

January 22, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

DOBLE STEAM CARS: To write on this subject, I should begin by saying that Jim Crank of Redwood City, CA, is the foremost authority on Doble cars today, and he would find corrections necessary in my text on the subject; however, I'll do the best I can.

Abner Doble was an eccentric genius born about 1890. For most of his life he was involved in making improvements in steam boiler and engine design. He attended M.I.T. about 1908-1911 and was very familiar with the Stanleys and the cars they were building at that time. In fact, he owned one and continually tried to improve upon it. He and a very young Ray Stanley, son of F.E., used to race each other on Commonwealth Avenue outside Boston. Undoubtedly the police won, but it's not likely they could catch either of them.

Abner had the idea to build a greatly improved steam car and established a small factory near Detroit for its manufacture. In an attempt to get financing, he was in Wilmington about 1913 in an attempt to interest William Winder Laird. Although the attempt did not bear fruit, about the same time he invented a small atomizing oil burner, suitable for homes and automobiles, and sold his patents to the No-Coal Company, which immediately marketed these burners for home use, becoming the first practical oil burners as we know them today. The Doble-Detroit auto venture was unsuccessful, and although there were rumors that 100 cars were built, not one has ever surfaced in the past 70 years.

Doble's second attempt was in San Francisco, where in 1921 several much-improved cars were turned out that were known as "Doble Simplexes". Utilizing the inventor's boiler/burner design but with a 2-cylinder engine mounted on the rear like a Stanley, great progress was being made but with a high financial drain. Several members of the Doble family invested in Abner's company, which soon moved across the Bay to Emeryville on the outskirts of Oakland.

Undoubtedly, the finest steam cars ever built were turned out at Emeryville between 1924 and 1931, but production was not continuous during this period. Most of the E-model Dobles, of which there were about 24, were built in 1924 and 1925. They were large, heavy and luxurious cars, built to compete with America's finest. They sold for about \$8,000, but since so few were built, the cost of manufacture was several times that figure. They employed Doble's atomizing burner, fired from the top down through a "flash" boiler consisting of over 500 feet of coils made from the best tubing available. By simply turning a switch on the dash, the burner would come on and in about one minute steam pressure and temperature was sufficient to start driving. The engine, still mounted on the rear, was a 4-cylinder cross-compound

using only two piston valves.

By the end of 1925, Doble had again run out of money, but there were a lot of parts, including engines, on hand. In 1929, sufficient financing was available so that another 8 or 10 cars were put together, being called the "F" series. Since body styles had changed, Cadillac and other fine bodies of 1929-31 were utilized, and some of these cars were very stylish. Unfortunately this final Doble effort failed financially as did the others. In his later years, Abner Doble worked on some bus projects, there was at least one Doble rail car in Germany prior to World War II, and he designed steam spraying equipment for the orange growers of California.

My father, not finding his Stanleys challenging enough, bought his first Doble at Cameron Peck's auction in Chicago in 1952. That car was #E-11 built in 1924, with a Murphy body and sliding glass windows. Although he always tinkered with it, my father enjoyed that car very much and drove it on several short tours and to Lakeville, CT, twice to attend the early steam car tours there. Weldin Stumpf and I drove it to Cape Cod and return in 1975. About 1955, dad bought his second Doble, #E-19 of 1925, which had been converted by Charles Briar of San Diego to a bucket-seat speedster with home-made hood. In an early-type restoration here, that car received a Rolls Silver Ghost touring car body and fenders, a new hood, and a 1917 Buick folding top. The third one, arriving at Yorklyn about 1957, was an F-model Coupe of about 1930 with a Cadillac body. My father sold that one a year or two later to Robert M. Chambers of Pittsburgh, and dad drove it to Bedford, PA, for the buyer's people to take delivery. It fetched \$12,500, which was believed to be one of the highest-priced antique cars sold up to that time. I sold E-19 to John D. Cole, then of Dayton, OH, in 1970. This car is believed to be in Florida but has not run for many years. Finally, E-11 was sold to a Mr. Holmes-a-Court of Perth, Australia, in 1980. The car is now maintained in operating condition by the present owner, William Stace-Lloyd of near Sydney, Australia. Of less than 40 Doble steamers built, about 13 are in existence, largely on the West Coast.

Our new working groups are doing well, and more progress on several fronts can be reported from last week's work sessions. Cab work on Locomotive 402, boiler covering and burner work on the 1905 Stanley Model CX, and boiler and burner installation on the 1913 Model 76 are all proceeding. The burner grate for the CX has been patched up and can be used again, but we are trying to find a new 16" grate, a very scarce item used only on this model. The steam pipe repairs to the '18 Model 735 are finally satisfactory, and the old electrical wiring has been removed for installation of the new. Brake and electrical work are in the final stages on the 1922 Model 740, and the front wheel bearings have been cleaned and repacked on several of the Stanleys. A definite plan has been established for upgrading the

wooden-chair cars on the Auburn Valley R.R. We know good progress will continue on many of these things this week.

On Tuesday, January 23, our Finance Committee will meet in the FAHP office at 7:30 to tackle the final budget for 2007. I commend group leaders who have provided some invaluable estimates of cost on necessary projects under their direction. Bob Reilly is back in Colorado and is working on a myriad of things via E-mail and phone contact. On Thursday, the 25th, the Events Committee will meet at the same place and time. The agenda should include finalizing the schedule of our on-site events for 2007.

As mentioned two weeks ago, we have made some promotional commitments during the February 8-10 period, and we hope some available volunteers may be able to help. The easiest one is having a manned table and display at the Newark Senior Center on Friday, the 9th. Set-up can be the afternoon before, or early that morning. Art Wallace has offered to help with this one. The "show" lasts only 4 hours, 10 to 2 on Friday. The second thing is a video presentation and talk to be given at the AACA's Annual Meeting in Philadelphia in connection with the AACA Museum's seminar. Bob Reilly is working on this, but will need help from a few volunteers. I don't know whether this is on Friday, 2/9, or on Saturday morning, 2/10. It should be excellent exposure for FAHP. Thirdly, we have been invited to have a display table with various props at the AACA's trade show in the Sheraton Hotel, adjacent to the Annual Meeting and its seminars. Mike Jones arranged to have the usual \$200 charge waived for us. In addition, they would like a Stanley car to be displayed as a part of our trade show exhibit. An early car would be desirable, probably the H-5 or the K. The Show will go on all day Friday and Saturday, with set-up time Thursday afternoon. This exhibit should be manned as much as possible during the show hours. Can some of you help out?

Bill Schwoebel is very comfortable and is recuperating at home following his back operation. He has learned to knit to help pass the time. Brent Campbell, on the other hand, has been very uncomfortable following an upper-back operation required as a result of his auto accident in Florida several weeks ago. He will have a neck brace for 2 months, and then therapy. We hope both a speedy and full recovery.

Tom