

= An Adventurous Automobile Trip =

An Adventurous Automobile Trip ( French : Le Raid Paris ? Monte @-@ Carlo en automobile or Le Raid Paris ? Monte @-@ Carlo en deux heures ) is a 1905 French short silent comedy film directed by Georges Méliès . The film , a spoof of the devil @-@ may @-@ care motoring exploits of King Leopold II of Belgium , features the King engaging in a manic , implausibly fast automobile ride from Paris to Monte Carlo . The singer @-@ comedian Harry Fragson stars as the King , supported by a large cast of stage performers from the Folies Bergère cabaret and other venues , with two cameo appearances from Méliès himself .

Méliès , working in collaboration with the stage director Victor de Cottens , designed An Adventurous Automobile Trip as an innovative Folies Bergère act combining stage performance and film , with a live prologue and epilogue used to frame the filmed sequence . After this version premiered on 31 December 1904 , Méliès adapted the film to be a standalone release for general distribution in 1905 . The lavish film , available in both black @-@ and @-@ white and hand @-@ colored versions , was a popular and critical success both in France and in America . However , the film 's high production values made it too expensive for many exhibitors , one of several factors that sent Méliès 's career into decline .

= = Plot = =

King Leopold , on holiday in Paris , wants to visit Monte Carlo , but does not have time for the seventeen @-@ hour express train ride between the two cities . He happens upon an automobile maker who claims his car can make the distance in just two hours . The King agrees and sets off in the car , with the auto maker acting as chauffeur . A large crowd sees them off from outside the Paris Opera House , including many celebrities from the Paris theatre world . After stopping to fill the car with gas , the King starts it and , from inexperience , accidentally runs it backward over a policeman , who is squashed flat as a pancake . The King starts inflating him with a pump , and then , to save time , lets other onlookers finish the job while he drives off . The onlookers set to the work with gusto , so much so that the overinflated policeman ends up exploding .

The car speeds over the French countryside and into the Alps , leaping between mountains and knocking over a postman as it goes . At the gates of Dijon , town officials try to stop the car to enforce the octroi tax , but the car keeps its course and runs headlong into one of the officials , who explodes in his turn . The car wends its way across the Mediterranean coast , overturning a fruit stand , crashing through a greenhouse , colliding with a tar wagon ( with another explosion ensuing ) , and , finally , arriving at the grandstand of spectators awaiting them at Monte Carlo . The car is now going at such speed that , rather than stopping in front of the grandstand , it somersaults up the stairs and crashes to earth . The King and chauffeur , unharmed by their adventurous race , are greeted warmly .

= = Production = =

For the 1904 Folies Bergère cabaret revue , the director Victor de Cottens approached Méliès ? then at the height of his fame as a filmmaker ? with the idea of combining theatre and cinema by presenting a short film as one of the fourteen segments of the stage production . The two directors worked out a scenario that would parody the motoring adventures of King Leopold II of Belgium , who was famous for driving , and often crashing , fast cars . In the stage @-@ screen amalgamation devised by Méliès and de Cottens , the segment began as a sketch with live performers before continuing as a film ; at the end of the film , the actor playing the King , as well as other actors playing cheering spectators , returned to the stage to finish the sketch live .

Méliès drew the cast of the film from various sources . Harry Fragson , a London @-@ born singer and comedian who was one of the stars of the Folies Bergère at the time , played the lead role of King Leopold . Louis Maurel , a Paris singer and comedian who had worked with Fragson in the 1903 Folies Bergère revue , was the chauffeur . In the scene in front of the Paris Opera , the

celebrities assembled include Jean Noté , a singer at the opera house ; the short actor Little Pich , whose persona was a close imitation of the better known British comedian Little Tich , and who also acted in films by Pathé Frères and the Gaumont Film Company ; the tall actor Antonich , known as the " Giant Swede ; " Félix Galipaux , who had been a popular music hall monologist in Paris since the 1880s and who acted in several Méliès films ; Jane Yvon , a Folies Bergère entertainer ; Séverin Cafferra , a popular mime ; and de Cottens himself . Fernande Albany , who also appeared in Méliès 's films *The Impossible Voyage* , *Tunnelling the English Channel* , and *The Conquest of the Pole* , played the plump lady in the Dijon scene , and the Folies Bergère entertainers Blondet and Raiter also made appearances . Méliès himself plays two roles in the film : a mailman who gets knocked over by the car , and the octroi official who explodes . Méliès also cast more extras in the film than was usual for him , sometimes staging them in layered arrangements for visual clarity , and sometimes letting them move at whim to create more disorganized , naturalistic groupings .

