

RUN OVER BY A 1926 CHANDLER

**FAST RIDES – STUTZ BEARCAT, VAUXHALL
SPEEDSTER & 1908 THOMAS FLYER**

WW II CIVIL DEFENSE IN STUARTS DRAFT

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DO AGAIN**

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As I look backward in time, I find myself thinking about the many different makes of cars my father owned and find that, with the exception of our 1915 Dodge, all the others became obsolete. One car that stands out in my memory is our 1926 Chandler. This car was one with a body style that might be classified as an opera coupe. It had only two doors and one had to fold in the front seats down in order to sit in the back.

I remember the aluminum stripe that ran vertically down the back of the body and the small truck shelf between the body and the rear mounted back tire. I don't believe that he ever fastened either suitcases or a trunk on this shelf since my father used it solely for driving back and forth to work at his office downtown.

One summer afternoon, however, the old Chandler and I became closely involved with one another. I was playing out in the yard behind our house when I heard the car start down our long driveway to the garage. I rushed around the corner of the house without looking and my Dad bumped into me and knocked me sprawling---under the left front wheel. My mother who was riding beside him jumped out and ran around the car to see where I was. Well, there I was, flat on my back with the tire resting on my chest. She shouted to my Dad that I was pinned underneath the wheel and that he should back off. Dad became flustered and in shifting to reverse he stalled the car. Then he flooded the carburetor and kept hitting the starter with my mother imploring him to start the car or get out and help lift the car off me.

At last (probably in ten seconds) the Chandler sputtered to life and I was free. I don't remember whether I was helped or carried into the front seat but I remember how quickly Dad backed the car out into the street and then roared down the three blocks to the office of our family doctor. He wasn't in. Off we went to the office of another doctor about two miles away. He wasn't there either.

After a hasty conference, my parents decided to take me home. I was put to bed and hovered over by my mother. About an hour later, good old Doctor Jones arrived. He pushed gently on my chest several times and asked, "Does that hurt? Does this place hurt?"

I felt a bit sore but I assured him that I felt pretty good. The good doctor smiled and said, "Oh. Hell, Mrs. Brown, he's perfectly o.k. Let him get dressed and go outside and play." In short time I was playing Red Light with some of my friends.

I have often wondered why my parents didn't take me to the hospital which we passed twice in search of the other doctor. They never thought about x-rays either, but I guess I was tough for a nine year old—and I'm alive today.

FAST RIDES – STUTZ BEARCAT, VAUXHALL SPEEDSTER & 1908 THOMAS FLYER

"Hey, Johnny! What would you rather do today—fly in an aeroplane or go fishing?" This question was asked of me by two young college men while we were vacationing in the Poconos way back in 1920. That was quite a choice for a four year old boy to make but since I had been fishing with my Dad a few days before I told them I would like to fly in an aeroplane (that's the way it was spelled in those days) if they had one. Well, they didn't have an aeroplane, but they did have the most beautiful red speedster I had ever seen.

I was a bit disappointed that we were not going up in the air, but we really did fly. This, I remember, was a Stutz Bearcat and I was held on the lap of one of the young men and we roared away down a dusty country road with the wind blowing in our faces and the trees on either side of the road seeming like a blur. That ride probably only lasted about ten minutes but it was so exciting that I have never forgotten it although the passage of almost sixty years has made me forget many other things that perhaps I should remember.

My second memorable auto ride took place in London, England in the summer of 1935. My sister and I met an Englishman named R.A. Driscoll while on board the German ship Bremen. He invited us to visit him in Croyden where he managed a department store called Kennards. When we arrived he asked us if we would like to drive to Brighton for tea. Of course we said yes and he took us to the parking lot and introduced us to "The Yellow Terror". It was one of the famous Vauxhall 30/98 speedsters. This particular car was painted bright yellow and the body behind the front seat had a flat deck of mahogany like a motorboat and had a small hatch-like opening called a "dickey seat".

I crawled into it and Mr. Driscoll warned us to "hold on to our hats" and off we roared. I was fortunate that I had no hat because it would have blown away as we sped down the high crowned road toward Brighton. My sister Adele was scrunched down in the front seat as far as she could go and I don't remember whether her eyes were closed or not, but I do remember glancing at the speedometer that hovered around the high seventies most of the way.

I believe that my hands shook as I tried to lift my tea to my mouth, but Mr. Driscoll remarked that THAT speed to a 30/98 Vauxhall was just cruising although the vehicle was about ten years old at the time. Upon returning to Croyden, we thanked our host and took the bus back to the hotel in Central London. One of my suppressed desires is to ride in an "old crock" with some Englishmen in a London to Brighton run some misty November in the future, but if I never do that—that first Brighton run will partly compensate for that famous annual event.

