

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 29, 2016

How a Packard Was Acquired (1956): Old-car collecting was a lot different 60 years ago. With the antique automobile hobby still in its infancy and no specialty places to advertise, knowledge of a desirable car for sale was often obtained by approaching the owner of a car displayed at a tiny meet (where there may have been 10 to 15 cars) and asking if he would sell it and, if so, how much was he asking. Also, old cars were still stored in barns, put there by an owner 40 years before, as they were too good to throw away but had little value as a used car. These were often the real bargains if good early cars could be found.

In 1953 a Hockessin neighbor, Gordon Biehn, bought a '32 Packard Twin Six Sport Phaeton from an ad in the Sunday *New York Times*. He brought it around for my father and me to look at. He complained of the front wheels being out of balance with the 8-ply black-wall truck tires that were on the car (the only new tires of this size available at that time). I balanced the front wheels for him and asked for first refusal on the car if he ever wanted to sell it. He said that would be unlikely, as it was just the model he had always wanted. He bought the correct dual cowl and windshield from a '31 or '32 Packard and had it installed, and he and his family used it regularly. However, in the spring of 1956, he called and offered me the car for \$2,000. I countered with \$1,800. He accepted \$1,900, and the deal was quickly consummated. Although our '32 Packard "Dual-Cowl" was a high-mileage car and had five or six owners before me, I have never been disappointed. Packard built only about 250 "Twin Sixes" (V-12s) in 1932, and only 16 of these were sport phaetons. There are believed to be between two and six in existence today. Some experts called this model the "most stylish car of the decade."

The car was sold new by the Packard dealer in Washington, D.C., in May 1932. The second owner was a black man, the chauffeur of the original owner. It then passed through about three owners, one of whom was Smith Hempstone Oliver of the Smithsonian Institution, before Gordon Biehn bought it in North Jersey. The original color is believed to have been a deep Packard blue with black fenders and probably black sidewall tires, as usually pictured in Packard catalogs. Someone before Biehn had painted the body and wheel spokes yellow, but the wheels were of a darker shade than the body. They had also replaced the original upholstery with unpleated imitation leather and had an ugly orange color on the dash, inside door panels, and around the horn button at the center of the steering wheel. While I had some mechanical work done on the engine and worked on a shimmy condition in the steering, I used the car quite a lot locally and on trips to Rehoboth in the ensuing years. In 1974 I made a trip to northern New England and return, 1,300 miles, with three members of the Pownall Jones family. We had some vapor-lock problems, and I refaced the needle valve in the carburetor on Frank Gardner's lathe, but otherwise it was a fun trip. In 1975-76, the car received an acceptable restoration.

All the bright work (except the bumpers that had been done by Biehn) was removed and replated by Standard Plating in Baltimore. Hibernia Restorations in North Jersey rebuilt the cloisonné medallions for the hubcaps and trunk rack, as well as the coat of arms on the horn button. They also refinished the chrome-and-anodized silver panel surrounding the dash gauges, but this was not satisfactory, so it was redone. Carl Amsley of St. Thomas, Pennsylvania, well-known as a steam car restorer and "dealer" from 1958 to 1998, re-painted the car, Aaron Stoltzfus striped it, and Sonny Crum, Amsley's "leather man" in Chambersburg at the time, did the leather upholstery and made the carpets and a new top. I bought new wind wings for the front windshield from Don Sommer in Michigan, and under-the-hood painting was done in-house. New 7:00 x 18 white-wall tires, then available, replaced the old truck tires. I bought an authentic Packard trunk from an insurance man named Rothensies who had kept it in his attic in Westover Hills (Wilmington) since he had owned a 1930 Packard 20 years before. It was a modest and not a body-off restoration, but many visitors to our museum over the years have picked it as the car they would most like to own—the "most stylish car of the decade."