In 1901, Rudyard Kipling wrote a long sad letter to a friend named Philips about the little Locomobile Steamer he owned. The last paragraph read: "It isn't as if we wanted her for long tours—isn't as if we tried to get more than ten miles an hour out of her, we got her for a carriage—a refined and ladylike carriage—and we treat her on that basis. Her lines are lovely; her form is elegant; the curves of her buggy-top are alone worth the price of admission, but—as a means of propulsion she is today a nickel-plated fraud. I guess Amzi Lorenzo goes about the world in a B'way surface car." (Amzi Lorenzo's full name was Amzi Lorenzo Barber, whose purchase of the rights to the early Stanley Steam Car are mentioned elsewhere.)

The early Locomobile Steamer did have demonstrable crotchets. Although later models were considerably improved and, in fact, sold quite nicely, the Locomobile Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, decided in 1902 that it had had enough of "teakettles on wheels" and sold its interests back to those stalwart Yankee twins, the Stanley brothers. Henceforth, the Locomobile would be a gasoline-engined car. And to design it a highly competent engineer, Andrew Lawrence Riker, was hired.

Riker was already a man of unusually long experience in the design of automobiles. He had successfully built electric cars—among them some of the first horseless taxis—and he had set records driving racing electrics. In 1900 he sold his Riker Electric Vehicle Company to that would-be automobile trust, the notorious Electric Vehicle Co. By then he had already decided that the future of motoring lay with the gasoline-engined car. But he disdained the path which other American car builders slavishly followed. He built no buggyish, engine-under-the-floor horseless carriage. His model was the more modern type of machine already being produced in Europe with a vertical engine up front. The first 1903 gas-engined Locomobiles were, therefore, similar to fine cars like the German Mercedes and the Panhard-Levassor. By 1904 the steamers were gone and the new high-quality Locomobile emerged as one of the country's top makes. It owed much to the Mercedes—honeycomb radiator (even its shape was that of the Mercedes), vertical cylinders, sliding-gear transmission, double chain drive, channel-section steel frame, etc. Oddly, however, Locomobiles had sprags, pointed iron bars hinged beneath the car, which could be dropped onto the road to prevent the car from rolling downhill backward.

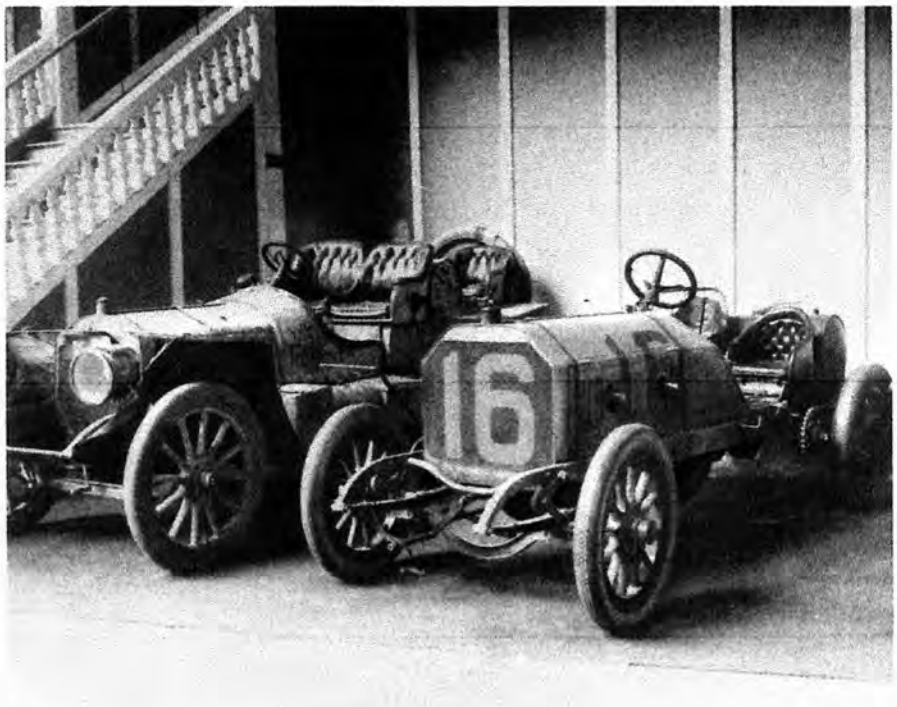
There were two models of Locomobile in 1904, one the Type C with two cylinders, and the other the type D with four cylinders. The cylinders (4 in. x 5 in.) were cast in pairs. The automatic inlet valves were in easily removable cages. Ignition was by vibrator coils supplied from storage batteries. Most unusual for 1904 was the inclusion of a generator for charging the batteries (Locomobile's literature called it a dynamo). The two-cylinder model was rated at 9-12 hp, and cost $2,100. The four-cylinder, 16-22 hp job "with top" cost from $4,250 to $5,100. Limousine-bodied cars were $5,000 and up—high prices for American cars in 1904. But Locomobile felt that its competition was not the comparatively crude domestic cars, but the princely $8,000 Panhard and the $12,000 Mercedes.

