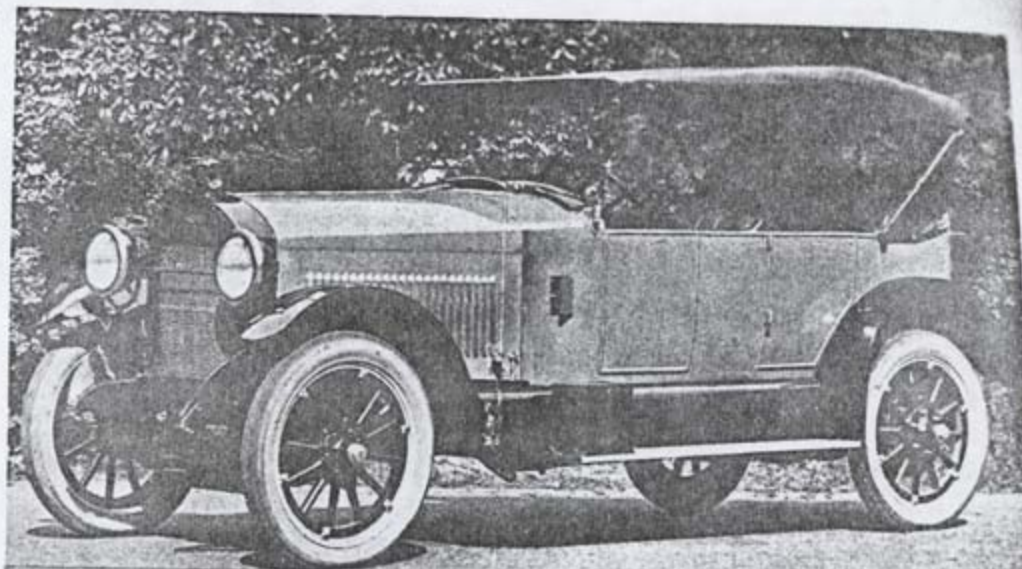


The 1922 Gearless Steamer touring car shows a slight similarity to the then current Stanley. Price was \$2,600, fob Pittsburgh. The cowl ventilators are most likely necessary concessions to the heat the boiler must have emitted.

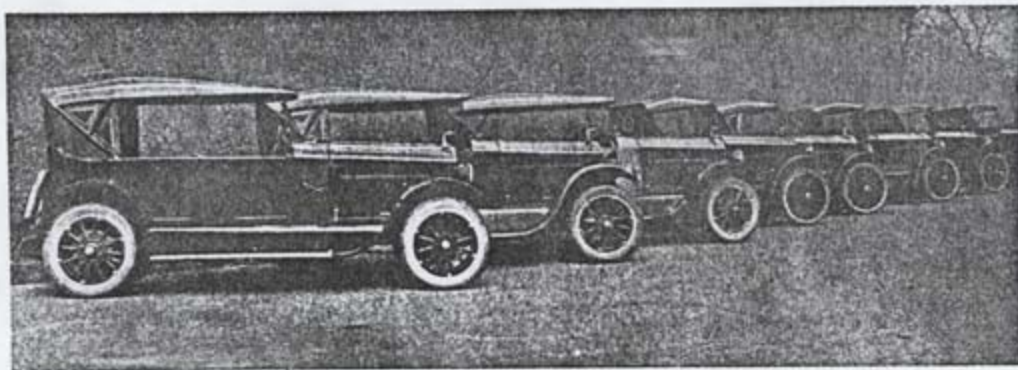


by Edward J. Blend Jr.



THE GEARLESS

The Steamer Was A Swindle



THE GEARLESS

This view shows what the author believes to be the entire output of Gearless Steamers . . . five roadsters and three tourings. It was advertised 25 cars were on the road, running thousands of miles of creditable performance. The location where the photograph was taken appears to be Highland Park, one mile north of the Flavel Street plant.

Among the thousands of different automobile manufacturers, certain corporate and historical figures stand out, presaged by good press agency, the right economic circumstances and sometimes the attention given by satisfied owners.

The latitude offered under our system of government and finance up until the time of the Securities and Exchange Commission offered a situation whereby many financier/inventors and a gambling public made frequent headlines.

It is not the intent here to argue legalities, rather to look at an automobile as offered and evaluate it in view of the known situation at the time, to see whether or not it was a little better than many were led to believe, including the speculators and initiators. The automobile to be discussed is the Gearless Steamer.

