarter of a mile. Then, bearing left, one continues downhill for another half-mile to Fingle Bridge itself.

This is set in perfect surroundings. The thickly-wooded banks slope steeply down to the boulder-strewn Teign: the sort of river that no keen fisherman can cross without a longing, backward glance.

I do not know how old is the bridge. It seems almost to have



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Something of the appalling surface of Fingle may be apparent to anyone studying the photograph reproduced on this page . . .

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been built for pack-horse traffic only, for I doubt if a haycart could be drawn across it. With a full-sized car there is scarcely an inch clearance between the hubcaps and the parapet.

Once the river has been crossed the hill rises ahead, slanting left under the trees, to double back to the right after a sharp hairpin bend. So far the hill does not seem difficult, unless the surface is thickly carpeted with fallen leaves, when wheelspin may develop quite low down.

The hill cannot be a mile long, yet in its short length it rises from 360ft. to over 1,000ft. above sea level. In the first third of a mile a rise of 422ft. has to be tackled and the gradient is probably steeper than 1 in 4 in one or two places, such as where there is a very "tight" S-bend (of which three come in quick succession) with a loose, stony surface.

It is its surface that makes Fingle difficult. In winter the dead leaves mix with the soil to form a surface akin to soft soap. In summer the pebbles break away from the dry earth and provide a surface like a sea beach.

Except on a very powerful car, however, one cannot afford to ease-up on this hill. If the car speed falls too low any extra throttle opening will almost certainly cause a stoppage due to wheelspin. The usual trials-hill tactics apply: tyres should be really soft, shock-absorbers dead tight, as much weight as possible concentrated over the rear wheels. Needless to say, "competition" tyres, or new covers with a bold tread, are desirable if a fast and certain climb is to be made.

Like many another famous test hill, Fingle Bridge goes on, and on, and on, long after the "worst" has been apparently negotiated in safety. Therein lies a trap for the unwary. After the hairpins and the stones the road still rises steeply. Failing engines will labour on the upper reaches. The surface is often slimy. So the trials driver may not rest until suddenly his car leaps into daylight, a thousand feet up, by the old earthworks of Cranbrook Castle, and the white, stony track assumes, once again, something of the character of a level road.