

April 9, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

An overnight trip from Boston: With gasoline rationing going into effect in July, 1942, it was a very bad idea for me to take my '40 Packard 110 to Boston on Columbus Day that year, hopefully to use it while in my freshman term at M.I.T. I seemed to have enough coupons to get up there, but as rationing became even more restrictive, the car was put in dead storage a month later a few blocks from where I was rooming. There it stayed until the semester was over at the end of January, 1943. My trip home for Christmas was by train both ways.

With mid-year exams over, my roommate Dick Mullikin and I planned to leave Boston as soon as we could and head home. Dick had been a classmate at Wilmington Friends School. The timing of his last exam and a heavy snowstorm caused us to leave, with tire chains on, about 4:30 P.M. Dick knew I would be doing all the driving, so he got drunk on a bottle of rum and his companionship was limited until after he had a long nap and awoke about 3 A.M. The snow was packed on the main road, so I removed the chains before we reached Wellesley. Soon thereafter it got dark and the rest of our trip was in darkness. I have tried to reconstruct but I can't understand how I was able to buy fuel through the middle of the night, as filling stations were not supposed to sell gas after 7 P.M, and with almost no one traveling, there was no reason for any of them to be open. The Packard got 15 m.p.g. at best, and I don't think the tank held much over 15 gallons. The total distance, using Route 202 and the Bear Mountain Bridge, was about 380 miles. We made our way over snow-covered roads through Sturbridge and Stafford Springs to the Charter Oak Bridge across the Connecticut River. On the far side of the bridge, I hit a terrible pothole and was surprised it didn't damage the tire or something worse. We kept coming through the "clock towns" of Bristol, Terryville and Thomaston, then Watertown, Woodbury, Newtown and Danbury. We crossed the Bear Mountain Bridge right at 12 midnight. In North Jersey, the roads were still packed with hard snow and ice, but with no traffic, we moved along with no delays. Mullikin finally woke up and I had a companion for the last 3 hours.

At just about 6 A.M., we pulled in at Mullikin's parents' home in a new section of Westover Hills, I dropped him off, and headed for Yorklyn. I do remember that the gas gauge was showing empty at this point, and I drove on faith for the last 9 miles, drifting in neutral down the hills, supposedly to save fuel. The Packard and I made it to Auburn Heights, I had to awaken my parents to let me in, and soon the little Packard went into dead storage again until I drove it to New Mexico in June, 1944. Following World War II, my father and I used this route from Boston often, and both the Mountain Wagon and my Model 607 Stanley were driven home over these roads in 1946.

As to the Packard 110: I was issued ration coupons for the trip to New Mexico as I was traveling "on orders". In the oil country of the southwest, gasoline was more readily available, and sometimes a friendly service station would sell it to a serviceman without coupons. So, during the 8 months at Roswell, NM, I visited Carlsbad Caverns, White

Sands, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque twice (once "on orders"). I then drove it overnight again from Roswell to Oklahoma City, 500 miles, when I was transferred to Will Rogers Field. In late May, 1945, when I was about to go overseas, my parents came by train to Oklahoma City and drove the little Packard back to Yorklyn where it went again into dead storage. Finally when I was released in August, 1946, the car went into daily use again, was repainted from the original light blue to a dark green, and was driven a lot until I sold it in 1950 with 77,000 miles. Sigmund Dobek of Wilmington drove it another 19,000 and gave it up late in '52 with 96,000 miles. Its top speed was 77 m.p.h. I tried to top that several times.

Steve Jensen did some track leveling last week and pronounced its condition satisfactory for trial runs next Saturday, April 14. Bill Schwoebel has asked all who can come to show up about 10 A.M. for firing and testing the locomotives, as it will be just two weeks before our initial charter event here on Sunday, April 29. Jim Sank plans to take one of the wooden cars for lettering this week, and also intends to finish the body stripe on the Model 735. Art Sybell has the painting done on the four "captain's chair" cars, except for the gold or yellow trim. He has also started on the construction of the closet to house gift shop inventory in the museum. Hopefully, the center section of the museum floor can get its second coat of paint this week, so we can move cars around and attend to mechanical things on a few of them by the end of next week (about April 20). Kelly Williams, Steve Bryce, Art Wallace and I fired up the 76 last Tuesday, and on Thursday Steve, Jim Personti, and Jeff Fallows repacked pumps and cleaned check valves on this car. Since that time, I've replaced the needle valve feeding the water-cooled brakes, and the water column is off for replacement of the 3-tube indicator. Jerry Lucas adjusted the rear gears in the Mountain Wagon, and it is ready for testing on the road. Richard, Art Wallace, and Dave Lumley worked on packing glands on the engine of the Model 78 roadster, and Art and Dave installed the engine cover, after Art and Richard had made and affixed new gaskets to the baffles. We fear the water tank may be leaking on this car, and it is about to be lifted out for further inspection. Butch did a lot of printing and cutting of promotional supplies, and Bill Schwoebel finished painting the locomotives. They look nice! Walter Higgins took the hood of the Model 740 to his shop for repainting, after having his paint expert match the body color. Anne Cleary held an Events Committee meeting last Tuesday which was well-attended. A Steam Car Tour Committee meeting was held here tonight.

Bob Reilly wants me to remind those who have not renewed their membership for 2007 that we would like to know about your participation in the Steam Car Tour, June 18-22. Those who have renewed received a questionnaire with their new membership card asking on what days and to what extent they'd like to take part. Please get these questionnaires back to the office so we can prepare the cars from the collection that will be used that week.

We were delighted to have Dave Lumley visit with us last Thursday, and to participate fully in our work session. He and his family were visiting their relatives and friends in this area over Easter vacation. Finally, we hope speedy recoveries to Alan Berry from a prostate operation, to

Jerry Lucas who has struggled with a low form of pneumonia for many weeks, and to Ron Turochy who has serious respiratory problems. Get well soon, one and all! Tom