Locomobile came to be known for its highly conservative cars. In 1906, however, it raised eyebrows by actually offering for sale, as stock models, replicas of the brutish 17.7-litre racing machine upon which the great Joe Tracy had taken third place in the 1905 Vanderbilt Cup Race.

The car offered to the public had a 110-inch wheelbase, a 90-hp engine with four giant 6 x 7¼-inch cylinders, and a stark body consisting of a pair of diminutive bucket seats and a cylindrical gas tank. I don't know if any were sold at the then-tremendous price of $18,000.

1

Preceding pages: 1909 Model 30 Locomobile had "baby-tonneau" body, four-cylinder, T-head engine of 38 hp. Cost: $3,500.
1. *In 1906, replica of great 17.7-litre, 90-hp Locomobile that placed third in 1905 Vanderbilt Cup Race was offered to public at price of $18,000.*
2. *"Old 16," winner of 1908 Vanderbilt Cup, and Thomas that won "Round-the-World" race appear side by side at 1908 automobile show.*
3. *1903 Locomobile steamer was still advertised when gas-engined models were already in production.*



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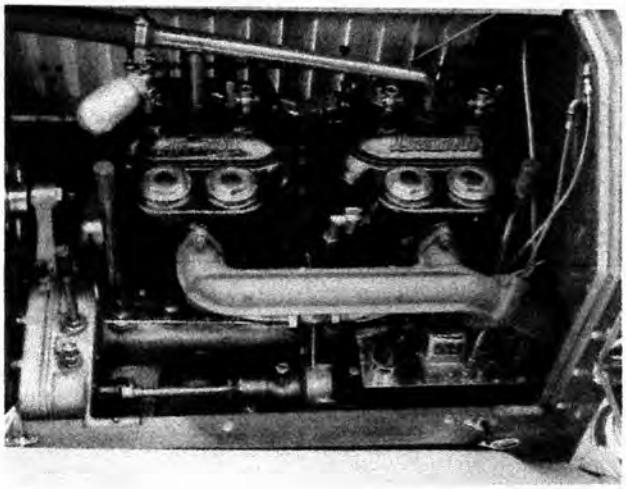
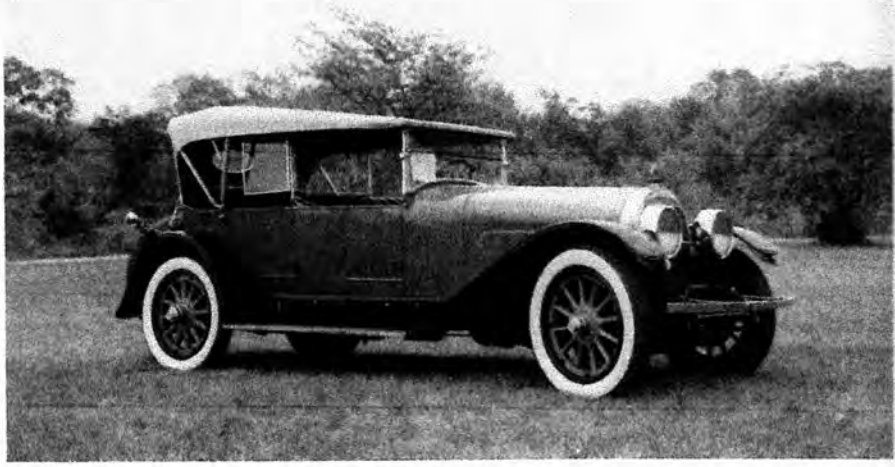


