

## STEAMING ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, 1972

Several Stanley owners have had similar experiences, Brent Campbell having completed by far the most "long tours", but in 1972 we were the first. This is the story of the trip we made in my 1912 30-H.P. Model 87 7-Passenger Touring Car

BY  
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### MONTREAL TO TIJUANA (Canada, U.S., Mexico)

At the end of March, 1972, a mailing came from the Veteran Motor Car Club of America, stating that there were still openings on the second-ever trans-Continental tour to begin in Montreal with a banquet on June 17. Four years earlier, there had been such a tour from New York to San Francisco with Millard Newman as chairman, and this was to be a sequel. Every rational consideration on my part dictated that I should not consider making such a trip, involving nearly two months away from home. But every day the prospect of doing something I had always wanted to do kept wearing down my resistance, and by the middle of April I had decided that if they would accept a steamer on such a tour, I would try to go. What I didn't know at the time, but found out later, was that there was great reluctance on the part of the tour committee to accept a steamer because of what they perceived would be a real problem to the other participants, and the distinct probability that we wouldn't get very far. One of my many friends must have put in a good word, and they agreed to let me try and accepted our entry. We had less than two months to get ready.

Cars entered had to be made in 1914 or earlier. There was a point system, whereby each car must make a designated check point by 6:00 P.M. on the appointed day (almost every day), or points would be deducted. In 1968 there had been about 38 cars; I don't know how many had perfect scores. This time they had hoped for that many or more, but the final count was only 21- twenty gas cars and one steamer! We got busy on what we had to do to prepare the big Model 87. We would not worry about cosmetic appearance. We installed bronze crosshead guides in the engine and made new wrist pins. We rebuilt the burner, but since the boiler had been new in 1960, we stuck with that. We added a large extra water tank and hung it under the car, and carried an extra temporary fuel tank in the tonneau. We put new 37 x 5 tires on the car, and worked on our lengthy list of spare parts and tools. And we shipped both pilot fuel and steam cylinder oil to designated places along the tour route and our route homeward after the tour concluded on the West Coast. Having long known about the poor water quality in many parts of this continent, I wrote to postmasters at approximately 75-mile intervals along the route, asking if they could find a source of good, soft water in their respective communities. I heard from about 2/3 of them, and most were enthusiastic about helping us.

Shortly after noon on a rainy June 13, three of us, Weldin Stumpf, Jules Reiver, and I left home for Montreal, 500 miles to the north. Making 3 overnight stops enroute, we arrived before noon on the 16<sup>th</sup>, parked in the Chateau Champlain garage, and made some last minute adjustments for the "trip of a lifetime" which was to start in less than 2 days. The other cars were assembling, and we learned some old friends and many new ones would be together with us for four weeks. We knew it would be great fun but also a real challenge, and I admit to being more than a little nervous.

Weldin Stumpf flew home, but on a bright Sunday morning (June 18) 21 old cars headed west toward our first night's destination, Ottawa, the capital of Canada, 128 miles away. We had a luncheon stop at a private estate about half way, and at day's end we could say we were still there and on schedule- so was everyone else. The second day was longer, over 200 miles, to Callander, Ontario, where the Dionne Quintuplets had been born in 1934. It was a warm day, and the bugs were a menace wherever we stopped, but we siphoned water from the Ottawa River, and made the final miles into Callander over a dirt road through the Canadian woods. The Stanley was running fine, and our second check point was made in plenty of time. As we



enjoyed the "Happy Hour" at the new hotel where we were staying, a bobcat sat on a nearby rock and watched us. On the next day's run to Sudbury, a heavy summer thunderstorm hit us on a section of road construction about 20 miles short of our destination, and we got soaked. The proprietor of a small garage just off the road saw us coming, threw open his door and motioned for us to drive inside, a most welcome gesture. We stayed there until the drenching rain subsided, dried our clothes on the boiler of the car, and then made our way into Sudbury. So far, so good!

