

# The American Locomotive Company's

## 1912 Automobile

By LEONA BELOTE

Our family, Philip, Bob and I, have just had a ride in a tremendous automobile - Dick Hovey's 1912 ALCO six cylinder touring car. This is one of the seven known to be in the United States. As we drove along Edgewater Drive, one of the pedestrians honored us with a sweeping courtly bow. To ride in such a magnificent, exceptionally well kept car, as the sun was setting across the bay, is really an experience to treasure.

Dick Hovey of Dunedin, Florida, and Bill Dawn of Knoxville, Tennessee, who are both members of VMCCA, recently got into a trade. When the mountain fog cleared away, Bill Dawn was the proud new owner of a 1915 Mercer and Dick Hovey was on his way to Florida in a fabulous 1912 ALCO.

Our club members first laid eyes on this truly fine car at the meet held at Taylor Park, Largo. When Dick drove up in the ALCO, all of the club members gathered around and when Dick stepped down, he saw the feet of Millard Newman, our S. E. Region Director, who was lying on his back under the car for a closer look at the underpinnings.

Ordinarily Dick is a rather quiet person, reluctant to discuss himself or his possessions. But now that he owns an ALCO, he's fairly bursting with pride. Who wouldn't be? Dick supplied the following information about the ALCO.

This 1912 ALCO six cylinder touring car is truly a fine car. The deep maroon finish of body, hood and wheels with black fenders and running gear, is beautiful. Now, add to this the gold striping, done by a specialist in his own field and it simply means perfection. Speaking of trim, this car seems to have more brass, bronze and copper than the president's yacht.

A drive through the country, from Knoxville to Dunedin in the ALCO is one of the thrills of a lifetime. It performs on those mountain grades just like the Alco Diesel Locomotives so prevalent on our railroads today.

From the information we have gathered about American Locomotive Automobile Company, their first cars were completed and ready for sale in the latter part of 1906. They continued to build cars at their plant in Providence, Rhode Island through 1913 with deliberately slow production schedules.

Little has been said and but few know that the six cylinder, 60 hp Alco won the Vanderbilt Cup Race in 1909. Harry F. Grant was the driver, with Frank H. Lee as riding mechanic. Again in 1910, the same driving team brought the Alco across the finish line, victorious over the same Long Island course.

The Alco was meticulously built of fine quality materials, limited in production and quite costly.

Following is a quotation taken from the 1913 catalog: "It takes one year and seven months to build one Alco - six months alone to build the rear axle."

Specifications of the 1912 Alco six: Engine - Six cylinder "T" head, vertical, cylinders cast in pairs, bore and stroke 4 3/4 x 5 1/2, piston displacement 579.51 cubic inches, 60 H. P.

Ignition - Bosch magneto dual system, two sets of plugs, battery ignition by separate breaker points in magneto. Lubrication - Force feed oiling, also splash. Clutch - Multiple disc. Transmission - Four speeds forward and one reverse, selective sliding gear, direct drive in fourth. Drive - Shaft, two universals. Cooling system - Water and fan. Frame - Channel steel, 5" deep. Wheelbase - 133 1/2 inches. Weight of Chassis, 3450 pounds. Weight of car, 4125 pounds, including gasoline, water, two extra tires, etc. Gasoline tank capacity, 24 1/2 gallons. Oil reservoir capacity, 8 quarts. Axles - Front, one-piece drop forging; rear, full floating type, one-piece forging. Equipment - Open and closed bodies; tire brackets, electric headlights, windshield, Sears-Cross combination speedometer and clock, Klaxon horn, combination electric and oil dash and tail lamps, slip covers on all open bodies.

The Alco Motor Car Book of Instructions for the 1913 six cylinder, sixty horsepower car built by the American Locomotive Company contains some pertinent and interesting information. Some of the readers may enjoy reminiscing over the good old days when it took a man with real mechanical knowledge to operate a car, so we'll give a few excerpts for comparison with 1963 cars.

