AQ Automobile Quarterly

1909 Isotta Roadster by Alex Buchan

Contents

VOLUME 49, NUMBER 1 • FIRST QUARTER 2009

Cover: 1936 Auto Union C-Type
Photography by Michel Zumbrunn


16

1908 Vanderbilt Cup Locomobile Twins

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER

The Locomobile known as "Old 16" became the most famous automobile in America overnight by winning the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race on Long Island, but a second Locomobile Vanderbilt Cup racer – "the little known twin," as artist Peter Helck referred to the second car – has been the source of a mystery that has persisted for more than 100 years.

BY LEIGH DORRINGTON

Left: The Locomobile factory was located in Bridgeport, Conn., on the harbor of Long Island Sound. Right: Andrew L. Riker recognized the value of racing to build a reputation for Locomobile. A 3.5 hp Locomobile is shown winning a hillclimb organized by the Long Island Automobile Club in 1902.

Andrew L. Riker was born in New York City in 1868, just three years after the end of the Civil War, but he was as forward thinking as anyone of his time. Riker built a three-wheeled vehicle powered by two electric motors in 1884 when he was just 16 years old, without formal training in either mechanical or electrical engineering. Historian Menno Duerkson pointed out that this accomplishment may seem less remarkable today, unless one considers that Thomas Edison invented the light bulb only six years before Riker built his electric vehicle. Riker invented the slotted armature that remains a principle of electric motor design. By the age of 20, he was president of the Riker Electric Motor Company. He built a second, improved electric vehicle in 1890 and his first four-wheeled automobile in 1895. In 1898 he formed the Riker Electric Vehicle Company to enter production of electric cars. Riker would later become the first president of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE).

Andrew Riker also was quick to understand the benefits of competition. He entered his electric against gasoline-powered vehicles in a race at Providence, R.I., in 1899 and won. He won another race in 1900 against a field of both gasoline and steam-powered vehicles, proving, as Duerkson wrote, that "an electric vehicle could not only go longer distances but that it could also travel faster than steamers or petrol machines." Riker also designed and constructed a torpedo-shaped electric automobile in 1901 to challenge the Land Speed Record, then held by Camille Jenatzy on a similar machine at 65.79 mph.

Riker already was experimenting with gasoline engines. He accepted an offer in 1901 to sell the Riker Electric Vehicle Company to a competitor who was consolidating the electric car field – reportedly for $2 million dollars, an astonishing sum in his day. With this stake, he set up the Riker Motor Vehicle Company to manufacture gasoline-powered automobiles.

In January 1902, it was announced that Andrew Riker would join the Locomobile Company of America. Working closely with Samuel T. Davis, Barber's son-in-law, who became Locomobile president in 1902, Riker created the first gasoline-powered Locomobile. The first example, a four-cylinder, 12-horsepower Model C, was reportedly delivered by Riker himself to a buyer in New York City on November 2, 1902. In the same year, Locomobile was the leading producer of automobiles in America, selling 5,200 steam-powered cars.

The philosophy on which Riker and Davis based Locomobile's future success placed quality before quantity. Virtually all Locomobile components were created in the Bridgeport factory. "When a car was ordered from a Locomobile dealership, a team of six highly qualified mechanics went through the factory and gathered the parts and pieces they required and then built the car to order," noted the editors of *The Locomobile Book*. It became a sense of pride that the lead mechanic would stamp his initials in the main bearing caps as he assembled the engine."

Artist Peter Helck was best known by automobile enthusiasts for two accomplishments. He documented the early years of automobile racing in America in a portfolio of illustrations and two books that have yet to be surpassed. He also owned for nearly half a century the Locomobile affectionately known as Old 16.

The author could hardly improve upon Helck's own words to describe how the artist's passion for race cars began. In his book, *The Checkered Flag*, published in 1961, Peter Helck wrote: "Of the cluster of admiring New York urchins crowding around the purring Simplex-50 chassis on West 96th Street, two of us got the hoped-for nod to hop aboard from its understanding driver. The luckier one – me – sat beside the man at the wheel.

