

Many others were a great inspiration but it was, as the Irish say, “meself” who had the audacity to name the tour “The First”.

A lot of hours went into arranging “The First” thus satisfying, my dream, my desire to get these antique Horseless Carriages restored, cranked up and motored out from those hidden corners had become reality.

We usually have two sides, the upside and the downside. The upside, and uncanny as it may seem, was of the first ten Tours organised only once did I have a bulk wheat ship to unload! On nine occasions the week before the Tour was free from long hours and another unexpected surprise, a letter came from America informing us that three couples from the Horseless Carriage Club of America would be attending our inaugural Tour to Hamilton. Better still they were to bring their finery, their dress-up gear, their period costumes that adorn their Tours, a real incentive to our fairer sex not to be out-done! Be sure, have faith they’ll equal the challenge!

The downside happened on the very first Tour!

On the final few days and all the loose ends to tie. Monday morning and the telephone no go! Tried my neighbour, Bruce but he was at work so ring complaints. “We’ll have a serviceman



there as soon as one becomes available.” Tuesday, ring again. Same assurance again on Wednesday and Thursday! If I operated my services likewise I’d be in the dole queue! I’m getting desperate. I’m half a day on Bruce’s phone. Something’s got to be done! I ring complaints and introduce myself.

“Could I speak to a serviceman please?”

“A serviceman?”

“Yes, my phone won’t go and I want to fix it!”

“You’re not allowed to tamper with your telephone.”

“I don’t want to tamper with it. I want to fix it so if you could put a serviceman on the line?”

I was amazed myself, at the efficiency of the Post & Telegraph Department. I had my phone by noon!

Finally it’s Saturday morning, and a glorious morning. Not a cloud to be seen. The Gods have been kind. An historic day, this first tour day. The first of near 30 “Auckland to Hamilton tours for Brass Era Vehicles” on March 8th 1975.



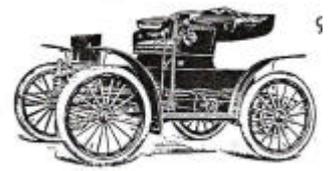
After thought:-

And yes, the gentleman who emphatically declared that in no way would his 1912 Austin be seen negotiating the Great South Road from Auckland to Hamilton, submitted his early entry and no doubt enjoyed the day and also yes, the who “wouldn’t be seen dead in those silly old clothes” arrived resplendent in her high collared creation and beribboned bonnet. Yes, those prototypes, those ancestors of the automobile you navigate today did reach Hamilton that day in 1975 under their own steam or benzene or by what ever?



Now, I have the bones of a tour, might even say I've got a skeleton. What to do now, as this has all been done off my own bat, without authority? Present it to the Directors. Happy to say it was received with acclaim and the whole concept was given the go ahead. Now it is full steam ahead, as I have my way and my desire to get these Edwardian conveyances restored and motoring is no longer just a fantasy, a dream. The Directors have given me the green light. I can commence building. The foundations are down, but it's the details that take the time!

There must be atmosphere, great atmosphere, this is to be a real colourful event, a prestigious event, full of fun and laughs and great memories, and the likes of which they've never seen. The "Star", the "Herald", Television, the Radio, the local rag, all to be contacted. Why not the Mayor of Auckland City, Sir Dove Myer Robinson, "Robbie" as he is affectionately known, to wish us well and send us on our way? When the wheat ship is in Port, so am I, but no trucking in the lunch hour. Club Member, Sel Bonney was on the wharf organizing his trucking and inquired as to the progress of the tour. I mentioned that I would be contacting Robbie and he suggested, "Why not now?" Consequently we arrived, unexpected and uninvited, but yes, he would see us. Robbie has always had a love of automobiles and was a very competitive motorbike rider in his younger days and yes he would be delighted to honour us with his presence and agreed to choose the automobile he would like to take home. He suggested he bring a presentation "Coat of Arms of Auckland City", to present to the driver.



Now, at the "Jolly Farmer" we would need tables and tablecloths, volunteers to make fresh scones, etc. and sun umbrellas, a must so the cream wouldn't melt, and urns, teapots, cups and saucers, and so much more. We would need serving wenches. Now who? Yes, who better than my sister's lovely daughters, my three comely nieces. Sister Pam purchased suitable material and attired them in true Edwardian fashion. Wow, they looked great and would sure enhance the occasion. As for the "Jolly Farmer", what a great venue, so reminiscent of an English coaching Inn and Hostelry making a great backdrop for our antique conveyances.

