

F. E. and Fred: In the three interviews I had with Fred Marriott, driver of the Stanley Rocket that held the world land speed record for four years (1906-1910), he frequently referred to his conversations with “Stanley.” Obviously he meant Francis Edgar Stanley, who was more involved with early racing than was his twin brother, Freelan Oscar Stanley. F.E. liked to race, and he held several track records in the early cars he designed and built as the Stanley Motor Carriage Company was in its infancy. In tiny steamers that got larger as their power increased, he made records at Charles River Park in Cambridge (MA) in 1898, at Readville track near Boston in 1903, and in two fast times to the top of Mount Washington in 1904 and 1905.

Born in 1873, Fred Marriott, a large athletic man with keen mechanical ability, was hired by the Stanleys to work in their steam car factory, and soon he became a shop superintendent. He was very much involved with F.E. in developing high-powered racers. Along with Louis Ross, Burt Holland and Frank Durbin, Fred had his share of racing wins in early Stanleys. In 1905, the most powerful cars the Stanleys were merchandising were called 18 and 20 horsepower, described as Models DX, H, and H-4. F.E. had aspirations for something faster and more powerful. The racer that was to become known as the Stanley Rocket, looking like an inverted canoe, was designed and built in the late months of 1905, having a boiler 30 inches in diameter with 1485 tubes, and a rear-mounted engine with a bore of 4-1/2” and a stroke of 6-1/2.” The plan was to carry 1,000 p.s.i. steam pressure, and the car was “back-geared” nearly two to one (the rear wheels would make nearly two revolutions to one for the engine). It was rated at 50 horsepower. It would be good only for high-speed flat racing, and there was no place near the factory in Newton, Massachusetts, for testing such a machine. F.E. had his eye on Ormond Beach, Florida, where flat racing on the hard-packed sand was attracting the finest high-speed cars and their wealthy owners from around the world in late January each year.

Marriott had been very much involved in building the “Rocket,” but he was taken to Florida in January 1906, not to be a driver but a mechanic. Frank Durbin was selected by F.E. to pilot his fast racer. In the days leading up to the one-mile “timed trial,” the Stanley car won a 15-mile event, won a 30-mile race in 34 minutes, and did well in other competition. However, Durbin’s wife was in Florida with the party, and she forbade her husband from risking his life in such dangerous adventures. Then F.E. planned to drive in the big race himself. After all, who knew more about the car that had been prepared? This time Augusta “Gustie” Stanley stepped in and quashed that idea. Her 56-year-old husband bowed to her wishes. Fred Marriott, still unmarried, was selected, and history was made on January 26: a measured mile in 28-1/5 seconds, or 127.66 m.p.h. Marriott and F. E. Stanley basked in their glory, and both were sure they could do even better.

Back at the factory, F. E. and Fred began refining their “Rocket.” Fred had complained about a “tingling,” a vibration of the tiller that steered the car, that made it almost impossible to grasp it firmly. Both men came to the same conclusion of what was causing it, and they were sure that a slight change in engine valve timing would correct the problem. At the same time, F.E. became interested in entering the Vanderbilt Cup Races on Long Island in 1906 and built two racers with completely different design but with basically the same power plant as the Florida “Rocket.” Durbin was selected again to drive one of these racers, and a photo exists of him and F.E. with a Vanderbilt car in front of the Stanley factory. About two weeks before these races took place, however, the governing committee advised the Stanleys that steam cars had been disbarred.

F. E., Fred, and the “Rocket” went to Ormond Beach again in January 1907. With expectations high, they jacked the steam pressure up to 1,300 pounds and, with Fred driving again, the car accelerated as it approached the starting line for the measured mile. Unfortunately, the beach was rough, as opposed to the year earlier, and, at a speed estimated at 150 m.p.h. or higher, the Rocket, hitting a sand bump, took to the air. When it landed on one side, it splintered into hundreds of pieces, the boiler rolled down the beach, and Marriott was thrown into the surf. Local photographers captured the disaster soon after it happened. Augustus Duryea of Somerville, New Jersey (not related to the auto pioneers), a trapshooting friend of my father, claimed he saw the crash and saved a piece of the wood body as a souvenir.

Fred Marriott was badly hurt, but he recovered rapidly. Back at the factory, he asked F.E. "When do we build the next one?" F.E.'s reply: "We don't." However, possibly with Marriott's urging, he was willing to try to find uses for his mammoth power plant built for the "Rocket" and the Vanderbilt cars. Hill Climbs against time, such as Dead Horse Hill in Worcester, Massachusetts, and Giant's Despair in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, were increasing in popularity, and auto manufacturers who advertised their success in such events could sell more cars. One of the Vanderbilt cars, driven by L.F.N. Baldwin, the Stanley agent in Providence, easily won Dead Horse Hill in record time in 1908.

