

Barrow Eskimos Go for Modern Snow Vehicles In Great Big Way

Barrow Eskimos are going for the mechanized snow vehicles in a big way and three to four hundred of these small winter "go-go's" are buzzing in and around the big "Top o' the World" village every day.

Along with the pleasure of operating the vehicles, the owners are testing them for utility and the latter doesn't always turn out to best expectations. Some of the go-go's have broken down 30 or more miles from the village and the owners have had to walk home, sometimes in inclement weather.

This has happened more than once so some of the owners are combining the new with the old for the sake of safety insurance. They are

making no bones about owning the go-go as well as a team of dogs.

"Some of them have trained their dogs to run along with the "go-go" that is pulling a sled behind it," said Silas Negovanna who is visiting Fairbanks this week. "When the thing breaks down, the fella just hitches his dogs and mushes back home."

Negovanna said that there were several models being used manufactured by different companies but so far only one of them has proven to be more reliable than the others.

"They like that one the best because it is rugged and can take a lot of punishment and it can haul a big load because it has good traction," Negovanna observed. "They

can even go on muskeg country at about eight to ten miles an hour and that is pretty rough going."

Negovanna said that some of the vehicles had too much power and the gear systems were too fast that result in "digging in the snow" whenever they haul a load. On some of them, the engine mounts give way when they are operated on hard-packed snow drifts and on rough ground.

HUNTING VEHICLE

The men of Barrow use the go-go's for hunting. One day, Negovanna and a friend, who owns a "rugged one," went caribou hunting and bagged

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four animals. They were about 25 miles from Barrow when they started back hauling the carcasses on a sled.

"We were going along very well but when we were about to pass the Wiley Post and Will Rogers Monument, the thing quit running," Negovanna said, smiling. "We ran out of gas. We didn't have dogs with us and we had to walk 12 miles back to Barrow in pretty bad weather and it took us seven hours."

And so the Barrow folks have gone in a big way for the snow vehicles.

"And those things are running around like bunch of ants all over the place and when you're in a house, you can hear them buzzing like a bunch of gnats," Negovanna said. "But just the same, they haven't quite replaced the dogteam as yet."

He continued, "Many of the

fellas told me they can't quite trust the things yet and they are taking their dogs along whenever they go any distance from Barrow."

At any rate, the "Top o' the World" seems to be offering the best proving grounds for the snow vehicles under some of the most rugged conditions in the Arctic.