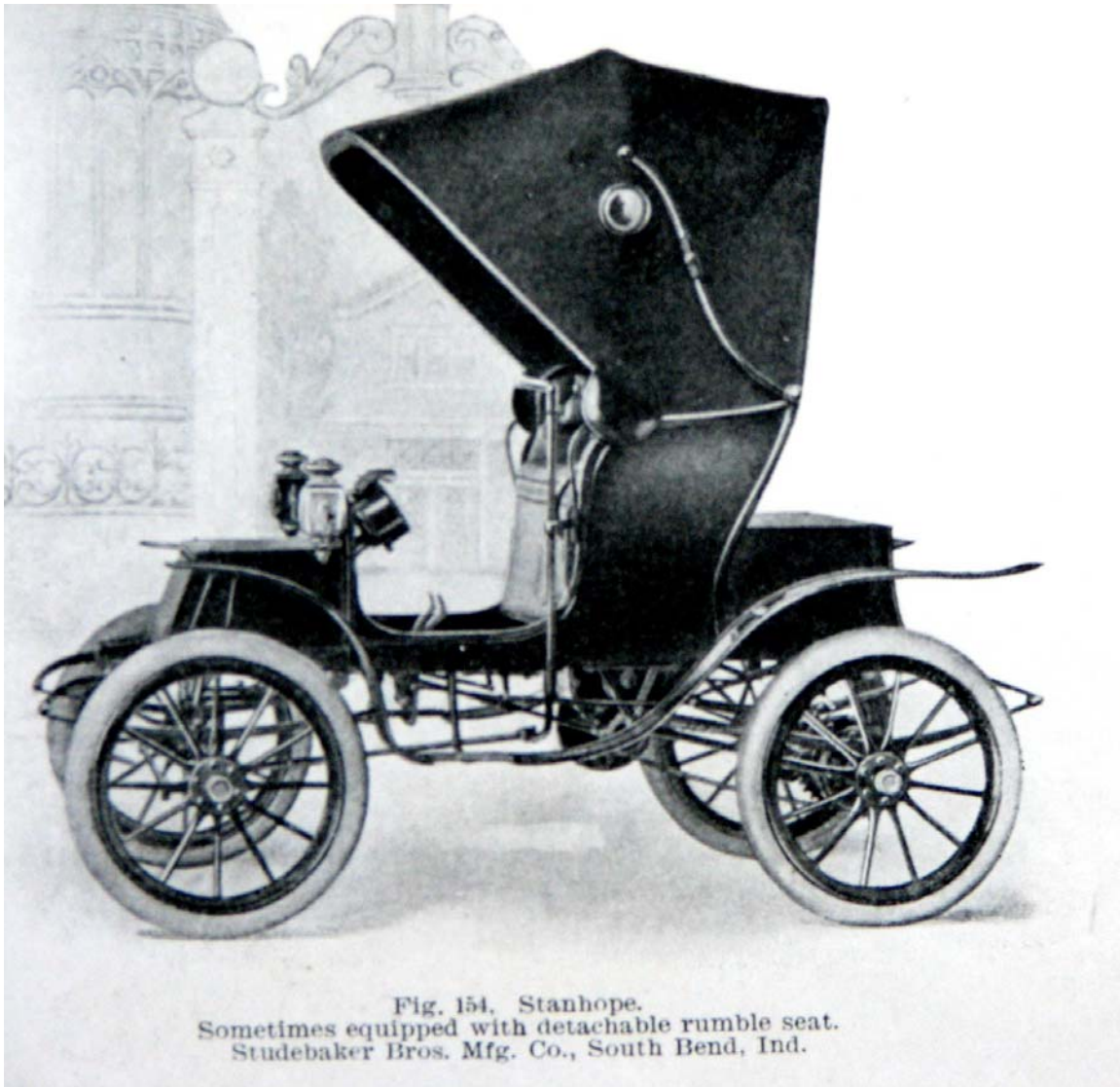


The American Automobile One Hundred Years Ago



Recently the Colebrook Historical Society received many items from Mr. Charles Viall, formerly of Winsted, now removed to Florida. His downsizing resulted in our acquisition of many important additions to the museum, among which were a large number of books and other printed matter. One volume in particular caught my eye; “Cyclopedia of Automobile Engineering”, copyright 1909. As you can imagine, it is full of fascinating photos, drawings and text. I think you will find the following selections enjoyable reading.