On the fourth day of the tour, we drove to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, just under 200 miles. At one of our planned water stops, Thessalon, Ontario, we were entertained for lunch by the mayor and president of the Chamber of Commerce in the old hotel, while others ran a water hose right across the town's main street to fill our tanks. It was at many, many occasions like this that we got to meet hundreds of interested people; the owners of the gas cars on the tour soon became envious. We spent two nights at the "Soo" locks, and then entered the United States again at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan..

On a rainy day we crossed Michigan's Upper Peninsula, mostly through the woods and along the north shore of Lake Michigan. At Naubinway, we had lunch with the postmaster and his wife and took on water from a steam laundry. During lunch, our pilot went out, and we lit it again before starting off. As it turned out, this was the only time in 2 months that our pilot went out when not turned off. By late afternoon as we approached Iron Mountain, the skies finally cleared and ushered in many days of fine weather ahead of us.

The beautiful countryside of northeastern Wisconsin, woods, lakes, and Holstein cattle, were a treat in the bright cool sunlight, and we stopped at Crandon in the middle of a centennial celebration, and partook of a delicious church dinner. That night we were at Rhinelander, where CARS AND PARTS magazine hosted a wine and cheese reception for our group. Here, Millard Newman announced that the next day's route would deviate from that originally planned, and would go to our destination, Minneapolis, via Wausau where a big car show and flea market was in progress. I begged Millard to let me follow the original route, as we had arranged for water at a hospital in Ladysmith, and again at a fish hatchery at St. Croix Falls. He consented.

We expected to see no one else on the original tour route, but about half way along we came upon Bayard Sheldon's son struggling with timing the magneto on his father's Napier. Jules Reiver and I tried to help and stayed with him two or three hours, but steam car men should never try to time a magneto! We had to leave him by mid-afternoon, or we could not have made our check point at Minneapolis at 7 P.M. (it had been extended that day because of the flea market most attended). About 10 miles out of downtown Minneapolis, a group of cars including several Model A Fords were stopped alongside the road and flagged us down. They were members of the local region of the Antique Automobile Club of America, and, not knowing of the change in tour route at the last minute, had come out to escort everyone into the city. We had to tell them what had happened, that everyone else was coming in on another road, so we had a private escort for the Stanley.

At Minneapolis on one of our free days, I consulted with representatives of Culligan, Inc., nationally-known water treatment experts. I thought they would recommend a proper chemical as an additive for the hard-water country we were about to encounter across the northern plains. But after learning more about the Stanley and its high-pressure boiler, they said that frequent blow-downs would be as effective as anything. We had been doing this anyway, always blowing all the water out at day's end. At Minneapolis, I also changed passengers. Jules Reiver flew home to Delaware, and Jim Johnson from the Chicago area, joined me, with the intent of staying with the tour until we reached Yellowstone National Park.

The first day out of Minneapolis, we crossed Minnesota, with a pleasant stop and free lunch at Sidney Strong's home town of Atwater, and a brief stop at the airport in Willmar. Just before we crossed the state line into South Dakota, another heavy thunderstorm struck, but no damage was done, and we stayed at Milbank, SD, that night. The next day's drive was only 100 miles to Aberdeen, SD, and we thought everything was going like clockwork, and we were having a grand tour! As we backed into position in front of our motel room,



however, Dick Hovey, the tour's mechanical director, said he heard a click in my right rear wheel. Although we minimized a problem at the time, three days later that small click would cause us an all-night session to make a repair.

We left Aberdeen before 6:00 A.M., as this was to be the longest day's drive of the tour, 314 miles to Baker, Montana. In order to stretch water mileage, we ran the first 90 miles at about 25 m.p.h., and made our first water stop in good shape. Just before noon, we crossed the Missouri River, and it became very hot during the afternoon. At a planned water stop in southwestern North Dakota about 4 P.M., we got in out of the sun for an hour before we proceeded. From then on, it was beautiful as the sun went down and our last water stop of the day, about 20 miles short of our night's destination, was at the old railroad town of Marmarth, ND, which had fallen on hard times since the steam locomotives were retired. The streets were unpaved but the whole town turned out, most of its residents having worked for the Milwaukee Road, and we took water from the old tank which satisfied the thirst of many steam locomotives. We had to break away, as we knew darkness would fall very soon, but it had been an eventful day. Still no rear wheel problem had come to light.

