

F.A.H.P. News, June 10, 2013

A Pinto Electric Conversion: Although not very innovative, I always had an interest in alternative power for automobiles. In the 1940s, my father and I hoped for a modern steam car. Since the mid-1920s, when the last Stanleys were built, there never was a time when someone was not experimenting with steam cars. Abner Doble was the most famous, but he built only about 40 cars in the late 1920s. The Williams twins, Calvin and Charles, of Huntingdon Valley, near Philadelphia, built at least two successful steam cars in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Bill Lear of Reno built a few experimental steam cars just after 1970 but gave up after spending a small fortune.

A musician, steel fabricator, and car collector named Ray Lyman from South Norwalk, Connecticut, bought a 1918 Model 735 Stanley, and Weldin Stumpf and I helped him get it running. It turned out Ray had been experimenting with electric cars and had converted VW Beetles and Ford Pintos to make them run on batteries. In 1983, I bought one of his Pinto electrics, and although completely impractical, I had a lot of fun with it. With my new (and first) JAC trailer, we brought it from Connecticut to Auburn Heights.

The 16 six-volt lead-acid batteries filled the trunk and some of the space under the hood, with an additional 12-volt battery to operate the lights. I think the battery charger was a separate unit; it was mounted in the garage and not carried on the car. The electric motor was also under the hood with the original Pinto stick-shift transmission and drive shaft in place. There was still ample room for four passengers inside the car. The gas pedal worked a rheostat to control the speed of the motor, and the driver shifted gears like in a regular stick-shift car of the period.

An adaptation of a potentiometer served as the “gas gauge.” When the batteries were fully charged, it registered “full,” and when it got below half, a definite loss of power was evidenced. This small car was heavy, weighing probably 1,000 pounds more than a standard Pinto. It was completely quiet but lacked power. The top speed may have been as much as 50 m.p.h., but at that speed the charge in the batteries was draining rapidly.

When I bought the car, the batteries were fairly new, but about 1987, I had to buy new ones. Unfortunately, the ones I bought were of inferior quality, and the earlier range, perhaps 30 miles on flat terrain, was much less than that. I drove the car on a frequent basis to Hockessin and Kennett Square but seldom to Wilmington. When I had to go to the inspection lane on Bancroft Parkway, nine miles one-way from Auburn Heights, I trailered the car to and from Greenville, fearing I could not make 18 miles over the hills.

Despite its shortcomings, I enjoyed my Pinto electric. I sold it back to Ray Lyman in 1989, who sold it to the aging Gardner King. When King, a former “steam car man” from Norwalk, had trouble, Ray would try to bail him out, but the Pinto electric had had its day.

Work Report: On Tuesday, June 4, a regular work session took place in addition to the technical lecture on Stanley cars. The following 11 volunteers attended the work session: Lou

Mandich, Emil Christofano, Jeff Pollock, Bob Jordan, Robert Hopkins, Art Wallace, Mark Russell, Jerry Lucas, Gary Green, Ken Ricketts, and Tom Marshall (in charge). The Model 735 was fired up, driven around the grounds, and the condenser checked for leaks. With the tightening of a few bolts holding the top tank to the core, it is believed to be tight. The locomotives were cleaned from their runs on June 2, and more towels were cut up to make shop rags. The Rauch & Lang batteries were checked after their use and subsequent charging. On the 1937 Packard brake project, an adjustment on the bands was discovered, which allows the wheels to slide on and turn freely. More sound-deadening strips were installed on the Lionel electric train layout. The nipple from the left blow-down valve on the Model 607 was shortened to allow clearance from the hood hold-down hardware.

Thirteen “students” and four teachers attended the technical lecture in the museum. The teachers, Bill Schwoebel, Steve Bryce, Bill Rule, and Kelly Williams, explained boiler, burner, brakes, engine, pumps, and three-tube water-level indicator and how each relates to the total operation of a Stanley car. The students in attendance, some for their first Stanley lecture, were: Dennis Dragon, Tim Ward, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Paul Kratunis, Tim Nolan, Jerry Novak, Karl Jorgenson, Steve Glazier, Jay Williams, Mac Taylor, Devon Hall, and Richard Gregg.

On Thursday, June 6, 10 volunteers were on hand: Tim Ward (in charge), Art Wallace, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Jerry Koss, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bill Schwoebel, Bob Stransky, and Tom Marshall. On the 607, one of the hood hold-downs was adjusted, and pins for the flap hinges on top of the hood were found and installed. The running board brackets were fastened in place (three on one side, four on the other), and the lifter handle for the hood was attached. The Soss hinges on the rear doors were further refined for a good fit. Kerosene and pilot fuel was added to the cars likely to go on the Ice Cream Run on June 11. Locomotive 402 was thoroughly studied to see what may have caused so many derailments on June 2. It was discovered that because of the excessive wear on spring hangers and their pins, that the two middle drivers were merely “floating” and carrying very little weight. It was decided that a temporary fix would be attempted starting next week, which might carry us for the rest of this year. The locomotive should be dismantled next winter to fix the problem correctly. One of the mixing tubes for the new three-venturi burner was flared. The right rear wheel from the Model 725, which had been creaking, was removed and inspected. It was determined that the wheel had been “Quik-Polyed” a few years ago and that the noise was probably coming from loose hub bolts.

Over the weekend, the threads were chased on the hub bolts, and the nuts were pulled up tight, after the wheel, hub, and brake drum had been thoroughly cleaned. The axle spindle, brake bands, and underside of the fender were also cleaned, and the wheel is ready to be put on. The bottom inside pan was fastened onto the three-venturi burner grate for the Model K.

On Tuesday, June 11, our first Ice Cream Run of the season to Woodside Farm takes place. Steamers taking part should leave Auburn Heights not later than 6:30 P.M. If you want to go, call or email Steve Bryce (302) 234-0789, or stevebryce@verizon.net.