

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 16, 2006

Our "Big Cars" (Packards, 1924–37): I was 13 in 1937 and had been begging my father for a Model T Ford that I could run in the meadow and around the fields near Auburn Heights. The going price for "T's" was from \$5 to \$25 in those days, with \$15 being the average. Naturally these were usually late model T's built in the 1920s. I thought there was a 50-50 chance that he might get me one.

One day in November that year, I came home from school, and he said, "Go out in the shop, there is a surprise there." I felt sure my dream had come true. As I entered I saw instead a large new car, which took up most of the space. He had bought himself the '37 Packard Twelve still in our collection. While I was always excited about the arrival of a new Packard, this excitement was tempered, indeed, as I realized I was never going to have my Model T. I learned later that my father's old friend, Jake Noznesky of Kennett Square, a longtime Model T operator, had recommended against it, fearing I would get into trouble. Two very wise men of an earlier generation probably made a sound decision, but I was disappointed. (Lou Mandich, an FAHP member, is in possession of Jake's old Model T truck, in which "Jake the junk man" collected scrap metal in this part of the country for many years.)

My father was proud of the fact that he got a very good price on the Packard. He said it listed for \$5,100, which is higher than any of the Packard books tell us, but possibly it did with radio, heater, defroster, chrome wheel rings, and "sidemount" spares with tire covers and mirrors, all of which were on this Packard. With his dealer discount and year-end close-out of the '37 models, he said he paid \$2,600. Actually, he had bought a '38 Super Eight Club Sedan in October '37, and this 13-year-old liked the '38 styling better, with the "broad-shouldered look" of the higher front fenders and new dash treatment. However, my father liked the '37, and indeed it was a better car and the last year of 144-inch wheelbase on the largest models.

When I grew up, we always had a "big car" for trips that was not used on a daily basis. My first recollection was a 1924 First Series Straight Eight, seven-passenger touring car. This was a fine car, the first Packard with four-wheel brakes and was used all summer, starting in 1925, for trips to and from Rehoboth Beach. Next came a 1928 Model 543 Straight Eight seven-passenger closed sedan, in which my parents, my mother's sister, and I went all around Florida early in '28. The first three months of 1932, my parents rented a small house in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and my dad drove this car the 460 miles from Yorklyn in one day (less than 13 hours). After a month there, Joe Stoeckle, who worked for the Packard agency in Wilmington, drove a new '32 Big Eight seven-passenger sedan from Wilmington to Southern Pines, delivering the new car and returning with the old one. He left Southern Pines at 6 A.M., and arrived in Wilmington at 4:15 the same day, running 60 m.p.h. most of the time. This big '28 Packard was hard to sell as a used car and sat in the Wilmington agency for several months with a price tag of \$450.

I liked the '32, but it was never one of my father's favorites. In late summer of 1934, we went in it to the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago and returned via Detroit. My dad had his eye on a Twelve seven-passenger limousine (which had a divider window and black leather in front). He wanted a '34 left-over model as the styling had changed drastically on the '35 models, which had a rounded appearance and most of the chrome removed. At the Packard factory, they showed him six or eight cars of the description he wanted, he picked one and drove it home. Joe Stoeckle was along on this trip as well, and he followed in the "old" '32, which was sold to a used car dealer in Philadelphia soon after our return. We went on a six-week trip to Nova Scotia and the Gaspé Peninsula in the '34 Twelve in the summer of 1936. The roads were dusty and rough, and this was the car that was dropped onto the deck of a ferry boat in the Minas Basin at the head of the Bay of Fundy. Nevertheless, I loved the car and was sorry (at the time) to have it replaced by our present '37, which turned out to be the last of our "big cars," but not the last of our Packards.