

TRANSPORT LAND

Those Long "Pencilled-In" Kilometres

Last winter, in the far northern town of Noyabr'sk, I once again saw a familiar sight: the driver of a powerful "Ural" had opened the tap of his fuel tank and was pouring gas on the ground. A stream of transparent, high-quality fuel was gushing into the snow, forming a puddle of impressive size under the wheels. There must have been two hundred and forty litres.

- Are you going to repair the tank? - I asked curiously.

- No, its not the tank, - he shrugged disgruntledly. - The tank is fine. It's the damned control. We are working on a new route and you can imagine what the conditions are like: either the road is blocked by snow, or there is no load, or you get stuck in mud. And so it goes, week after week. You cannot foresee everything, but that does not stop them from entering on the travel sheet the full amount of work that the machine can do in a shift, even though it very rarely does that much. The superintendents and foremen have no choice in the matter, because otherwise they won't get a transport allocation the next time. And they make the control mechanics enter the fuel left after each run. So what can we do but pour off the "surplus" gas.

The driver's voice betrayed his sincere bitterness. And I thought back to more than thirty years earlier. It was 1953, and the notorious piece-work system for paying drivers, on the basis of