

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 26, 2009

Stanleys Can Be Vulnerable: When I was a new Stanley owner in the late 1940s, I wanted to show off. My father had told me many stories about how Stanleys could out-run "gas" cars with almost unlimited power. I wanted to find out. The trouble was my car was only a 10-horsepower Model 607, the lightest and frailest of the Stanleys. My father helped me gear it higher, and it would easily cruise at 45 M.P.H. I had driven the car home from Randolph, Massachusetts, in December 1946, with the original engine. In 1947 and 1948, it was used a lot, including participation in the '48 Glidden Tour in Pennsylvania. I was lucky and made out well, the only real trouble being with a back-firing burner. In early spring of 1949, I wanted to make the car look as nice as it ran, so it was partially dismantled in Bill Allaband's paint shop in Kennett Square and prepared by me for its new paint. It was first on the road again the day of the very first tour of the new Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania to Valley Forge Park. Despite working all night the night before putting on the finishing touches, I didn't get away from Kennett Square until early afternoon and met the other cars on the tour coming out of the park as I tried to enter. My father and Homer Kratz had a good day in my dad's newly restored 1916 Model 725.

About a month after that first trip, I had been somewhere in Delaware County and returned home via Kennett where my father had his little 4-8-4 steam locomotive operating in place at a local hobby show in the basement of the American Legion Building. He was powering the locomotive with a steam line from the boiler of a Stanley just outside. With my car, I pulled in alongside the Stanley he was using as a power source. When it came time to leave, I had to back up an incline onto South Broad Street. This I did, but when I attempted to go forward, slightly uphill toward the traffic light, something broke in the engine. An original wrist pin, crystallized from metal fatigue, had sheared off, and the piston on that side of the engine went through the cylinder block. Raymond Noznesky came around with his tow truck and moved the Stanley to his father's Royal Garage. Now I had a beautiful-looking Stanley that wouldn't run.

My father always had lots of spare parts, and he had another engine of exact design that we put in the car, and I was back in business. Still, it had not sunk in that my driving habits undoubtedly contributed to the engine failure. I enjoyed the Model 607 that summer and entered it on the Glidden Tour of 1949 that began in Gettysburg and ended in Wilmington, Delaware, just prior to the annual Fall Meet of AACA at the Devon Horse Show grounds. I was in charge of hotel reservations for the Glidden Tour, and the tour committee took responsibility for making (and guaranteeing) participants' reservations. I entered my Stanley, and my father took his Mountain Wagon. As we fired up at Auburn Heights prior to starting for Gettysburg, 100 miles away, the lead blew out of the fusible plug on my car, and I changed it with very hot water blowing under boiler pressure into the firebox on top of the burner grate. Finally it was replaced, I fired up again, and we were on our way. The car did not steam well going to Gettysburg, and my passenger, Bill Carr, and I had headaches when we reached the starting point. That night we dropped the burner to find over half the tiny holes choked with asbestos (from the removal of the fusible plug). Poking out the holes solved the problem, and the car ran very well for the next five days or so.

Showing off again, I passed several of the tour cars while climbing over the Blue Ridge near the Skyline Drive. The little Stanley would easily do it. My foolish prank caught up with me about two days later. Moving along at 35–40 M.P.H. on level terrain in Tidewater Virginia, a loud banging noise in the engine told me something had broken. Inspection revealed another blown cylinder head, and I was out of business. The engine was blocked out of gear and the car towed to Tappahannock, where I found a garage that would keep it for a few days. I went back in a week or so and towed it home on its own wheels with a self-steering tow bar. Wrist pin fracture had again caused this serious engine breakdown. A welder near Village Green, Pennsylvania, repaired both fractured cylinder blocks, and one was re-installed, this time with new wrist pins fabricated by my father. While that problem was corrected, the welding had softened the valve seats, and they scored after 300 miles. Still another cylinder block was fastened to the engine frame, and, with a lot more care from the operators, it lasted well until the engine was removed in 2008 for the car's complete restoration. I like it when people say to me, "You never have any trouble."