

“Trans-Cons” on Which I Did Not Participate: Millard W. Newman, a cigar magnate and Rolls Royce collector from Tampa, Florida, chaired about 12 “Transcontinental Reliability Tours” for cars built in 1914 and earlier, most of which were under the auspices of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America. These tours covered the period from 1968 until around 2000. I went with our 1912 Stanley Model 87 on four of them, 1972, 1979, 1982, and 1989, and I have written stories about all of them. This story tells what little I know concerning some of the other tours, as many of my good friends attended most of them. Never were there more than three steam cars on one of the “Trans-Cons.”

The first such long tour of over three weeks was in 1968 from New York to San Francisco. I think about 35 cars took part. Carl Amsley, well known in the steam car community for his dozens of Stanley sales, often to people who had no idea what they were getting into, had sold a 10-H.P. Stanley less than a week before the tour started, and the new owner, who knew nothing about steam, intended to drive it on the cross-country tour! Carl reluctantly agreed to go along as far as Chicago, to teach the owner how to drive his new toy. While they made it that far on schedule, the steamer and its owner became a thorn in the side of many of the other tour participants, with his increasing problems and unfriendly attitude. About 1:00 A.M., I was awakened by a phone call from Iowa from the Stanley’s problematical owner (I had never heard of him until that call). He wanted me to prescribe an easy remedy for him to fix his Stanley so he could continue with the tour. It soon became clear that he had scorched his boiler. There was not much I could do for him 1,000 miles away. He dropped out but apparently showed up at the end of the tour in San Francisco, where he lived. Millard Newman and his committee decided they never wanted to accept a steam car on any future tours.

I have written in great detail about my “trip of a lifetime” in 1972 from Montreal to Tijuana (obviously the committee re-considered to accept my entry). In 1976, our Bicentennial Year, the third “Trans-Con” was planned from Seattle to Philadelphia, arriving at Independence Hall in time for the July 4 celebrations. I was too much involved with Bicentennial events near home to think of going. The tour left Seattle in early June and hit a blinding snowstorm and very slippery roads crossing the Bitter Roots in western Montana. The group passed through Delaware and had lunch at Buena Vista on its last day into Philadelphia. Bill Harrah, the famous casino operator and car collector from Reno, and his wife were on that tour, as well as a Delaware couple, Don and Dorcas Farquhar. No steamers participated.

I went on the next two “Trans-Cons,” in 1979 from Key West to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and in 1982 from Pebble Beach, California, to Jekyll Island, Georgia. Brent Campbell completed both of these tours in his Stanleys, first in a 1913 Model 76 and then in a 1910 Model 80 (which had been built to his specifications). These tours and the trouble I experienced have also been well documented in the “News.”

In 1985, the long tour was promoted as “Portland to Portland,” starting in Maine and ending in Oregon, crossing the continent almost entirely in Canada. I signed up with the 87 again and also made hotel reservations for friends Howard Henry, Whitney Snyder, and Ernie Gill. About two months before the tour started, however, Ruth said she would marry me, so I stayed closer to home and canceled out (on the tour, not the engagement). A former South African, Derrick DuToit, made the trip in a Model 76 Stanley, along with Brent Campbell in his Model 80.

Millard Newman went “big time” in 1987, when the Trans-Con crossed the British Isles instead of North America. Ruth and I signed up, but I got cold feet as the time approached. People and cars were transported round-trip on the Cunard Liner “Q.E.II,” and a three-week tour took place around England, Scotland, and Wales. This time two steamers took part again, Brent Campbell in his Model 85 named “Big Green” and Alex Joyce in his Model 85, the first of the nine reproduction 85s, this one built by Carl Amsley in 1983. Other than fuel problems, I think they both made out well.

In 1989, the Trans-Con was from Galveston to Bar Harbor (actually Ellsworth, Maine), and for the only time in the history of these long tours, three steamers took part: Brent Campbell in his 85, Alex Joyce in his 85, and we in our 87. This was Ruth's only "Trans-Con," and fortunately it was the one with the least trouble -- practically none at all. It, too, has been well recorded.

The early Trans-Cons were at four-year intervals ('68, '72, '76), but participants enjoyed them so much they urged Newman to have them more often. The intervals were reduced to three years, and finally to two years ('79, '82, '85, '87, '89, etc.). Although many of our friends continued to participate, Ruth and I lost track in the 1990s, and I think the final one was held about 2000 just before Millard Newman died.

By the late 1980s, several participants were complaining that all the tours were "one-way"; that is, they began about 3,000 miles from where they ended, making the shipping of participating cars expensive. The first Red Rock Tour, a three-week loop around the Southwest, was offered, beginning and ending at the same place where trailers could be stored for the duration of the tour. This concept and the tour itself were very popular, and these independent invitational tours have been offered biannually in many parts of the country. They are still going strong and usually have at least two steamers among the approximate 30 cars. Our good friends in the hobby, Brent and Martha Campbell*, Don Bourdon, Mike and Kathryn May, Alex Joyce, Charlie Johnson and Sandy Heefner, and the Lederer family (not steam car people) are "regulars."

* Brent Campbell has not participated for a few years.

Work Report: On Tuesday, May 16, nine volunteers were on hand, as follows: Mark Bodenstab (in charge), Steve Bryce, Dennis Dragon, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Dave Leon, Tom Marshall, Neal Sobocinski, and Larry Tenny.

The dry-wall lift was repaired, and the remaining sections of the dry wall ceiling were fit and hung in place. The Stanley Model 87 was fired up and driven 3 miles, but the water-pumping problem is still not fixed. With the prospect of the correct rubber coverings on the way, the running boards on the '37 Packard were prepped and repainted. The window fans were installed in the museum's attic.

On Wednesday, May 17, six volunteers were on hand for the afternoon session: Richard Bernard (in charge), Larry Tenny, Jerry Lucas, Dave Leon, Mark Russell, and Tom Marshall.

A prospective volunteer was given a tour by Richard Bernard. The Model 740's front end was greased. The Rauch & Lang electric was prepped for upcoming use. The pilot system on the Model H-5 was thoroughly cleaned and tested -- all is very good. On the leaking banjo bolt for the Model 735's pilot, the brass washer was annealed, but it still leaked, so a soft copper washer will be found or made.

The pumping problem on the Model 87 was worked on again. All water lines were checked and found to be clear. It is now believed that the problem has been at the boiler check. Slight modifications have been made, and it will be tested again very soon. Lexol was applied to the leather seats on the Models 71, 76, 87, and 820.

On Thursday, May 18, 11 volunteers attended: Jerry Novak (in charge), Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Tim Ward, Mark Russell, Jared Schoenly, Geoff Fallows, Jim Personti, Kelly Williams, Bob Stransky, and Ted Kamen.

The right front tire on the Mountain Wagon had lost pressure, so it was inflated to 65# for further checking. One of the seat cushions on this car has a serious tear, so this was switched to a less-used location until it can be repaired. The four new wheels for the Model 607 received an application of Kwik-Poly in preparation for painting. Light sanding and a second coat will be required before these wheels are painted. On the '37 Packard, the right running board is now painted and ready for the new tread when it arrives (and if it fits). A new bronze "cow-catcher" for Locomotive 402 has been received, and it will be drilled and painted for attachment to the pilot on this locomotive.