"Getting underway, the bark of the exhaust, the click of the chains and the race-like acceleration prompted what seemed a thoroughly logical question under the circumstances, 'Did you happen to see the Vanderbilt Cup Race last year?' But for this curiosity I may well have missed some of the far later and most pleasurable experiences of a reasonably long life.

"Anyway the doughty driver replied, 'See the Vanderbilt? Hell, I was in it!'

"Because the countenances of all the top drivers had been known to me from newspapers and trade journals, my side-long glance at the speaker offered no assurance. Perhaps sensing my doubt he then revealed that he had ridden with Joe Tracy on the place-winning Locomobile.

"Wait a moment! 'Then you must be Al Poole,' I exclaimed. He was."

The Best Built Car in America

Locomobile was one of the earliest leaders in the U.S. automobile industry. Like many early automobile manufacturers, the Locomobile Company of America of Bridgeport, Conn., explored different technologies before settling upon one that would bring the firm success. When it came, Locomobile's success brought international recognition and validation of the company's claim to manufacture "The Best Built Car in America."

Locomobile was founded in 1899 by John Brisben Walker, who was editor and publisher of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and Amzi L. Barber, who was known as "The Asphalt King." Both men were keen to cash in on the growing popularity of the automobile. Having no background in manufacturing, for $250,000 they purchased the entire assets of F.E. and F.O. Stanley's new venture, producing steam-powered automobiles.

The first Locomobiles were built in the Stanley plant in Watertown, Mass. The partnership between Walker and Barber was short lived, and Barber moved Locomobile steam car production to Bridgeport in 1900, while the Stanley brothers soon returned to manufacturing their own automobile in the Watertown plant.

Steam cars, as well as electric cars, enjoyed enormous popularity at the end of the 19th century. Locomobile was briefly the best-selling automobile in America. Mechanical complexity and the limited range of early steam-powered automobiles failed to meet the expectations of many motorists, however. It was becoming clear by 1902 that gasoline-powered automobiles represented the future. Again, Locomobile went outside of its own organization to purchase access to a new technology. The asset the company purchased this time was Andrew L. Riker. The decision to hire Riker defined Locomobile.

Jim Florida's Locomobile drew the #1 starting position for the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race and received the lion's share of pre-race publicity.

"The Locomobile is composed largely of forgings, which are produced complete in the Locomobile works," declared *The Locomobile Book*, published annually for owners and prospective owners. "Even the dies from which the forgings are made are sunk by experts in our employ. All materials used throughout the construction of the Locomobile are the best quality obtainable. We claim (the Locomobile) to be the best of its class because no other car is so largely a product of its factory; it is produced in a model plant by skilled New England mechanics, the best in the world. We have adhered to a policy of limited high-class production, making only a moderate number of cars every year, each one representing our best efforts. This policy has made our cars famous for uniform high quality and general excellence."

By 1908 Locomobile offered two models. The 20hp Type E was offered in various body styles from $2,900 for the runabout in standard trim to $4,200 for the limousine, on wheelbases of 102 to 116 inches. The Type I, variously described with 40 hp or 60 hp, was available for $4,750 for the Runabout and a

Above: William K. Vanderbilt Jr. broadly influenced the first decades of automobile racing, both as a participant and as a race organizer. Top: Jim Florida's Locomobile was the first car to start the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race, and overshadowed the eventual winner in prerace publicity. Right: Andrew L. Riker (l) stands proudly beside one of the two Locomobile Vanderbilt Cup Racers built in 1906, with Joe Tracy at the wheel.

staggering $6,200 for the Limousine, on a 123-inch wheelbase. Both models were powered by four-cylinder water-cooled engines, driven through four-speed transmissions and side chains to the 32-inch rear wheels. These model designations provide some confusion today, as the types were renamed the Model 30 and Model 40 in 1909, and the factory immediately began using the new designations when referring to 1908 successes.

