

Steam Cars Other Than Stanleys: Although many really did not know what they were, in the mid-to-late 20th century, nearly everyone had heard of a Stanley steamer. When they learned these were real automobiles propelled by steam, they figured no one else really built such an unusual vehicle. In fact, however, there were 125 makes of American steam cars, most of them built just before and after 1900. The White Sewing Machine Company in Cleveland built 8,000 steam cars from 1901 to 1910, during which time the Stanleys built less than 6,000. Stanleys were made for a longer period of time, 1897 to 1924 (or 1926 if you count the “SV” period), with about two years out (1899–1901) during the Locomobile agreement.

A few publishers such as Floyd Clymer and John Bentley offered inexpensive books on steam cars, in which they mentioned most of the makes that had been marketed to the public. Some of the offerings were simply promotional pieces, and it’s doubtful if their promoters actually finished a car that would run and could be demonstrated. People like Henry Ford experimented with a steam car several years before the Ford Motor Company was founded in 1903. Bicycle builders got into the act with 3- and 4-wheel vehicles. George Eli Whitney of East Boston probably built one of the first partially successful steamers in 1896 and gave up on a try to climb Mount Washington two months before F. O. and Flora Stanley did it successfully on August 31, 1899, while promoting a Stanley-designed Locomobile.

In addition to traveling many miles in a Stanley, I’ve had the pleasure of riding in and driving a few other makes of “steamers.” In the late 1940s, I rode with my father in his 1902 Toledo Jr. Steam Car made by the American Bicycle Company of Toledo, Ohio. Within a year or two thereafter, I rode briefly with Murray M. Brown in his 1909 Model O White, originally owned by General Electric’s Charles Steinmetz. The greatest White experience was with Dr. John P. Miller in his big 1907 Model G, a car similar to the one in which President Theodore Roosevelt is pictured near his home at Oyster Bay, New York. In 1980, I drove our 1907 Model H at the time we sold it to the Holmes-a-Court Museum in Perth, Australia, and a 1905 Model E (rear entrance) White when Weldin Stumpf and I restored it for Ted Jamison in 1983.

Lane steam cars, built in Poughkeepsie, New York, from about 1901 until 1911, were quite successful and attractive, although the later ones were underpowered. I rode in a 1902 Lane from Windsor to Woodstock, Vermont, with the car’s owner, Arthur Eldredge, in 1977. Grout steam cars, built in Orange, Massachusetts, had several styles during the six or seven years of their production. Jim Beun, then of Washington, D.C., drove his 1902 Grout on the Glidden Tour through New England in 1954. Locomobile steamers, successors to the very first Stanleys, were built from 1899 to 1904, mostly in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and in the year 1901, more Locomobiles were built (over 1,000 cars) than any other make in America. Mobiles were an offshoot of Locomobile, and about 600 were built between 1900 and 1904 in Tarrytown, New York. Lesser makes like Prescott and Marlboro were reasonably successful for very short periods of time right after 1900.

Arguably, the cars built by Abner Doble, first in Detroit, then in San Francisco, and finally in Emeryville, California, were the most famous of all. While none of the Detroit cars survived, about 15 of the 40 or so built in California still exist. They were far and above the finest and most expensive steam cars ever built, and their decade was the 1920's. My father owned three, and still owned two at the time of his death in 1969. The Dobles were both sophisticated and complicated. Our 1924 Doble #E-11 with a California top, was driven the most of those housed at Auburn Heights. My father drove it twice to steam car tours at Lakeville, Connecticut (1955 and 1958), once to Rockville and once to Easton, both in Maryland, and Weldin Stumpf and I drove it to and from a steam car tour on Cape Cod in 1975.

Work Nights: Projects last week at Auburn Heights included: On the Model 76, Steve Bryce and Jim Personti worked to get the rear properly hooked up with the recently installed engine and installed new O-rings on the rear cover. Steve also strengthened the pump box. Bill Schwoebel, Jeff Pollock and Dave Leon fired up the Model K and drove the car around the grounds to test the adjustment of the rear gears. A new body shop has been selected to continue the 607 project. New Garden Collision & Restoration and proprietor Ashley Ritter began receiving parts last week and agreed to an aggressive painting schedule to help move the project along. Ted Kamen and Dennis Dragon painted the top of the 607 frame, and Butch Cannard continued stripping paint from the body moldings around the car's water tank. Emil Christofano and Jeff Pollock continued reassembling the rear suspension of the Rauch & Lang. Jay Williams and Ed Paschall completed touching up paint and securing the trestles for the upper-level track bed on the standard gauge train layout. Steve Bryce added packing to and tightened the flexible steam pipe joint on the Model 735. Kelly Williams, Bob Stransky and Dan Citron repacked the firing up valve on the Model 725, and Art Wallace cleaned around the car's pumps and oil tank, hoping to track down a leak in the oiling system. On Friday, Tom Marshall and Bill Schwoebel traveled to Waynesboro, PA, to pick up the new wheels for the Mountain Wagon from Bill Calimer. On Saturday, member Ed Lee treated Pete Parlett, Jerry Novak, Butch Cannard, Susan Randolph, Kevin Hujber, Dan Citron and Tim Ward to a High-Wheel Bike Training session at his home in Chesapeake City, MD. After the morning ride, Ed treated the group to a superb lunch at the Tap Room Crabhouse.