

JANUARY 28, 2008 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Stanley Trips with Problems: I have been touring in Stanley cars for over 60 years. Until 1983, I did not own a trailer, but a few times before that I borrowed an open trailer. Otherwise all touring from Yorklyn was “over the road”, and I made 20 such trips to New England alone, most of them round-trip. I have had a lot of luck along the way, and when breakdowns occurred, exemplary help always seemed available. For many years, my favorite touring car was the big 1912 Model 87, and it served me well. However, many of the “disasters” I can recall occurred with this car.

In the mid 1950’s when my father was losing interest in touring with Stanleys, he allowed me to use the 87 frequently. In July, 1954, my parents were in Rehoboth and I was going to drive the 87 down and back for a long weekend. Leaving home Friday morning, I got just 8 miles! Crossing the double-tracked main line of the B & O Railroad on the old Route 41, the jar loosened the drive-in superheaters (original in non-condensing Stanley boilers), all the water in the boiler with 500# pressure behind it escaped in about 15 seconds, and I was completely blinded and engulfed in steam. Through a stroke of luck I got the car onto the road’s shoulder before coming to a stop. There was nothing to do but call “Cliffey” at home, who came with our pick-up truck and a rope and towed me back to Yorklyn. The burner grate was badly cracked and was discarded, but the tubes in the boiler were tightened up and it saw a few more years’ service. I got a ride to Rehoboth later that day with some friends in a ’54 Olds 88.

In June, 1979, I was driving from Key West to Halifax, NS, on the second “Trans-Con” that I’d attempted (a portion of the first such tour in 1972 was the feature article in the most recent “Herald”). Brent Campbell was on the ’79 tour with his 1913 Model 76. Trying to make two days in one coming up the Blue Ridge Parkway from Asheville to Roanoke, with Jerry Brady as my passenger, at a water stop we noticed the two new rims on the rear wheels were cracked and blow-outs were imminent. A call to Weldin Stumpf at Yorklyn resulted in borrowing the rear wheels from my 1912 Model 88 Mountain Wagon (now owned by Allen Blazick). Stumpf delivered them to the point of break-down along the Parkway in about 15 hours! Four or five days later, with Jules Reiver as my passenger, just northeast of Oil City, PA, the left rear axle broke in the middle of a bridge crossing the Allegheny River. When this happens, the wheel keeps going and the car comes to an abrupt halt. Several tour members stopped and offered help. We got the Stanley loaded onto an Illinois friend’s trailer, and he towed us to a machine shop a few miles off the tour route. An elderly machinist who lived next to his shop “took us in”, and went to work the night of July 3 and the morning of the glorious Fourth, making a new axle half and helping us fit everything together. After giving him and his wife a short ride, we were on our way late on Independence Day, catching up with the “Trans-Con” in Toronto by the evening of July 5. I have seldom been so tired, but we completed the tour without further trouble and then drove home from Halifax some two weeks later.

A complicated arrangement was devised to attend the annual Steam Car Tour at Sturbridge, MA, in 1981. We had worked on a 10-H.P. Stanley for Frank Cooke who lived about 15 miles from Sturbridge, and we planned to trailer it back to him on Weldin Stumpf's open trailer, while driving the Model 87 to the Meet. Stumpf did not plan to go, so I invited Steve Jensen to go along. Leaving on a Saturday morning, Steve drove my '69 Chevy Longhorn pick-up truck with trailer behind and followed me, steaming alone in the 87. Just over 100 miles from home and about 3 miles southwest of Stroudsburg, PA, the same axle broke at the same place it did just two years before (the car had been used a lot in those two years, however). Steve stayed with the disabled Stanley, while I took truck and trailer into Stroudsburg to find a garage where we could store Cooke's car for a few days. Being successful, we then had a trailer available for the Model 87, a tow truck accompanied me back to the point of disaster, we got the Stanley loaded, and headed back to Yorklyn. By the time I got to the garage Sunday morning, Stumpf had the 3-wheeled Stanley unloaded and wanted to know what car I wanted to take to the Sturbridge Meet. He said he'd better go with me, and we decided to take the 1914 Model 607, which had not been used much for several years. We fired it up, loaded it on his trailer, and were in Sturbridge by midday on Monday. I tried to get Steve to go with us, as he had planned to take a week's vacation, but he said he was bad luck and it would be a bad omen if he went along. On Wednesday of "tour week", Weldin and I went to Stroudsburg, retrieved Frank Cooke's car, and delivered it to him that night. The gypsy moths had eaten the hillsides bare in that part of the country that year. The 607 ran perfectly for the 3 days we used it on the tour at Sturbridge. Cooke soon made two new axle halves for the Model 87 from the best steel available for this application, and the axle is still going strong 27 years later.

More "trying times" while on tour with the 87 will be described next week. Tom