Locomobile had entered a specially built race car designed by Riker in the 1905 Vanderbilt Cup race. It was on this Locomobile that driver Joe Tracy and mechanician Al Poole finished third in a field of specially prepared and much larger-engined racing cars from Darracq, Panhard, FIAT, Renault and Mercedes. Little wonder that young Peter Helck was elated.

The only known existing photograph showing both Locomobiles built for the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race was taken as the cars were being prepared for the 1906 race. Only one of the two cars raced in 1906.

The Vanderbilt Cup Races

The Vanderbilt Cup Races (*Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No. 2) were the offspring of William K. Vanderbilt Jr. of New York, the great-grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, the creator of the family fortune. "Willie K" Vanderbilt was born to a life of travel and leisure and became familiar with auto racing in Europe at an early age. At 17, he contributed a portion of the prize money for the first-ever sanctioned automobile race, from Paris to Bordeaux on June 11, 1895, along with James Gordon Bennett, the Paris-based American publisher of the *New York Herald*. In 1904, Vanderbilt claimed a land speed record – 92.30mph on his 90hp Mercedes at Ormond Beach, Fla.

The Vanderbilt Cup Races were held on Long Island, N.Y., between 1904 and 1910, and later continued in Savannah, Milwaukee, Santa Monica and San Francisco until 1916, but never again with the significance of the Long Island races.

The announced purpose of the first Vanderbilt Cup Race in 1904 was to provide an opportunity for American automobile manufacturers to challenge their international rivals, who had benefited from the rigors of European competition. Vanderbilt donated the trophy for the Vanderbilt Cup Race, an enormous cup created by Tiffany jewelers from 30 pounds of sterling silver, standing 31 inches high and said to hold a volume of 10 gallons.

The AAA Racing Commission adopted international rules for the race. Cars were limited to a maximum weight of 2,204 lbs. and a minimum of 800 lbs. There was little doubt about where most of the entries would weigh in based on the monstrous size of their engines. Three French Panhards had engines of 15.4 liters, as well as a De Dietrich at 12.8 liters, a Renault at 12.1 liters and a Clement-Bayard at 11.3 liters. Five privately owned Mercedes were entered, with engines ranging from 9.6 liters to 12 liters. Two 90hp Fiats, also privately entered, had engines of 10.6 liters. The American entries ranged from the 4.5-liter Packard Gray Wolf to a 14.7-liter New York-built Simplex.

The Americans were no match for the European racing machines. A Pope-Toledo and the Packard were scored in the top five; although both retired before the end of the race, their speeds were more than an hour behind the leaders at the time of their retirements. The first Vanderbilt Cup Race was won by an American-born, British driver living in Paris, George Heath, aboard a French Panhard.

The event was a stunning success as an opportunity to bring awareness to automobile racing in America. Grandstands had been erected for the social elite at the Westbury start-finish, where breakfast was served on china plates immediately following the start. Others made do with whatever they brought or whatever they could find, neither of which was likely enough to last for the 284-mile race that took nearly five-and-a-half hours to complete.

The 1905 race took place on a revised circuit, allegedly designed by the organizers to allow the Vanderbilt Cup Race to become the fastest race in the world. The race was dominated again by the cars of factory-supported teams, including a 17-liter (1,038-cubic-inch) 130hp De Deitrich, plus Darracq, Renault and Panhard of France. Three 16.3-liter, 110hp Fiats, including one driven by Vincenzo Lancia, were entered by Fiat's U.S. distributor, as well as three new 14-liter, 120hp Mercedes and one 12-liter car, all privately entered to represent Germany.

Joe Tracy's dark red Locomobile was the same car prepared by Riker for the 1905 Gordon Bennett Cup Race that had taken place in France in July. In spite of having

the largest engine in the race at 17.7 liters or 1,077 cubic inches, the Locomobile failed to finish, dropping out at mid-distance after running on only two gears.