By the summer of 1907, a prototype "Semi-Racer" was turned out by the Stanley factory, which used the same-sized engine as the Rocket, geared lower and with a smaller boiler 26" in diameter, and it was called 30 horsepower. This was the first Model K, Serial #3463, a restored version of which is now in the Marshall Collection. This car, driven by Philadelphia agent D. Walter Harper, and another K driven by Fred Marriott, competed in the Giant's Despair Hill Climb on Memorial Day 1908. From 1908 through 1911, this power plant, with suitable gearing, was used in 26 Model K "Semi-Racers," 75 Model M Touring Cars, and possibly 150 Model Z 9-passenger Mountain Wagons, the first of which were used at F.O. Stanley's hotel in Estes Park, Colorado.

Fred Marriott told me that the 20-horsepower Model H-5, geared one to one, was a better hill climber than the larger and more powerful Model K. In fact, a Model H-5 had raced at Giant's Despair in 1907 and made faster time than the Ks the following year. Fred went to the British Isles in 1906, and along with the agent in London, he went to Ireland with three or four Stanley cars, the largest of which was a Model H-5, to compete in a hill climb there. According to Fred, the Stanleys "cleaned up" in all the classes. Fred got married and his daughter, Rhoda, was born in 1910. By that time, F.E. and Fred had lost their lust for racing, but Fred remained at the Stanley factory until it closed in 1924.

F.E., while not officially racing, remained a fast driver. It caught up with him in 1918 when his Model 730 upset on the Newburyport Turnpike and killed him instantly. When the factory closed down in 1924, F. O. Stanley built Fred a new garage one block away, where the latter bought and sold used Stanleys and serviced them into the 1950s. I had the pleasure of talking "old times" with him in 1942, 1954, and 1955. Possibly he exaggerated some, but he was entitled to that, and it was very good listening. He died in 1956.

Work Report: On Tuesday, September 12, nine volunteers were on hand, viz: Steve Bryce (in charge), Mark Bodenstab, John Bacino, Bob Jordan, Dave Leon, Tom Marshall, Brent McDougall, Bill Scheper, and Neal Sobocinski. After getting all the fittings tight, the boiler for the Model 725 tested out well, holding 600# hydrostatic pressure overnight with almost no drop-off. The remainder of the old insulation was scraped off the wire winding, and the wire was well oiled and wrapped with two layers of Fiberfrax insulation. The boiler was then lowered into the car and rotated to the proper position to match the fitting connections with the car's piping. Re-piping was begun.

After a successful test drive, fuel was added to the tank of the Model 78 roadster, to be driven to the Hagley Car Show on September 17. The car was cleaned and polished. On the '37 Packard, small details were completed, and the Lionel electric trains were made ready for their use on September 24 and October 1.

At the Events and Scheduling Committee meeting, it was decided that this committee will be discontinued in January in favor of a new Volunteer Committee headed by Mark Bodenstab.

On Wednesday, September 13, eight volunteers attended, as follows: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tom Marshall, Jerry Lucas, Steve Bryce, Dave Leon, Larry Tennity, Bill Schwoebel, and Lou Mandich. Piping up the boiler on the 725 continued. On the Model 87, the king pins were tightened, and the burner forks moved closer to the mixing tubes. These changes were made to reduce shimmying and to quiet the howl of the burner. The car was test driven and appears to be fine. The Model H-5 was fired up, tested, lubricated and polished in anticipation of its trip to Hagley on 9/17. Our Model T Ford and our Rauch & Lang electric were also made ready for this 16-mile round-trip and display at the annual show. Work continued on the A.V.R.R. train car shed under the leadership of Bob Koury.

On Thursday, September 14, 10 volunteers attended the session: Dave Leon (in charge), Richard Bernard, Bob Stransky, Kelly Williams, Tom Marshall, Ted Kamen, Devon Hall, Bob Jordan, Tim Ward, and Larry Tennity.

On the '37 Packard, the final trim above the windshield was fastened in place. Several of the nine cars registered for the Hagley show were prepped where needed. In particular, these were the Stanley Models 735 and 740 and the Rauch & Lang electric. Preparation of the Model EX was continued with its newly cleaned fuel automatic. The car was fired up and driven around the driveway in the dark, and except for questionable fuel in the tank and pressure tanks, it seems ready to go. New fuel without ethanol will be added early Sunday morning before the trip. On Friday, the pressure tanks were blown out and pumped up again with the hope that the fuel quality to the burner is improved.

We extend our sincere sympathy to our long-time volunteer Ted Kamen, whose brother passed away on September 7.