

Earle S. Eckel Sr. (1891-1978): Earle Eckel became a Stanley dealer in his home town of Washington, New Jersey, about 1918. He was also an early auto-gyro pilot who had a contract to fly U.S. Air Mail from an airport at Allentown, Pennsylvania, some 35 miles from his home. While selling several new Stanley condensing cars, about 1919 he took in trade a 1914 Model 712, 20-horsepower non-condensing roadster. Over the next 40 years, he drove this roadster 150,000 miles, first using it as a tow car, then as an advertising vehicle for his garage and auto-gyro business, and finally as an antique.

In the 1920s and 1930s, it was important to make an old car run as well as possible, often using newer parts as the original supply sources dried up. Earle, who was a perfectionist at making things run well, greatly modified his roadster. The original tires were 34 x 4-1/2, mounted on demountable rims with an inflated spare carried on the rear. Earle replaced these with 20" "balloon" tires and lowered the fenders so there was proper distance between tire and fender. Also, he lowered the windshield and sloped it back. He installed a Cruban burner, popular in the '20s and '30s as an after-market replacement for a standard Stanley burner. Cruban or "Empire" burners were well made but heavy, requiring several castings to make the burner complete vs. the Stanley, which had lightweight castings only for the burner and pilot grates. Eckel had his burner fine-tuned to the point that he could rub his white handkerchief across the bottom of the bonnet flap, and it was still white! He carried three pounds pressure on his pilot (the usual is about 25#). On a trip, he was very careful in his purchase of kerosene and would hold a small amount in a glass jar up to the light. If it was not water-white, he wouldn't buy it.

In the early 1930s, Earle Eckel heard of the Philadelphia Old Car Derby that was held annually, and he began driving his Stanley roadster to attend. From this event, the Antique Automobile Club of America was founded in 1935, and he became a charter member. His Stanley had all sorts of advertising painted over the body and hood, but when AACA developed rules regarding such things, he was asked to remove it, which he did. My father met Earle Eckel early in World War II, possibly in Drexel Hill near Philadelphia, where many early gatherings of AACA were held at the Folwell estate. Hyde Ballard had married Mary Folwell, and the Ballards lived with her parents. By 1946, Eckel was calling frequently at Auburn Heights, traveling in his Stanley with his wife Harriet and their younger daughter, fully grown. Somehow, the three of them fit in the single seat of the roadster, with their luggage, tools, parts and pilot fuel being stowed on the deck behind and on the running boards.

I was always fascinated with long-distance travel in a Stanley, culminating in my four "Trans-Con" tours from 1972 to 1989. Many years before, however, in 1949 Earle drove his roadster to Minneapolis and return, and I implored him to furnish details of his trip. He kept a log and eventually gave me a copy. Great stuff! Like my father, he almost never had trouble. However, we hosted a small steam car tour at the Yorklyn Gun Club about 1950, and we played car games. One such game was to shut off your fire at 500 pounds and drive around an oval track as many times as possible (with no fire) as long as the car would move. Earle probably won the game, but in firing up afterward, he slightly scorched his boiler. Making it to Auburn Heights, he lay on his back expanding tubes in our carriage house before driving the 100 miles back to his home in his famous Stanley. He said the boiler had about 125,000 miles on it at that time, but he soon replaced it.

In July 1951, Bob Ostwald, Elwood Wilkins and I, traveling in my 1914 Model 607, met Earle and Harriet Eckel near Pine Brook, New Jersey, about 40 miles east of their home, and we traveled together to the Boston area to attend the third-ever Steam Car Tour held at the Wellesley Inn. We thought nothing of crossing the George Washington Bridge and then followed the Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways to the Charter Oak Bridge south of Hartford. Here we were joined by other antique cars from the Connecticut Valley, all of which were going to a small Saturday meet at the newly restored Sturbridge Village. Three of the Boston-area steamers joined us there, and we traveled together on to Wellesley. The "tour" itself lasted through Saturday evening and all day Sunday, hosted by Stanley Ellis, Frank Gardner, and Ed Pamphilon. George Woodbury of Bedford, New Hampshire, author of "The Story of a Stanley Steamer" drove down in his Model 730 to join us for Sunday's events. On Monday, the Eckels and my contingent started for home, visiting en route Al Garganigo's early car collection at Princeton, Massachusetts, and James Melton's short-lived museum near Norwalk, Connecticut. It was a fun trip.

The Eckels, with the Stanley roadster, had never missed a Glidden Tour Revival, the first of which was in 1946. In 1954, however, the Veteran Motor Car Club of America, sponsors of the tour that year, decreed that only cars made in 1913 and earlier were eligible. It was unfair, but the Eckels could not go. They did participate in a weekend tour that I ran in 1955 for the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania from Wilmington, Delaware, to Easton, Maryland, and return. Many people thought Earle's roadster would not run over 40 m.p.h., as his usual road speed was 37-38. I had my father's Model 87, quite a fast car in those days with its original wooden frame. On many miles of level road, I kept the big Stanley at about 50 and was sure I would leave the Eckel roadster far behind. After a good many such miles, however, I looked behind, and he was still on my tail. The famous roadster was fast when it needed to be.

In the 1950s, Eckel made his roadster look more original by putting back its original wheels, raising the fenders, and straightening the windshield. He drove it on the Glidden Tour to Cleveland, Columbus, and Detroit in 1953, and to a Steam Car Tour at Kent, Ohio in 1957. In the mid '50s, however, he completed a first-class restoration of his 1903 Model C Stanley, and the same quality restoration of Bob Lyon's 1908 Model F. The Model C won numerous prizes, and at the Apple Blossom Festival in Winchester, Virginia, about 1964, he carried Lucy Baines Johnson, the younger daughter of President Lyndon Johnson.

