

1901 LOCOMOBILE STEAM BUGGY

By Ross Jones, Owner



We met the second owners of the car, Mr and Mrs Beetham, who were in their 80's at the time, and they were able to give me the history as they knew it.

Mr Barton bought the Locomobile in England and brought it out to White Rock Station, near Masterton, where Mr Beetham worked and helped to get water for the boiler from near-by creeks. Eventually the car was left to Mr Beetham who brought the car with him to the Feilding area where he

used it, only occasionally, as a result the boiler rusted out. When he retired the car was kept on his farm until 1923 when he dismantled it keeping the engine, tanks and pipes and giving the chassis and wheels to a neighbour where I later found the chassis up in the hay loft minus the rear sprocket, which had been used on a winch! I obtained the motor, tanks, pipes and automatics from Mr Beetham who was now living in Masterton. There was no trace of the wooden body, which was made from scratch.

The Locomobile has a fire tube boiler, a petrol vaporising burner for heating the water, an 18-gallon water tank and a can carrying 3 ½ gallons of fuel. The engine is a simple 2 cylinder steam engine with a bore of 2 ½ “and a stroke of 3 ½ “, a direct chain-drive requiring no gear box or clutch. The car has tiller steering, is very simple to drive and a pleasure to operate.

We first competed in the 1977 International Parliamentary Tour from Auckland to Kaitaia and back, travelling a good 500 miles in five days, we used 300 gallons of water and 50 gallons of petrol. It also completed in the Christchurch to Nelson Rally and the Auckland - Napier – Wellington Reliability Trial, travelling the whole distance without a single breakdown! The Locomobile can maintain about 30 mph on the flat, has a range of 60 miles and can attain 45 mph in a short burst.

As I recall, my first trip on the Auckland to Hamilton run was pretty uneventful, other than the routine of re fuelling every 30 miles and topping up the water tank! I do remember the fun going through Newmarket and the interest the public showed in the car – especially enjoyed being first at the lights and being able to “burn off” ahead of the then young hoons! I had the honour of taking the letter from Mayor Robbie and delivering it to the Mayor of Hamilton. The part that was a concern to me was that I had to stand up on the car, in front of the crowd in Hamilton, and give a speech!

On a later run I recall getting a puncture and the interest shown by the passers-by when I replaced the tube and pumped it up using the Steam Air Pump on the car! I might also add that I felt a bit stupid doing this repair all dressed up in antique clothes.

It was a privilege to be on the “First Run”, just as it will be for the 30th in the same car!

