THE VANDERBILT CUP

GRANT'S OWN STORY

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Harry F. Grant and Frank H. Lee, winners of the Vanderbilt Cup two years in succession with the same stripped touring model

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BY

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BEFORE any big race a driver has a week or so of practice in which he learns the peculiarities of the course, the speed it will hold, and at the same time has a chance to study the work of his competitors. To calculate during that week the average speed most likely to be necessary in order to win, and on the day of the race to drive so as to make that average, knowing you have a car that is running better all the time, does not seem to me to be a very great thing to do, or worth bragging about. This is what I have done both times I won the Vanderbilt Cup. I went in to win, I calculated how it could be done, my car was faithful and I won. That is about all there is to it, as it seems to me.

It is insisted, however, that it is a very wonderful thing for the same driver with the same car to win the famous trophy two years in succession and that, therefore, I must go on and talk about it, and about myself, and how I got into racing, until I am all talked out and have lost every bit of reputation for modesty. The task set looms bigger before me than that of winning the cup.

I got the racing bee in my bonnet about five years ago when I was chief tester at the American Locomotive Company's factory in Providence, where the Alco cars are built. In common with my fellow testers, I sought out the roads on which

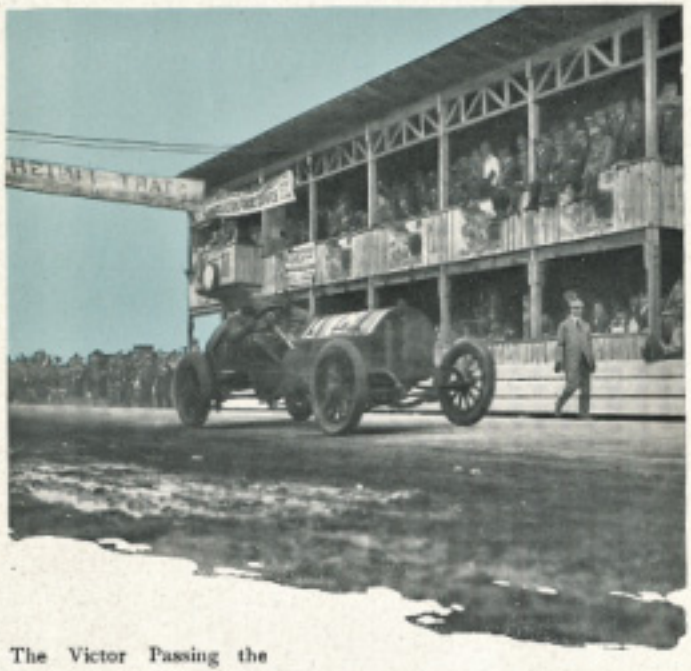
In May, 1907, I left the Alco factory and went with Mr. C. F. Whitney, the Alco agent in Boston. Once there, I started in again and kept right on teasing Mr. Whitney to let me race. With him I was successful. In June he sent me to the Alco factory to get a chassis on his account and I want to tell you I was a pretty happy man that day. Right from the floor of the assembly room I took a brand new forty horse-power chassis that never had run a mile. I drove it to Boston, tuned it up for three days and then drove in the races at Readville. Frank Lee, who was a tester at the factory, rode with me. We won a five-mile race, a twenty-mile race, and in a fifty-mile event we were leading at forty-five miles, when a tire burst. We put on a new tire and finished second.

My first big road race was at Lowell, in 1908, and I went into it with a demonstrating car that had been run more than 20,000 miles. It was stripped and had bucket seats put on it Saturday. On Sunday morning it was driven twice around the course and Monday Lee and I started in the race. The car had not been tuned for racing; it had not even had the valves ground. Eight tires blew out in that race, yet we finished second. After that showing it seemed as if I surely could get a new six-cylinder car from the company and

tune it up properly; but there was nothing doing then. At the Vanderbilt Cup race in 1908 I told the officers of the Company that the Alco car was the only American stock car that could win the Vanderbilt Cup and insisted that I could do it with one. They tell me I was very much in earnest and almost cried.