1

1. *Four-cylinder engine of 1909 Model 30 Locomobile still used "make-and-break" ignition system.*
2. *1911 Model 48 six-cylinder, shaft-drive Type M Torpedo cost $4,800. This one has headlights, fenders, windshield, and top removed for a race it has just won. Note trophy in hand of its still shaking driver.*
3. *1924 Locomobile 48. "Sportif" model was built from 1917 to 1929, cost $4,750.*
4. *Joe Florida on 90-hp, 16.2-litre Locomobile No. 1 that took third place in 1908 Vanderbilt Cup Race. Teammate Robertson won race on similar machine.*

2



3

4

In the 1906 Vanderbilt, Tracy drove a 120-hp version of this machine. Although he set a record lap of 67.6 mph, he had terrible luck with his tires, changing eleven during the grueling day. Again a foreigner, Wagner, on a French Darracq, won at 61.4 mph. In 1908, using the same car, George Robertson won the Vanderbilt Cup. This car, famous today as "Old 16," is owned by artist Peter Helck. It ran the 258.06 miles at an average of 64.3 mph.

Until 1909 Locomobiles stayed with double chain drive. For that year it announced shaft drive, which had for some five years been used by Peerless, Pierce Arrow and Packard.

In 1911 the first 135-inch wheelbase Locomobile six, the "48" was produced. It had "square" cylinders (4½ in. x 4½ in.) and developed 70 hp. For the next eighteen years, until 1929, there would be little change except for electric starting and lighting in 1913. Certainly, the Locomobile was as beautifully constructed as any car anywhere. But to imagine, as Locomobile's management imagined, that the mechanism of their motor car had finally reached perfection and needed but slight changes in detail or body styling as the years rolled by was a mistake.

If, however, we examine a Locomobile catalogue of, say, 1912, it becomes easier to understand why its makers could see little need for improvement. A hard-cover volume called *The Locomobile Book*, it makes today's catalogues look like cheap flyers from chain grocery stores. Consider some of the statements made therein: "The rear seat cushion and back in our six-cylinder models are provided with upholstery *ten inches thick*. . . . Skillful distribution of weight is another feature of much importance; the perfect *balance* of the Locomobile is one of the many reasons for its easy and steady riding at all speeds. . . . The foot rest is a brass rod lightly knurled to prevent the feet from slipping. . . . The crank case is government bronze . . . the crankshaft has seven main bearings. . . . The four-speed selective transmission with its manganese bronze case and alloy steel shafts and gears *never gives trouble*. . . ."

And so on and on, interspersed with photographs and diagrams, for 210 pages.

According to *The Locomobile Book*, a six-cylinder "48" cost $4,800 for a seven-passenger touring car, $6,250 for a Berline. A smaller four—the "30"—which was built to the same stringent standards as its big sister, cost $3,500 for a tourer, $4,600 for a formidably bodied limousine.

In 1915, after much soul searching, Locomobile at last departed from at least one bit of European practice. Left-hand drive was standardized. Body design was also changed, however, to the ugly, boxy "straight line" type.

In 1922 Locomobile filed a petition of bankruptcy and fell into the hands of William Crapo Durant, now head of his own automobile-producing unit, the Durant Company. Surprisingly, for the first few years he did not cheapen the car or use the Bridgeport factory as collateral for some wild financial scheme. In 1924 Locomobiles got four-wheel brakes and a much needed, if barely noticeable, face-lift by the design firm of Le Baron. In 1925 the Durant Company, which included the Flint, Durant, Eagle, Star, and Princeton cars, brought out the Locomobile "90," which had a six-cylinder (3⅞ in. x 5¼ in.) cast *en bloc* engine, a three-speed gearbox and a 138-inch wheelbase chassis. Durant also produced a cheap Locomobile, the Junior Eight, a typical piece of Durantobilia with an overhead-valve eight-cylinder engine ($2^{13}/_{16}$ in. x 4 in.). This cost only from $1,785 to $2,285. Within the next few years various eights, one with a Lycoming engine, were offered in concert with the staid old "48" and the newer "90." By 1930, there was no longer a Locomobile. It had been Durantized out of existence.