In the October 1905 Vanderbilt Cup Race, however, the Loco finished third with Tracy and Poole. Vincenzo Lancia dominated the race in his Fiat before colliding with American J. Walter Christie. Tracy's Locomobile had not run smoothly all day but was fast enough to snatch third place as the crowd spilled across the start-finish and the race was prematurely halted.

The fine finish was enough to encourage Locomobile to authorize Riker to build two new cars for the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race. Contemporary accounts claimed that the pair of racers was constructed at the phenomenal cost of $40,000.

Joe Tracy and mechanician Al Poole won the American Elimination Trial for the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race on one of the new gray Locos, and expectations were high on race day. Tracy started 9th in the Vanderbilt Cup Race, but nine flat tires dashed American hopes. Tracy and Poole painstakingly had to mount each new tire on the course, while the European teams benefited from new demountable rims designed by Michelin to speed tire changes. Tracy still managed to set the fastest lap of the race on Lap 5, however, and gave the home crowd something to cheer about.

The crowd for the 1906 race was larger than ever. One spectator was killed when he stepped into the road and was struck by a racer driven by Vanderbilt's cousin, Elliott Shepard. Race winner Louis Wagner was quoted after the race as saying, "The miracle was... that hundreds were not killed." The future of the Vanderbilt Cup race on Long Island roads was in very real jeopardy.

Vanderbilt responded with an audacious plan. Howard Kroplick wrote: "Two days after the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup Race, the concept for a privately owned speedway on Long Island was developed by Vanderbilt and his associates." The Long Island Motor Parkway (*Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 2) was capitalized with $2 million in December 1906. A prospectus described "a grand thoroughfare that would boost real estate values, create jobs and fuel the Long Island economy." Construction was delayed until 1908, however, and no Vanderbilt Cup Race took place in 1907.

Only one of the two Locomobile racers prepared for the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup was raced, but both cars were modified for the 1908 event. The modifications included adoption of demountable rims as well as other minor mechanical changes.

Joe Tracy had retired from racing and was now man-

Above Left: The Vanderbilt Cup trophy featured a likeness of William K. Vanderbilt Jr. setting a speed record of 92.30 mph on his 90hp Mercedes at Ormond Beach, Fla., on Jan. 27, 1904. The record was not recognized as a land speed record in Europe. Above: The course for the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race was the third in as many races, including portions of the Jericho Turnpike and the newly built Long Island Motor Parkway.

aging the Matheson team. Riker was forced to select two new drivers. As one, he chose George Robertson, who was considered to be America's premier driver, although sometimes reckless. Robertson assuaged concerns two weeks before the Vanderbilt Cup Race by winning the inaugural Fairmont Park race in Philadelphia on a stock-chassis Locomobile. For his second driver, Riker chose James (Jim) Florida, a driver about whom very little has been recorded but who also was teamed with Robertson at Fairmont Park.

Above and Right: The Locomobile Headquarters for the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race were located in the D.F. Maltby Garage in Jericho. George Robertson and mecanician Glenn Etheridge became the first to win an international automobile race with an American-built car on Locomobile #16 in 1908. Note the early pits in the foreground.

Automobile racing shared the page with "Gossip of the Gridiron" in the *New York Herald* of Thursday, October 22, 1908, two days before the race. The "highly valued left half back, Thorpe," of the Carlisle Indians had sprained an ankle in the previous day's practice, but the headline at the top of the page read "Vanderbilt Cup Field Ready for Record Race." The photograph at the top of the page showed James Florida on the Locomobile Number 1.

An advertisement for the Long Island Rail Road in the same paper offered train service "direct to the Grand Stand," with departures from Manhattan beginning at 1 a.m. A Motor Omnibus that was scheduled to depart from the Plaza Hotel at midnight included fare, grandstand and special catering, all for $10. Dinner parties beginning at 11:30 p.m. were scheduled at the best New York City restaurants.

Starting positions were drawn by lot. Florida would start first, while Robertson drew Number 16 in the 17-car field. On race day, the starter would release the cars one minute apart, "which will scatter the cars on all sections of the course leaving no break in the interest," noted the *New York Herald*.

