



LUXURIOUS LIGHT CARS
SCRIPPS-BOOTH CORPORATION
981 BEAUFAIT AVE.

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SCRIPPS-BOOTH REGISTER NO. 8

In July, I was finally able to take a trip to the Detroit area. Barney Pollard let me take a number of pictures of his Model G, Patience Nauta let me into the Detroit Historical Museum's warehouse area, and I was able to spend an afternoon at the National Automotive Historical Collection in Detroit's Public Library. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to visit James Scripps Booth's paintings and memorabilia at Cranbrook, in spite of Mark Coir's kind offer of an overnight room on campus.

Barney Pollard's Model G is a well-kept older restoration of a very good and complete original car. You may remember that Register No. 6 (1993) noted that Barry Jensen's Model C was the first Scripps-Booth to make an appearance at Greenfield Village's October event. Not so! Barney's G sports a blue ribbon from Greenfield Village on its windshield. This is a rare case where the error is no fault of mine - the Village's solicitation was the source of my information. What was my fault was a big stripe of paint left on a concrete-filled post used to mark the driveway at Barney's shop. As I set out to back out, the post proved a lot tougher than the front fender and bumper of my car. Another round of apologies, Mr. Pollard!

A word of caution to those of you who might have the occasion to visit NAHC. Don't try it on a Monday - the whole public library is closed. In fact, NAHC is only open after 1:00 pm on the other days. When I visited about 10 years ago, most of the collection was on browseable open shelves available to the public. Of course, the public abused the privilege, so now you pretty well have to know what you are looking for before the librarian will retrieve it for you. Ron Grantz was out of town, and I had a bit of trouble convincing the librarian on duty that there was such a thing as a James Scripps Booth Collection. The document file proved disappointingly small. It took some more convincing to show that the collection included a pair of scrapbooks and a photo file. Just about the time I was convinced that these were lost, both made an appearance. One of the scrapbooks is a wonderful compendium of technical brochures collected by JSB in the early 'teens. It may well be the best single document illustrating the state of the automobile art in those early days, but the book is very fragile. I hope that it has been microfilmed. The other scrapbook deals with JSB's lawsuit against Stutz. Except for the fact that there were one or two communications addressed to "Dear Jimmy," I found little of interest. The photo file was interesting. A number of them have appeared in various articles on Scripps-Booth, and Tom Booth had already given me copies of a number of others. There was, however, a photo of a "commercial" body on a daVinci Pup chassis which I hope to get a copy of. This thing looked more like a top fuel dragster than an automobile or truck! While at NAHC, don't miss the G. Riseley Collection in the reading room. Many bound volumes of ads and articles, all organized by make of automobile.

The Detroit Historical Museum is understaffed and underfunded, so it was a real privilege that Patience Nauta found the time to lead me into the warehouse where their Biauto, Rocket, Model C and daVinci Pup are stored. Unfortunately, the cars are not in very good shape. It has been only within the last few years that they have been stored in a climate-controlled area. Some correspondence in my files from a restoration shop claims that they were restoring the Biauto in the 1980's, but that obviously was not true. It's likely that the wheels were respoked for a 1946 auto show and that the color was changed from the original gray to red at the same time, but since then heat and humidity have taken a heavy toll. A past curator (a position that no longer exists) had towed the Rocket improperly and managed to jerk the front axle off. Heat and humidity have also taken a toll on this one since William J. Scripps restored it about 1952, but not so badly as the Biauto. The museum's Model C was a butchered restoration some years ago, and not at all a good example. The daVinci Pup had once been lent to a Friend of the Museum for cosmetic restoration. It wasn't until I got my pictures developed and had seen early

photos of the Pup at NAHC that it became apparent how badly this was done. Patience told me that all of the Historical Museum's vehicles may be available for indefinite loan to another qualified museum. She does have the original and well-preserved manufacturing drawings for the Biautogo, the Rocket and the Pup.

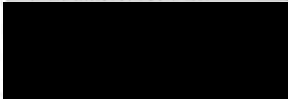
Register No. 7 included a few illustrations of the Biautogo, and it seems like maybe a good idea to continue the thought of including info on a single Scripps-Booth design in forthcoming issues. Consequently, you'll find 1914 Rocket/Packet stuff in the back. (Although the prototype was built in 1913, 1914 was the only production year.) Quotes from JSB's autobiography in Register No. 7 gave the Rocket a pretty bad rap, but the Historical Museum's Rocket was supposedly a pretty fair machine after W.J. Scripps' restoration modified the dry clutch into a wet one.

