

DEPARTMENTAL MOTOR-VEHICLES.

Eighty-seven new motor-vehicles of various kinds were purchased during the year, some as additions to the fleet and others in replacement of vehicles that were no longer serviceable. All the vehicles purchased were of English manufacture.

During the depression period many vehicles were retained in service for periods in excess of their normal life. As a result of this and of increased business it has been necessary to purchase more vehicles than usual, and there is still some leeway to be made up. The departmental workshops could not cope with the body-building work required, and several motor-vehicle bodies were built by outside firms.

A new type of body has been designed for vehicles used in the construction and maintenance of telegraph and telephone lines. The body is of steel construction and is of the covered-in type as distinct from the open-tray type with low sides. The new vehicle will provide cover for workmen when proceeding to and from jobs and will also obviate the need for separate tool-boxes on the trucks. Provision is made also for ladders to be carried on top of the body of the truck, instead of on the side.

Vehicles in commission at the end of the year numbered 578, comprising 429 lorries, trucks, and vans, and 149 motor-cars. Eighty vehicles were withdrawn from service. The fleet, including several vehicles held for sale, shows a net increase of seven. The number of miles travelled by the fleet during the year was 4,743,634, an increase of 481,864.

BICYCLES.

Details of bicycles in use at the end of the year are as follows :—

596 machines owned by individual officers for the use of which an allowance is paid ;

164 machines purchased by the Department and supplied free of cost to officers, who are required under agreement to maintain the machines and to utilize them in the Department's service for a fixed period based on the average daily riding-time ; and

507 machines owned by the Department and held for use by officers as required.

Bicycles supplied to officers under agreement are assembled in the Dominion to the Department's specifications.

POST OFFICE.

REDUCTION IN NEWSPAPER-POSTAGE RATE.

An appreciable reduction in the postage rate on inland newspapers was made on the 18th September last. Since 1931 the rate for a newspaper not over 3 oz. had been $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and that for a newspaper over 3 oz. and not over 16 oz. had been 1d. The new rate per copy was fixed at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for each 8 oz. This was a reduction from 1d. to $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the postage on newspapers over 3 oz. and not over 8 oz. in weight. The alteration was made in view of the desirability of having a uniform rate for newspapers (the former initial step of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 3 oz. was disproportionate to the succeeding step of 1d. for 16 oz.) and in pursuance of the policy, made possible as a result of the improvement in the Department's finances, of extending facilities and reducing rates wherever possible.

REDUCTION IN PARCEL-POST RATES.

Towards the end of last year a comprehensive review of the inland parcel-post was undertaken ; and, as it was apparent that the Department would be able to handle at small increased cost a larger volume of parcel traffic than was then being received, it was decided to reduce rates and to increase the maximum weight of parcels as follows :—

Old rates .. 6d. for first pound, 2d. for each additional pound to 10 lb., and 1d. each additional pound to 14 lb.

New rates .. 6d. up to 3 lb., 1s. up to 7 lb., 1s. 6d. up to 14 lb., 2s. up to 21 lb., and 2s. 6d. up to 28 lb.

The grouping of the parcels under the new scale makes for simplicity of charging and is preferable to the old system of charging on each pound. In addition, the increase from 14 lb. to 28 lb. in the maximum weight of parcels was appreciated by business firms which desired to forward by post parcels exceeding 14 lb. in weight.

Although the new rates operated only from the 16th March last, it was evident at the close of that month that the reduction made would have the effect of increasing considerably the volume of parcel-post business.

INLAND COMMERCIAL PAPERS AND PRINTED PAPERS : REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIONS.

In the past the addition to an account (commercial paper) of anything in the nature of a request for payment or a slight variation in the text of a circular (printed paper) rendered the article liable to the letter-rate of postage. In May last it was decided to widen the definition of an account to permit brief remarks (including a request for payment) relating solely to the subject-matter to be added either by hand or by means of a stamp impression or "sticker," and to bring within the definition of a circular a printed communication that has inserted in spaces reserved for the purpose simple additions which necessarily vary with each person addressed.

HANDLING OF UNDELIVERED INLAND PRINTED MATTER PREPAID AT HALFPENNY RATE.

A change was made in August last in the handling of undelivered inland printed matter prepaid at the halfpenny rate. Previously such matter, if it bore a special request for return to the sender or if it was of intrinsic value was returned on payment of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. return postage, but if it