Selecting a motor-car. In purchasing a vehicle, it is well to study the character of the manufacturers, and is desirable to visit their manufacturing shop. It must be borne in mind that it is quite likely that the purchaser will have to have some repair work done on his car. Is the company you are considering well enough organized so that they will give your repair order prompt attention? Is the company reliable enough to manufacture standard and interchangeable parts throughout the whole season, or is it a company whose individual cars vary with the whim of the shop proprietors and the carelessness and inaccuracy of the shop workmen?

Owing to the great demand for motor-cars, there has been a rush into the business of manufacturers who are qualified to build wheelbarrows, infant perambulators, farmer's buggies and simple agricultural machinery; but these same men are not necessarily by any means qualified to build motor-cars.

Price. There will unquestionably be a great market for fairly light cars to be run at moderate speeds and to be sold at prices between \$500 and \$1,500. A person needs to be particularly careful in selecting a car that is sold within this range of prices, especially if the manufacturing company is a new one.

In considering first cost and cost of maintenance of an automobile, it should be borne in mind that the motor-car is practically horses and carriage combined. Certainly its first cost, in order that it may be a good car, must be as high as that of an extra high-grade horse-propelled carriage, plus the cost of a well-built engine and necessary transmission apparatus. Its stable bill is little after it is at rest. The gasoline bill depends upon the mileage.

Instruction in driving. It is not at all difficult to learn the function and method of operation of the parts that have to be handled in driving a car. These parts include the steering wheel, the throttle and ignition levers, and the brake and change-gear levers and pedals.

To become an expert driver, however, is a different matter. This requires alertness of mind; a refinement of the senses of sight, touch, hearing and smelling; and an ability to anticipate conditions that are to be met. A person whose mind and senses are sluggish will never make a good driver. Experience in bicycling or in sailing is of value, since it has brought into play the same mind and sense training that is required in automobiling.

Range of speeds. If the engine power is liberal for the weight of the car, it is likely that the driver will seldom make use of more than two speeds; and a number of cars built at moderate price for family use are appreciating this fact by providing but two speeds.

Levers and pedals. The positions of levers for varying speeds should be so distinct that there will be no likelihood of making mistakes through absent mindedness, or "getting rattled." For instance, in an arrangement in which throwing the lever forward means full speed, throwing it backward means slow speed, and the foot pedal is used for reversing and braking, there is less liability to error than in arrangements where one lever has to do nearly all of these tasks. Any car should be made so that as much of its operation as possible can be done by foot-pedals.

Clothing. When driving at twenty miles an hour, the air will actually pass through ordinary overcoats and cloth garments; hence it is necessary that clothing be air proof, and so contrived that air will not get under the garments. The coat should by all means be so made as to fit closely at the wrists. Goggles are indispensable if no front glass is used on the car.

It is worth remembering that if you are in a rain and have no top, the seat cushion should be put inside your coat and not outside.

Accessories. The number of accessories is legion. Many of these are of doubtful utility, and are likely to become a source of annoyance after the wane of the first enthusiasm.

Powerful searchlights are disagreeable; owing to the sharp contrast, everything not in their range is invisible.

Acetylene lamps are usually more troublesome than oil lamps if the gas is generated on the car. The use of compressed gas, which is supplied in cylindrical tanks attached to the side of the car, has become almost universal.

Small dynamos (generators) for furnishing lights can be attached to the car as easily as a dynamo for sparking, and are likely to gain in popularity.

An article which perhaps is more of a tool than an accessory, and which should not be overlooked by any means, is the jack. This article should not be kept at home, but should be carried with the car.

In the five years from 1900 to 1905 the manufacture of automobiles grew from an industry so unimportant that it was not reported separately in the census of 1900, to one with products valued at nearly \$27,000,000 at the Census of 1905. This remarkable growth is not, it is believed, like that of the bicycle industry, based on a fad, and so liable to as sudden a decline. Unlike the bicycle the automobile is not essentially a new vehicle, but merely a carriage or truck with new means of propulsion, possessing many advantages over a vehicle drawn by horses. As a means of amusement its popularity may fluctuate or decline, but its practical value has been so thoroughly demonstrated that its use will doubtless become more and more general.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg