

Doble Steam Cars: To write on this subject, I should begin by saying that Jim Crank of Redwood City, California, is the foremost authority on Doble cars today, and he would find corrections necessary in my text on the subject; however, I'll do the best I can.

Abner Doble was an eccentric genius born about 1890. For most of his life he was involved in making improvements in steam boiler and engine design. He attended M.I.T. about 1908–11 and was very familiar with the Stanleys and the cars they were building at that time. In fact, he owned one and continually tried to improve upon it. He and a very young Ray Stanley, son of F.E., used to race each other on Commonwealth Avenue outside Boston. Undoubtedly, the police won, but it's not likely they could catch either of them.

Abner had the idea to build a greatly improved steam car and established a small factory near Detroit for its manufacture. In an attempt to get financing, he was in Wilmington about 1913 in an attempt to interest William Winder Laird. Although the attempt did not bear fruit, about the same time he invented a small atomizing oil burner, suitable for homes and automobiles, and sold his patents to the No-Coal Company, which immediately marketed these burners for home use, becoming the first practical oil burners as we know them today. The Doble-Detroit auto venture was unsuccessful, and although there were rumors that 100 cars were built, not one has ever surfaced in the past 70 years.

Doble's second attempt was in San Francisco, where in 1921 several much-improved cars were turned out that were known as Doble Simplexes. Utilizing the inventor's boiler/burner design but with a 2-cylinder engine mounted on the rear like a Stanley, great progress was being made but with a high financial drain. Several members of the Doble family invested in Abner's company, which soon moved across the Bay to Emeryville on the outskirts of Oakland.

Undoubtedly, the finest steam cars ever built were turned out at Emeryville between 1924 and 1931, but production was not continuous during this period. Most of the E-model Dobiles, of which there were about 24, were built in 1924 and 1925. They were large, heavy and luxurious cars, built to compete with America's finest. They sold for about \$8,000, but since so few were built, the cost of manufacture was several times that figure. They employed Doble's atomizing burner, fired from the top down through a "flash" boiler consisting of over 500 feet of coils made from the best tubing available. By simply turning a switch on the dash, the burner would come on and in about one minute steam pressure and temperature was sufficient to start driving. The engine, still mounted on the rear, was a 4-cylinder cross-compound using only two piston valves.

By the end of 1925, Doble had again run out of money, but there were a lot of parts, including engines, on hand. In 1929, sufficient financing was available so that another 8 or 10 cars were put together, being called the "F" series. Since body styles had changed, Cadillac and other fine bodies of 1929–31 were utilized, and some of these cars were very stylish. Unfortunately, this final Doble effort failed financially, as did the others. In his later years, Abner Doble worked on some bus projects, there was at least one Doble rail car in Germany prior to World War II, and he designed steam spraying equipment for the orange growers of California.

My father, not finding his Stanleys challenging enough, bought his first Doble at Cameron Peck's auction in Chicago in 1952. That car was #E-11 built in 1924, with a Murphy body and sliding glass windows. Although he always tinkered with it, my father enjoyed that car very much and drove it on several short tours and to Lakeville, CT, twice to attend the early steam car tours there. Weldin Stumpf and I drove it to Cape Cod and return in 1975. About 1955, dad bought his second Doble, #E-19 of 1925, which had been converted by Charles Briar of San Diego to a bucket-seat speedster with homemade hood. In an early type restoration here, that car received a Rolls Silver Ghost touring car body and fenders, a new hood, and a 1917 Buick folding top. The third one, arriving at Yorklyn about 1957, was an F-model coupe of about 1930 with a Cadillac body. My father sold that one a year or two later to Robert M. Chambers of Pittsburgh, and dad drove it to Bedford, Pennsylvania, for

the buyer's people to take delivery. It fetched \$12,500, which was believed to be one of the highest-priced antique cars sold up to that time. I sold E-19 to John D. Cole, then of Dayton, Ohio, in 1970. This car is believed to be in Florida but has not run for many years. Finally, E-11 was sold to a Mr. Holmes-a-Court of Perth, Australia, in 1980. The car is now maintained in operating condition by the present owner, William Stace-Lloyd of near Sydney, Australia. Of less than 40 Doble steamers built, about 13 are in existence, largely on the West Coast.