In reviewing the January-February 1962 issue of ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE

magazine, the story of the Pennsylvania cars caught the author's attention (Volume 26, No. 1) and hastened my research into a car of which very little is known in the Pittsburgh district. Kenneth H. Stauffer's listing and the subsequent stories of Messrs. Pascal, Risby and Mr. & Mrs. George Dohn were an excellent beginning for any would-be Pennsylvania automobile historians.

The corporate entity of the Gearless Steamer Company was located at 117 Flavel Street in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh, Pa. New low-rent, high-rise apartments have evolved in this area as a result of urban redevelopment, leaving no geographical or physical evidence that an automobile had once been produced in the area.

Purely by accident, an old catalogue prospectus of the Gearless Steamer came to light in a hoard of old auto parts. It has served as the nucleus in the compila-

tion of the facts surrounding this practically unknown steam automobile.

The Pittsburgh City Directory of Business lists the principals involved as Duncan MacDonald, President; Raymond Stearns, Vice President and Treasurer; Frank McClintock, Secretary and S.H. Smith, General Manager. These men were all directors, including N.R. Daugherty. Chief engineer was one William H. Edmundson. Frank McClintock was Auditor and L.B. Rearich was Purchasing Agent.

Capitalization of the Gearless Steam Car Company was set at \$2,000,000 under the laws of the State of Delaware. The Pittsburgh executive offices were located at 1503, The Arrott Building.

Previous to this declaration and in the earlier 1907-09 period, another Gearless automobile is listed in the Rochester, New York, City Directory of 1907. Other listings give Pittsburgh as the manufacturing city. Probably the corporate entity

About The Author

Author of the article on the Gearless Steamer, Edward J. Blend Jr., is no stranger to East Coast AACA members. He has been a member of the AACA for 11 years now, and shows his various classics at meets throughout the East. In addition to the 1934 Packard shown, Ed's collection includes a 1931 Packard Dietrich victoria and 1936 Lincoln Judkins town car.

Ed is also a charter and life member of the Classic Car Club of America and has just finished his second term as director of the Western Pennsylvania Region of the CCCA.

This is not Ed's first attempt at writing for ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE. His article "H.A.L. Spells Lozier" appeared in the May-June 1965 issue.

was the same, but due to the inability of the writer to unearth any principals or concrete manifestations of product, we will deal only with the Gearless Company, circa 1919 through 1923.

Students of the antique automobile oftentimes find beautifully engineered products much advanced for their time and wonder why these products never succeeded.

Trusts and giant corporate entities often spelled doom for certain advanced theories made possible through the imaginative brains of the inventor. Unusual is the circumstance where the fertile inventor's mind was able to promote and market his product without ultimately losing control of both the invention and the company.

It can be said, too, that speculative projects often displayed theories and concepts that for the times were too advanced for the timidity of the speculative investor who held back, fearing a total loss if he further involved capital and self interest.

Let us then speculate on the Gearless. It has been reputed that 25' demonstrators were produced and to date not a single Gearless has been unearthed. However, several Gearless models were displayed at the annual auto show in New York City, held at the Commodore Hotel January 7 through 14, 1922.

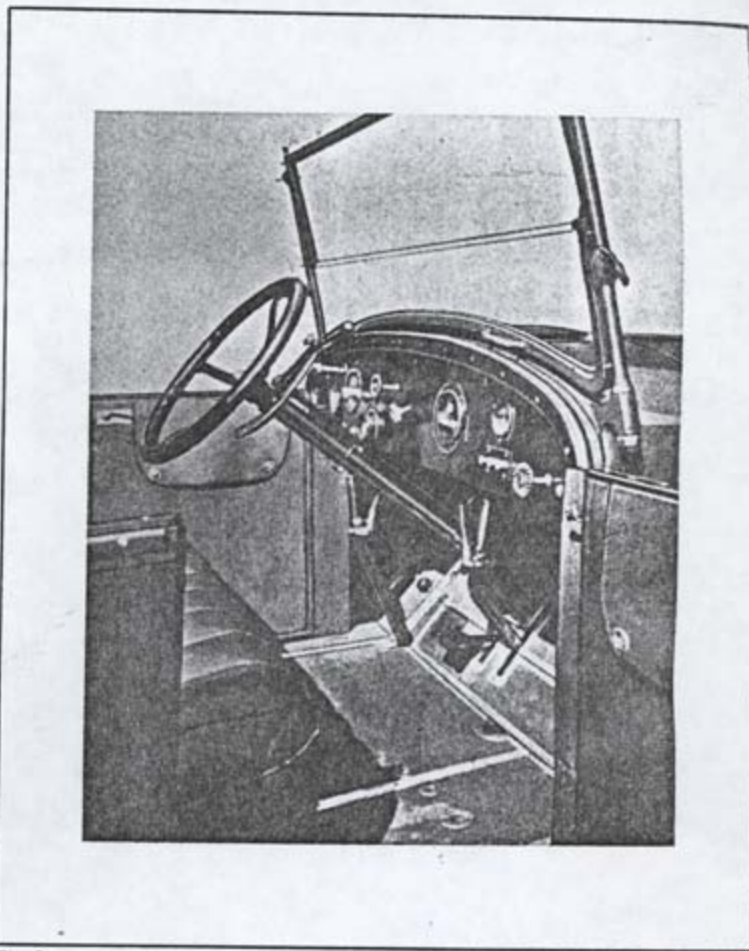
To cover the operation's early speculative claims, advertising for the Gearless stated: "No claims - no knocks - just demonstrations." Another gambit stated: "Facts - not hopes - no dreams." Were the initiators hoping their car would dare be better than they hoped, and would the demonstrators then on the road stir the speculative public? And, would potential dealers clamour to invest in a steam car