In addition to the parody of King Leopold II , Méliès 's scenario for the film features another topical element : the scene with the tar wagon is based on the experiments of Ernest Guglielminetti , who spread tar over a small part of the gravel road to Monaco . This experiment , widely reported by the press , successfully eliminated the dust clouds kicked up by cars on gravel and sand roads .

The film 's special effects were created using stage machinery , miniature models , pyrotechnics , and the editing technique known as the substitution splice . Long shots showing the car were filmed with a miniature car and a landscape rolling past it , creating a multiplane effect . Most scenes , including the detailed and faithful recreation of the Place de l 'Opéra outside the Opera House , were painted studio sets , as was Méliès 's custom . However , the last scene , showing the arrival at Monte Carlo , was filmed not in the studio but outdoors in Méliès 's garden .

= = Release and reception = =

*An Adventurous Automobile Trip* premiered at the gala opening night of the Folies Bergère revue on 31 December 1904 . It ran for six months at the Folies Bergère , lasting more than 300 performances . Méliès also intended for the film to be shown by exhibitors elsewhere , outside the context of the revue . Thus , after its Folies Bergère run , it was released as a standalone item by Méliès 's Star Film Company and numbered 740 ? 749 in its catalogues , where it is advertised as a *grande course fantastique funambulesque* . As with at least four percent of Méliès 's output , the film was available both in black and white and in individually hand colored prints sold at a higher price .

The film was also released in the United States , by the New York branch of Méliès 's company . During the summer of 1905 , Klaw & Erlanger showed it at the Aerial Gardens , on the rooftop of the New Amsterdam Theatre . In the American release , the scenes were slightly rearranged : the first and second scenes were switched in order , as were the sixth and seventh . In addition , because of a renumbering , ten tableaux were advertised instead of the French catalogue 's twelve , although no scenes were removed . ( The two prints of the film surviving in the Méliès family 's archive , the Cinémathèque Méliès , use the French ordering of the scenes . ) Another discrepancy between the French and American catalogues occurs for political reasons : the American catalog specifies that the protagonist is King Leopold , but the French one keeps the identity anonymous , so as not to offend Belgian audiences . Similarly , the Alps in the film are named as such in the American catalog but are unnamed in the French one .

*An Adventurous Automobile Trip* was one of Méliès 's most successful films , and ran to acclaim at the Folies Bergère for six months . A notice in *The New York Clipper* said that the film " is very clever , and keeps the audience in continuous good humor . " *The Morning Telegraph* concurred , reporting that the film " scored an instant success . Nothing funnier has been seen here in many a day . ... The thing is a scream . "

However , the venture was not as profitable as Méliès had expected ; the high costs of the lavish hand colored film put it out of the reach of many fairground exhibitors . These financial difficulties , which continued with Méliès 's similarly spectacular film *The Merry Frolics of Satan* the

following year , helped hasten the decline of Méliès 's career .

Portions of at least three prints of the film survive : a complete nitrate print with the car sometimes painted red , given to Méliès 's granddaughter Madeleine Malthête @-@ Méliès by an American collector ; an incomplete hand @-@ colored nitrate print , bought by Malthête @-@ Méliès from a Belgian collector ; and some fragments at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences . In his book @-@ length study of Méliès , the film historian John Frazer spoke highly of the film , noting its careful use of continuity of direction and comparing it to Mack Sennett 's slapstick comedies and to the 1968 automobile film Chitty Chitty Bang Bang . Méliès made another film in a similar vein , Le Raid New York ? Paris en automobile , in 1908 ; it was also received with success .