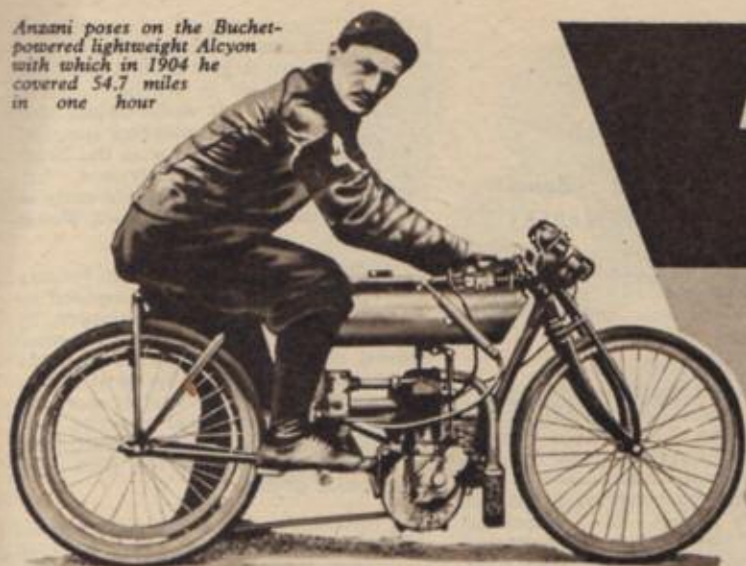


Anzani poses on the Buchet-powered lightweight Alcyon with which in 1904 he covered 54.7 miles in one hour



Alexandre ANZANI

J. A. SHELDON RECOUNTS THE
EARLY HISTORY OF THE FAMOUS
RIDER, TUNER, ENGINE DE-
SIGNER AND MANUFACTURER

THE appearance in recent years of the once-famous name of Anzani on pleasant little twin two-stroke engines has called forth many reminiscences from older clubmen of happenings in the 1920s, that golden period of motor-cycle sport so ably perpetuated by the Vintage Club. Tales are told of mighty Anzani big twins thundering round Brooklands to win many a hard-fought race. The name of C. F. Temple is recalled with memories of his overhead-camshaft Anzani vee-twin. The Anzani-powered Morgan three-wheelers come up for discussion. But nobody has so far mentioned the extraordinary character and achievements of the man who gave his name to the engines. Probably he acquired fame in so short a time and in so many different spheres that no one branch in the field of petrol-fired transport can claim him.

Alexandre Anzani was born in Milan in 1879. He was the son of a sewing-machine mechanic with whom he went to work after a turbulent boyhood in which he revealed much originality of thought but little scholastic promise. At the turn of the century he left his parents' home and made his way to Paris, at that time fast becoming the European clearing house for engineering ideas. It was there that young Alexandre first came in contact with the motor-cycle industry when he found employment with M. Buchet, who was manufacturing the huge engines which Parisians of the day thought necessary to propel the motor cycles which raced round the Parc des Princes track.

As a rider Anzani proved absolutely fearless and it was not long before he had achieved factory recognition. He finished third in the International Race in 1903 in which Sigonnaud surprisingly defeated Marius Thé. The following year he was runner-up to Thé for the World's Championship and a year later—on 23 July 1905—he won the World's Championship with one of his perfectly prepared Buchet engines in an Alcyon machine. By that time his skill both as rider and tuner had become something of a legend. He got his results as much by careful, methodical preparation as by the brilliance of his riding. In the lightweight class (it was 333 c.c.—a third of a litre—in those days) he was virtually unbeatable with the little o.h.v. Buchet engine; his achievements included taking the lightweight hour record with a distance of 88 kilometres (54.7 miles) and winning a sensational 12-hour race at over 40 m.p.h.