How to Operate - Preparatory to Starting - Fill the gasoline tank. Ed. note: This is a good practice for modern cars also. Fill the oil reservoir of the motor. Inspect the transmission, the differential and the grease cups, and see that they contain lubricant. Fill the radiator with water.

How to Start - See that the hand brake is on and that the gear shift lever is in the neutral position. Turn on the gasoline.

On the left hand side of the dash there is a hand pump. Open the valve at the bottom of this pump by turning the handle so that it points toward the floor boards. Pump until the gauge shows a pressure of two pounds, then close the valve.

On the steering wheel there are two levers. Push the long one - the throttle or gasoline control lever - about two inches of its throw toward the word

"advance" on the quadrant. Push the smaller lever - the spark lever - about one-half inch away from the word "retard" on the quadrant. Prime the carburetor. Turn the switch on the dash so that "A" is opposite "B". This connects the batteries.

Pull out the compression release lever. This is located to the right of the starting crank. Engage starting crank and pull up several times. If the motor does not start after reasonable cranking, do not continue cranking, but locate the trouble. When motor is cold it may be necessary to prime the cylinders before starting. Open the cylinder petcocks and place about half a teaspoonful of gasoline in each. Close the petcocks before cranking.

Starting without Batteries - If you have no batteries, pump the pressure as before. Push the throttle about two inches away from the word "retard". Advance the spark lever about four inches of its throw towards the word "Advance". Turn the switch so that "A" is on "M" for magneto. Prime the carburetor. Pull out the compression release lever. Spin the motor. Ed. note: This phrase intrigues me. I try to visualize a motor spinning. Often when

the motor has been left standing for a short time it can be started by the following method: Place the throttle and spark lever in their proper position, with the switch turned to "B". Push the button in the middle of the switch two or three times. The motor will start provided there is gas in the cylinders; otherwise it will be necessary to crank the motor.

After Motor is Started - Quickly push in the compression lever. Turn the switch to "M". Advance the spark lever about three quarters of its throw towards the word "advance". Push the throttle one-quarter of an inch from the word "retard".

Applying the Brakes - Whenever possible, slow the car by merely taking the foot off accelerator pedal. Apply hand brakes only in cases of emergency and when the car is left standing.

Care of the Car - Keep the motor clean. Inspect the car frequently. If any trouble should develop, locate it immediately before it becomes serious. Keep the spring clips tight. Don't be afraid to use oil. Grind the valves once or twice a season. Keep the tires well inflated. Use tire gauge.

## **D O N ' T S**

Don't start on a trip without replenishing with gasoline and water.

Don't start on a trip without attention to lubrication.

Don't attempt to start the motor until the gear-shifting lever is in the neutral position, and the hand brake is on.

Don't attempt to start the car with the hand brake on.

Don't advance the spark lever too far when cranking motor. You may be injured.

Don't shift gears without first releasing the clutch.

Don't start by jerks, and pass unevenly into the different speeds. It causes unnecessary strain on the motor.

Don't continue running if you detect an unusual noise. Investigate the cause.

Don't neglect squeaking parts. Oil them.

Don't allow bolts to remain loose or permit any parts to rattle. Tighten them.

Don't tamper with parts or make adjustments, until you are certain as to the trouble.

Don't race the motor.

Don't start the day's work if the motor is not running properly. Locate the trouble before anything serious happens.

Don't use an inferior grade of lubricating oil. It causes carbon deposits on the piston heads, spark plugs, and combustion chamber walls.

Don't let the motor run when you leave your car. You will be saved gasoline and oil, also trouble should anyone tamper with the gear shifting lever while you are absent.

Don't forget to clean the spark plugs. The gap between the points should be 1/32 of an inch.

Don't drive the spring clips loose. Always keep them tight.

Don't start with the throttle too far open.

Don't let the motor run with a retarded spark.

Don't fail to keep the brake adjusted.

Dick Hovey driving his 1912 Alco.  
His passenger is Kathleen Carson,  
former Miss Dunedin.

Clearwater Sun photo