What was done in that Lowell race had made its impression, however, and soon after the Vanderbilt Cup race of 1908 I had a long talk with the vice-president of the American Locomotive Company and the manager of the automobile department. The outcome was that the next summer I was told I could have a car; that I could pick it out at the factory, make any legitimate adjustments, tune it up to suit myself and enter stock car races with it. You can just guess I was the most tickled man in New England that night.

That fall, 1909, was when I began racing for the American Locomotive Company, after begging the officers for three years to let me show them how good a car they had. Previous to that all my racing had been done as the representative of Mr. Whitney and at his expense.



The Victor Passing the Stand of the Judges, Timers and Press Representatives on the Last Lap—"Can It Be Possible He Has Won Again?"

there was hardly any travel, in order to drive at speed. These lonesome roads were generally rough roads. Some of them were little better than trails and pretty much the same as when the Indians used them. Over these roads I drove the new cars, or rather the chassis with nothing on but a temporary seat, and often it was literally true as I rode that I was touching only the high spots. I did not have the speed mania, but I was so amazed by the pounding the cars would stand that I kept increasing the speed and the severity of the test to the very limit. I never had a breakage of any sort during the two years I was testing. I had driven other cars and knew about how much abuse an ordinary car could stand. I knew about the alloy steels used in the Alco construction, of course, but still I marvelled at the way I could drive a car and have it keep running better the farther it went. Then it occurred to me that I would like to drive one in a race. After that I knew no peace of mind until I did get into a race and I am told that I kept the peace of others somewhat disturbed.

From time to time, as opportunity offered, I pleaded with different officials of the American Locomotive Company for permission to race. Invariably the answer was that the company did not build racing cars but touring cars, big, substantial and lasting. I kept telling them that they had a better car than they thought and that with the touring body removed, it was a much faster car than they suspected; but they could not see it the way I did.

With one lap to go and only a short lead, Grant had to stop and have a tire changed. The change was made in twenty-two seconds.

Wm. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., referee of the race and donor of the cup, is the man in a light suit, facing toward the car, with his hand on the arm of the man in a dark suit, who is pointing.

The whole thing is that I knew the car would go through a long race all right. I knew also it would hold the road in the turns better than any other car I had ever seen in any race. This conviction was based chiefly upon my experience as a tester, but there had been also a revelation of the speed of the car at Lowell. Of course there is always a chance of some small breakage which would not amount to much at any other time, but that chance was remote and my confidence was unbounded. Above all else, I wanted to race for the Vanderbilt Cup.

It was always my theory that the best way to drive in a big road race would be to figure on an average pace and hold it. In racing, as in touring, there is nothing like keeping going if you want to get there. It is the stops that do the mischief, and in a race, especially, stops are very often due to spurts of excessive speed. The steady grind is the thing, varying your speed average to meet the circumstances. This is also the safest method of driving, because you approach the turns at a pace that enables you to take them deliberately. If you do not drive at a regular speed you are taking hazards at the turns. You know where to begin to slow for a turn at a certain speed, but when you get going considerably faster than usual it is all guess work where to begin slowing, and you are apt to enter one at too high a speed. This is the reason for disasters in the turns. As a rule the car that makes the fastest lap does not win the race and it does not pay to be showy. There are others who believe that the steady

it was done in twenty-two seconds. As I started off again in the race, Mr. Michelin came trotting up exclaiming: "Ah! Non! Too fast! Too quick!" He was afraid the tire had been put on too quickly to hold, but it was on securely and it held all right. Quick as the change was made, that tire blow-out, coming at the end of next to the last lap, nearly cost us the race, for, of course, we lost a lot of time stopping and getting under way again, beside the actual time it took to make the change. Lee discovered the flat tire coming up the stretch to the grand stand, but not in time for me to make a good stop. The car skidded far past my pit and I had to stop, throw in my reverse, and back up to my own pit before the men could begin their work. That was required by the rules.