even though by 1920 the uncertain status of steam versus internal combustion had already been established?

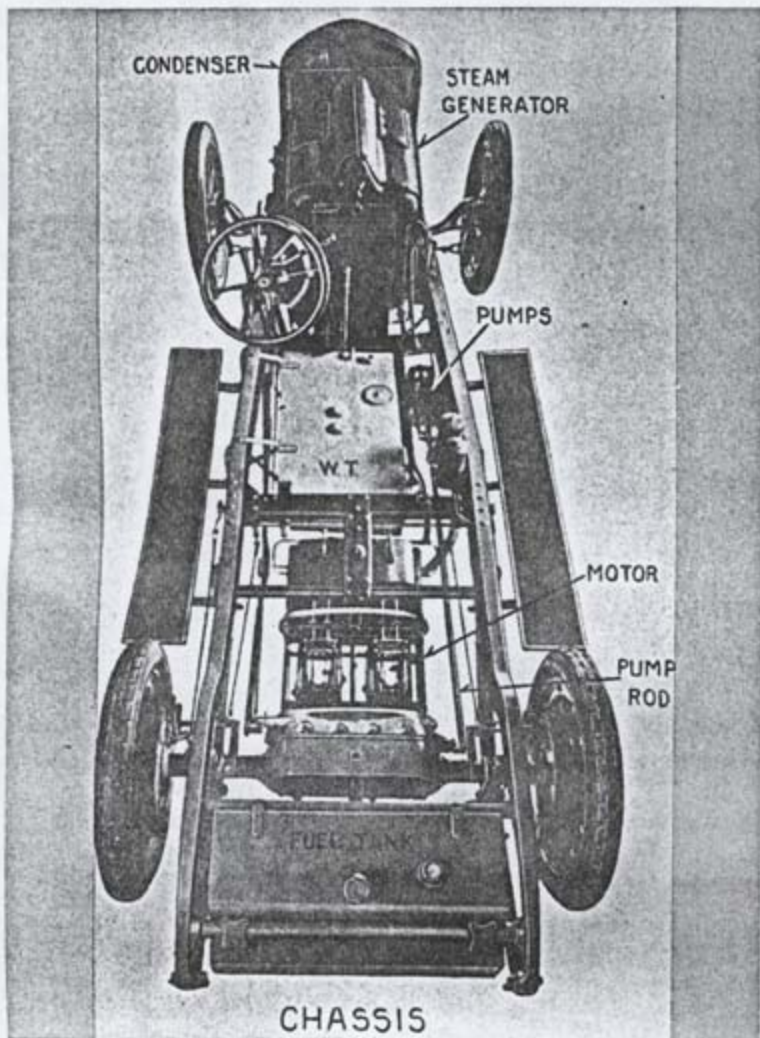
An acquaintance who at one time was chief boiler inspector for the Pennsylvania Railroad at Pitscain, Pa., attested the design looked good and was similar to boilers he had serviced for the railroad and for the Navy during World War II. Some features look a little like Doble in concept, but only a steam aficionado can verify these opinions.