The last memorable ride took place about 10 years ago at Hershey. Some of the National Directors and I had been told that Bill Harrah wanted us to come to the back of the Hershey Stadium. I don't know the reactions of the other directors, but I was really

astounded because in front of us was the famous New York to Paris Thomas Flyer of 1908 round the world fame. I had read about this car and its drivers; I had met George Shuster, the mechanic-driver in the race but I had never seen this legendary vehicle. There it sat—with its crimson wheels and French gray body partially filled with lanterns, ropes, camping gear and fuel cans—just as it looked when it arrived triumphantly in Paris to win the race. The sides of the wooden body were covered with people's carved initials—carefully reproduced from photographs. Everything was as closely reproduced as possible.

At that point, Bill Harrah told us that any of the directors who wanted to take a ride in the Thomas could do so. We went in groups of three because there wasn't a lot of room with all of the gear in the back but as we whizzed around the cinder track inside the stadium, I felt that it was one of my most memorable automobile rides. Bill Harrah is gone now, but that historic automobile reposes in his great museum to be enjoyed by thousands of people now and in the years to come.

WW II CIVIL DEFENSE IN STUARTS DRAFT

Whenever I hear the fire alarm wail its mournful sound from atop the old schoolhouse, I immediately feel uneasy and start hoping the fire will be a small one or even a false alarm, but at least I know that it isn't a warning to begin a "black-out" to darken our little town as a protection from enemy aircraft. What you have just read may seem a bit corny or perhaps amusing but back in the dark days of 1942 through 1944, black-outs were frequent and were mandatory in Stuarts Draft and many other small towns and in town on Route 11. Why?

Because we were told these clusters of lights would serve as a beacon to German bombers that would be seeking the important munitions factory at Radford. Who in these days would believe that Germany had bombers that would carry a load of bombs over three thousand miles to drop on the Radford Arsenal? Nobody. But back in 1942, the Japanese had shelled the west coast from a submarine and U-Boats were sinking our tankers off the Virginia coast. Also it was believed by our military "experts" that the Nazis still had in operation the LZ130 and the LZ131, which were giant airships even larger than the ill-fated Hindenburg that crashed in flames at Lakehurst, New Jersey in 1937. Actually these two giant dirigibles had been dismantled on the orders of Adolph Hitler, who hated the leaders of the German Air Service, but the Germans were building planes capable of bombing the United States.

This is why in the autumn of 1942, I was contacted by a government official and was asked if I would serve as chief control officer of Civil Defense in the Stuarts Draft area. I agreed and began making plans to put a crude warning system into effect. My two wardens were Mr. W.A. Bussey and Mr. Crawford Brooks. My badge of office or authority was a World War I helmet painted white with the letters "CD" inside a triangle. Now, since this information is no longer "classified" and I will not be called to explain anything before a congressional committee, I will tell everyone how we operated.

On cold winter nights our telephone would ring two longs and one short. The caller from Staunton would identify himself and say that "condition yellow" was in effect. I would then put on a coat, cap, and gloves and head for the garage and my faithful 1929 Model A touring car. I would then pick up my flashlight that I had covered with red cellophane around the lens. Heading down the driveway and onto Route 12 (now known as 340), I would pause by each house, blow my "aah-oogah" horn, and shine my red light in a window. If no one blinked a light in recognition, I would go to the door and knock and holler, "black-out".

My area of coverage was from the area of what is now Broadmoor to the intersection of the highway and Rt. 608. I was then to proceed down Main Street to the home of Cliff Forbes. By that time, hopefully, Crawford Brooks had warned everyone from Calvary Church to the corner and Bill Bussey had contacted everyone as far out as Justus Cline's place and the folks on Flory Avenue. We would then go back to the Bussey home and wait for my number to ring on his phone. A voice would say "the condition is red". That was our cue to go back to the Forbes home, and, after stuffing cotton in our

ears we would activate the town fire alarm, which was by pounding on a large locomotive wheel rim with a sledge hammer. We had been told that this alarm could be heard from almost a mile away if the conditions were right.

As this awesome signal began, all lights would be turned out or "black out curtains" would be pulled shut. I then proceeded to drive back to where the stoplight is now; turn off my car lights and wait for the car of the official coming from Staunton to check our efficiency or lack thereof. While waiting I sometimes was obliged to stop the few trucks or cars on the highway and tell them to pull over and turn off their lights. Some of the truck drivers refused to pull over even when I told them I had to get their license plate numbers, but once in a while the cars contained a young high school couple and they were always happy to comply with our regulations! When the official arrived, I was told that we were back to "condition yellow" and that we could go back home and wait for the "condition green" telephone call.

