

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 12, 2009

**One Night in Billings, 1972:** Under dates of 1/2/06, 3/20/06, 5/8/06, and 11/27/06, I have written about “my trip of a lifetime” from June 13 to August 9, 1972, in our 1912 Model 87 Stanley. It was an adventure never quite duplicated again. As a member of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America's Trans-Continental Reliability Tour for cars older than 1915 from Montreal to Tijuana, I was determined to show that a steam car could successfully complete such a tour, and with a perfect score. For 58 days from Yorklyn to Yorklyn, we had reservations every night, and without an accompanying vehicle to carry tools, parts, and special fuels, and to run errands, we made all our destinations on time. At the end, we claimed all sorts of records, such as the longest trip ever made in a steam car (8,328 miles), the most water used on a trip by an automobile (12,500 gallons), etc.

We had a minimum of trouble. Near Montreal at the start of the tour, we had the small oil reservoir soldered to repair a leak. In Reno, we removed fittings in order to properly wash the boiler (an unnecessary precaution). At Disneyland, California, we rebuilt the burner, replacing the inside burner pan. At Springfield, Illinois, on the return trip, while removing the throttle to “lap it in,” a fitting broke off in the top of the boiler and had to be repaired. But the only time we got less than a full night's sleep was at Billings, Montana, on July 1.

In high spirits as we left the Twin Cities and headed west, the first night was spent at Milbank, South Dakota, and the second at Aberdeen. As we backed in front of our motel room, a member of the tour, standing next to the Stanley, said he heard a click in the right rear wheel. I could not detect it from the driver's seat. The next day was the longest day of the tour, 314 miles, from Aberdeen to Baker, Montana, which was run off in good time, arriving before dark. A short drive the next day put us in Miles City, and the rear-wheel noise, if it was there, was barely audible. We had 150 miles to go for our checkpoint at Billings, which had to be on or before 6 P.M. on July 1. Less than halfway on this stretch, however, the noise became much louder, and I realized there was a problem. Pulling the wheel, I found the wheel bearing had frozen, probably many days before, and the housing had been turning on the axle itself, the eventual wear causing the ever-increasing noise. We decided to limp into Billings at 20–25 M.P.H., hoping we could make it before our checkpoint deadline on a Friday evening of the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend.

By phone from our motel, a machinist was reached at his home. He said he had to take his wife out to dinner, but if we would appear at his shop about 7 P.M., he would try to help us. We drove the two or three miles to his shop, and he soon arrived to open up. I had a new bearing with me, but we had to disassemble everything in order to remove the old bearing, have the axle shaft built up with weld and turned down to size, and fit the new bearing. Jim Johnson of Park Ridge, Illinois, was my passenger at this point, and he, our machinist friend, and I did the job. About 4:30 A.M. we were finished, and everything was back together and ready to go again. As we drove back to our motel amid snow flurries, dawn was breaking. We got about three hours' sleep before it was time to go again. We headed west from Billings probably two hours behind most cars on the tour. However, as we reached our checkpoint at Livingston, Montana, about 3:00 in the afternoon, someone on the tour shouted, “Here comes the steamer!” Indeed.