

**A HARROWING RIDE IN A 1930 JORDAN**

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## **A HARROWING RIDE IN A 1930 JORDAN**

My most harrowing experience while driving an automobile occurred back in 1934. The car I was driving was a 1930 Jordan "Airline Eight" sedan painted tan with crimson artillery wheels. My father had purchased it new and drove it for two years before he passed away and I found myself becoming my mother's chauffeur at the age of 16.

It was early in December that my grandmother became quite ill and my mother wanted me to be at her bedside. We arrived at my grandmother's house which was in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh about six miles away from Edgewood where we lived.

I stayed and visited for about an hour with my grandmother and then prepared to leave. Imagine my surprise when I opened the front door to find it snowing heavily with over an inch on the ground already. It was at this moment that I realized that the chains were hanging up in our garage.

With the cheerful optimism of a seventeen year old I decided that I could make it home safely if I drove up and down the streets slowly.

All went well until I arrived at Wilkins Street which was three blocks long and quite steep except for a short level space where each cross street intersected. I started down the first hill and decided to shift into second gear. Well, that did it. As I braked slightly to shift I felt the old Jordan begin to slide. Before I reached the first cross street the car was already going sideways. I started honking the horn and looked anxiously for approaching headlights. Luckily, there were no approaching vehicles and by this time the car was sliding down the street completely backward. I might mention at this point that at the end of the third block there was a blinker light mounted on a steel pedestal in the middle of the street.

I could see it blinking as I looked through the back window and I was sure that I would hit it squarely. As I continued sliding down the last block, all I could think of was how I would tell my mother that I wrecked the Jordan. I never once thought I might be injured.

At this point I felt the car beginning to veer toward the curb and I pulled on the steering wheel in desperation. The left front wheel hit the curb and the car stopped—just about ten feet away from the blinker. Getting groggily out of the car, I looked for damage and finding none I drove the rest of the way home without incident.

The next morning I examined the wheel more closely and discovered—believe it or not—a slight dent and several scratches on the aluminum hubcap. I decided that I wouldn't tell my mother about the three block slide downhill in a snowstorm. She had enough troubles raising me.

## RECALLING THE SMELLS OF OPEN CAR TRAVELS

In these days as we speed down the highways in our automobiles with our heaters on in winter and our air conditioners cooling us in the summer, we almost completely miss something that was part of our motoring past. What is it that we miss? In my opinion, it is smells, odors, and aromas—whichever sounds best. Those of us who are sixty years of age or older did most of our traveling in open touring cars and for this reason we smelled many things—some were delicious and some were really bad.

As we traveled throughout the far West and later, up and down the east coast, my parents would point out interesting things to my sister and me and also asked us to smell different things along the way. Occasionally, when I am out walking or driving one of my antique cars, I get a whiff of smoke from a chimney—a combination of oak and pine—and I am transported in fancy to one of the Indian missions in California where the aroma of burning pinyon pine and white oak filled the air.

At other times when traveling in Pennsylvania, I pass a field of blossoming buckwheat and I am transported back to the 1920's riding in the old Marmon with my family. I also recall the acrid but pleasing odor of piles of burning limestone rocks fired by farmers to make their own agricultural lime. Even the tobacco grown in parts of Pennsylvania for the cigar wrapper leaves had a pleasant smell on a hot summer day.

On rare occasions when I visit a stable containing horses, harness, and hay I think back to several summer weeks spent on the farm in the Pocono mountains and once in a while on an outing of our local antique cars, the smell of burning brake linings transports me to the mountainous parts of the old Lincoln Highway (still numbered Route 30) and the tense feeling I had as my mother would call out to my father, "Alton, your brakes are burning!" He would usually explain to Mother that you can't smell your own brakes and what we smelled was from brakes of the car ahead creeping down the steep hill. Once in a while it WAS our brakes and we would have to pull over to the side of the road and wait for them to cool off.

Then there was the delicious smell that comes from pine sawdust inside a country farm icehouse as we stopped to purchase a large block of ice when camping. That is one aroma I haven't enjoyed in recent years, but if I smell pine sawdust somewhere, it still jogs my memory of camping trips to the national parks out West in the old Chalmers back in 1921.