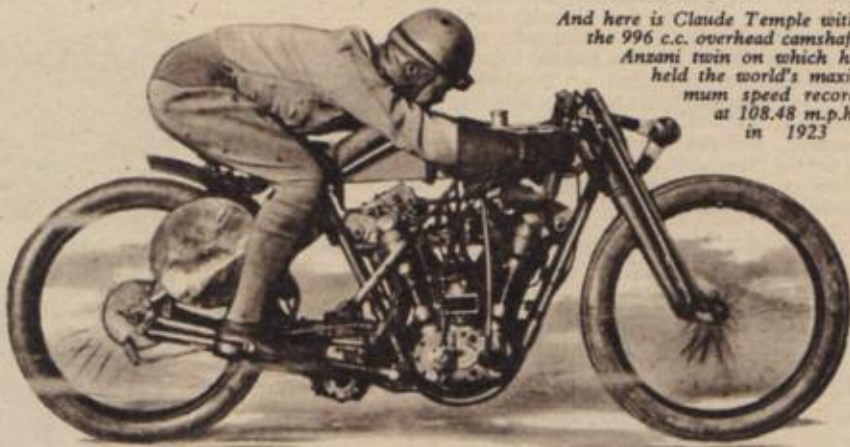
In 1906 Anzani decided to open a factory of his own in the western suburbs of Paris. There he continued to manufacture high-speed motor-cycle engines, while his friend, Henri Cissac, replaced him as Alcyon's official rider. Tuning and development occupied most of his time but in the following year, 1907, he appeared as a

member of the Le Metais car team in the Coup des Voitures, the formula class of the French Grand Prix, using an engine of his own construction. The formula then in force more or less compelled the use of a single-cylinder engine of 110mm bore which was very much his province. At the same time he was developing a vee-three (an inverted broad-arrow arrangement) for motor-cycle racing and was also displaying some interest in aviation.

Anzani's interest in the aeroplane, then very much in its infancy, dated back to the previous year. Ernest Archdeacon, President of the Aero Club de France, had got him to build a special two-wheeler with the engine mounted transversely in the frame and belt drive to a shaft which turned a propeller in front of the machine. With this amazing design, aided by Anzani's dare-devil skill, Archdeacon was able to do much research on airscrews and they finally got the machine to do 50 m.p.h.

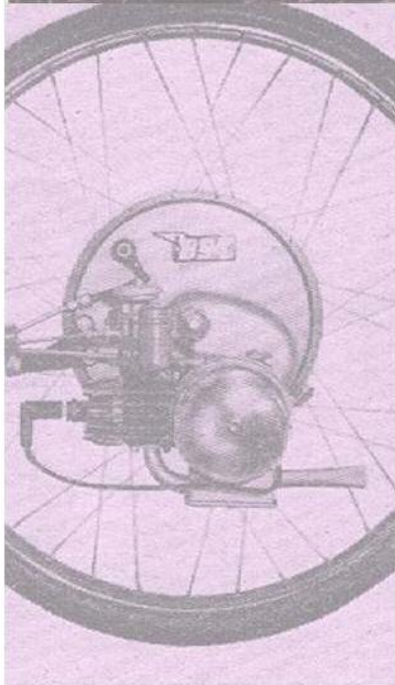
By 1909 the three-cylinder engine had been developed as a light aircraft power unit in its air-cooled form, and there was on the stocks a water-cooled six-cylinder engine consisting of two "fans" of three cylinders. Anzani is reputed to have admitted that he could not keep the middle rear cylinder cool except with water cooling, which added to the weight.

Early on the morning of 25 July 1909 Louis Blériot took off from France in his little monoplane powered by an Anzani three-cylinder engine. Half an hour later he landed near Dover. The first crossing of the English Channel by air had been made and the name of Blériot rang round the world; so did that of the young French-Italian who had made the engine. At the age of 30 Alexandre Anzani found himself world famous.



And here is Claude Temple with the 996 c.c. overhead camshaft Anzani twin on which he held the world's maximum speed record at 108.48 m.p.h. in 1923

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