

Virginie DETRY, “The motorization of the postal delivery by the light vehicles in France from 1930 to the reform of 1988” (La motorisation de la distribution du courrier en France de l’entre-deux-guerres à la réforme de 1988), master thesis in contemporary history directed by Pascal Griset, University of Paris-Sorbonne Paris 4, 2008.

The history of the French Post Office is a permanent integration of new techniques to improve its service. For postal delivery, it introduced the bicycle in 1893, the motorcycle and finally the automobile with the first trial in 1899. The French Post Office becomes aware of assets of this vehicle by observing the advantages that it gives in countryside with the service of “PAR” or even Telecommunications, which already have adopted it.

Between the two world wars, a car service was put in place by the French Post Office. But it decides to entrust it to a concessionary that it chose after an invitation of tender. It also attempts an experiment of postal delivery with a Simca V.

In spite of the encouraging results, this attempt was stopped suddenly because of the beginning of World War II. During the war, the concessionary has many difficulties to carry out its missions with the mobilization of the staff and the equipment, the shortages...

At the end of the war, cars begin to become common on the French landscape pushed by the arrival of the 2CV. As the automobile grows more popular and with the low service of concessionary "CGAP", the French Post Office decides to turn to the "direct state control." In other words, it is equipped with its own car service. For that purpose, it takes back a part of the staff of the CGAP, buys vehicles, builds garages and trains its staff for the driving... A whole organization is set up. This passage is going to favour other revolutions: the motorization of postal delivery in countryside by the French Post Office. This is going to be able to offer users a real public utility. The automobile permits to satisfy the needs of the urban men as well as the countrymen. The French Post Office's cars can go everywhere, in all weather and allows distributing an important amount of mail. It also offers to the mailmen better working conditions. Consequently, over the years, rounds with cars are going to multiply, which allows the increase of mail. But the automobile doesn't only have advantages. It also creates accidents and pollution. To decrease these, in the sixties, the administration decides on giving road safety's formations and testing its material. In 1973, it must look for solutions to face the energy crisis or even take measures to improve the working conditions in garages.

The institution of the mail automobile was a real success. The yellow car is henceforth recognized by all. And yet, in the eighties, the mail car service is threatened. In spite of the importance of this, the bad harmony between the French Post Office and telecommunications is going to encourage the administration to set up the reform of the SNAG which transforms its garages into a "service provider" up to its total stop which leads to the return of the system of the concession.