

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 30, 2008

Movie Companies and Our Cars: Twice during the Magic Age of Steam years (1971–1977), we were approached by movie companies to provide cars for the films they were making. Although great promises were made as to what they would pay, in neither case was it rewarding for us. About 1973 a small company in Princeton, New Jersey, was planning a fun film, hopefully to be used as a short-subject comedy for New Jersey Public Television. They came up with the title *The Great New Jersey Steam and Air Race* and planned to film a gyro-copter and our Model H-5 Stanley at many locations from the northern tip of New Jersey to Cape May. No one was to know which would win the race. Weldin Stumpf, accompanied by his brother Charles, agreed to take the Stanley on his open trailer to the first filming point.

Stumpf, the driver of the H-5, was outfitted with a duster and cap and a false beard and was supposed to accommodate the filming crew with shots at four or five locations a day as they moved southward through New Jersey. One was at a covered bridge near Belvidere where the Stanley entered one end and a group of cyclists entered the other at the same time. They all came out backward at high speed. Another was showing the Stanley stalled on a railroad crossing at Whippany, New Jersey, with a steam locomotive on a tourist railroad fast approaching. The sequence indicated that the Stanley was out of steam, but the photographer shot a picture of the steam gauge, which stood at 500#. Still another location was at Batsto in the Pine Barrens. In all, there were about 10 locations, to be done in two days (an impossible schedule), with the car moving between sites, sometimes 30 miles apart, on the trailer. At almost all filming places, the gyro-copter was hovering overhead with a ridiculous-looking pilot flying close to the ground. Of course, it was touch-and-go as to which vehicle was ahead.

The sad thing was that Stumpf, hurrying to accommodate the filming crew, got the Stanley on fire and badly burned his hands and arms. In addition, he scorched the boiler. Finished for that day and in agony, he was brought home by Charles after they promised the movie crew they would be back as soon as the boiler was replaced and the driver was able. We had a boiler here ready to go, and Bob Parke and I changed the boiler, and Bob repainted the hood that night, finishing at 3:00 A.M. The next day the two Stumpfs returned to South Jersey with Weldin's hands and arms bandaged, and the final filming was done at Cape May. Neither won the race. Approaching the finish line in a dead heat, the gyro-copter and the Model H-5 were fused together and both crossed the line as one with the Stanley climbing into the air as in *Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang*. We were to receive a percentage of the proceeds from the film, but there were no proceeds. I had a lot of trouble getting anything, but finally we did get a copy of the 16 mm. sound film that chronicled the event. Depending on your point-of-view, it may or may not be worth watching.

A few years later, we were engaged by a big-time movie crew that was filming segments for *Ragtime*. This was the story of Stanford White, Evelyn Nesbitt, and Harry K. Thaw, which took place in 1906 (Thaw murdered White over Nesbitt), and it turned out to be James Cagney's last film. They were looking for a street scene in Philadelphia as it was in 1906 but had to settle for a turn-of-the-20th-century street in Lower Manhattan. The one thing missing 70 years later was an early street car. Thinking our Mountain Wagon would be a good substitute, they agreed to pay \$1,500 if we would bring the big car to New York for the filming. Again, Weldin Stumpf said he would do it, so he trailered the "Wagon" to a motel near the west end of the Lincoln Tunnel, where the movie company paid for his room. He was to be on-site in Lower Manhattan shortly after dawn. With the Mountain Wagon loaded with properly costumed bit actors, several sequences were filmed during a period of a few hours. When the film came out, the Wagon appeared for about 10 seconds, pulling up to a curb, supposedly to unload passengers. Again the film company reneged on paying. They said it was not worth \$1,500. Eventually we settled for \$1,000. It was not a particularly rewarding experience.