



THE OVERLANDERS

Winter is not yet upon us but our prediction department, which has an uncannily accurate record in such matters, forecasts that it will arrive in about a month. For those of us who look forward, if that's the phrase, to a winter of office work, to the daily routine of the alarm clock, the mild hangover, the cup of coffee made from the hot tap, the vain attempt to thaw toes and the trudge through the snow to the tube, the idea of spending an extra summer in South America, of crossing the plains of Africa, or of an overland trip to Asia is the sort of impossible dream that the song was written about. Even if your standard of living and state of organisation is slightly higher than that described in this tragic little outline and even if you've got one of the most interesting and varied jobs in the country you may still sense a certain lack of fulfillment if you have to conduct your operations in the British sub-Arctic.

There is a group of people who will not be spending the next few months in a humdrum rut or stumbling sadly through the gulags of EC1. While we

are trying to improve the circulation in our extremities they will be concerned with avoiding sunstroke. And while we are trying to decide between a Pot Noodle or a cardboard jumboburger they will be concerned with the preparation of exotic meals made with local ingredients and cooked in the open air.

Expedition leaders come as close as anyone can to the sort of buzz experienced by Cortes when he spotted the Pacific or presumably by all the other adventurers of the past when they found what they weren't sure they were looking for.

Such a way of life will not appeal to you if you'd hate to miss an episode of your favourite soap opera, if your idea of living dangerously is to go in the public bar instead of the lounge or if it is absolutely vital for you to know how Arsenal got on on Saturdays. If, however, you're made of sterner stuff — grim-jawed, eagle-eyed and one of those who made this nation great etc, you might want to know what qualities are required of the few people who can get these jobs.

Encounter Overland

We went to the British base of one of the most experienced expedition organisers, *Encounter Overland*, and spoke to one of their directors, Rob Rumball. He reckons that the organisation gets plenty of application and that a careful selection procedure is needed to get the right ones for the job. They look, he says, for people with a wide range of interests, people who are adaptable, diplomatic, patient and who have the quality of leadership. The leadership aspect is important and it shouldn't be the jackbooted-shouting-orders-all-the-time type, but a gentler more practical sort involving natural charisma, the ability to lead by example, that kind of thing. In other words the type of quality which we all think we possess and about which bit of self-perception we are all, or almost all, completely wrong. *Encounter Overland's* expeditions last between 11 and 17 weeks, during which time the members who probably have never met before, live and work together without a break. Apart from the crises which occur when any group of people live in such close proximity, the expedition leaders have to be able to cope with any problems which may arise out of political developments in the countries which they visit.

Most importantly of all perhaps is that they should have considerable mechanical knowledge or at least the ability to acquire it. *Encounter Overland's* training scheme takes between 4 and 6 months at their workshops where successful applicants have to dismantle and reassemble their vehicles before they ever get out on the road. When his or her mechanical skill is considered satisfactory (there is already one female expedition leader and there's no suggestion that she's a one-off in a male preserve) the trainee goes on an expedition as an assistant to an experienced driver on a full trip abroad. He or she is then assessed again and only then is reckoned to be ready to lead an expedition.

Encounter Overland is not run from

an armchair. All the bosses are ex or occasional expedition leaders and know exactly the sort of problems which have to be faced and the sort of qualities needed to deal with them. The company was set up in the mid sixties by Tony Jones who had just completed a three year stint as an Army officer and was not prepared to settle for a more sedentary career. It was established as a commercial proposition in 1967-8 when the current board joined him. The idea is to take small groups of young people — they're strict about the age limit of 35- to remote and interesting places in maximum comfort. The emphasis on the comfort, as much as the training of the leaders distinguishes Encounter Overland from some of the other organisations which are offering similar trips.

The fact that the expedition members are under 35 means that the expedition leaders have to be around the same age group. Although the upper age limit might not be applied to an experienced driver it would be very unlikely that anyone over 35 would be accepted as a trainee.

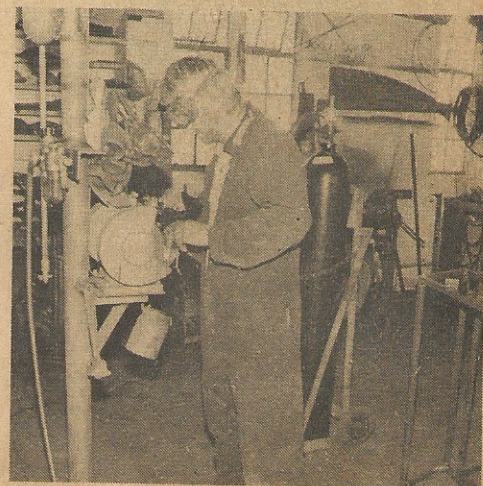
How to apply

What sort of people do the job? Rob Rumball says that they come from a wide variety of backgrounds. One driver leader is a qualified solicitor, others are workshop mechanics. When Encounter Overland decides who to choose they look for potential demonstrated by what the applicant has already done with his or her life for any preconceived stereotype. If you think the life might suit you and you think that you could convince them that you can do the job you should get in touch with Encounter Overland at their office at 271 Old Brompton, London SW5. Write first. They aren't desperate to have people cluttering their doorstep. We should however warn you that we have heard rumours that the job is addictive and that once you have lived like this you will never again be able to settle for the alarm clock, the trudge



through the snow to the tube, EC1, and the rest.

If they turn you down, you could always join one of the expeditions as a member. The cheapest costs a paltry £1,255-over £2,000 for South America — and if you think they'd have difficulty finding people to go at those prices you'd be amazed. The business is thriving. Of course if you do get taken on you'll get *paid* around £70 a week all year round with all found for doing the same thing. For us, and we should think for most people, this could be the only way to travel.



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20p

10 SEP 1980

SEPTEMBER 13th

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