

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 9, 2007

An Overnight Trip from Boston: With gasoline rationing going into effect in July 1942, it was a very bad idea for me to take my 40 Packard 110 to Boston on Columbus Day that year, hopefully to use it while in my freshman term at M.I.T. I seemed to have enough coupons to get up there, but as rationing became even more restrictive, the car was put in dead storage a month later a few blocks from where I was rooming. There it stayed until the semester was over at the end of January 1943. My trip home for Christmas was by train both ways.

With mid-year exams over, my roommate Dick Mullikin and I planned to leave Boston as soon as we could and head home. Dick had been a classmate at Wilmington Friends School. The timing of his last exam and a heavy snow storm caused us to leave, with tire chains on, about 4:30 P.M. Dick knew I would be doing all the driving, so he got drunk on a bottle of rum, and his companionship was limited until after he had a long nap and awoke about 3 A.M. The snow was packed on the main road, so I removed the chains before we reached Wellesley. Soon thereafter it got dark, and the rest of our trip was in darkness. I have tried to reconstruct, but I can't understand how I was able to buy fuel through the middle of the night, as filling stations were not supposed to sell gas after 7 P.M., and with almost no one traveling, there was no reason for any of them to be open. The Packard got 15 m.p.g. at best, and I don't think the tank held much over 15 gallons. The total distance, using Route 202 and the Bear Mountain Bridge, was about 380 miles. We made our way over snow-covered roads through Sturbridge and Stafford Springs to the Charter Oak Bridge across the Connecticut River. On the far side of the bridge, I hit a terrible pothole and was surprised it didn't damage the tire or something worse. We kept coming through the clock towns of Bristol, Terryville and Thomaston, then Watertown, Woodbury, Newtown and Danbury. We crossed the Bear Mountain Bridge right at 12 midnight. In North Jersey, the roads were still packed with hard snow and ice, but with no traffic, we moved along with no delays. Mullikin finally woke up and I had a companion for the last three hours.

At just about 6 A.M., we pulled in at Mullikin's parents' home in a new section of Westover Hills; I dropped him off and headed for Yorklyn. I do remember that the gas gauge was showing empty at this point, and I drove on faith for the last 9 miles, drifting in neutral down the hills, supposedly to save fuel. The Packard and I made it to Auburn Heights, I had to awaken my parents to let me in, and soon the little Packard went into dead storage again until I drove it to New Mexico in June 1944. Following World War II, my father and I used this route from Boston often, and both the Mountain Wagon and my Model 607 Stanley were driven home over these roads in 1946.

As to the Packard 110: I was issued ration coupons for the trip to New Mexico as I was traveling on orders. In the oil country of the southwest, gasoline was more readily available, and sometimes a friendly service station would sell it to a serviceman without coupons. So, during the eight months at Roswell, New Mexico, I visited Carlsbad Caverns, White Sands, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque twice (once on orders). I then drove it overnight again from Roswell to Oklahoma City, 500 miles, when I was transferred to Will Rogers Field. In late May 1945, when I was about to go overseas, my parents came by train to Oklahoma City and drove the little Packard back to Yorklyn, where it went again into dead storage. Finally, when I was released in August 1946, the car went into daily use again, was repainted from the original light blue to a dark green, and was driven a lot until I sold it in 1950 with 77,000 miles. Sigmund Dobek of Wilmington drove it another 19,000 and gave it up late in 52 with 96,000 miles. Its top speed was 77 m.p.h. I tried to top that several times.