Ken Kaufman gets credit for supplying corporate data and the portions of the Victor gasket catalog included.

OWNER NEWS

You won't find the usual owner and address lists in this issue, as there has been only one change. After previous disappointment with a supposed Rocket in Canada, this time there really is one! It's in storage near Ottawa, but complete right down to kerosene headlamps with Scripps-Booth markings.

Mr. Edward Lett



This car was once owned by the father of Keith Akers, who had the now-defunct Wonderland Car Museum in Morrisburg Ontario, Canada. Edward traded a motorcycle for his Rocket about 10 years ago.

ERRATA

A surprisingly small section. Apologies to Miss Patience Nauta for misspelling her name in the last issue. Also a note that FS is not a casting prefix on Ferro V-8 engines. On the V-8, FS is the S/N prefix, and the engine S/N can be found on top of the bell housing. This info courtesy of Bill Woodke at Kes-Autos.

DEBUNKING SOME MYTHS

COMPANY NAME

Upon its incorporation in 1913, there were eight shareowners in the Scripps-Booth Cyclecar Company. Two of them counted more than the rest. Newspaperman James E. Scripps, who founded the Evening News Association had a son named William E. Scripps. Will was a founder of the Scripps Motor Company, which made marine engines into the 1950's. George Gough Booth had married one of Will's sisters, made his fortune with the Evening News, and was also a partner in the Scripps Motor Company. George was the father of James Scripps Booth. The company derived its hyphenated name from the association between William E. Scripps and George Gough Booth, not from the name of engineer/designer James Scripps Booth. On January 15, 1914, *The Automobile* reported, "This firm has no worries as to capital ..."

OWNERSHIP

When the company was founded, Will Scripps held 37% of the stock, and George Booth 50%. James Scripps Booth held 4% and never came to own a controlling interest in the company. Although he was a Director and corporate officer until his resignation in 1916, his holdings reached a high of 17% in 1915. He was not listed among the stockholders after the company's reorganization. (In 1916 his shares would have been held in trust for six months to ensure that former owners could not "dump" their stock.) After the 1917 takeover by Chevrolet Motor Company, JSB had a 3% interest. He had sold all of his interests by the end of the following year.

STEP-DOWN DESIGN

Some writers have reported that JSB was the originator of the "step-down design" claimed by Hudson in the 1950's. Hudson dropped its floorboards between the frame members. Booth's claim was far more basic. A patent

for his Biautogo shaped the vertical frame members so as to drop the occupants' seating area below the level of the axles. No production Scripps-Booths had floorboards below the frame.

SPARK PLUG REMOVAL

Writers also report that it was necessary to remove pushrods from Sterling engines to change spark plugs. Sterling engineers who thought two main bearings were enough soon learned better than to design an engine like that, and the original plugs for small-bore 1915 engines could easily be replaced with SAE Regular plugs to avoid pushrod removal. Later Scripps-Booth Sterling engines came with AC Titan plugs having a SAE Long base (See Register No. 7). Only an owner who was foolish enough to replace with plugs having a larger shell would have had this problem.

1000 MILES THAT WASN'T

The prototype Rocket never made the 1000-mile round trip from Detroit to Indianapolis, as has been widely reported. After an inauspicious beginning wherein a dog became road kill after encountering one of the Rocket's drive belts, JSB and a passenger identified only as "Clyde" did make it to Indianapolis via Napoleon and Marion, Ohio - a distance of 450 to 500 miles. A roundabout way to get there, but maybe that's the only route that had passable roads in those days. The engine failed and was repaired, but "... we big-chested manufacturers from Detroit still had a vital bill for \$75 or so which we were unable to meet on the spot The only much-whispered-over answer to the situation ... was to have the car shipped to Detroit Express C.O.D [where] we again had the car on the street, drove around to the Evening News office and called out a photographer to take free pictures ... telling of our marvellous thousand mile three states tour" (manuscript autobiography, p. 170) Even so, the trip was a notable achievement at the time, especially with an untested prototype automobile.

ENGINEERING GENIUS?

At the risk of revisionism, James Scripps Booth's engineering ability may be open to question. Unquestionably, he was an artistic and visionary inventor, but there was always somebody else around to do the true engineering work. A Biautogo letterhead lists William G. Simpson as "Engineer," and there was a ready source of engine design talent in Uncle Will's Scripps marine engine factory. Bill Stout, not hired as chief engineer in 1914, certainly contributed. JSB didn't even have right of approval on Engineering Change Orders for the Model C at Scripps-Booth. Louis Chevrolet's shop, where the daVinci was built, surely had no shortage of engineering talent.