Having satisfied our immediate needs we would then motor south passing through Rangiriri, Huntly, then turn left at Taupiri, to motor on to Gordonton and the idyllic country homestead of the Bridgman family. Here Eileen, (nee Bridgman) husband Noel, and friend Velma Goodman, preparing lunch, or banquet would be a more fitting description. The "Royals" would not dine better. Not to hurry here, just relax, help yourselves at the tables, enjoy the cars and company and take photos. Why not have our friend and local, Jack Morgan here with his horse and buggy? Speeches and prizes, Bridgman's Choice, Driver's Choice, and the Motat Trophy would follow. Bill Miller must take the longest distance travelled, all the way from Ashburton, South Island.

Finally its time to "Harness Up" as the Mayor of Hamilton, Mike Minogue and citizens awaits us at the Founders Theatre. The Waikato boys have done us proud. A letter conveyed by the oldest automobile from the Mayor of Auckland and addressed to the Mayor of Hamilton is delivered and read. More speeches end a most memorable and exhilarating day.

Off to our Motel, evening meal, more formalities, more speechmaking, and more presenting of Plaques! This has been a big day, a big week for organisers and participants and everyone is tired out. But no single soul receives the credit for such a successful venture; I enlisted and was offered some great help. Again I venture to mention the help and encouragement of David, always so positive and full of enthusiasm. It was David who arranged and helped design the plaques and he also suggested the title "the Auckland to Hamilton Tour for Brass Era Vehicles".

O.K., where to start this tour? The Auckland Railway Station, a big frontal car park, lots of space for spectators, great atmosphere, but permission will be needed. Write to the Superintendent, correspondence changed hands and a final refusal. Now what? The most suitable venue in Auckland, I think, is the Chief Post Office at the seaward end of Queen Street. Always a busy centre of activity, especially on Saturday! I very much doubted that permission would be granted to use this area. As mother also said, "Never venture, never gain."

Vern Dawson was top brass in the Auckland City Traffic Department. A real nice guy and I had known him for some years. I drafted a letter of request, no stamp needed, as I would deliver it personally. Vern, with his offsider were both most enthusiastic when I outlined the format of the planned tour and offered me full assistance. So far, so good, we now had a great start venue.

Having already discussed the tour possibilities with long time friends Noel and Eileen Newsome the next step was to meet with Eileen's parents, Archer and Molly Bridgman whose property at Gordonton with its early colonial homestead, mature trees and picturesque gardens could provide an idyllic setting for the midday banquet. They were delighted to entertain us.

While lying awake when I should be sleeping, I got another inspiration. Ross Crook! Now Ross is an amateur moviemaker, with a lot of imagination and expertise. Yes, why not record this auspicious event on film.

Those of you afflicted with this all consuming passion of spending one's leisure hours engrossed in the study and the debateable pleasure of endeavouring to motor from A to B in this kind of antiquated machinery, need not be reminded of the long hours, preparation and frustrations, (not to mention, conflict in the family residence) we endure leading up to, and immediately before, letting out of the clutch.



For those of you, especially out-of-towners, the lead up to a tour can be quite devastating. All the brass, final tinkering, ironing the finery, someone to feed the cat, and by the time you've arrived at the start, there was no time for breakfast! You are pooped, listen to all the cob wash, then you are told to be off!



Something must be done about this. These folk are traumatized and need sustenance, fuel to proceed. Get them out of the city limits, through the last traffic lights, out where the air is clean. They need liquid and nourishment. Drury sounds good and "Ye Olde Jolly Farmer Inn". Yes, Drury that's ideal. They've got atmosphere there. I approached the Manager, Ron Wheeler with my ideas. "Sure, sounds good, no problem." You sure meet some great people. Now we have everything falling into place.

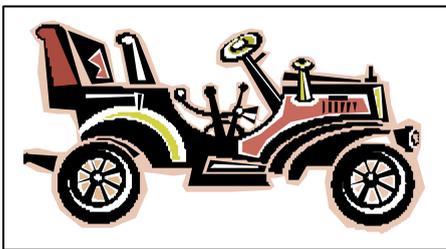
We have a starting place, somewhere to have mid-morning refreshments and a place to partake our midday meal. Now all that's needed is a place to finish our tour, replenish the appetite we lost at lunchtime and a pillow to rest our weary heads. I realize help would be needed in Hamilton. I have enough to do organising the Auckland end. Waikato Vintage Car Club President, John White and mate of many years George Hawkins were enlisted to arrange details in Hamilton. I have confidence these are good men. They'll do it right.

So the first and most ancient Horseless Carriage is away, followed by the next vehicle wheezing, chugging and spitting merrily, hopefully destined to enter the Waikato township of Hamilton come nightfall, perhaps, God willing, a little before.

So, who are these quaintly attired folk? What is the occasion? Where are they heading, these ancient automobiles? I suggest that the most appropriate place to commence would be the beginning.

