

# JULY 4, 1932, IS ALSO KNOWN AS RR-DAY

BY WILLIAM C. STEWART

To me, the Fourth of July always will be RR Day. The anniversary of the day in 1932 I bought the Rolls-Royce, and so became one of the few hundred people in the world with that distinction, shared with the princes of India, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, a few Boston and New York millionaires and a half-dozen of the more firmly established residents of Beverly Hills north of Sunset Blvd.

Friends had driven over for the holiday, and during a barbecue luncheon the conversation centered chiefly on the purchase by the friends of a second car.

I could see my wife's face getting longer and longer as my friend Richard's wife babbled of her acquisition, and I resolved that something must be done.

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While the girls went about their occasions, Richard and I drove his new car to a suburban auto dealer's establishment. After some discussion, I concluded that my funds would not stretch sufficiently for the purchase of any of the shiny offerings gracing his lot. As I started away, I felt the dealer's gently restraining hand on my sleeve.

"Just a minute," he said. "I have the thing for you—come and see it."

We were led into the depths of the garage, and a tarpaulin was pulled off a car in the corner. The dusty sunlight glistened on German silver, dark red lacquered body and aluminum fittings. There in all its original glory stood a Rolls-Royce, vintage 1929, a Phantom II. Its purchase price three years before had been \$18,000.

I fell in love with it on sight. The asking price of \$400 was whittled down to \$250 and 10 minutes later I was the owner of the lordly machine.

It developed that the late Albert E. Wells, president of the American Optical Co., had traded the Rolls in on

a new car. In 1931, about a year before, the Rolls assembly plant in Springfield, Mass., had closed down and by way of liquidation the shareholders, including Mr. Wells' brother Cheney, had received assorted models. The Wells family literally had a stable full of Rolls-Royces. The practice had been to have the chassis built in England, knocked down and shipped to this country as auto parts, under a lower tariff rate, and reassembled in Springfield with bodies made by Brewster. Virtually all Rolls bodies were custom made.

This sedan had beautiful blue Laidlaw broadcloth upholstery and fittings of fine metals. For the mechan-

my wife's face never left it until the car was dissembled of several years later. "Good Lord," she said by way of appreciation as she faltered down the steps, "have you lost your mind?"

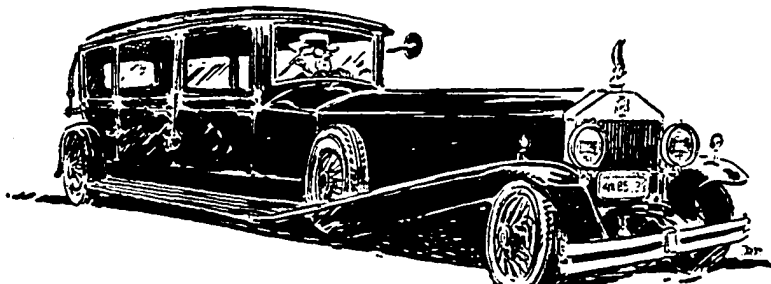
We all boarded the monster, which appeared to be at least 20 feet long and half as wide, and I began pulling levers and gadgets. Some time later, with constant reference to the very British book of instructions and helpful advice from the passengers, we got under way and toiled slowly and majestically along the boulevard. The maiden trip was without incident.

Only twice did my wife attempt to drive her new car. As might be expected

phone and journeyed the 17 miles downtown. It was not a pleasant evening.

I had my share of mishaps, too. That summer we visited Sherwood Anderson at his farm in Southwest Virginia, far out in the hills, purchased with the proceeds of "Dark Laughter" as a dream hide-out for a novelist.

On the way, the car picked up a considerable amount of dirt and grease. Sherwood, a great writer but a wholly impractical man, suggested it was shameful to allow such a beautiful car to be marred by mud splashes. He, I was told, always washed his car by driving it across and through the little



ically minded, it might be noted that the Rolls engine, built largely by hand, was — and probably still is today — so finely machined that gaskets were not necessary, the bronze motor block and the aluminum head fitting tightly without them.

Mr. Wells had made several trips between Massachusetts and his home in Rancho Santa Fe and a couple of hunting trips to Mexico, but the machine ran like a watch. I was handed a book of instructions on how to start a Rolls, and the dealer gave me a short course in engineering.

Arriving home, a honk of the horn brought my wife and her guest to the front porch.

"Here," I said grandly, "is what a Stewart does for his bride — behold a veritable Rolls-Royce."

The look of awe and consternation that appeared on

she took over my car in time, and I fell heir to her Rolls.

On the first occasion she visited a relative in a neighboring town. Because she remembered my initial attempt to start the motor, my wife did not dare to stop it during her visit. For an hour, while the motor ate up a gallon of gasoline every few minutes, the Rolls sat in front of the relative's house, the cynosure of admiring and somewhat apprehensive suburbia.

Following the uncomfortable discussion that ensued, she made another trip, downtown and this time berthed the behemoth in a parking lot. When time came for her return home, neither she, the parking lot attendant nor the garage-man from across the street could do anything with it beyond the production of a low growl. Some hours later I was located by tele-

creek that ran by Ripshin Farm.

So, urged by these unworlly people, Sherwood and my wife, I maneuvered the Rolls across Ripshin Creek and spent the morning washing and rubbing the car. When I started the motor and prepared to pull out carefully, so as not to stir up the creek mud, I found that the Rolls—which I suppose weighed three or four tons—would not budge. It was mired in feet of mud.

Eventually a tow car came out from the nearest town, 25 miles away, at \$2 an hour, and making progress at the rate of some 5 miles an hour. The Rolls was snaked out of the creek bed, muddier than it had been before I was argued into Ripshin Creek.

Some years later I sold the car, and recently I heard it still is in use, as a tow car. These machines simply never wear out.