Harriet Eckel died about 1955. Earle married her lifelong best friend Agnes, who accompanied him on his later trips and to AACA functions around Philadelphia. Agnes was very popular in the antique car community, and I had them as passengers on two steam car tours in 1969 and 1970, first in the Model 87 and then in the 725. Earle Eckel, who no longer enjoyed driving, still accepted a ride in a steamer whenever it was possible, and I was honored to have him as a passenger. He was interested in and very supportive of the Wilmington & Western Railroad in its early years. I last saw him in 1976, when I stayed overnight in his son Revell's trailer, en route home from Lakeville, Connecticut, in our Model 87.

Earle sold his famous roadster to a museum in Toms River, New Jersey, along with at least two other cars. More than 10 years later, it passed through Carl Amsley's hands, being owned "between times" by Bill Shekooley of Edmonton, Alberta, and Alex Joyce of Nashville, Tennessee. Finally about 1990 it was bought by Eric Haartz of Lincoln, Massachusetts, who drove it on a 12-day tour of northern New England in 1991. To my knowledge, it is still owned by Haartz, but he doesn't use it. Donald Eckel, son of Revell and grandson of Earle and a member of FAHP, still owns and operates the 1903 Model C and Lyon's 1908 Model F. Don has two sons, both interested in the cars, and the family still has a small museum that Earle started. They do restoration work for others on Stanley cars. I'm sure they can correct some of the information in this article.

Work Report: On Tuesday, August 16, 13 volunteers were on hand: Jerry Lucas (in charge), Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Steve Bryce, Brent McDougall, Dennis Tiley, Anne K. H. Cleary, Neal Sobocinski, Matt Richard, Tim Ward, Tom Marshall, Jared Schoenly, and Bob Stransky. The new boiler designated for the Model 87 was hydrostatically tested to 900#, and location of fitting holes, top and bottom, were located and carefully marked. On the '37 Packard, more re-wiring in the dash area was completed, and the speedometer cable was attached. New frame rod bushings and springs were fitted on the H-5 engine, and the engine was installed again in the car. Shims 1/8" thick are still needed to keep the capper case from hitting the angle braces from the perch poles.

The 725's boiler was flushed again with kerosene and filled with water in preparation for its trip to Kinzers on August 19. On the Model 735, the rebuilt pilot was installed, the branch forks reattached with new copper washers, and everything in that area was "mudded up." The return line from the condenser to the water tank was connected, and the car was made ready for testing.

On Wednesday, August 17, seven volunteers appeared during the session, viz: Dave Leon (in charge), Gary Fitch, Bill Schwoebel, Tom Marshall, Jeff Kennard, Steve Bryce, and Bob Jordan. The speedometer cable housing for the Mountain Wagon, having been prepared and painted, still had a blockage, possibly caused by a combination of heavy grease and a broken cable link. Numerous attempts to clear it failed, but it was left with grease-cutter soaking inside for another attempt later. The vaporizer was removed from the burner in the Model EX for the purpose of improving the pilot, which has been too strong.

The Model 735 was fired up and driven several miles, and all appeared to work well. The oil pump was set back again on the Model 725. The Model 76 had kerosene added and the pump drive oiled. Fuel levels and tire pressures were checked on all cars to be used on 8/19 and 8/20.

On Thursday, August 18, 12 volunteers attended the session, as follows: Tom Marshall (in charge), Bob Stransky, Ted Kamen, Steve Bryce, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Paul Kratunis, Richard Bernard, Matt Richard, Paul Blau, Nate Blau, and Devon Hall. The new clincher tire for the left rear of the H-5 was stretched further by turning the stretcher 90 degrees. For the past 75 years, clincher tires have not been available in 27" rim size, so we use 8:75 x 1:05 (metric) tires, which equates to 26" rim size, and then stretch them one inch in diameter. On the '37 Packard, the connected speedometer head was fastened into the dash, the switch for the electric fuel pump was fastened in, and several new wires were run where needed.

On the Model 87 boiler project, the drilling of fitting holes was begun in the new boiler, and a few copper tubes were removed from the old boiler in preparation for its scrapping. Since scrap copper is worth roughly 30 times that of scrap steel, it pays us to separate the copper from the steel of the boiler. The nozzle size for the pilot pin in the Model EX was reduced by peening, brazing, and re-drilling, and the vaporizer was re-installed in the burner on the car. It is ready for testing.

The boiler in the Model 735 did not syphon after its run on Wednesday, so it was filled in preparation for its possible use on 8/19. Castor oil was applied to the brake linings on the Model 740, and the Model 76 was further prepped for its trip to Kinzers on Friday and the Wilmington & Western R.R. on Saturday. The Blas, father and son, had an informal lecture on the operation of our Model EX.

In mid-day on Wednesday, August 17, Dave Leon, Mike Ciosek, and Pete Higgins gave rides on the A.V.R.R. for a group of about 50 summer camp children, using our faithful "Diesel" locomotive. On Friday, several in the driving program had a pleasant 60-mile round-trip to the annual Threshermen's Reunion at Kinzers, PA, using our Models 76, 725, and 740 under the supervision of Steve Bryce, Richard Bernard, and Jerry Lucas. On Saturday, the 76 and the 735 made the trip to the Summerfest at the Wilmington & Western R.R., and both cars ran well. Jerry Novak was also there with his '31 Chevrolet, and Bob Wilhelm and Robert Hopkins had Bob's 735 touring.