Peter Helck described his own observations from the start of the 1908 race. "The crowds, less in number than 1906, but calculated at 200,000 were no less obstreperous and far more purposeful. Not until showers of cold water from the pit connections were hosed on the mobs could a semblance of passage be cleared. It was not until 6:30 a.m. that Florida on Locomobile No. 1 got the word. In all, it was a most rowdy spectacle."

Robertson took the lead on the first lap before delays to change tires again dropped the Loco by Lap

4. Robertson took back the lead when the ignition on American Willie Haupt's supercharged Chadwick failed on Lap 6, and held it until the final lap began with only a few minutes separating the Locomobile and the Italian Isotta driven by Herb Lytle after 235 miles of racing. Now, Robertson's aggressive driving nearly did him in. While Lytle drove more steadily, hoping a mistake by the leader would give him the race, Robertson skidded off Plainview Road and blew a tire. Robertson and his mechanician, Glenn Etheridge, affixed their only spare, with the benefit of the new rim, as they kept anxious watch over their shoulders for Lytle's Isotta. The pair managed to win over the Isotta by less than two minutes. An American car had prevailed over European competition for the first time in international road racing.

Florida also drove an excellent race. The Number 1 Locomobile ran among the leaders throughout the race, coming to the finish just behind Robertson and Lytle. Unfortunately, crowds again swarmed across the finish line as soon as Robertson was flagged as the winner. Despite attempts to slow the remaining racers, Florida's Locomobile reached the finish line already crowded by spectators and their automobiles. Although his Loco crashed into a touring car, Jim Florida was credited with third place.

Locomobile

Establishes American Supremacy in Automobiles

Wins the Vanderbilt Cup

The Greatest International Road Race ever held in this country and the supreme test of reliability and endurance

258 MILES IN 240 MINUTES

OVER A SLIPPERY COURSE

Made the Fastest Lap

THE LOCOMOBILE CO. OF AMERICA

BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

Above: The Vanderbilt Cup Races were unrivaled as American sporting events in the early 20th century, even giving birth to a Broadway play in which Barney Oldfield played himself. Top Center: Peter Helck fettles the engine of Old 16. Far Right: Locomobile celebrated its victory with advertisements, a school holiday and a black tie banquet in Bridgeport, as well as a national tour of Old 16 that lasted three years.

After that day, the two Locomobiles never would be equals again.

October 24, 2008

The temperature had dropped below freezing during the night and a heavy frost blanketed the pastures. The last leaves of fall were dropping softly from trees like an early winter snow. Fog hung over the low-lying areas and ponds, and traffic inched forward cautiously.

October 24 was the date of the fourth Vanderbilt Cup Race on Long Island. This, though, was October 24, 2008, the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Vanderbilt


Locomobile

Establishes American Supremacy in Automobiles

Wins the Vanderbilt Cup

258 MILES IN 240 MINUTES

OVER A SLIPPERY COURSE

Made the Fastest Lap

THE LOCOMOBILE CO. OF AMERICA

already crowded by spectators and their automobiles. Although his Loco crashed into a touring car, Jim Florida was credited with third place.

After that day, the two Locomobiles never would be equals again.

October 24, 2008

The temperature had dropped below freezing during the night and a heavy frost blanketed the pastures. The last leaves of fall were dropping softly from trees like an early winter snow. Fog hung over the low-lying areas and ponds, and traffic inched forward cautiously.

October 24 was the date of the fourth Vanderbilt Cup Race on Long Island. This, though, was October 24, 2008, the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race. The author enjoyed the privilege of sharing this auspicious day with Peter Helck's son Jerry and Vanderbilt Cup historian Howard Kroplick to discuss the fate of the two Locomobile Vanderbilt Cup racers.

Above: Peter and Jerry Helck maintained Old 16 for 60 years. Here they are shown at their home in Boston Corners, N.Y., before the 1946 Glidden Cup Tour. Below and right: Old 16 was a popular participant at most early old car meets on Long Island. Old 16 on the horse track at the Mineola Fairgrounds in 1946.