Sometimes when I pass a creamery, I am reminded of staying at a farm and going to the springhouse with its aroma of cooling milk, cream, and butter and the thrill of seeing a large trout held captive in the water to keep the spring free of insects and salamanders.

Lastly, I always enjoy the smell of a bakery at night and remember the times we would pass the Haller Bakery in Pittsburgh on the way home from my grandmother's house. Some of those aromas can never be enjoyed again, but I still have the memories of them and the pleasant experiences of my childhood.

April 1991

Editor's note:

On Friday, April 5, 1991 John Brown passed away. John has contributed his column to Clutch Clatter for many years and his recollections of his life filled with the joys of automobiling will be missed. This column is the last column written by John. We will occasionally be re-printing some of John's earlier columns as well as printing a few columns that have been written in the past, but have not appeared in the newsletter. We sincerely appreciate all that John has done for the antique car hobby and this column will serve as a lasting memorial to his love for antique cars and his love for people associated with antique cars.....

## **OPEN CARS**

With a few exceptions, an open-type antique automobile will bring a much higher price than a closed model because a buyer is willing to pay twice or three times as much for it. Why is that? To begin with, except for the early pioneer or brass era car, the closed sedan, a coupe and Tudor began to replace rather rapidly the touring car of the post-World War I era. With the closed body, a manifold or other type of heater was developed and the family car could go more places, go for longer trips, and would not have to be put "up on jacks" in the garage or barn. I believe it was the Essex which changed America's idea of what a comfortable, closed car was "all about." The 1923 or 1924 Essex sedan, although "boxy" and rather drab was inexpensive and reliable and sold well for a period of time and was copied and improved upon by many US car makers.

My childhood memories of family cars remind me that our first closed vehicle was a 1921 Studebaker, which my father bought from his brother Tom, because after purchasing the new car and having a professional driver teach him to operate it, Tom decided that at 55 years old, he was too old to learn to drive. He had the car put up on jacks in his garage for over a year. I must admit that I did like the floor heater in the back which captured a small amount of heat from the hot exhaust manifold and made the lap robes un-necessary except in zero weather. But, otherwise, I felt sort of "trapped" and had to get parental permission to roll down a window.

Dad soon felt the same way and he bought a 1923 Model 34 Marmon Six of which I have written about several times. It was roomy, comfortable, and could really move fast on the open roads. A couple of years later my mother, who was always uncomfortable riding in chilly weather, persuaded Dad to buy the infamous Chandler Opera Coupe which, because of my youthful carelessness, caused my father to knock me down and stall the car with the front wheel on my nine year old chest.

After that incident, Dad continued to drive to work in the Marmon and use the Chandler to take Mother to Church or to visit relatives in the late fall and winter. I could hardly wait for summer so we could take our trips in the Marmon. Once again I could lean out of the seat in front and pretend that I was an engineer or an airplane pilot. What fun it was to

smell the newly-mown hay, the buckwheat fields in blossom, the bakeries, the fresh tar being put down on a new road, the hot sun on a pine forest, or even just the exciting odors that greeted my nose as we drove through a stretch of woodlands on a rainy day!

What a shock it was in late 1928 to learn that Dad had sold the Marmon and bought a 1928 Jordan Sedan from a relative who had the Jordan franchise. I don't know whether it was all in my mind, but as I entered the puberty stage, now called "teenage" I almost always became "car sick" and many sudden stops had to be made on my behalf which were both embarrassing and annoying to the rest of the family. As I recall, it took me almost two years to become used to riding in that Jordan and then Dad bought another one—a 1930 "Airline Eight." He hired an elderly man who doubled as chauffeur and handy man for my mother who did not drive. Dad loved the new Jordan and we took trips in it for several years until his death in 1933.

The Great Depression suddenly came upon all of us, so at age 16 I received a driver's license. We had to let our handy-man go and I became the family driver since my sister Adele was away at college. The 1928 Jordan was sold to a wealthy man who wanted it as a gift for his chauffeur! Now it was my turn to take Mother to the grocer's, the bakery, the butcher shop, the fruit market, or to visit relatives. It would be quite amusing to the young people of present if I told them that I was not permitted to take the car for a date, a drive around town (known in recent years as *crusin'*), or even drive to the nearby town of Wilkinsburg to see a Saturday afternoon movie. Mother believed that a "Shank's Mare" (walking) was the best way for young people to get from point A to point B.

The big moment in my life came when I was allowed to pick up my date for the Junior Prom and stay out until 1AM. Quite a thrill even though my prom date ducked away from a good night kiss! Incidentally, when we meet at our class reunions every five years, we still have a good laugh about that.

In July 1934, I drove my mother, my sister, and a friend of the family to the "Century of Progress" World Fair in Chicago and back in the Jordan. It still looked good with its tan body and crimson wheels and we didn't have any car trouble on our thousand mile round trip. I soon talked Mother into trading the Jordan in on a beautiful 1934 Dodge Sedan. Mother passed away a few months later and my sister used it to drive to work. Soon afterwards, I bought my very first car---a 1930 Model A Coupe which was like the one I now own and that cars that followed were also closed cars. It was only when I had a chance to buy a 1928 Model A Touring for \$60 that I found out again the pleasures of fresh air driving. It became my second car during the War years and was used for hauling kids, rocks, hay, and other things expected of a pickup truck. Yes, after nine years I foolishly sold it for \$175 to a Fishburne cadet. Well, as the wise Romans once said *EXPERIENTIA DOCET*---Experience teaches. Today, I can still recapture the experiences of my youth when I take the Jeffery out in warm weather. Now, however, the smells are usually the horrible fumes given off by GM cars with their catalytic converters, diesel truck smoke, dead skunks, and a kind of burned grease aroma from fast food establishments. No, it isn't quite the same but it is still fun.

Apparently, a lot of new car buyers feel the same way because the convertible is once again rolling off the assembly lines in Detroit and in foreign countries. Don't be surprised if you see an electric convertible in dealer showrooms in a very few years. If I'm still around, I will be one of their first customers, believe me!

## LONDON TO BRIGHTON RUN

I've written about a lot of experiences in this column, but I have never told you about my chance to take part in the famous London to Brighton Run which takes place in England during the first week of November. I was especially pleased because the person who invited me was a Mr. R. A. Driscoll who lived in Croydon-a town near London, and the little car in which we would ride was his little one cylinder Vauxhall of 1902 vintage. I was thrilled also because I thought I might have to ride in a Peugeot, a Panhard, or a Renault driven by a Frenchman who couldn't speak English or, even worse, an Italian driving a F.I.A.T. Yes, all of us in the U.S. of A. can understand the English---or, can we? Let me tell you what happened.

When he called me at my hotel, the Regent Palace, he informed me that at the moment he was fixing up his flat but that he would be "round for me at 7:30 am". I was glad that he was getting all his tires in shape for the trip but I was puzzled when he suggested that I wear wool socks with suspenders, bring along a Brally, and try to find an Inverness and deerstalker for to be dressed for the period of the vehicle in which we would be motoring. I was also reminded to leave my shoes outside my door so that "Boots" could take care of them for me and not to forget to leave a "bob" in one of the toes for gratuity.

I arose early next morning and crept down the hall in a bathrobe and slippers to be met by an unhappy-looking maid who began apologizing that my bath water might not be as hot as I like it because they had been having early morning trouble with the "geezer". I don't know who the old guy was but he really did use up most of my hot water.

Well, after a hasty breakfast of weak coffee and cold toast, I was at the hotel entrance before 7:30 and very soon heard a gentle putt-putt sound. A beautiful little Vauxhall with Mr. Driscoll at the wheel pulled up to the front entrance and we were off to the starting point at Hyde Park where we were assigned a starting number and given some instructions that were quite clear to my friend but entirely unintelligible to me. Mr. Driscoll asked me if I have ever seen so many "old crocks". Seeing no drunks, I really didn't know how to answer his question. I could tell that he was disappointed in my outfit which consisted of a ski costume with a parka, mittens, and engineer boots. I had a pair of bright red suspenders over my outfit as instructed but he seemed amused and asked me why I was wearing braces. I was about to tell him that what he thought were braces was just my partial plate but I thought better of it and just smiled.

I saw dozens of beautiful little cars as each took off at a given signal and headed for Brighton by way of the Westminster Bridge and we were finally waved off by an official and made our way through the park.

My host was in good spirits as he guided our little voiturette across the Thomas River Bridge and we waved to the crowds that would line the entire route to Brighton. Every now and then someone would shout "hooty hootah! Not understanding this strange order I just waved as we passed. I wasn't going to let those people know that I was an American if I could help it.