WEIRD STUFF

James Scripps Booth was an inventive soul, but some of the early Scripps-Booth oddities were adopted from outside sources. One example was the Bijur starter-generator. In the first Model C's and at a speed below 10 mph, the generator used battery power to assist the engine via the starter. This led to a claim that it was impossible to stall the engine, but it must have been pretty tough on batteries. Later 1915 Model C's had an "IDLE" position on the ignition switch to disable the starter at low speeds, but it must have taken a real thinking man to manipulate the switch when you consider horsemen and carriages among the traffic. In "IDLE" position, it was not possible to charge the battery.

Distributor points had a problem in the early days - metal tended to migrate from one contact to the other. Remy tried to solve this problem on Model C's and D's with an ungrounded distributor and an ignition switch that switched coil polarity each time you turned it on. If you happen to have this sort of set-up, be sure to warn anyone who might be fiddling with your ignition system - it would be easy to burn out an irreplaceable ignition switch.

On a Model C (and D?), the ammeter moves to the left when charging.

For Models C and D, the accelerator pedal was between the clutch and brake pedals. If the owner found this inconvenient, there was also a lever on the steering column to move the accelerator. These models didn't have a "choke." The knob on the dash was labeled "STRANGLER."

The V-8 powered Scripps-Booth Vitesse shown at the 1916 New York Auto Show, not only had tandem rear-mounted spare tires, but you filled the gas tank through their tubular mount. The 2-passenger Vitesse had no doors (you climbed steps for access) and never reached production, but it was to be guaranteed for 75 mph!

Not really Scripps-Booth related, but balancing wine glasses to show smoothness of the engine is nothing new. Publicity for the 1916 National Six brags that a golf ball balanced on the radiator cap "Fails to Move When Engine Is Speeded Up to 2500 Revolutions a Minute."

A copy of an old title for my Model C, issued to Gene Zimmerman 2/9/76, shows a lein of \$1,236,204.24 against the car. I'd gladly forfeit it if I could borrow that much against the car, but it turns out that the lein was against Zimmerman's entire *Automobilorama Museum* collection. Too bad.

JAMES SCRIPPS BOOTH - THE ARTIST

(All quotes are from JSB's manuscript autobiography in Cranbrook Institute's archives.)

In the Fall of 1911, JSB and his bride of just over a year traveled to Europe, where JSB was to take art lessons. In Paris, he set out to inquire. "... I had barged in the wrong door for my investigation, judging from the surprised countenance of the instructor and the vibrant air of the assemblage. I had never seen a nude model in my life or in the warm flesh, so this most startling and somewhat embarrassing experience was really a devastating high spot in my early artistic career." (p. 91-2) Next door, he found "... four large flood lighted but smoke laden studios each with a nude model surrounded by a mixed crowd of young art students with no instructor on the job, all sketching according to their own individual requirements or preferences or else just sitting and enjoying the bohemian view."

On one occasion, "We sat a long time until her highness eventually condescended to arrive and who then proceeded calmly to undress on the dias before the whole class and within three or four feet of me... As her own idea, she finally took a partial kneeling pose, somewhat above me but unfortunately facing the other way -- technically it may have been good, but from where I sat it left me wondering whether or not I were enjoying all of the charming advantages of that sketching class for certainly I'd never be able to recognize her again, excepting possibly under peculiar circumstances." (p 92-3)

Of course, nudes were only one of many subjects for James' paintings, and he did study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and under well-known painter Myron Barlow in Etaples, France. Although he did some work with gouache and with oil paints, his preferred medium was pastels. He continued to paint throughout his life, and many of his paintings are in the possession of the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

He was a harsh critic of "modern" art, and had the following rationale for his dislike: "... the camera with its often remarkably excellent results sets a pace we easel artists cannot ignore -- modern forced nonsense of distortion and slovenly draftsmanship may be either an escape or an attempt to fly in advance of the photograph, but even now this last is catching up on distorted and literally cock-eyed compositions and the modernist painters are hard pressed to devise some new forced and artificial scheme of expression to prolong and preserve the necessary mystery in art and attract the hoodwinked public acclaim -- without which there is small market." (p. 109-10) Too bad our National Endowment for the Arts folks don't share this outlook.

There's more, but 5 pages is all I can mail with a 29-cent stamp, so this issue of the Scripps-Booth Register is done. Incidentally, I'm on the Internet at [REDACTED] at least as long as my wife keeps teaching.