George Robertson's racer immediately became known as Old 16 following victory in the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race. The city of Bridgeport called a school holiday. Old 16 was paraded through the streets and a men's smoker was hosted for city leaders at the new Stratfield Hotel. Small replicas of the Vanderbilt Cup were created as toasting cups.

Old 16 was swiftly dispatched on a tour of Locomobile dealers around the country that ultimately extended to two years. Old 16 eventually returned to Bridgeport, where it remained at the Locomobile factory until it was removed to A.L. Riker's farm in Manchester, Conn., and stored in a barn for several years. In 1913, Old 16 was sold to Joseph Sessions, a Locomobile foundry supplier, who built a special structure to store the car at his home in Bristol, Conn.


PRICE 15¢ — OFFICIAL •• PROGRAM •• — PRICE 15¢

Automotive Golden Jubilee

and

Antique Automobile Pageant

Veteran Motor Car Club of America

MINEOLA FAIRGROUNDS

SATURDAY - - - JUNE 8, 1946

Over the years, Sessions outfitted the Loco with fenders, horn, rearview mirror and other modifications, and the automobile was driven regularly on Connecticut roads. Collectors descended on his widow following Sessions' death in 1941. Metropolitan Opera tenor and early automobile collector James Melton reportedly visited Mrs. Sessions and left a blank check upon his departure. Peter Helck maintained an active interest in Old 16 over more than three decades. Helck also paid a visit to Mrs. Sessions following her husband's death, and a sale was finally agreed with Tracy's entreaty.

Perhaps more has been recorded about Peter Helck's stewardship of Old 16 than any other automobile in history, including *Automobile Quarterly* (Vol. 6 No.

Left: Jerry Helck's home is filled with mementos of Old 16. A special room contains file cabinets containing his father's meticulous records and photos, many marked in Peter Helck's own hand. Right: The reconstruction of Number 1 has taken many years, under the watchful eye of Locomobile experts.

Other unique parts Dragone acquired in addition to the engine included the gearbox, axles, springs, shifter and brake lever and pedals. "All of these are different from production Locomobile pieces," Dragone pointed out.

As this is written, an automobile patiently is being assembled around these parts in Dragone's Bridgeport, Conn., restoration shop, just a few miles from the site of the Locomobile factory where the car originally was built. It was hoped that the automobile would be running by 2008 in celebration of the 1908 Locomobile Vanderbilt Cup victory, but the old racer continues to give up its secrets slowly. Every detail has been painstakingly researched. Above the workbench hangs a large photograph of the 1905 racer, as well as photographs of Jim Florida on Number 1 and George Robertson on Old 16. A yellowed copy of the October 22, 1908, *New York Herald* shows Florida seated proudly on Number 1 before the race.

Shortly before the October 2008 anniversary, Old 16 was started and driven at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich. Modern diagnostic technology had recently determined a small crack in one of the pairs of cylinders. The Henry Ford announced that this would be the last time Old 16 would ever be started before being retired permanently to static exhibit. Henry Ford Museum Curator Bob Casey described the event before a crowd of excited spectators. "It's a race car," he said. "It doesn't want to go slowly!"

How ironic, then, that the only Locomobile Vanderbilt Cup racer enthusiasts will ever see – or hear – under its own power may be "the little known twin," a car that was forgotten for more than a century

Above: Two pairs of cylinders were mounted on a cast aluminum crankcase. The hollow crankshaft was forged. Right: The gear set illustrates the level of quality that went into the racers.

Old Number 1

Two Locomobiles raced in 1908 following the one-year Vanderbilt Cup hiatus in 1907. Then, virtually nothing was ever seen of Number 1 again.

Only two published references have been found speculating on the fate of Number 1. Jerry Helck, Manny and George Dragone, and Howard Kroplick are familiar with them. Joseph Sessions is said to have thought the Locomobile engine might have been installed in a boat, and that the rest of the car was scrapped. A second more substantiated story tells of a workman, Elmer McFarland of Stratford, Conn. McFarland said he worked in the new car-service department at Locomobile in Bridgeport. In 1929 or 1930, he was instructed by his employer to clean out a shed containing the remains of several old Locomobiles. One of the cars, he said, was the second Vanderbilt Cup racer built in 1906. He continued that he had partially disassembled the engine and kept a piston, connecting rod and exhaust valve as mementos and later gave them to Peter Helck.

It's the last part of Mr. McFarland's story that leaves the door open, perhaps forever. The mechanic said that after removing the parts from the racer, it was pushed into the water of Long Island Sound, along with the other old cars found in the shed. It does appear that surplus automobiles were sometimes discarded this way at the Locomobile factory located on Bridgeport's deep harbor. The problem with this story, however, is that McFarland said the shed was in Bristol, Conn., not Bridgeport. Bristol is located nearly 40 miles inland from Long Island Sound.

Is it more likely that the automobile pushed into Bridgeport harbor – the automobile from which McFarland removed a piston and connecting rod – was actually the 1905 Locomobile racer? Noted collector Henry Austin Clark was said to be familiar with this version of the story. It may be likely that the second car had already been broken up by the time Sessions bought Old 16, to keep the famous car running, but, then, what of Number 1?

When Manny Dragone purchased Old 16 from the Helck family, the car came with a large number of disassembled parts. A confidentiality agreement prevents the participants from discussing the transaction specifically, but Dragone believes these were the remaining parts of Locomobile Number 1. "We had 60% of a complete car, including 90% of the original engine," said Dragone. "We knew there were many spares to go with the two racers, but I don't think more than two complete engines were ever built." The aluminum crankcase and forged crankshaft seem to support this theory. It would be extraordinarily difficult to create these pieces without working patterns.

Left: Peter Helck included Old 16 in many commercial illustrations, including this one created in 1957 for Johnnie Walker Scotch. Above: Vertical inlet valves were mounted on top of the cylinders and operated by rocker arms and push rods on the intake side of the engine.

2). Helck's paintings and illustrations of Old 16, photographs and written accounts provide a rich account. Helck sometimes included Old 16 in his advertising illustrations as well his remarkable paintings of early races and his two auto racing books, all contributing further to the extraordinary history of the car.

What is less well known today is the active role young Jerry Helck played in Old 16's preservation. Jerry was 10 years old in 1941 when his father and Joe Tracy brought Old 16 home to Boston Corners, N.Y. He has a treasury of personal recollections, as well as his father's archives including photographs, correspondence and other detailed records.

Jerry Helck appears in many photographs and film records of early antique automobile events, including the opening of Henry Austin Clark's Long Island Motor Museum in 1947 and events of the Long Island Old Car Club. There are short gaps in the record during the early 1950s while Jerry was in the Army. The record quickly resumed, however, and the files carefully prepared in Peter Helck's own hand supply a staggering amount of detail on the history of Old 16 before the senior Helck's death in 1988.

Jerry Helck continued to maintain Old 16 after his father's death. Knowing that it ultimately had been his father's wish for the car to be accessible to the public, Old 16 was offered for sale for the first time in nearly half a century. Finding a buyer proved to be difficult.

Ultimately, an arrangement was made for Old 16 to become part of the collection of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., in 1995. The transaction was complex. No buyer had come forward before vintage automobile collector and broker Manny Dragone of Bridgeport, Conn. Dragone and his brother George are well known among collectors, and both have presented automobiles at Pebble Beach. George is considered to be the leading Locomobile authority in America. Manny Dragone purchased Old 16 from the Helck family, then arranged a trade with the Ford Museum that included a number of automobiles such as the well-known Ferrari Testa Rossa s/n 0704. "He was an absolute hero," said Jerry Helck.

As part of the collection of the Henry Ford Museum, Old 16 is on display before more than a million visitors each year. Very little, however, has been known about the second car since the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race. Driver Jim Florida and Loco Number 1 were acknowledged for their contribution to Locomobile's success on the program for the dinner at the Stratfield Hotel, and then, both seemingly disappeared.

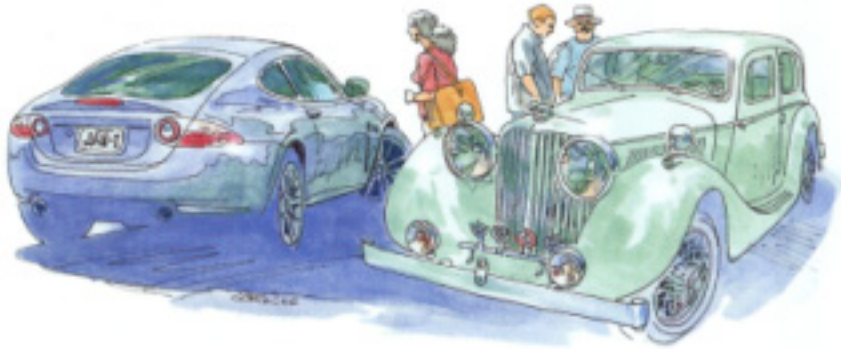
Old 16

VOLUME 49 NO. 1

The author wishes to thank Manny and George Dragone for introducing him to the story, for their extensive knowledge and expertise, and for access to historic images of Andrew L. Riker and Old 16. The Dragones are also the caretakers of the Riker Electric on which Andrew L. Riker won the 1899 Providence race identified in the story. Thanks as well to Jerry Helck, for inviting the author into his home and sharing his personal recollections of nearly a lifetime spent with Old 16 and Peter Helck's archives. And to Howard Kroplick, whose enthusiasm for the subject and voluminous image library are unequalled. All have been uncommonly generous in their contributions to this story.

Photography provided by Manny and George Dragone, Howard Kroplick, Jerry Helck, and the author. More of Kroplick's imagery can be found at www.VanderbiltCupRaces.com.

Color photography from the AQ Research and Photo Archives.



Bibliography

"1908 Auto-Book Vanderbilt Cup Race," *Journal of Commerce & Commercial Bulletin*, 1908;

Burns, John M. *Thunder at Sunrise, a History of the Vanderbilt Cup, the Grand Prize and the Indianapolis 500, 1904-1916*, McFarland & Company, 2006;

Cooke, David C. *Racing Cars that Made History*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960.

Doyle, Gary D. *Carlo Demand in Motion and Color; Automobile Racing 1895-1956*, Racemaker Press, 2007;

Duerksen, Menno. "Locomobile – The Man Who Made Locomobile a Great Car," *Cars & Parts*, December 1986;

Heilig, John A."Privileged Passage, Long Island Motor Parkway," *Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 2, 1995;

Helck, Jerry. Personal interview, 2008.

Helck, Peter. *The Checkered Flag*, Castle Books by arrangement with Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961;

Helck, Peter. *Great Auto Races*, Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, 1975;

History of the Best Built Car in America, The Locomobile Society of America, 2007;

Kimes, Beverly Rae. "Vanderbilt Cup Races 1904-1910," *Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No 2, 1967;

Kroplick, Howard. *Vanderbilt Cup Races on Long Island*, Arcadia Publishing, 2008;

Kroplick, Howard, Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum. Personal interview, 2008;

The Locomobile Book 1908, The Locomobile Company of America, 1908;

The Locomobile Book 1909, The Locomobile Company of America, 1909;

The Locomobile Book 1910, The Locomobile Company of America, reproduced by the Steam Automobile Club of America, 1965;

"Vanderbilt Cup Races," www.vanderbiltcupraces.com;

Sklarek, Clifford. *Antique Motor News*, February 1977;

Street, Julian. "Car Coming!" reprinted from *American Magazine* with compliments of The Locomobile Co. of America, 1908;

Vorderman, Don. "Old 16 Impressions," *Automobile Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No. 2, 1967.