Suddenly the engine of our little car began to sputter and Mr. Driscoll signaled that he was pulling over to the curb for a stop. The crowd backed up discreetly as we got out. Mr. Driscoll asked me to look under the bonnet to see if anything looked amiss. I pretended I didn't hear him so he did the checking himself and lifted up the hood.

"I know that it's not the accumulator because this early model doesn't have one." He said, "but I hope that it's not the big end because if that is gone we're out of the run."

I just smiled again and tried to look wise. My host asked, "Would you hand me my tool box, please? I need an eight millimeter spanner. If we don't have what we need we're still in luck because I see an ironmonger's across the street."

As I leaned over with the toolbox he warned me to "mind the wings - they're a bit brittle since they're made of patent leather and very old." I didn't see anything that looked like wings so I just moved very carefully. In a minute or two my host emerged from under the vehicle with a smile and said, "It was just the mixing valve and I've fixed it. Let's be off again. By the way if you get hungry I have a tin of biscuits and some Porter in the hamper."

I told him no thanks and after a turn of the crank, the little motor came to life again and we pulled away as the crowd cheered.

"I hope that you don't weigh more than thirteen stone. We have a few hills ahead and this Vauxhall won't pull more than thirty stone on a steep grade!"

I assure him that I didn't although I began to feel a bit weight conscious as I wondered how many stone I was.

Mr. Driscoll told me not to worry about people running alongside because they were being careful but he said we might encounter a dustman's lorry now and then some places still hadn't taken up their old tram lines. I nodded and said I'd keep my eyes open for anything that looked like a potential danger.

After about four hours we both were feeling the effects of the damp air. Noting my condition, my host remarked cheerfully, "Hold on, we're almost to Brighton. When we pass the checkpoint and park we can head right for the hotel. It's tea time and they serve wonderful scones and buttered Hovis. By the way, do you prefer China or India?"

I was about to remark that I did not know much about either of those countries when he spoke up again.

"No matter, the dinner menu is tickety-poo. They have marvelous joints of lamb, Dover Sole, and white bait. You can eat all you want for about ten quid!"

I was about to ask if they made good hamburgers and fries but I decided to eat what the British ate even if it killed me.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"What's in a name?" asked William Shakespeare. Names have always fascinated me and although I made poor grades in Latin, which caused despair to my Latin teacher and my parents, I have somehow retained enough of that so-called "dead language" to figure out the meanings of many new words that were familiar but which I had never attempted to investigate. Now, you might ask, "what does all this have to do with antique cars?" My answer would be, "Not very much", but, wait! I will explain....all words and names have an origin; be they names or things people, or places.....

Until the period of the Norman Conquest in 1066, most of the people living in England had only one name such as John, Mary, Tom, or William. When the Domesday Book was written for purpose of tax collection, an additional name had to be added such as Thomas, the baker; and Joseph, the smith. Men were catalogued with regard to the type of work that they did, their physical appearance, or where they lived.

Quite a number of the male residents of the British Isles took it upon themselves to be known as tall man, wise man, pretty man, gold man, and merry man. These facts made me wonder what effect the horse and carriage and other wheeled vehicles had upon the names of the persons engaged in making the vehicles of the day. Some family names have their beginnings in transportation related occupations. We can find such names as Wheelwright, Wheeler, Cartwright, and Carter. A man who shod horses was called a farrier and from that came Farrier, Ferrier, and, of course, all the Smiths, Smithey, Schmidt, and Smythe.

After several thousands of years of riding horses, donkeys and camels, or jouncing along in coaches, wagons, and cart---man invented the carriage that moved without a horse. Yes, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the automobile arrived on the scene. Nothing has changed man's way of life more than the automobile but, in spite of this fact, nobody seems to take on an automotive last name.

It is possible, of course, if a body repair man became quite wealthy, he might decide to change his name to "John D. Rockerpanel", but that's about it. There is not much appeal in Robert Rear-End, Ignatius Ignition, or Teddy Tailgate. No, we are in love with the automobile, but we don't want any last names connected with it. Yet, there is one name I can think of---MR. GOODWRENCH.