The delays in this last race were, all but one, in the latter half of it. This rather upset my calculations, but even as it is the record is a good one. We stopped on the course in the tenth lap and changed a tire. Our first stop at the pit was in the seventeenth lap, when we got a new tire for the rack on the car and took on supplies of water, gasoline and oil. In the nineteenth lap we changed another tire on the road and at the end of the twenty-first lap we had that rapid change of a front tire made at the pit. Except in these laps and in the first one, which was slow because of being from a standing start, the variation in our time was never more than sixteen seconds, our fastest lap being done in eleven minutes and twelve seconds and our slowest in eleven minutes and twenty-eight seconds. I had calculated on

Passing the Grand Stand Regularly and at Even Pace, Grant and His Car Were Watched by the Experts.

grind is the wisest way of racing, but it is probable that there will always be cars of very high speed that will do spectacular things and then drop out. Some persons cannot help being showy, and, also, there is the nervous rivalry that leads some drivers to think they dare not let another fast car pass them. For one reason or another racing men will continue to drive in bursts of speed faster than is sensible or safe. It requires only one nervous man to start it. Then, one after another, they will take up the pursuit, until six or more are going at a clip so furious that anyone of experience would predict their failure to stand the terrific strain and go the distance.

With faster cars going past you every now and then, perhaps the greatest strain when you are driving on schedule in a big race is to keep your nerve and confidence in your own plans. Before the race it is easy enough to calmly figure out that those who go crashing past you at a terrific speed will "come back", or in other words, will be overtaken by you, but the difficulty is to stick to this belief when you see them tearing past like mad. It is not easy to resist the temptation to put on all speed and chase them.

Both in 1909 and 1910, I planned how I would drive and estimated what average would be necessary to win the race. In 1909 I estimated that something between sixty-two and sixty-three miles an hour would win. I won with five minutes to spare at an average speed of sixty-two and eight-tenths miles an hour. In 1910 my estimate was that it would require an average of about sixty-six

miles an hour to win. Our average was sixty-five and eighteen-hundredths, but the victory was by a very narrow margin. We should have made a higher average. The reason we did not make a higher average was because of a mistake in the signals. Along in the ninth lap, and for several laps thereafter, the signals told us that we were in second place. Lee and I both thought it a bit strange, but proceeded to ease up just a little. If I had known that our position was really sixth in the twelfth lap, I would have increased my speed a mite. Had this been done, there would have been more time to spare when that tire burst in the twenty-first lap and we would have won by a bigger margin.

That was a wonderfully rapid tire change made just before the last lap and it has been much talked about. There is a heap of credit due the three men who made it. They were Frank H. Lee, who rides with me as mechanic; George Babcock, an assistant and pit attendant, who is foreman of the engine testing room at the Alco factory; and George Cleland, one of the experts of the Michelin Tire Company. The change was timed variously by different persons, but I have always accepted the figures of Tom Forbes, who was near the scene with a stop watch. He says

driving the laps in from eleven minutes and fifteen seconds to eleven minutes and thirty seconds. This would have allowed us to make an average of sixty-six miles an hour and still leave a liberal margin for tire troubles. Sixty-six miles an hour means eleven minutes and thirty seconds for a lap. Except for the stops, we were averaging eleven minutes and twenty seconds to the lap, which is at the rate of sixty-seven miles an hour. The stops made our actual average for the whole race eleven minutes and thirty-eight seconds to the lap.

Of course no such even driving would be possible except with a car that was absolutely dependable for consistent running. The engine of the Alco never missed and the hood was not once lifted. At the finish the car was fit to go on indefinitely.

One can drive fast and yet safely in a race, just as when touring. All that is required is self-restraint from taking any unnecessary chances. A man may speed upon a highway when the road is clear and he can see a long distance ahead, yet be a safe driver if only he slows down sufficiently when approaching every turn and cross-road. It is the same in a race. I do not believe in taking chances and I drive a safe race. Starting in a race I feel just as free from risk as when starting

on a trip in a touring car. If ever I felt that I was risking my life you can bet I would not start. I think too much of my wife and family to take any risk.