Additional civil defense regulations required that I make a survey of all homes in this area and find out how many rooms were available for housing refugees from the Washington area in case the Capitol was bombed. Courses were also given which explained how to extinguish fires started by thermite bombs... which burned at several thousand degrees and could not be put out with water. Buckets of sand were the suggested solution to the problem.

Yes, that was civil defense in Stuarts Draft from 1942 through most of 1944. It seems almost funny and it sounds a bit unreal to us today, but back then people were worried, co-operative, and patriotic. We had a war to fight, and a war to win, and we believed that somehow we too were working toward that end.

THINGS I'VE DONE IN OLD CARS THAT I'LL NEVER DO AGAIN

This column is going to be a treat of things that I must refer to as "things I did in my love affair with the automobile that I will NEVER do again." The first incident that comes to mind is a trip to the Tidewater area for an Old Dominion Meet many years ago. I drove my 1916 Model T Ford in company with Raymond Driver, Herb Hulvey, and Jeff Diffie. I recall that we were between Richmond and Williamsburg when darkness overtook us and the headlights on Herb's car would not work, but his tail light was burning fine. So we closed ranks in our four-car caravan and I led the way with my very bright magneto headlamps and dim oil tail lights followed by Herb's car, Jeff's Dodge, and Raymond's Nash. We finally looked frantically for a place to stay and finally pulled in at the Mary Washington Motel for the night.

We made our way to the meet site and had a fine time. I found out, however, that the Model T brake band had disintegrated and a replacement was not to be found. For this reason my son Jerry and I decided to leave early Sunday morning with a plea to Jeff, Herb, and Raymond to keep a lookout for us alongside the road somewhere between Norfolk and Waynesboro. The old T ran hot but steadily at about 23 miles per hour and we were able to bring it to a stop at traffic lights by using the low gear pedal, a dab of reverse, and then the hand brake. Signaling for a stop with the left hand and then quickly pulling on the brake was a bit tricky, but when you are young, things like that are part of the fun. We arrived home without incident and I promised my family that I wouldn't be involved in any hair-raising situations again.

Well, I was wrong. The following Spring I succumbed to the lure of the vernal equinox and made plans to drive my 1906 Wayne to the Old Dominion Meet at McIntyre Park in Charlottesville. Son Jerry and I persuaded his mother that the trip would be "a breeze" and all she had to do was bring the Chrysler and the trailer to the park in the afternoon. We started from home about 7:30 and arrived at the Waynesboro city limits shortly after 8 o'clock. We filled the radiator and our water jugs and "sprinted" for the base of the mountain and the curves and hills of Route 250. Stopping to put more water in the radiator only twice, we made our way to the summit in half an hour. The problem of going down Afton Mountain with primitive brakes was solved by driving on the gravel shoulders and using low gear and reverse from time to time using our trusty planetary transmission.

To make a long story short, we conquered all the hills and valleys on the way to Charlottesville and arrived in time to meet the registration deadline. It seemed like a lot of fun at the time and I was proud of my little two-cylinder car, but I can assure you that I wouldn't and probably couldn't do it again.

Another "I'll never do it again" incident that comes to mind is one morning on the 1957 Glidden Tour that Jerry and I left Washington DC in the Model T heading for Gettysburg. On that particular morning, it was raining quite hard and it was still dark. The magneto powered headlights and the kerosene tail lamp were about to meet the challenges of

Washington traffic. Of course, many of our congressmen were still in bed sleeping off last night's celebrating, but there were still lots of folks going to work at 7:30 am.

Jerry was my navigator; reading the city map with the aid of a flashlight as we drove through the unfamiliar streets, hoping that the cars behind would see my hand sticking out of the rain curtain making signals for stops and turns. They apparently did manage to see my signals and we managed our exodus from the capitol without a scratch or dent. We reached Gettysburg for a lunch at a country store and then on to Hershey before dark. That evening I sat around with old friends and laughed about our problems, but if I had to make that same trip today, I would be in a cold sweat the whole day.

Other scenes flash by in my mind that involve driving the Wayne in a thunderstorm in Roanoke, through downtown traffic heading for our motel outside of town on Route 11. I could hardly see because of the heavy rain and I knew that my primitive brakes would never stop us in an emergency, but it seemed like a great adventure at the time.

I recall yet another drive in the same car in 1966—or was it 1965? It was raining steadily, but our club was determined to hold the Old Dominion Meet at the Staunton fairgrounds. I drove on some of the back roads and the little car never missed a beat. We arrived at the meet site with just one area of my clothing still dry...the seat of my pants. Even that area was a bit damp, but as I drove the little blue runabout into the mud at my designated space, I felt no regrets...only elevation at my accomplishment. This was the spirit of antique automobiling! This was high adventure in my favorite hobby.

Would I do something like that again? Would Germany build a zeppelin named *Hindenburg II*? To quote a 19th century expression, "Not on your tintype, Belinda!"