## **MY PROPOSAL TO GET THINGS ON TRACK**

Back in the innocent days before World War I, our Vice-president, Thomas Marshall, is reputed to have said, "What this country really needs is a good five-cent cigar." When he spoke those famous words there were plenty of five-cent cigars, but most of them were not very good. However, to make up for the shortage, we did have the penny postcard, the two-cent stamp, the five-cent pack of chewing gum and the twenty-cent gallon of gasoline. Now, I am proposing a list of new ideas that I believe will correct many of our social and economic problems and just about everyone will have a lot more fun. My proposal to get this country on the right track again is as follows:

First, scrap all body and engine designs of cars and trucks made after December 7, 1941. In case some of our younger members are wondering why this date was selected, I must hasten to point out that on this date a large number of bombers and fighter planes manufactured by Mitsubishi, Nakajima, and other companies in the "Land of the Rising Sun" dropped bombs and torpedoes on our navy at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This resulted in an altercation which lasted about four and a half years and got our country ready to welcome transistor radios, Yamaha motorcycles and pianos, Toyotas, Datsuns, sushi bars, and Japanese class valedictorians at Harvard and VPI.

Second, encourage auto makers to come out with improved Model A Fords—1928 through 1931, Model B's, the Chevy Master series, the Auburn Beauty sixes, Hudson-Essex Terraplanes, some Packard 120's, Studebaker Presidents, and perhaps, a revival of the Willys-Knight. A few Duesenbergs would be authorized for selected gangsters and police forces to keep things from getting stale. If you are a former watcher of the "Untouchables", you will understand the necessity for a few very fast and powerful cars being not available to the general public—which is "us".

Third, require all oil companies to restore Ethyl lead to their gasoline and to keep the price to at least four gallons for a dollar and to require all their gas station employees to wear the company uniform (example: the Gulf tan uniform with the orange Gulf logo, the dark green Texaco outfit with the star on the cap and shirt pocket, and the blue and white Esso coveralls worn by young men who always cleaned the windshields and also checked the battery and crankcase oil level if requested). These oil companies would also be required to print and give away free road maps. They would probably still be difficult to re-fold, but what a pleasure to have a pile of them in the glove compartment.

At this point, I would encourage my readers to re-examine my three proposals before I present my fourth, and possibly agree with me that in complete modesty that what I have so far proposed will possibly rank equally with the Monroe Doctrine or the Bill of Rights.

Just imagine some of the pleasures you could experience again---such as sitting in the back seat of a sedan with no floor hump to cramp your feet, the back of the seat cushioning your back and the back of your head, and the smaller rear window preventing the sun from beating down on you as you ride along. You could also enjoy watching the water temperature on a beautiful motometer attached to a real radiator opening instead of starrng at a non-functional plastic doodad held on by a spring. Also, you could enjoy the pleasure of sitting on a wide running board (required for all cars

under my proposal) at a picnic or empathize with the patrolman or state trooper who enjoys putting his foot on it while writing out your parking or speeding ticket. With your running board, of course, you could once again attach one of the folding gates and carry camping gear, blocks of ice, or even a sack of fresh vegetables purchased from a country roadside stand.

Another pleasure would be the pleasure of not seeing bearded men in jacked-up pickup trucks with chrome roll-bars festooned with orange lensed spotlights. There would be no traffic jams on weekend evenings because "cruising" would be only something wealthy people did on ships.

Since at this point I would have most of the intelligent people in this country behind me, I would slip in another proposal. Finally: All plazas should be removed and the acres of blacktop shall be dug up and the wonderful soil once again available shall be converted to community vegetable and flower gardens with shade trees and plenty of park benches on all four sides. Of course, there must be a large bandstand or gazebo in the center for the enjoyment of young and old alike.

Also, all oil-wasting diesel locomotives shall be scrapped to provide material for the new coal-burning steam locomotives with those wonderful steam whistles we haven't heard in years. All cities with populations greater than 25 thousand shall re-build the trolleys and trolley lines which they destroyed in the period between 1946 and 1957. Air polluting city buses shall be scrapped and recycled for the production of non-polluting electric street cars and high-speed inter-urban electric trolleys which would eliminate Greyhound and Trailways pollution of fresh air in rural areas.

This, all antique car lovers, is my list of ideas for a pollution-free, low-speed move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If you approve, please honk your ah-ooga horn, klaxon or exhaust whistle the next time you see me. Thanks.