

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 15, 2014

The Longest Days in a Stanley: The Stanley twins knew their cars were not to be recognized as practical for very long trips, mainly because of their limited range on water consumption (average, one mile per gallon). This is why the Stanleys never entered their cars on the original Glidden Tours (1905–1914). Despite this, in 1899 F. O. Stanley drove one of the first Locomobiles home to Newton from Tarrytown, New York, over 200 miles, possibly in one day. His brother, F. E., routinely drove from Newton to New York City before 1910, about 240 miles through Springfield (this route offered the best roads) in 6½ hours. A prominent local man, Dwight Hollingsworth, told me his uncle “routinely” drove his condensing Stanley from his home in Iowa to the West Coast and back, but this was never confirmed.

The daily records for most miles in a Stanley have been made in the “collecting” period. Coming home from the 1950 Glidden Tour that terminated in Rochester, New York, Leroy Benge, accompanied by his wife, Emma, drove his 1915 Model 720 from Elmira, New York, to Yorklyn, Delaware, in one day. Detouring to visit friends in York County, Pennsylvania, en route, their odometer showed 291 miles when they arrived home. During the 1951 race between a Model 65 Stanley and a Stoddard-Dayton from Chicago to New York, the daily mileages are unknown, but it was won by the Stanley (now owned by Bob Reilly).

Details are available on the longest daily mileage I made in a Stanley, June 29, 1972, from Aberdeen, South Dakota, to Baker, Montana, 314 miles. This was on the first transcontinental reliability tour I completed in our 1912 Model 87. Having reservations in advance and knowing it was to be a long day, Jim Johnson (my passenger for this portion of the trip) and I left Aberdeen before 6 a.m. and headed west. Since our first water stop was nearly 100 miles away, I drove at 25 to 30 m.p.h., knowing that water mileage is improved at slow speeds. We had that part of South Dakota to ourselves on a still summer morning; it was beautiful. By about 10:30, we had made our first water stop and were approaching Mobridge, South Dakota, where a local antique auto region had planned to have lunch for those on our tour in a small city park. Having to wait ½ hour until they were ready, others began to arrive, and we then enjoyed lunch and were on our way again, crossing the Missouri River on a long bridge (the river had been dammed up just south of this crossing). After lunch, it turned out to be a really hot afternoon.

With a water stop at McIntosh, South Dakota, our next one was planned for Hettinger, North Dakota, and here we paused for an hour or more while we enjoyed a snack in an air-conditioned ice cream parlor. Proceeding westward, the twilight hours were beautiful on the high plains with their uneven escarpments, but our night’s destination was too far ahead to “stretch” our water supply. Although unscheduled, we came upon the small town of Marmarth, North Dakota, with its dirt streets and run-down dwellings indicating it had fallen on hard times. It turned out this had been a railroad servicing stop in the steam days on the Milwaukee Road, and when steam locomotives and through trains no longer stopped at Marmarth, no other industry had survived. When the old-timers spotted the Stanley, however, we were directed toward the closed railroad shops, where there was still a good water supply. The whole town turned out, and many had their pictures taken in front of the Stanley. It was hard to break away, but darkness was approaching, and we made the 15 miles to Baker, Montana, just before dark. The day before this “longest day,” the mileage from Milbank, South Dakota, to Aberdeen was about 100; the day after from Baker to Miles City, Montana, it was also about 100, so the total for three days is not that impressive -- just over 500 miles. About a month later, crossing the country from west to east, we covered 1,872 miles in nine days from Estes Park, Colorado, to Yorklyn, Delaware.

Naturally, I am not aware of all the daily long-distance records in a Stanley. I do know of two very impressive ones. When I had both boiler and engine trouble with our Model 87 west of Dodge City, Kansas, in 1982, Brent Campbell put the disabled car on his trailer and drove his Model 80 Stanley 341 miles in one day from Dodge City to Tulsa, Oklahoma. This was part of the Pebble Beach-to-Jekyll Island “Trans-Con” Tour. Again in 1988, Brent set another record with his Model 85 (called “Big Green”), when he and his wife, Martha, drove home from the steam car tour at Hamburg, New York, to Northborough, Massachusetts, in one day, 425 miles!

I'm sure other records exist, of which I'm not aware. No doubt similar daily long-distance runs have been recorded on Trans-Cons and Red Rock Tours. Earle Eckel made many trips in his 1914 Model 712 roadster, including one from his New Jersey home to Minneapolis and return in 1949. Ray Carr drove a Stanley from Anchorage, Alaska, to Bar Harbor, Maine, about 1995, but I have no information on daily mileages. David Nergaard has driven his Model 735 roadster to well over 30 steam car tours, and he must have approached 300 miles per day numerous times.