

F.A.H.P. News, January 9, 2012

The Packards at Auburn Heights, 1937-1946 (Continued from Dec. 5, 2011 Weekly News): In the fall of 1937, two new Packards came to Auburn Heights. First was a 1938 Super Eight Club Sedan to receive License #8, which replaced the 1935 Standard Eight (actually they were the same engine, but the 1938 had Bohn pistons, which proved to be unsatisfactory; Packard replaced them without cost). Less than a month later, the “leftover” 1937 Packard Twelve #1508 arrived to become #76 (the “big” car), this prize still being in the F.A.H.P. collection 74 years later. In the spring of 1938, my mother also got a new Packard, an enlarged Six, as the wheelbase went from 115 inches in 1937 to 122 inches in 1938. This replaced her 1936 One-Twenty and carried License #155. The 1931 Model 826 was still the “school car” with License #154.

On January 11, 1940, 72 years ago this week, my diary recorded the fact that there were just 40 days to go before I could get my driver’s license. I had been waiting for this day since I was eight years old and thought I knew how to drive. I knew having wheels would change my life, I thought for the better. “Cliffey” (Clifford Murray, who worked at Auburn Heights for 50 years) told me: “Buddy boy, your troubles will just be beginning,” but I still couldn’t wait.

Packard came out with a new line of cars in the 1940 model year. The heavy Twelves were a thing of the past, and the new cars had a slightly lower and rounded look with more chrome than before and parking lights on the front fenders. Actually, the One-Twenties and Sixes, which became One-Tens, were changed the least, but they and all other cars in the line were lighter in weight with newly designed straight-eight and six-cylinder engines. When I got my license on my 16th birthday, I was allowed to drive my mother’s 1938 Six to school, but soon thereafter, my father ordered a new light blue One-Ten five-passenger sedan for my use later on. We went to the Packard distributorship on North Broad Street in Philadelphia to pick it up and drive it home, although the new car was not entrusted to me quite yet. My mother got a new 1940 One-Sixty touring sedan with 127-inch wheelbase (the large engine with the shortest of three wheelbases), and my father ordered for himself a new One-Eighty with 138-inch wheelbase, which later became the car he converted to steam (now owned by Bill Rule). Since there were four Packards already and only four low numbers, my future car had license #1974. By early summer, I was allowed to drive it on a regular basis, and the 1938 Six was sold to Anthony A. Dougherty. When the 1940 One-Eighty was converted to steam at the end of 1941, my father came up with an almost-identical car for his everyday use. His second One-Eighty of 1940 was driven 89,000 miles before he got another new car in 1954. So, when World War II came along at the end of 1941, we had six Packards at Auburn Heights, the 1931 “school car,” the 1937 Twelve, and four 1940s, including the experimental steamer. Space was tight in the carriage house, so the Twelve and my One-Ten were often stored in Clarence Walker’s garage at 906 North Jackson Street in Wilmington.

Not much exchange of cars took place during the war, but in 1944, we got another Chalfant-Bowers car, a 1941 One-Twenty with low mileage to replace my mother’s 1940 One-Sixty that was sold to her brother-in-law, Bassett Ferguson, of Ridley Park. Having sold a 1936 Chevy

station wagon with no rear seats in 1944, my father converted the '31 Model 826 sedan to a step-side pick-up truck in 1946, and so it remained until it was scrapped in 1955. Also in 1946, when I returned from the service, I began to drive my 1940 One-Ten again, and it had 77,000 miles on its odometer when I sold it to a Polish fellow in Wilmington in 1950. He drove it another 19,000 miles. Since my father had sold his interest in the Packard Motor Company of Wilmington at the beginning of the war, new Packards stopped flowing toward Auburn Heights.

Work Report: Both Tuesday night and Thursday night, after our holiday recess, were very productive. The 607 project made great steps forward, as the wheels are now on the chassis and it can be pushed around as needed. A lot of time was spent on the steering tie rod, correctly mounting the brake drums, king pins, front wheel bearings, and the new hydraulic brakes. A lot of paint had to be removed from the matching surfaces of all moving parts. The plan now is to install the truss rods and complete the front frame corner plates before putting the boiler in the chassis and lifting the body in place temporarily to simulate the proper weight distribution for fitting the hood. Walter Higgins is anxious to get the hood just right and will bring it to the car for final fitting when the heavy objects are attached to the frame. Those who worked on the Model 607 this week were Bob Jordan (leader), Art Wallace, Butch Cannard, Bill Schwoebel, Mark Russell, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Jerry Novak, and Lou Mandich.

Other projects in progress or completed include installation of new end bearings for the pump drive on the Model 87, building up and resurfacing the aluminum rear case on this same car, and thoroughly checking the engine bearings and differential adjustment, also on the 87. The boiler installation is moving along on the Model 725, with all fittings and piping now hooked up, and additional insulation around the circumference of the boiler. A hydrostatic test revealed no leaks in the boiler, and one or two small ones in the fittings, which have been addressed. The holes in the burner grate were cleaned, and a new stainless liner is planned before the burner is ready to go back under the boiler. Locomotive 402 had some spring hanger problems discovered by Bill Schwoebel when he washed the boiler about two weeks ago, Jim Personti checked this out and found a small bracket broken off. Those working on these projects were Steve Bryce, Jerry Lucas, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Bob Young, Kelly Williams, and Tom Marshall. At Tom's request, Dennis Dragon completely cleaned and lubricated the bench lathe in the shop, and Steve Bryce and Mark Russell started on finishing the large wooden sign that advertises our events on the front bank of Auburn Heights. All had a chance to observe the 607's body with its upholstery and new striping "ready to go."