The next night we stayed at Miles City, Montana, on the Yellowstone River, where our tour group enjoyed a Western barbecue and barn dance at a local ranch-type restaurant. We thought our last 150 miles into Billings would be easy, and we took water at a ranch which had been arranged by a postmaster. In early afternoon, however, a much louder noise became apparent near the right rear wheel, and I decided to pull the wheel and inspect. The wheel bearing was "shot", and the inside housing of the bearing had turned for many miles on the axle shaft and had worn it badly. Hindsight indicated that the bearing had been fit too tight before we left home, at least 2,500 miles before. We limped the last 70 miles or so into Billings at 20 m.p.h., but still made our check point on time.

I got on the phone to find a machine shop that would take the car in that night and hopefully make the repair during the night so we could be on our way the next day. But it was the Fourth of July weekend (our National holiday), and no businesses would be open. However, I have always been very lucky, especially when traveling in Stanleys, and I did indeed find a shop owner who said if I would give him time to take his wife to dinner, he would meet us at his shop about 7 P.M., and he would see if he could help. This worked out, and shortly after 7:00, we were disassembling the rear to pull out the axle half. I had a spare wheel bearing with us, so the axle shaft was built up with weld, then turned to size, and the bearing properly fitted. We got the whole thing back together and installed about 4:30 A.M. and we returned, amid snow showers just before dawn, to our motel. Getting on the road again by 9:30 or 10:00, we were about an hour and one half behind most of those on our tour, but about 3 P.M. at Livingston, our night's destination, I heard one of our tour members shout: "Here comes the steamer!" We even participated in Livingston's Independence Day parade before the afternoon was over. We were tired, but we had made it. The next day we climbed into Yellowstone National Park, where we celebrated July Fourth at Old Faithful Inn.

At Yellowstone, my passengers changed again. Jim Johnson was supposed to go home, but he had enjoyed the tour so much (even the all-night work session) that he became Millard Newman's passenger in the tour chairman's 1911 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost and continued with him to Reno, Nevada, several days later. I was joined by three members of the Stumpf family, Weldin, Dorothy, and their 13-year-old daughter, Joan. From that time on, Weldin Stumpf and I shared the driving. We went south from Yellowstone, past the spectacular Grand Tetons, and then came along the Snake River into Idaho, stopping that night at Idaho Falls. Along the Snake, the Stanley's boiler seemed to "foam" and the 3-tube water level indicator, on which we were relying, was "bouncing all over the place". We stopped and gave our blow down valves good blows. Things settled down again, and no more trouble of this kind was encountered. After Idaho Falls, we headed for Sun Valley, stopping briefly at Craters-of-the-Moon National Monument (having nothing to do with the actual moon landing 3 years earlier). Sun Valley is an oasis in the desert, but long desert drives were ahead of us as we went south into Nevada and then west toward Reno. From Twin Falls, Idaho, (where Evil Knievel jumped across a canyon) to Wells, Nevada, was about 120 miles, and, so far as we knew, there was not a town or water hole of



any kind in this stretch. Other members of the tour offered to carry gallon jugs and leave water along the roadside for us. Sidney Strong carried some of our luggage in his Pierce Arrow to cut down on our weight. Just before we left Twin Falls, however, we heard of a gambling casino that had sprung up on the Nevada border, and they had a limited water supply. The place was named "Jack Pot", and indeed it was our jackpot, as we nourished our thirsty water tanks here before moving on to Wells. That night, we stayed at Elko, NV, and then followed two trans-continental railroads from there to just east of Reno. One of our mid-day water stops was at a casino and restaurant in Lovelock, NV. I went to the door to inquire about water (which had been pre-arranged) and was greeted by a "bouncer" who glared at everyone approaching the front door with his arms folded across his chest. Rather timidly, I approached the bouncer about water for the Stanley. His personality changed immediately- I think he probably owned the place- and he directed me to a back alley where he proceeded to dump heavy bags of rock salt into his water-softening machine. We soon had ample soft water, filled the tanks, and had lunch, very grateful for our friend the bouncer.

Despite a strong head wind and another overnight stop at Winnemucca, NV, we pulled into Reno on time after a short stop at Harrah's Museum at Sparks, just east of Reno. Weldin Stumpf, an old boiler maker for the Pennsylvania Railroad in the steam days, thought we should wash the boiler on the Stanley after so many miles and questionable water. This we did, but found it remarkably clean, so we "buttoned it up" again and went sightseeing in a rented car to Lake Tahoe and Virginia City.

From Reno, the tour schedule gave us two days to reach Fresno, California, with a high crossing of the Sierra-Nevada Mountains at Tioga Pass, just under 10,000 feet elevation. Between the pass and Fresno we would pass through the beautiful but mountainous Yosemite National Park, where we would go from 10,000 feet to less than 4,000 on the floor of Yosemite Valley, then back up to about 8,000 feet before leaving the Park's south entrance and down to Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley, only a few hundred feet above sea level. We planned to stay at Yosemite Lodge in the Valley the first night, just over 200 miles and many grades from Reno. The big challenge was the climb from Lee Vining, CA, to Tioga Pass, and the descent again into the Valley. The Model 87 at that time had only the original brakes- no modern improvements had been retro-fitted. We left Reno about 5 A.M., and at 11:20 we were at Lee Vining, nearly 150 miles to the south. We took on water, and began the climb. The grade began immediately, there was no opportunity to "get things hot". I believe this ascent of the Pass from the east is about the same as the road up Pike's Peak in Colorado: a climb of about 6,000 feet in 12 miles. Both water pumps were doing their full duty, and we maintained between 12 and 15 m.p.h. most of the way. Relying only on the 3-tube water level indicator, I thought it best to stop, jack a wheel, and pump water about  $\frac{3}{4}$  the way up. This we did for maybe 10 minutes, then made our way to the top. At Tuolumne Meadows, a few miles farther, Frank and Marjorie Cooke were returning from a hike in the high country. At that time, he was driving Curtis Blake's 1913 Rolls- I have no idea what time they must have left Reno that morning! We descended, as planned, at about 15 m.p.h., the 50 miles into Yosemite Valley, and arrived in late afternoon. Our welcome there was less than enthusiastic; our busy National parks are not used to welcoming steamers in the height of their season. The next afternoon, we arrived at Fresno and were greeted by a temperature of 106 degrees.

I wanted to visit an old army friend who lived in Porterville, CA, so I asked the tour chairman if we could deviate again from the designated route, and he consented. After a nice visit (though the weather was hot!) and an open-air cook-out, we proceeded the next day to the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles, recently built on the site of the old 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox film lot. Coming out of the underground garage the next morning with the top up, there was not sufficient clearance and I broke a top bow, which had to be patched up for the remainder of the trip. This day we stopped at the ever-popular Disneyland for a few hours and then proceeded to Harbor Island in San Diego, which was almost the end of the official tour- but not quite. During that first night in San Diego, one of our tires went flat, which had to be fixed the next morning before the final day's run to Tijuana, Mexico, and return. Some friends of the Stumpfs who lived in San Diego rode with us across the border, we parked under guard near the Jai-alai stadium, had a Mexican lunch, and were glad to re-enter the U.S.A. for our final banquet and the sad good-bys.



The Tour itself had been about 4,100 miles long, and we had driven 500 miles more to get to the starting point. We finished with a perfect score, as did about half the 21 participants. Most planned to ship their cars back home, participants being largely from the east or the mid-west. We planned to drive home, however, another 3,700 miles or so via the route we had chosen. So we drove back to the Disneyland area, where we did more visiting with friends, and prepared the steamer for the return to Delaware. The burner had been back-firing for a few days, we knew we could get through the tour, but we wanted to fix it before heading east. In tearing it apart, we found the inside burner pan burned through under the pilot, so a new inside pan was fabricated and installed. This corrected the problem, and the car was again ready. I flew home for 9 days, and the Model 87 was in the charge of the Stumpfs.

Their first stop out of the Los Angeles basin was Barstow at the edge of the Mohave Desert. The next day they stopped at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, a 270-mile run. Then they visited Bryce Canyon, and headed north toward the Great Salt Lake. A phone call from Provo, Utah, just 44 miles south of Salt Lake City, informed me that they were right on schedule. After a short stay at Salt Lake, they went to Ogden, and then headed east across Wyoming. They attended the Cheyenne Rodeo, before I joined them again at Fort Collins, Colorado, as we prepared for the route of the Mountain Wagons up Big Thompson Canyon from Loveland to Estes Park. This, too, had been planned in advance. One of the owners of the Stanley Hotel at that time, Leon Feddersen, had heard of our trip and had asked us to stop on our return to help publicize the hotel, which we were glad to do. So, with Feddersen aboard, we made the 30 miles from Loveland to the Park in 65 minutes, during which time we climbed 2,500 feet. We sat in the parlor of the Stanley Hotel, and looked through a huge picture window at the nearby Rockies, while being interviewed by the press and TV people from Denver.

From Estes Park to our home in Delaware, it was 1,872 miles, and we planned to drive it in 9 days. Day after day we traveled along as if we could do it forever, with the car cooperating perfectly. Overnight stops across rainy Nebraska were at Ogallala and Central City, and the Stumpfs flew home when we reached Omaha. Don Tulloch joined me at Omaha, and we had two interesting experiences as we crossed southern Iowa. First, one of our planned water stops was at Creston, which I almost forgot, then realized that those providing us services requested that we be there at 1:00 P.M. Barely on time, we passed a radio sending tower about 2 miles west of town and immediately a police escort appeared and escorted us to the center of town. It seems that once we passed the tower, we were "on the air" but didn't know it until we stopped and were immediately surrounded by hundreds of interested town-folks. Interviews with TV people from Des Moines followed, and we were hard-put to get away to continue our journey. At Lucas, IA, our next water stop, a huge banner across the street proclaimed "John L. Lewis Day". It turned out that the American labor leader was born and raised in Lucas, and a big celebration was planned for his birthday a few days after our visit. We politely told our hosts we could not remain for that, and we headed on to Ottumwa, IA, where we spent that night.

Crossing the Mississippi River the next day, we stayed overnight in Abraham Lincoln's home town, Springfield, Illinois, and, trying to tighten a fitting on top of the boiler, I broke it off and despite working into the evening, we had to wait until a plumbing supply house opened the next morning to buy a pipe tap and complete the repair. On our way at noon, we made the 200 miles to Indianapolis before darkness set in. Don Tulloch flew home the next day from Dayton (Ohio) Airport, and at Columbus, OH, 70 miles farther along, I picked up my final passenger, Bob Reilly, who rode with me from Columbus to Yorklyn, DE. We stopped the last two nights at Zanesville, OH, and Somerset, Pennsylvania.

Our Steam Car Museum, along with other steam things, was open to the public in those days, and we were always glad for free publicity. We thought the successful completion of an 8,300-mile trip in a 60-year-old steam car would get us a story, so Weldin Stumpf made up a huge sign saying "Welcome Home, Tom" and hung it above our museum door. He invited the media to witness the completion of the trip as we drove in, and told them we would arrive at 5:00 P.M. on August 9<sup>th</sup>. At 3:45, I was 5 miles from home, and phoned him. He told me to wait there for an hour, so I would pull in just before 5:00. This plan was carried out, but no one

showed up. We learned in a hurry just how important we were. But, indeed we had driven the Stanley 8,328 miles since June 13, had made every check point including all the overnight stops as scheduled (and we had reservations every night for nearly 2 months), we had no accompanying vehicle, and I believe this is still a record for the longest trip ever made in a steam car. So, there was a lot of self-satisfaction, and WE DID HAVE FUN! After 28 years, it still stands out as the TRIP OF A LIFETIME!