The motoring public today is not confronted with the many different types of locomotion available in the late teens and early twenties when gasoline, steam and electrically propelled vehicles were displayed side by side at the annual shows. At the time this car was to have been built, steam was still in general but disputed use, both on the road, railroad and on the farm. To quote from the Gearless brochure - "Many highly ingenious devices have been worked out at heavy expense, only to be superseded in a year or two by something more expensive and complicated and still the end is not in sight. The fuel problems are the serious ones now and chambered manifolds, hot spots, electrical heaters, etc., are adding their weight to the load and still the man who must make a train or keep an engagement must allow 15 or 20 minutes on a cold morning for the uncertainty of starting his motor, and he may have to press the old teakettle into service before he gets away."

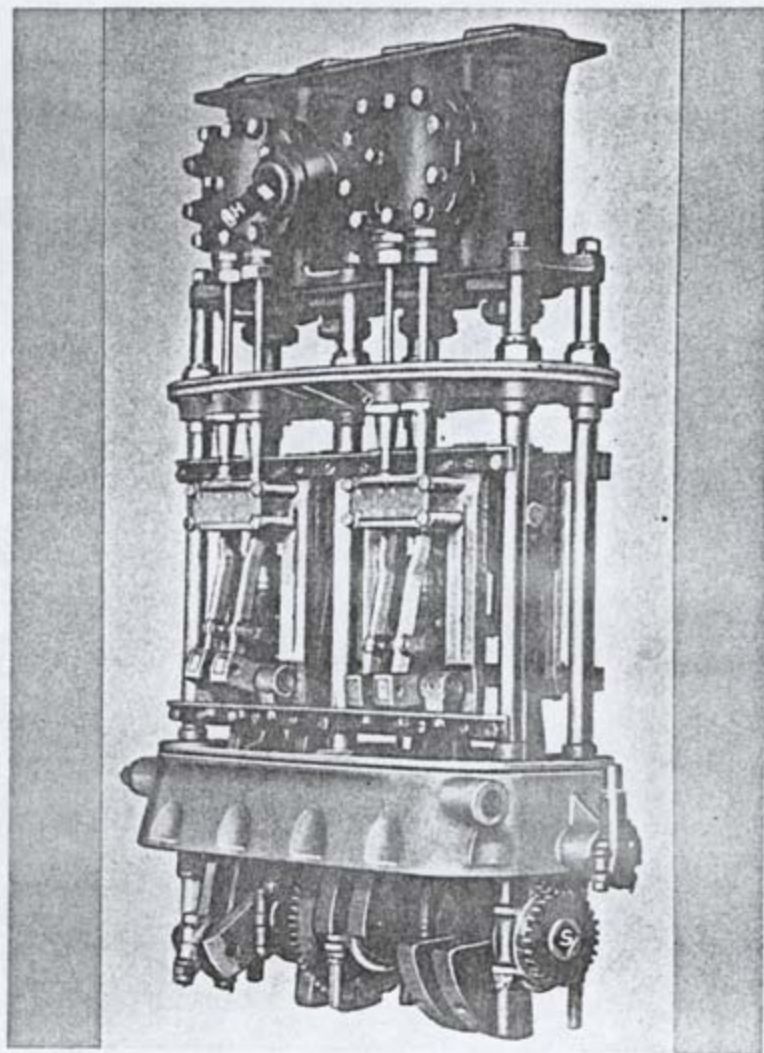
Evidently the superficialities of this statement meant one teakettle would supersede another teakettle! The steam car promised to do away with the vagaries of the low octane gasolines in a combustion engine of that era and to go it one better by effectively using kerosene



The Gearless Steamer's controls appear to be quite simple. Note the throttle quadrant below the steering wheel. The use of the two emergency type handles is uncertain.



The Gearless Steamer chassis was listed at \$2,000. fob Pittsburgh. Roadster, sedan and touring bodies were available in the catalog, and custom bodywork would be quoted on request. Note how the two two-cylinder engines operate directly on the back axle.



The Gearless 65 H.P. engine in vertical position. At 60 mph it turned only 600 rpm. Walchaert valve gearing was used. Note the engine was not altogether gearless, as three can be seen. Bore and stroke were 3" x 6" for each cylinder.

in a design of seeming simplicity in operation.

Further delving into the conduct of the Gearless Steamer Company's business reveals that confidence was the keynote in selling of the prime requisite, stock. Confidence not so much in the product, of which the 25 pilot models were reputed to have been made, but confidence that steam was still not dead.