Following the Annual Meeting of the Vintage and Veteran Car Club of New Zealand, it seemed very obvious to enthusiasts, John Stewart and David Porter, that there was very little interest amongst Members for these very antiquated Edwardian automobiles. So, what to do? Both John Stewart and David Porter belonged to an American based club. A fun club with a common sense constitution and a very readable bi-monthly magazine dedicated to pre 1916 "Brass Era Vehicles". Approaches were made, discussion followed and thanks to John and David the New Zealand Chapter of the Horseless Carriage Club of America was born!

After being kindly persuaded, and assisted, by my friend and early HCCA Member, Sel Bonny, I duly signed the forms and soon found myself in the boardroom wearing the title of "Director of



Activities"! This involved organising a monthly club run and a get-together, usually at a member's residence. All good fun and enthusiastically attended, often with a 70% turnout! Hold on, why were we together and what were we about? The motorable pre 1916 automobiles in our stables could be counted on one and a bit hands, but have another look, in the dark corners where quite a number of un-restored vehicles could be found lurking there!

When one navigates a truck all day and into the night, one has ample opportunity to meditate and indulge one's thoughts. Something needed to be done. Here was this club, its aims to foster the restoration and use of pre 1916 automobiles, but really there was little incentive created to foster its purpose. Better get creative! What's needed is an event, and annual event, the likes that haven't been seen before. An event, full of colour; of fun and laughs; one that would last long in the memory. An event that would enthuse those with un-restored vehicles to pull out the tools and join the cavalcade.

Where to? We had all seen Dudley Moore and Kaye Kendall motoring in their 1905 Darracq "Genevieve" in the immortal film of the same name, in the very best of English comedies on their epic journey in the "London to Brighton Rally". This was the obvious format, from town to town, and the obvious towns, Auckland to Hamilton. O.K., the master plan formulated, now to sow the seed. Where to sow? The A.G.M. next month!

My thoughts were presented and discussed. Yes, the concept; had merit." Where to?" "From Auckland to Hamilton". One member with an Austin of 1912 manufacture was quite vocal in his disapproval and was adamant his vehicle would not be seen traversing this busy route. After some discussion a Director was appointed to select an alternative and suitable route for the tour. The ball was rolling. Twelve months passed and another twelve months, with the same answer to the question of what progress had been made? "Been very busy but I'm getting onto it shortly."

Mother always told us, "If you want something done, ask a busy man." The philosophy didn't seem to be working. I've never been one to sit and suck my thumb, just get stuck in, put in the hours and get it on the road.

Horseless Carriage Club of America

The 1st Brass Era Tour

By Bryan Belcher

“I know what it is, it’s a film set, and they’re making a film, that’s what they’re doing!”

“I don’t think so, there’s no camera.”

“Oh! There here somewhere, they’re getting organised. You’ll see them.”

She was a tall angular woman making statements that left no opening for discussion. Her companion was as short as she was tall and shaped sort of like a brandy keg with the necessary appendages, and observing these two; one with little imagination could easily compare them as a feminine creation of “Laurel & Hardy”.

I was in close proximity, attired in top hat and tails; the taller woman gave me a direct look, no doubt seeking confirmation of her statement. I was quickly somewhere else! There was much yet to do and no time for small talk. Later, she must have ensnared some other unfortunate, as I could still hear her holding forth.

“Hamilton! Hamilton? When do you think you’re going to get to Hamilton?” “Today!” “You reckon, today! You must be an optimist! More like a week, that’s if you get there at all.”

An elderly gentleman with a cultured voice, close at hand, remarked to his good lady, “Genevieve, that’s what it reminds me of. Genevieve, remember we saw Genevieve when the Queen was here?” His remarks pleased me. It was what I wanted to hear.

Surely it was a grand spectacle to behold. Such gorgeous antique automobiles and their occupants. Who are these ladies in their elegant Elizabethan finery of boas and bonnets, fancy parasols, buttoned up boots and Ostrich plumes! Their men folk were not to be outdone (no doubt with a little bit of help from the good lady) were an impressive sight, attired as men folk were in the early 1900’s, which may only be described as dashing or handsome or any other words worthy of their description.



The automobiles, Horseless Carriages, or “stink buggies”, call them what you may as Grandpa did, were truly a sight to behold! All that magnificent brass, so ornate, the horns with all those twists and every one so different, and note the beautiful big lights and windscreens with brass fittings.



How long would it take to make them sparkle like this with everything, even the hubcaps, polished to perfection! The automobiles; Locomobile, Cadillac, Star, Ford, Delage Brush and more, beautifully painted and every one with a different body style, deeply buttoned upholstery and some with tops as protection from the elements and some without. These are the prototypes of today’s conveyances, manufactured when motive power was in its infancy, replacing poor Dobbin.

The crowds! The questions! A lady hoists her hemline to surmount her conveyance while hubby is busily engaged pulling things and pushing things, tinkering with the controls, then around to the frontal end, the cranking handle is turned and, hey presto, with a little bit of luck the machine bursts into life!