My wife attends all my races and she feels perfectly at ease, because she knows that I will sacrifice my chance of winning rather than take any needless risk. Yet there is one thing about this subject of risk necessary to explain, in order to have my meaning fully appreciated when I say I take no risk. This is the safety of my car. Sometimes I feel guilty of having an advantage over the other drivers who are anxious all the time over the risk of a tire bursting, or coming off, and the car running off the road and overturning. They have always the dread of such a happening, while Lee and I do not. For us there is no such risk and no such worry. We know that the car will not overturn. I am willing, if emergency demands it, to drive that car until not a tire is left on it. It is a touring car and not any freakish machine of special build. It is long and low and has just the proper balance. When a tire bursts it does not flounce about and skid off the road and spread itself over the surrounding country, but just keeps right on with its work. During practice for the last Vanderbilt Cup both tires on the right-hand wheels exploded at the same time, when we were entering a turn at a lively pace, but the car veered only a little. I always had it in hand. Once while rounding the turn of a one-mile track at top speed, two tires were pulled entirely from the rims. If that car

was capable of being capsized that was the time it should have turned over. This illustrates what I mean by saying I know my car will not turn over and that I am taking none of the usual risks. It is to be remembered also that I worked at the Alco factory and know all about the special alloy steels used in the car, and know that there is no danger of a broken axle, crankshaft, frame, springs, gears, or other vital part. They simply don't break; that's all there is to it.

View of Judges' Stand at Moment after the Sign of Finish — Checkered Flag — Had Been Waved at Grant and Lee.

It is my inclination to be optimistic and I am usually confident of victory from start to finish. Milk is my regular toddy and, no matter what anyone else may do or recommend, I never take any stimulant either before the start or during a race. The only place I get tired while driving is in the back, but that is trivial.

Sometimes I think the hardest part of a race is in getting ready. A great amount of study is necessary in order to know a course just right. One should know every turn, every hollow and bump, and every grade intimately.

During preparation and in the race, Frank H. Lee, who rides with me, is of inestimable value. He is my eyes. He is looking all about us, looking behind for other cars and looking ahead for the turns, while I am watching the road and driving. Lee has certain landmarks that he memorizes as the places to begin slowing down for a turn, and to pick up speed coming out of one. It is important that he should often look behind in order to give me warning in case of another car trying to pass. Another thing, he must keep watch of the condition of the tires. He may be able to save time by warning me to stop and change a tire just before it blows out. Great credit is due the mechanic in any race. In every emergency the driver knows what he is going to do, but the mechanic does not. He has to trust the driver, and in a big race, such as the Vanderbilt Cup, his confidence has to be good and strong. I most certainly would rather drive than ride in a race.

FACTS ABOUT THE RACE.

Both the fifth and the sixth races for the Vanderbilt Cup, in 1909 and 1910, were run over the same course, made up of a stretch of the Long Island Motor Parkway and connecting highways of Nassau County.

The course was 12.64 miles in circuit and the race twenty-two laps in length, making a total distance of 278.08 miles.

In 1909, there were fifteen starters, including both foreign and domestic cars. The rules called for stock cars with not more than six hundred cubic inches cylinder volume. Only two cars finished officially, and only two others were running when the race was called off. Grant, in the Alco, finished more than five minutes ahead of the second man. His time was four hours, twenty-five minutes, forty-two seconds. His average rate of speed was sixty-two and eight-tenths miles an hour.

In 1910, the rules permitted any sort of cars, the sole restriction being that the cylinder volume must not exceed six hundred cubic inches. The result was the entry of a string of specially built cars to compete against Grant and his stock model, several entries being made in teams of two or three, so as to be practically relayed against any single entry. Three cars, all of the same make, were brought over from Germany for the race.

There were twenty-nine starters and only ten finished the race. Grant's time was four hours, fifteen minutes, fifty-eight and sixty-four hundredths seconds, an average of sixty-five and eighteen-hundredths miles an hour.

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