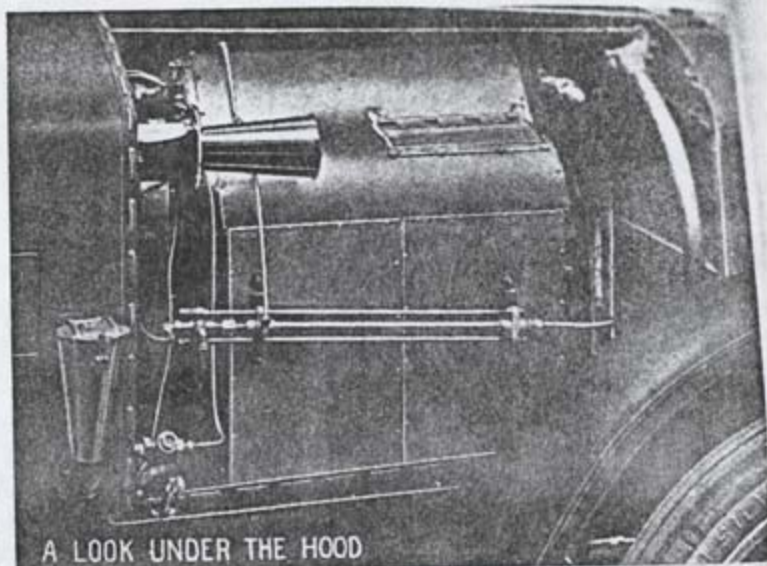
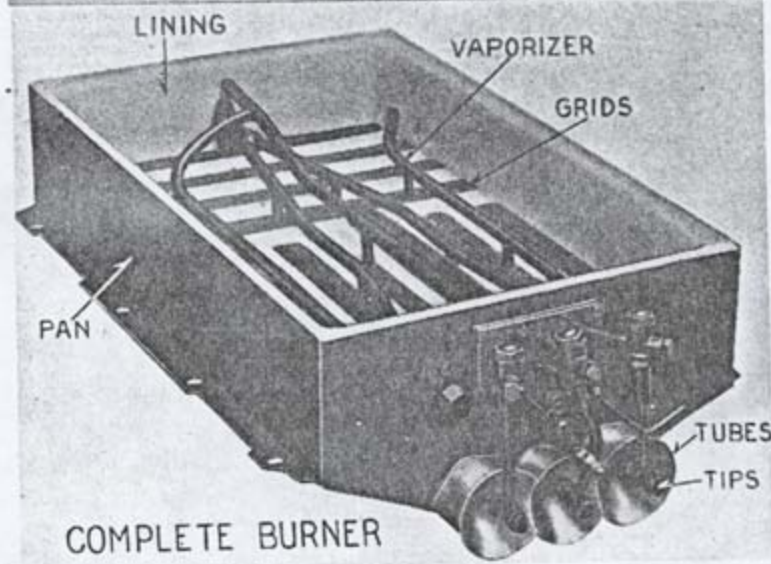
Since automotive libraries offered scant Gearless information, Murray Fahnstock of Pittsburgh, automotive

historian and ex-editor of *Ford Owner*, was contacted. Asked if he remembered the car he retorted "Heck, yes, that was a stock scheme!" How come they built as many cars as they did? Evidently the promoters wanted to be as sure of collecting imagination as well as capital.

The bodies were built in Butler, Pa., location uncertain. Custom coachwork as ordered, was to have been completed at the Flavel Street Plant, supervised by Gearless engineers.

Bare Chassis was priced at \$2,000.00

The Gearless Steamer's burner tips were placed for easy once-a-month cleaning. However, it would appear that vaporizer cleaning would be another matter.



The Gearless Steamer's boiler, condenser and water level indicator are shown in this photograph. Note the water tank filler spout neck on the lower part of the cowl.

- Touring Car 2,600.00
- Roadster w/Wire Wheels 2,650.00
- Sedans built on order 3,600.00

Specific engineering features of the Gearless were:

Wheelbase 127" - Engine 4-cylinder Gearless 3" x 6" B. & S. - Horsepower 65 - Steam Generator - Water Tube, Gearless Special. Burner-Vaporizer type with improved gassifier. Condenser: tubular radiator with pressure relief. Pumps outside packed, hydraulic type, mechanically driven from motor with auxiliary

pump. Duplex steam - rear axle-Gearless Special, 3/4 floating eliminating differential and all other gears by direct connection to the motor.

Brakes: Internal-external rear only.

Capacities: Fuel - 20 gallon
Water - 25 gallon
Oil - 2 gallon

Lubrication - by force feed and splash, using a dash sight feed.

Steering: Gemmer
Lighting: Splitdorf, 6-volt storage

GEARLESS (STEAM)

GEARLESS MOTOR CORP., PITTSBURGH, PA. 1920-23