

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 28, 2017

Jay Leno Climbs Mount Washington: On what she called the “Last Day of Summer,” Flora Tileston Stanley accompanied her husband, Freelan O. Stanley, in climbing the rough gravel road to the top of Mount Washington in a tiny Locomobile steamer on August 31, 1899. Although not the first to try, this little car of Stanley design piloted by one of the Stanley twins himself was the first automobile ever to make the climb and reach the top. The time for the 8-mile ascent climbing 4,600 feet in elevation was just over two hours. The Weekly News of 8/31/09 and 9/1/14 covers this historic event.

Very soon after this historic date, the old carriage road to the summit of New England's highest mountain became the greatest challenge of all hill climbs, and several successful climbs were achieved in the years immediately after 1900. Charles J. Glidden, Augustus Post, and a number of their well-to-do friends went up in high-powered cars in 1904. F. E. Stanley showed most of them up when he made the ascent in 28 minutes in a little Model C Stanley, similar to our Model CX. In the next year, 1905, F. E. made it in 22 minutes in a slightly larger Model D or Model E, when the first Glidden Tour was at nearby Bretton Woods.

Over the years, manufacturers tested their high-powered products on the old carriage road. As a 12-year-old in 1936, I first rode up the road in one of the big Pierce Arrow touring cars kept at the bottom for that purpose. When the Glidden Tour Revival visited Glen House at the base of the road in 1947, “Cannon Ball” Baker, working for Nash Motors at the time, was trying for a record but barely beat F. E. Stanley's time from 1905. In 1949, to gain publicity for the “motor road,” as it was then called, the owners contacted Edwin A. Battison of Windsor, Vermont, and asked him if he could drive an early Stanley to the top on August 31, the 50th anniversary of the first climb. With his '02 Stanley, similar to our Stick-Seat Runabout, he drove from his home in Vermont to the base of the mountain and, at the appropriate time, made a successful climb to the top. In 1961, he was asked to do it again and probably used the same car, this time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the building of the original carriage road. For a second time, Battison had no trouble of significance.

By 1980 members of the steam car community were joking about driving a Stanley to the top. In 1984, and with no special preparation, Brent Campbell undertook it while returning on a tour from Kingfield, Maine, which was spending the night at nearby Gorham. Doug Philbrook, then owner of the motor road, encouraged Stanley owners to try, so, on the spur of the moment, and late on an August afternoon, Brent assembled three others to go along in his special Model 80. His passengers were Ole Vikre, Bob Reilly, and Wayne Coffman. It was a remarkable trip, and they returned safely before dark. The stage was set for more steam car attempts.

In early August, 1999, the largest Steam Car Tour ever assembled, sponsored by the Stanley Museum, was held at Gorham, and owners of the 80 cars in attendance were encouraged to climb the mountain. With unfavorable weather, several tried it, and about four cars, at least one of which was from Great Britain, made the climb to the top and back. 3 weeks later on the centennial date of August 31, 1999, either three or four Stanleys completed the round-trip on a perfect day, as it had been in 1899. Sue Davis became the first woman to drive a steam car to the top, when she did so in the Stanley Museum's Model 725. Since that time, numerous successful climbs have been accomplished by Stanley owners. Brent Campbell has climbed in one of his Stanleys at least four times. He is responsible for the remainder of this story. The event took place on July 4, 2017, and I quote from Brent:

“Jay Leno drove my Stanley “Ray's Car” up the mountain successfully without any trouble. Bill Barnes followed with his Vanderbilt Cup Racer and also had no problems. As expected, we did stop once to pump water into our boilers with a wheel jacked up. The production crew doing the filming consisted of 40 people, all very skilled and experienced. They had 12 cameras attached to my car and two of the film crew sat in the rear of a minivan facing rearward, so as to capture the event. Then there was the helicopter that flew directly above us

capturing it all on film from above. It was an exciting day, and everyone enjoyed it, including Jay, who was very gracious and friendly in every way. The weather was perfect with the exception of the summit, where it was cloudy, windy, and cold. Two ramp trucks took both cars down without incident, and more filming was done when they were unloaded at the bottom.

“Jay drove Bill’s Vanderbilt Cup Racer the day before and had to be impressed since it has a 30-H.P. engine, and his has only a 20. Bill’s car is easily the fastest Stanley I have ever had the privilege to drive! Jay also rode one of Bill’s steam motorcycles and must have liked it because he didn’t return for over 20 minutes. Unfortunately, the film crew was not on hand to capture Jay on Bill’s bike. All in all, it was an exciting day for everyone. The show, “Jay Leno’s Garage,” will air our climb to the clouds sometime in the fall. We will know exactly when beforehand.”

On the same day as Jay Leno’s climb, Lisa Cantor, accompanied by her husband Mark, drove their 10-H.P. Stanley to the top, becoming the second woman to pilot a steamer to the summit. Congratulations, ALL! Rest well, Flora and F.O., after 118 years on Thursday.